Medway Parents and Carers Forum Newsletter Winter 2023/2024

By families... for families

BECAUSE EVERY CHILD MATTERS

medway parents & carers forum

Registered Charity 1183372

What have we been up to?

Coffee meetings

Once again we've been very busy organising and attending many coffee meetings for parents and carers and they continue to be successful.Since the last newsletter we have had a wide range of professionals attending to give information and be on hand to answer questions.

Speakers we have had are:

Celia Buxton, assistant director Immunisation team

Fiona Alexander, educational psychologist

Sarah Richards, Short breaks consultation

Mandy Lawson, Social Care

Adam and Paul, Transport team

Emma Block, SENDIAS consultation

We also had a parents and professionals Christmas coffee morning and one with our family support team.

All parents and carers who attended gave good feedback on the content.

If you would like a particular person or subject covered at a meeting please email info@medwaypcf.org.uk

Speaking out!

We have spent lots of time identifying common issues being faced by families and speaking out on your behalf.

During Autumn 2023, the 3 biggest issues faced by you all was Transport problems, EHCP delays and ADHD medication delays. We were in constant contact with senior members of staff at all times and gave as many updates as we could to keep you informed of recent developments. We also invited the members of staff to come along to talk to parents and hear the issues first hand. The SEN team will start working from hubs this year and we have asked Celia Buxton for information to share with parents about when this will all take place and arrange for parents to be invited at the earliest opportunity to see the new way of working in action. Watch this space!

Family Support Team

We hope everyone had a nice Christmas/ Happy holiday; We appreciate it can be a very stressful time for SEN families.

Medway Parents and Carers Forum Family Support team has been very busy in 2023. The Family support team has had a range of training and with vast personal experience and knowledge, we can offer support with form filling, signposting and a friendly listening ear. The service has been running little over year and we have helped over 200 families, this is not including the families we have spoken to at coffee mornings and events. We have had some lovely feedback, here are just a few examples.

"I was given friendly professional advice that that was understandable and well presented. I was able to request a mandatory review of my DLA claim and was awarded a higher rate."

"Very kind understanding ladies that offer much support and advice and a listening ear".

"I was very happy with the support and advice given, very knowledgeable and helped me in what was a very stressful time. Would highly recommend."

"Thank you so much for the advice you gave me a couple of weeks ago as it really helped and gave me confidence when we went to the Universal Credit meeting at the job centre".

We have been advertising our services to local Nurseries, Schools and Post 16 placements and we have had a positive response, with being invited to coffee mornings to talk to families directly about our service.

2024 plans for the Family Support Service, ultimately must be, to keep being a positive support for our families in Medway and to hopefully reach out to more families.

If you have used the Family support Service last year and haven't had a chance to fill out our feedback form, can you please click the link, Thank you in advance.

https://forms.office.com/e/YbqBGSHraT

We have enclosed our presentation for our service, that we delivered at our online coffee evening in October, which has some useful links.

Presentation1.pptx

The Family Support team would like to wish everyone a happy and supportive 2024.

Facebook

Did you know we have 4 Facebook groups and a Facebook page?

Medway Parent and Carers Forum - business page

Medway Parents and Carers Forum Family page - for parents and carers only

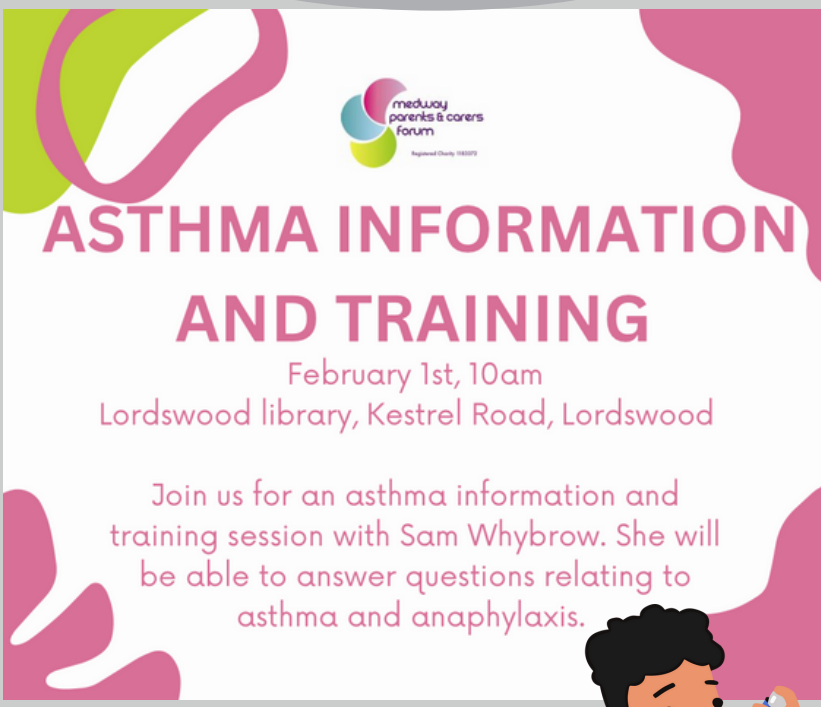
MPCF professional parents and carers - for those parents and carers who work in a professional role

MPCF professionals group - for those professionals who don't have an SEN Child

MPCF Young People's Group - Facebook - for age 13+ young people. No adults allowed on page except forum staff with enhanced dbs and safeguarding training. To join parents must be a member.

If you want to join any of our pages please visit our website www.medwaypcf.org.uk

Coffee Meetings this Winter



MPCF SEND Survey
closing date 30/1/24

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Medway Parents and Carers Forum's 3rd Annual Send Survey

This is your chance to tell us about your experiences with SEND services in Medway over the last 12months.

The survey is anonymous and will help structure improvements moving forward. Any information provided will be used to guide improvements for families.

Follow the link below or scan the QR code to complete the survey and enter for a chance to win one of 3 £25 Amazon voucher prizes.

Prize draw T&C's can be found on www.medwaypcf.org.uk

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MPCF23SENDSurvey

MEET FIONA

Name Fiona Alexander
Job Role Principal Educational Psychologist

What does that mean I do? I am responsible for the operational and strategic delivery of Medway's Psychology Service. We are currently a service of qualified educational psychologists and host trainee educational psychologists during their training. This year we are also developing an Assistant EP role and have welcomed a Psychology Intern from the University of Kent.

How does your role help with supporting children, young people and families? The overall purpose of the work of educational psychologists is to promote the social and educational inclusion and achievement of children and young people, so that they lead rewarding and fulfilling lives.Sometimes we do this by working directly with children and young people but more often we work with the adults who know them best, such as families and staff in schools and colleges. We can work in a variety of ways and at different levels, such as direct work, consultation, training and undertaking research. Some of our work is called core work (providing advice for EHC Needs assessments, input to Tribunal Hearings, and critical incident and sad event response) and some of work is 'traded' – where schools and other partners buy services from us. My role is to ensure that our team of psychologists are well at work, working safely in ways that meet required professional standards, and are having a positive impact on the work of staff in schools, and parents/carers they work with.

What do I like about your role? I have wanted to be an EP since I was 14, when I had some formative experiences that evoked a sense of unfairness and injustice. A passion was lit and I recognised that I wanted to 'speak up and out for' those who for whatever reason, couldn't speak out for themselves. I find working as a psychologist is very gratifying and interesting. I am very much motivated by a sense of public service and duty, and by ways of working that empower others. I am fortunate to work with a very skilled and dedicated team of EPs, so I experience my leadership role here at Medway as a privilege.

What do you dislike about your role? I am really lucky, as there is not much I don't like about my role. My main concern currently is the limited capacity in our service, and the implications of this for our children, families and schools.

Favourite meal- I love hot and spicy foods, and I would be torn to choose between chilli and curry.
Favourite film- I do like the Green Mile, The Art of French Cooking and films with Jason Statham or Jackie Chan. I was on the edge of my seat one summer, by a series called Prison Break.
Favourite drink- Oh, all sorts depending on the weather. For a hot drink treat, I like mocha. I am trying to drink more water generally
Favourite phrase- "The road to a friend's house is never long" (Danish Proverb), "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle" (sometimes ascribed to Plato but I am not sure)

A message from one of our trustees

2023 was a challenging year for our families and MPCF continued to be the voice of those families in some difficult situations during this year. For example, school transport had some issues which were resolved by feeding any concerns from our members to and working closely with the local authority. It was also a year of change as we had to get used to a new administration at Medway Council following the local government elections in May. Our staff and volunteers continued to build and develop their skills making them a strong team to represent our families. As one of the trustees, I can see first hand how much hard work our team put in and I am immensely proud of all of them. So we leave 2023 with a solid foundation and increasing knowledge and confidence.

As we begin 2024, we enter a period of challenges not least the financial situation of Medway Council, but rest assured we will be making sure that we do our utmost to ensure our families voices continue to be heard with all our professional partners. We also have a packed schedule of meetings, coffee mornings and get togethers, starting with our New Year Wellbeing Breakfast where you will get a chance to meet our team and find out about what we do on your behalf. It might be that we may interest you enough to offer some time or skills to volunteer.

The forum will continue their regular attendance at the Medway Council Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and attend other regular meetings with other professionals.

One of the new projects is the Medway Parents Panel which was recently set up for parents of young children with or without a disability. We are looking for parents of young children without a disability to help represent the diversity of voices on that panel.

All of these meetings enable us to feed back directly the concerns and issues that affect all of our families and if you feel you can offer some time, skills or knowledge, we would welcome you as a volunteer or trustee.