



Seventh Annual Conference Report

18 March 2017

John Innes Centre

It has been my pleasure, this year, to lead the organisation of the Family Voice Norfolk, seventh annual conference, 18 March 2017, for parents and carers of children with special educational needs and disabilities. It has been an interesting and, at times, all-consuming role, but without a doubt a fantastic experience.

As in previous years we held our big day at the John Innes Centre (JIC). This year 212 delegates and a further 80 SEND professionals, providers, charities, Dr Wendy Thomson, Chief Executive of, and elected members of Norfolk County Council joined team Family Voice to take part in this extremely popular information bonanza.

From the moment we opened our doors there was a hive of activity as parents waited patiently to be registered and the speed-dating sessions were snapped up yet again. The stand-holders immediately swung into action offering advice and support to members of the delegation.

The key note speakers were Dr Nick Hammond and Nicola Palmer, both from the Educational Psychology and Specialist Support Service (EPSS) at Norfolk County Council. They spoke about the Person-Centred Review (PCR) project they have been working on for the past two years in Norfolk, giving key information on the research and pilot studies they have conducted around the county. The result of this work will be to roll out PCR's across Norfolk with the SEN and Virtual School teams later this year. This speech was well received and stirred much debate late into the day, with parents interested to find out from other professionals how this approach might help their child.

Following on from Dr Hammond and Ms Palmer, the first five workshop sessions were held on: Short Breaks; Legal Aspects of Transition into Adulthood; Complex Care; Education, Health and Care Plans; and Family Voice: who we are and what we do. Here are some highlights from the morning sessions.

The short breaks workshop led by Rachel Gates was full to capacity with standing room only and the Legal Aspects to Transition Planning session was also very well attended; it was an extremely informative and professional presentation. The Complex Care workshop has ensured new links have been forged between the Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital and Family Voice Norfolk, whilst the Education, Health and Care Plan workshop broke down

barriers between parents and Children's Services by being open and honest around its ongoing operational issues.

We were delighted by the number of parents who attended the Family Voice presentation and ultimately joined as new members.

After lunch the afternoon workshops quickly filled up and were as follows: Short Breaks; Adult Outcomes: realising a shared vision; Norfolk's Local Offer; Starfish: learning Disabilities, Child and Mental Health Service; Family Voice: who we are and what we do.

The Short Breaks and Family Voice presentations were repeated from the morning sessions providing a second chance for parents and families to take part in these very interesting workshops. Claire and Wayne from Norfolk's Local Offer gave us a fast paced tour of the website, imparting much knowledge and information to their audience, whilst the Starfish Clinical Psychologists talked us through the intricacies of living with and supporting children and young people with learning disabilities and mental health issues. Finally Frank Crowdy gave a second, excellent but different workshop on the Transition Services available to families in Norfolk.

The market place comprised 34 stands, who were a mixture of sports charities, local forum groups, many local and national SEND charities, healthcare organisations, NHS service providers, services from the local authority, educational organisations, and others. As always there was a great buzz and the market place provided many opportunities to network, swap ideas and gather information. Both parent carers and professionals alike find this a very beneficial resource.

This year, Dan Grimmer, public affairs correspondent for the EDP and Evening News, joined us for the morning session. He was very impressed by the positive impact of the conference on parent carers and the work of Family Voice Norfolk. Subsequently, articles appeared both online (EDP) and in the evening news (*Help at hand for families of young with special educational needs: 18/03/17 and 20/03/17 respectively*).

At lunchtime, once again, we held our speed-dating sessions. As in previous years these appointments were snapped up within the first hour of the day. For the uninitiated the 'Speed-dating' event allows individual parent carers to book a one-to-one session with a 'speed-dating' professional. There were 16 speed-dating professionals and thus 64 sessions available over the hour.

Of course lunch was a veritable feast and, this year, was held in the Chatt Atrium; a wonderfully relaxing space to the side of the conference centre, providing much needed seating for all the attendees and a chance to refresh and refuel.

A new addition for this year was the Family Voice Norfolk area in 'The Link' exhibition space, to the back of the JIC. Here, our ambassador team worked tirelessly to create a relaxed and informal area where parent carers and their families could find out more about the work of Family Voice. Families were invited to listen to our team presentation (which I may add was very well attended in both the morning and afternoon), chat with the ambassadors, and look at the exhibition boards which were crammed with information.

We also asked for feedback from families: there were conference feedback questionnaires; the Parent Carer Journey banner; postcards asking for comments; and opportunities to share information and top tips, with other families. There was also a raffle to win gift card prizes throughout the day and a child friendly atmosphere.

This was a definite success and will be developed further for next year. We have also gained many new members.

Our feedback questionnaire was completed by parents and practitioners alike. We had 147 responses. They provided feedback on what they found most useful about the event and what could have been better. There were many comments, but the highlights were that a massive 93% of those feeding back would definitely recommend the conference to a friend, and 90% of the survey respondents would definitely like to attend next year. I am sure you will agree this is a wonderful endorsement for the day.

Finally on behalf of the Family Voice Steering Group I would like to extend a huge thank you to all who attended and took part on the day and for making it such a success.

See you next year!

Emma Parncutt

Conference and Special Events Lead.