

INFORMATION SHARING SESSION



In November 2018, Family Voice Norfolk met with SENSational Families, ASD Helping Hands, Norfolk SEN Network and Norfolk SEND Partnership to share how we all work and how we can best work together. Mrunal Sisodia from the National Network of Parent Carer Forums facilitated the meeting.

There are over 15,000 children with SEN in Norfolk. Between the five groups, we estimate that we have active contact with the families of approximately half of these children.

In discussion, it quickly became very evident that each organisation is hearing about similar issues affecting parents and their children and young people.

This group of organisations reported that the issues currently causing the most stress for families are:

- EHCPs
- Tribunals
- Autism diagnosis

Representatives of these groups are keen to meet the Local Authority and Health services to discuss the contents of this report.

EHCPs

While there are instances where the EHCP process is working, most of the organisations were experiencing an increasing number of parents that were unhappy with part or all of the process, from trying to get a plan through to the finalised plan, and beyond that in its lack of implementation in educational settings.

- Parents are finding that it is taking too long for the EHCP to be written and finalised.
- There are cases where a final plan has been actioned without a draft.
- Some EHCPs are not fit for purpose.
- Most EHCPs focus on educational outcomes, while Health and social care issues are often poorly represented.
- Workload for support in the EHCP process has doubled and trebled in recent years.
- Parents are finding that once an EHCP is in place, educational settings do not necessarily act on it.
- Parents feel that they have to have an EHCP to access services for their children and young people. The message that they may not need this is failing to reach them or being denied by educational settings.
- Higher numbers of parents are having to go to mediation and tribunal to have EHCPs that are fit for purpose and SMART.
- EHCPs are being done within the "spirit of the law" not with the actual legal requirements of the law.

Tribunals

Norfolk SEN Network and Norfolk SEND Partnership are working to capacity on preparing parents for, in many cases, extremely complex tribunal processes. Between them, they have supported over 120 cases this year.

- Parents are resorting more and more to going through the tribunal process.
- Parents feel that the LA is forcing them down this route because it is cheaper than providing the services upfront, even if the LA loses the case at tribunal.
- Parents feel that the LA is forcing them down this route in the hope that they will give up.
- Some families report that these additional stresses have forced them into crisis and marital breakdown, which will have a knock-on effect on public services.
- Tribunal processes are long and demanding on support services such as Norfolk SEND Partnership and Norfolk SEN Network.
- Numbers of cases going to tribunal are increasing year on year.
- Nine out of ten cases do not make it to tribunal and are settled out of court.
- When cases do make it to tribunal, the majority are found in favour of the parent.

Autism diagnosis

ASD Helping Hands supports families throughout the diagnosis process with a variety of support groups, home visits and monthly clinics.

- Parents are finding that it can take three to four years to get a diagnosis for their child.
- Once the child has a diagnosis, there often is no on-going support.

Recommendations

- EHCP co-ordinators to be adequately trained to understand and interpret the law around the EHCP process.
- Support organisations to be involved in the interview process of EHCP co-ordinators.
- LA and Health professionals to be held accountable for delays in the systems around EHCPs and diagnosis.
- Early intervention with parents to resolve issues that are currently being pushed through the tribunal process.
- Improved joint working between the LA and Health services to identify faster processes for ASD diagnosis and appropriate support thereafter.
- Improved joint working between the LA, Health and social services to simplify assessment of and provision for children and young people whose families find navigating the various processes currently both complicated and stressful.

Chair

National Network of Parent Carer Forums – Mrunal Sisodia

Representatives from:

- ASD Helping Hands
- Family Voice Norfolk
- Norfolk SEN Network
- Norfolk SEND Partnership
- SENSational Families