



Family Voice Norfolk Annual Conference

Saturday 11th March 2023 at the John Innes Conference Centre

After a long two year absence following the global impact of Covid 19, the Family Voice Norfolk (FVN) team was delighted to be able to welcome parents and carers of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to our eleventh Annual Conference at the John Innes Conference Centre in Norwich.



Despite the two-year break imposed by Covid restrictions, the conference remained very popular, attracting almost 200 parent carers and children and 130 professionals. It was fabulous to see so many familiar faces, but also encouraging to learn that **50% of attendees had never been** to the conference before. The chance to visit the numerous stands, attend the highly sought-after “speed dating” and workshop events and indulge in complimentary pastries, refreshments and lunch buffet undoubtedly drew everyone to this very special event!

At the entrance, everyone was handed a copy of the programme for the day, together with a Family Voice Norfolk canvas tote bag containing some practical goodies as a gesture of our thanks for attending the conference. Registration complete, David and Lewis (husband and son of our Chair) invited attendees to place a sticker on a big map of Norfolk to show us where they had travelled from. This is something we do at every conference and gives us an important visual representation of the effort and commitment our members and non-members make to attend the conference, which we know, is not always easy.



A quick chance to look at the stands and into the Auditorium for the ‘Welcome’ from our Chair, **Tracey Sismey**. Tracey highlighted that with the long-awaited return to ‘normal’ life, some positives had



arisen from the restrictions previously imposed. She went on to explain that the now standard use of ‘Zoom’ and ‘Teams’ have enabled Family Voice Norfolk to attend many more meetings on a daily basis and have also meant little need for travel for our reps. This development has therefore facilitated an increased representation of parent carer needs and concerns in meetings and decision-making processes, but has also emphasised the need for FVN

to increase the number of reps on the team. Parents and carers were therefore invited to speak to current reps present at the conference and to take the opportunity to find out from them what being a rep is like, what it involves and how they could make a difference to SEND services in Norfolk by joining the team. Tracey concluded by thanking everyone for coming along and welcomed our Keynote Speaker, **Louise Warren**, to the stand.



Louise, the **Regional SEND Manager for NHS East of England**, delivered an informative speech about her role, SEND in the East of England, the national and regional priorities of NHS SEND and the NHS's objectives to provide



person-centred and compassionate experiences for the SEND population and their families. As Louise gave her speech, a very young member of the audience decided that she would also like to be the highlight of the 'show' and as she graciously made her way to the stage, was

greeted with roars of appreciation! It was an impromptu moment, but perfectly captured the essence of the whole event and the reason why everyone was there. Indeed, feedback received from one parent carer expressed that the speech had been...



wonderful !



The over-riding objective of the Family Voice Norfolk conference is to provide parent carers with comprehensive information on SEND services and facilitate access to that information through a range of channels, such as workshops, stands and one-on-one consultations with professionals. We were more restricted on space this year, due to a

change at the conference centre itself, but were still able to host a total of **37 stands**. The foyer was bustling with people and feedback received confirmed that **the stands were..**



interesting,
informative, relevant
and positive (with) real
help, support and
opportunities.

With...

access to so many
key people and
organisations in one
place.

...proving to be invaluable.

People also found themselves ...

talking to organisations I had
either never heard of or
vaguely heard of and hearing
what they're all about.

Equally, **stand holders** were very appreciative of being able to participate;

..it was great meeting all the families and we got to share what we do with lots of interest from them.

Our own stand was very busy, with lots of interactions and questions from fellow parent carers. The majority of conference attendees (**63%**) were already members with a further **13%** people applying to join us via membership leaflets available



at the stand, the website or via the feedback forms we asked to be completed at the end of the day. These applications have been processed by our Membership Secretary, Kate Draycott, who will ensure that everyone is added to our database so they can receive all our communications, newsletters and social media posts.

A total of **eight workshops** were held in the adjoining meeting rooms: four in the morning and four in the afternoon, with standing-room only for one in particular. **Over 60%** of delegates attended at least one workshop, with over **25%** attending two. The diverse range of topics covered in the presentations were all highly appreciated by the attendees, with many considering these to be the highlight of the event, being...



very useful and informative.

and providing a much needed opportunity to...

hear more in-depth information.

Whilst the delicious lunch buffet opened for service, the Auditorium hosted the ever-popular '**speed dating**' event and provided parent carers with a unique opportunity to speak privately with a professional of their choice for fifteen minutes each.



With a total of eighteen professionals available, the slots had booked up quickly as for many this provided an invaluable opportunity of....

having one-on-one
time to talk with a
professional

and being ...

able to discuss
personal issues
with people who
are in the know.

Following the afternoon workshops finishing at 2pm, parents and carers had a last chance to visit the stands until the day concluded at around 3.30pm. We asked everyone to complete their feedback forms, in addition to our red and green cards. These cards are very important as they help us to gauge what is working for you as parent carers and what is not which we can then communicate to the organisations we work with.

One parent said that they....

really appreciate the
conference – it has given
me faith in humans again
and being heard has been
amazing.

and another said...

I finally feel I'm not alone
with so much support out
there.

This is extremely gratifying to hear and confirms yet again, the value and importance of the conference.

For those who missed a particular workshop or the keynote speech, these presentations are now available to view on the Family Voice Norfolk website at <https://www.familyvoice.org.uk/articles-reports/conferences/> and details of the feedback from parent carers will be found in an appendix accompanying this report shortly.

Finally and most importantly, **we would like to thank all the parent carers and professionals for making the day the success that it was.** We have listened to **all the feedback** and we will work hard to make the conference even more successful next year, so stay tuned for our announcements ! In the meantime we will, of course, continue to always represent your concerns and needs in everything we do. Thank you again for your amazing support.

The Family Voice Norfolk Team

April 2023



