



Parents Opening Doors Participation Handbook



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1	Background	
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Parents Opening Doors (PODS) Parent Carer Forum is a user-led Charity, run by parent carers all of whom have a child with a disability or additional need.

We have been working across Telford & Wrekin since 2008 and are well respected by our key partners in health, local authority, education, social care and voluntary services. They respect our experiences and your voice and continue to listen to you as a family, which impacts on the decisions they make.

Our Core principles include:

- **Parent Carer Focus:** Ensuring voices of parent carers are heard and represented through services and that families are at the heart of any decisions made about them
- **Participation:** Enabling parent carers to participate and be involved in a way that they are comfortable with
- **Training:** investing in training opportunities to meet family needs and to develop our Parent Rep network
- **Development:** Encompassing the voice of parent carers in developing our forum and including views in future planning
- **Information & Communication:** sharing information and intelligence with families, professionals and key stakeholders via bulletins, social media updates, websites, etc
- **Funding:** seeking future sustainability through funding bids and appropriate funding to meet legal duties
- **Face 2 Face:** Providing resilience and ability to cope to families accessing emotional support at time of challenge or difficulty or at point of diagnosis

2	Key Principles	
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- PODS is Pan Disability
- PODS are the collective voice of parents/ carers.
- PODS work on behalf of parent carers of children and young people with disabilities and/or additional needs aged between 0 to 25 years collectively.



- PODS work in partnership with all other statutory and voluntary organisations.
- PODS are a positive force to encourage and ensure that the local authority improves services for children and young people with disabilities and/or additional needs by listening to the voices of their parents/ carers.
- PODS is the principle parent participation organisation within Telford and Wrekin representing collectively parent carers of children and young people with disabilities and/or additional needs.
- PODS recognize that at times grandparents, foster parents and other family members have parental responsibility of children and young people with disabilities and additional needs. Where this is the case PODS will add their details to the mailing list if requested.

3	Aims	
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- To influence and shape service design and development on a local, regional and national level
- To ensure we have a collective voice for parent carers in Telford and Wrekin
- To represent the views and issues raised by a majority of parent carers
- Help groups of parent carers engage with professionals across Health, Education and Social Care.
- Facilitate participation of parent carers in service delivery.
- Hold informative events enabling many parent carers to become involved and or informed.
- Help parent carers have access to the information about what services are available to them.
- Signpost parent carers to other agencies/ organizations who provide specific services that we do not.
- To ensure that parent carers have a genuine influence in the shaping of services.



- To raise awareness of unmet needs and ensure that parent carers have the opportunity to raise issues and areas of concern collectively.
- To be the voice of all parent carer any child or young person no matter of the severity of their disability (in line with 'every child matters')
- To be fully inclusive of the views of all parent carers
- Representation in strategic and operational boards

4	What We Do	
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- PODS will ensure that parent representatives (parent reps) who sit on boards and groups feed back to the appropriate lead using the PODS reporting methods; the lead will then feedback the information to the PODS board of trustees and also filter down the information to the wider forum in the appropriate manner.
 - Provide notification to the appropriate person regarding which parent rep will attend the group or board. We aim to have continuity and allocate work streams accordingly to our parent reps so they can build up a relationship with the other members on the board. This also ensures that reps have a continuous knowledge of the topics discussed.
 - Should a designated rep be unable to attend an event/ meeting or group the appropriate contact will be notified of replacement or apologies will be sent.
 - Make available information gathered by parent reps during feedback process.
 - PODS expect all their representatives to show impartiality and will not bring any personal agendas to meetings. Personal agenda's should not be confused with the use of anecdotes and personal experience used to elaborate on understanding
 - PODS will develop and facilitate a resource for sharing information relating to meetings/ conferences with parent reps, leads of other parent groups and members of PODS. This resource will be shared with parent reps and will take the format of a reporting template that information can be inserted in to. The use of online forms via survey monkey will also be utilised.
- Supporting and empowering parent reps – training, mentoring etc.



- PODS will provide all necessary support and mentoring to parent reps.
 - Every parent rep will be allocated a direct lead of the work stream they are involved with.
 - This lead has full responsibility of this work stream and all queries need to be directed to this person. The parent rep needs to seek advice and approval at any time from their direct lead.
 - PODS will either deliver in house training or procure training from outside agencies to help strengthen and develop parent participation ensuring that our members and reps have access to and are supported to attend other regional and national training/event opportunities.
- Consultation - Collating the views and issues raised by parents and what happens next!
- PODS will seek to include parents in shaping of services in a variety of ways thus ensuring many parents' views are incorporated – PODS are mindful that not all parents wish to contribute in the same way for a variety of reasons but are fully aware all views are equally important.
 - PODS is mindful and respectful of other parents views regarding religion, culture and their possible language barriers
 - PODS will seek to gather majority views and bring forward issues that are relevant to groups of families.
 - PODS will enable parents/carers who wish to take forward the views of the collective voice of parents/carers to become parent reps.
 - PODS will collate any information gathered through various avenues in to reports which will then be made available to contacts within the LA, the wider forum membership of PODS and any other partner agencies/ parent groups/ organisations.
 - PODS will hold drop-in sessions/focus groups related to children at different ages



- PODS will facilitate Sub groups/ Working groups to discuss issues so that they can feed information in to the bigger group
- PODS will host meetings with representatives of other parent groups to discuss a variety of issues.
- PODS actively participates in the regional network of parent carer forums to ensure that its members remain up to date and involved in regional and national issues
- Providing and cascading information.
 - PODS will utilise a variety of media to cascade information to all interested parties. Media used includes e.g. a website, printed newsletter and social media like Facebook, Twitter, and also text message
 - PODS will try to encourage information sharing amongst parents/families that is accurate. (Peer to peer support, information sharing is an invaluable resource)
- We ask that (partner agencies)
 - All contact regarding any boards or strategic work will be directed to the participation coordinator and in their absence to the Chair. Who will then assign an appropriate parent representative (parent rep)
 - Should anyone wish to have a particular parent representative attend an event, meeting or group they must contact the participation coordinator who will see if they are available on the desired date. We endeavor to allocate work streams to designated parent reps to have continuance in information.
 - In order for the parent reps to be properly prepared for a meeting, event or group we require the agenda and minutes be forwarded to the participation coordinator, where possible, at least one week in advance of said meeting, group or event.
 - Those boards take school hours into consideration to enable our parent reps to attend.
 - PODS will send a designated Parent Rep to attend specific meetings.
 - Partner agencies agree not to pass out any PODS documentation without prior written agreement.



- We ask that (parent reps)
 - Do not pass any information they receive at meetings or they work on to other parties without the approval of their lead.
 - Do not get involved in discussions about their own political, cultural and religious views
 - At all times ask for approval of the information they want to share and what contacts they are planning to make.
 - Are at all times aware of the chain of command and respects this at all times. In case of confusion for them to go to their allocated lead for further explanations.
 - That the parent reps only use their PODS email addresses or info@PODStelford.org when attending at meetings and not request details to be sent to their personal emails unless prior approved by the participation coordinator.

5	Working Practices	
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- PODS have a clear complaints and problem solving procedures and request that these be adhered to and will make this information available to all necessary parties.
- These are detailed in the volunteering handbook parent representatives must read/ follow alongside this handbook.
- Documentation which parent reps have to agree to and sign is available for perusal as part of PODS resource pack.
- PODS respect the need for confidential discussion and as such will support any designated rep involved in any such discussion and will adhere to any confidentiality agreement over and above PODS confidentiality agreement.
- Should any parent rep behave in an inappropriate manner PODS expect to be notified so that the matter can be addressed quickly and if necessary appropriate measures can be taken.



- All Parties are asked that they direct anyone who has an issue with PODS or its Volunteers report this to the Participation coordinator/Project Officer in the first instance who will address their particular issue.
- We ask that partner agencies agree not to put parent representatives in any unnecessary untenable situation regarding sharing of minutes and confidential information. Should parent reps be required to be involved in such discussions we ask that you notify the Chair or Participation coordinator prior to or within 48 hours of said meeting.
- Partner agencies should be aware that PODS cannot take on individual case work.

6	Political and Personal Views	
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PODS ask that parent carers when acting as parent representatives;

- Do not express political viewpoints and/ or opinions
- Only use personal anecdotes to make points relevant to their work
- Remember that they are representing the wider forum/ charity not themselves.

7	Conflicts of Interest/ Loyalty and Declarations	
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PODS realise at times that parent carers acting as parent representatives may come across situations that affect them personally. It is important parent representatives know what is required at such times.

PODS will:

- Help parent representatives understand about conflict of interest during any training provided.
- Help parent representatives to understand the conflict of interest policy and how to use it.
- Provide parent representatives with a declaration of interest form to complete where there is any conflict of interest/ loyalty and provide help to complete this form if needed.

Parent Representatives should:



- Declare any conflicts of interest/ loyalty (it is always best to declare anything you feel may lead to a conflict rather than remain silent)
- Complete the declarations form as and when required
- Ask for help when deciding if something may be a conflict if you are unsure

8	Confidentiality	
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There are times when parent representatives may come in to contact with information that is sensitive or personal in nature and is viewed as confidential.

During training about parent representation and participation confidentiality is discussed as well as how to handle situations where confidentiality may be needed.

Parent representatives are asked to read the confidentiality policy and follow the guidelines in it.

Approval Date: 11/11/2019

Approval Name: Phil Gillum

Position: Trustee