

**PARENTS
OPENING
DOORS**
PARENT CARER FORUM



PODS

'COVID' SPECIAL

Newsletter

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Company/Charity number: 1150871

Foreword

from Elaine Pearce, Project Manager



A warm welcome to our 2021 newsletter, what a strange 12 months it has been since our March 2020 edition. First of all, a massive well done to you all for having got through those last 12 months, I know you would have had highs and lows and faced many challenges along the way, but you have made it and should be immensely proud of yourself. This newsletter will be mainly focusing on Covid, from how we have responded to top tips and info to give you the strength and resilience to keep going, we have also included many of our usual topics and information.

We had so many plans for last year, inclusive trips, Easter events, quiz nights and our biggest ever Picnic in the Park, just to mention a few, unfortunately Covid had other ideas! However, being as determined as ever to support you all, our dedicated staff have managed to put on many fabulous activities and sessions, whilst home schooling.

The last 12 months if not challenging enough, have also been educational, we have all had to adapt to new ways of working and embrace such technologies as Zoom and Microsoft teams. Who would have thought that we would ever be in a situation where schools were closed for months and the only place you could take your children for a day out was the back garden?

Our Befriender Team has gone from strength to strength, just prior to the first lockdown we started a training program with some eager volunteers who were keen to be your listening ear. This regrettably had to be halted, however our volunteers were not deterred and continued their training online. We now have a large team who have completed their training and are regularly supporting families, Lin the Team Lead has a more detailed update for you further on.

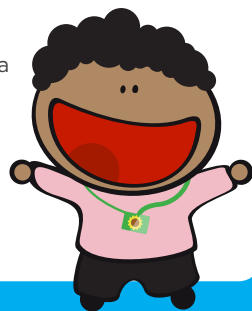
On the forum side we have continued to gain your views via our volunteer parent reps, social media and phone calls and represent parent carers at meetings (virtually). Aside from this we have been heavily involved with

the local Covid response and ensuring that our families are not forgotten. We have been carrying out hundreds of wellbeing calls and produced an 'out and about' card to make travel and access easier. Read on for a full update from Jayne our Strategic Co-ordinator. Uma has strived ahead in the face of adversity and has ran and continues to run online family groups, craft sessions for children/ young people and her ever popular Lego club. When restrictions have allowed this have been accompanied by in person sessions carried out across Telford, including a regular meet up at Blists Hill.

Jo who heads up our fundraising and events, who is usually supported by a fantastic group of volunteers has had her work cut out. She has worked incredibly hard to come up with new ideas and ways in which to keep the fundraising going so we can continue our vital work. She has also supported Uma in the family sessions coming up with some fantastic craft ideas.

Kerrie has continued to keep the ebuletins coming out regularly and was instrumental in the production and distribution of the 'out and about' card. She also ran our ever-popular Christmas card competition and is the unsung hero of compiling and assisting with the design of our annual newsletter. During lockdown our membership base has continued to grow and that highlights to us the importance of the work we do and are extremely proud to be here supporting you all. Fingers crossed that by the time we write the 2022 newsletter things would have pretty much returned to normality. Keep going everyone you're doing amazing job and remember that we are here for you either by phone, email, social media and hopefully in person very soon.

Elaine Pearce
Project Manager



Hello



from Jayne Stevens, Strategic Co-ordinator

How are you? How are your family? A simple question that can open-up all sorts of questions and conversations and through this we've spoken to many of you over these past months, at all different stages of the lockdown.

What has been most important to us is continuing to ensure that our parent carer voices are heard as we work with Strategic Teams, Commissioners and Service Leads, with our partners and with the wider community in Telford & Wrekin, and that's my role – the meetings have continued with at least one a day, and the work around Short Breaks, Commissioning, Keyworking roles, BeeU, Local Offer, Learning Disability and Autism Groups and Boards, Aiming High for SEND, with IASS, and SENCO's – much, much more. I update via the ebulletin most weeks and I hope this helps to give a sense of the importance of your parent carer voices?

Your parent carer voice has come to me through the work that we've done in collating experiences through the COVID survey, the ongoing conversations via email, social media, over the phone, and also the important wellbeing calls that all of the team have been involved with and we've spoken to many of you, sometimes more than once if needed and we have been able to continue to offer this, as a dedicated team.

We've ran some workshops this past year, some great input from community partners such as Mind (Mental Health Support), Sibbs and most recently a conversation with Ed Psych team leads to gather feedback and discuss development of a service offer to help support families in the greater context, this work is highlighted in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment as a recommendation of need and will feed into the wider Autism Pathway developments.

We have continued with regular online meetings and we are in the process of revisiting these with themes and an

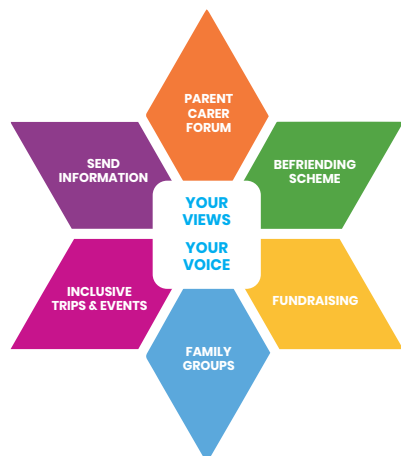
opportunity for 'just a cuppa and a chat' – if you've not already accessed one of these, don't be shy – we're a lovely friendly bunch, and you're free to just pop in and you can choose to have your camera on or not.

Our strategic participation meetings have continued – albeit online via 'zoom' or 'teams' with our wider team of Parent Reps who have their ear to the ground, and some have been able to still attend meetings with me, where their circumstances allow for which I'm very grateful. Continued thanks to Deb Sheppard, Tina Lowe, Simon Buckley-Robins, Karen Evans, Sarah Richards, Liz Bickford-Smith, Keiron Warr for your input and invaluable insight and widening the reach of our forum work. The core (Ops) team where staff team members bring the voices from our community events, discussions, family groups and wellbeing calls etc include Kerrie, Jo, Uma, Elaine and Lin. Thank you all.

I've included some key workstream updates within this newsletter with some articles that have been written for us by professionals, and as always, we welcome your views and questions and conversations about these.

Jayne Stevens

Strategic Co-ordinator



VOICES Project

Our four principles:

WELCOME AND CARE

VALUE AND INCLUDE

COMMUNICATE

WORK IN PARTNERSHIP

developing and nurturing each of these areas to build

TRUST

We are well on the way of developing the VOICES model of working here – strengthening the work we do on co-production, using those four areas that are vitally important to demonstrate joint working and building a strong community that is able to offer challenge but also work together, through a framework of Welcome and Care, Value and Include, Communicate, Working in Partnership to build Trust. Workshops have taken place for key staff across Health, Education, Social Care and with young people and we have held a very powerful workshop for

our parent carers. At the time of writing this newsletter, we are just in process of planning an ‘event’ to bring everyone together and out of that we will be developing a local co-production ‘VOICES charter’ type document. This opportunity will feed into the wider SEND Action Plan, ensuring we embed the VOICES work through everything we do, in a structured way that is meaningful and is ‘owned’ locally by the whole community and partners.

COVID ‘Experience’ Survey Feedback



We have released a report on the COVID Survey feedback we received in the Summer, and this has been extremely valuable in helping us develop a series of FAQ’s that have gone onto the Telford & Wrekin Local Offer, and also formed part of the information that has been shared there.

“Thanks to all our families who have shared their experiences with us – these will go towards helping with service development in the future and for any immediate changes that may need to be addressed and that we pick up at regular communications meetings with key strategic leads across social care, education, health and community partners. We were aware of various national led surveys on the impact of COVID, and we took the opportunity to gather views at a local level and are presenting these in a formal report. Conversations regarding key elements of this have been shared in comms meetings and through regular updates. This report forms an element of an evidence base with a mix of data and qualitative data responses. Responses in this survey mirror discussions we have had with families via our wellbeing calls and a further summary report will be reported at Comms meeting in September”

Asking question of how families are coping with lockdown,

59% report they are doing OK all things considered,

26% are not doing very well at all with half of these doing really badly.

71% of
respondents
were shielding.

Accessing information is really important to families

67% Government information was most useful, with **19%** finding out via Local Offer and **23%** via Newspaper and social media

35% of families said that virtual appointments had gone well, with **30%** wanting to continue with them, in this way.

Impact of COVID on parent carers has ranged, with emotional health been mostly affected (over half poor or very poor), alongside loneliness and stress (over half again poor or very poor). Physical health was slightly less affected and maintaining friendships was better.

Impact on their child/young person demonstrated mental health and stress was majority of poor or very poor, struggling to maintain friendships and loneliness been a factor. Physical health was slightly better.

Families have been accessing emotional support for themselves via family and friends mostly (**88%**) and another **26%** have accessed the wellbeing line or befriender scheme. **25%** have accessed social media and **20%** through mental health professionals. **2%** have accessed support via faith groups.

We were pleased that some positives had been recorded:

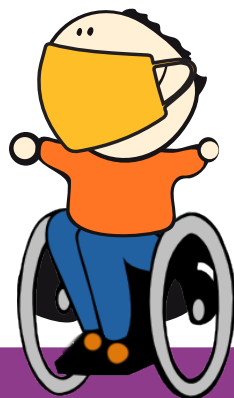
"Whilst some families have struggled, using things like technology, accessing social media to talk to friends and getting out the house has helped to alleviate some of stressors, and this has been made easier because of less traffic on the roads. Time for lie-ins and plenty of time for play, also reduced demands on transitions like going to school, or the changes between home and school, more time for fun stuff and eating together more often. More time focusing on physio and learning including skills like handwriting; other families able to access sports activities and music and virtual performances online. For families where they have been educating at home keeping to a routine has been really important, as is keeping busy"

We've had a really mixed reports from families regarding the impact of COVID where some feel they have been "totally neglected and offered no solutions", through to support available from case workers and Hope House deemed as "excellent".

"I feel that children with special needs have been totally neglected and their families abandoned, there has been no facilities available, no practical support and no respite available. Talking to people about the situation has offered no solutions and the parents are left exhausted with only the hope of things returning to normal".

Please note that since the report was published and these experiences fed back to strategic teams, we now see many more families receiving some level of support - through direct payments and access to personal budgets and respite, or through support from schools and education settings.

Ongoing work around the experiences of families means we have raised questions and challenges through these processes - using a model of "what's working, what needs to be better, questions from families" and this has all been fed into 'comms' meetings with answers shared via the local offer and SEND updates to families.



JSNA (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment)

This piece of work has been led by the Aiming High for SEND Board and gives a picture of what it's like to live in Telford and Wrekin – we have used lots of feedback from families to feed into this and the full document is available on the Local Offer. It provides 80+ pages of information relating to disability and additional needs covering education, health, social care, parent carer experiences. A series of recommendations, details of future commissioning intentions and what needs to be developed in the future.

It's a very significant piece of work that we have done through lockdown, and we'd encourage families to review this. If you have any comments on it or any questions to let us know.

Key Findings from the JSNA

1. There are rising numbers of children with SEND, particularly with autism and poor social emotional mental health.
2. At the 2-2 ½ year old check, almost 1 in 3 children are not at or above the expected level in 5 areas of development
3. Moderate learning difficulties are the most common primary need of pupils with SEND. We perform below the national target in all 4 standards to reduce over-prescribing of medication for CYP with Learning Disabilities.
4. Parent Carers value some services, but report poor experiences from others. For example, there are gaps in service provision i.e autism and trauma and long waiting lists in services such as autism, SALT, physiotherapy
5. Improve access to information and support to navigate education, care and health services and development of published pathways, clear information and better communication
6. Need to improve engagement and co-production with children and young people
7. Opportunities to build on digital and information management improvements put in place during Covid times i.e information sharing, casework practice, service delivery

Extract from Local Offer: "The purpose of JSNAs...is to improve the health and wellbeing of the local community and reduce inequalities for all ages. They are not an end in themselves, but a continuous process of strategic assessment and planning – the core aim is to develop local evidence-based priorities for commissioning which will improve the public's health and reduce inequalities... Department of Health, 2011

https://www.telfordsend.org.uk/downloads/file/2378/telford_and_wrekin_send_jsna_2020

The whole series of conclusions and recommendations gives an idea of the scope of our work and the key work areas and where the voices of families still is vitally important!

Local Offer

Please check out the Local Offer and the resources and information for parent carers: [National Lockdown - Resources for Parents, Carers, Young People Schools, Settings & Professionals - SEND - Local offer](#) (telfordsend.org.uk)



Short Breaks Offer

My Options who run the young people's services has shared the following statement with us (February 2021). We have regular meetings to share families experiences around the short break offer and also as part of the development of the Short Breaks "Statement".

Lockdown 3 Statement

My Options Young People's Services continue to follow Government and Public Health England guidance in relation to the Coronavirus pandemic and changing lockdown restrictions, so we can ensure the safety of our customers and staff in the activities the service provides Telford & Wrekin Council will continue to work with families who have significant needs through their allocated Case Workers or Social Workers.



The guidelines and advice remain in place about minimising contacts and social distancing, and in addition, the council's Public Health team are also advising against providing care and support in a group setting. Therefore, Telford & Wrekin will not be able to offer the usual Sports & Leisure, Arts and Youth Club activities due to the current restrictions.

We will, however, continue to be able to offer our My Options, Young People's Services, PA service where we can support at 1:1 or a 2:1 basis.

Telford & Wrekin Council understand that many families many find this lockdown period challenging. If you find yourself in this position, please contact your allocated worker from the Children with Disabilities Team. If you do not have an allocated worker, contact Family Connect on 01952 385383.

We remain committed to supporting children and families. We thank families for their continued understanding of the complexities and that provisions have to be based on a social care needs led risk assessment.

Please check here for regular updates:
https://www.telford.gov.uk/info/20729/my_options_-_covid_19_service_updates



Sensory Difficulties? Ideas from the Occupational Therapy Service



With feedback from families we had a discussion with the children's OT team, sharing family experiences and asking them to share some information with us on what the service can offer regarding support for children and young people with sensory difficulties – information on their opt-in parent education workshops is included below. The discussion regarding sensory assessments is still under review as part of our continuing joint commissioning discussions.



Shropshire Community Health **NHS**
NHS Trust

Children's Occupational Therapy Service Supporting Children and Young People with Sensory Difficulties

As occupational therapists we know that sensory needs can affect children's participation in the activities they need, want or are expected to do but there are different ways to address these.

We currently offer advice and support to parents and education settings for supporting children with sensory difficulties through our advice line and opt -in parent education workshops. You can find out more about our service on our website <https://www.shropscommunityhealth.nhs.uk/childrens-occupational-therapy> . However, the Occupational Therapy service does not offer a service providing "Sensory assessments" and we are not able to provide Sensory Integration Therapy.

We will soon be launching our Facebook page alongside pages being developed for Children's Physiotherapy [Shropcom Children's Physiotherapy - Home | Facebook](#) and Children's Speech and Language Therapy services.



We have put together some 'Top Tip's from our parents education workshops and we have included links for the resources we find most useful when working with parents and educators.

Calming Activities at Home

When the young person is over-stimulated and feeling anxious these activities/strategies may help them feel calmer (from 'Making Sense of Sensory Behaviour')

Quick Fixes

- Sitting under a big, heavy blanket.
- Hands on head and pressing down.
- Tucking legs up and squeezing.
- Deep pressure massage.
- Slow rocking e.g. rocking chair.
- Giving themselves a hug.
- Lavender scents
- Squeezing and relaxing a small fidget toy.
- Squeezing and relaxing face and/or hands.
- Snuggling into a small space.
- Sucking a "sweet" sweet.
- Sucking yoghurt/thick milkshake through straw.
- Bear hug.

Longer lasting ideas

Long term routine calming activities may be part of the day. Walk after coming home from school (with backpack on).

- Press ups or chair press ups regularly through the day e.g. before school, lunch time, after school.
- Allow chill out time, prior to homework in a daily routine.
- Help with moving furniture e.g. pushing sofa – relocating plant pots, Hoovering.
- Help with heavy manual tasks in the garden e.g. digging.
- Put on a heavy coat or heavy blanket over the shoulders as part of chill out time.
- Have a corner with favourite sensory activities to go to at any time.
- Squeeze/rock against gym ball.

Occupational Therapy resource pack

This is available to downloads from Shropshire Community Health Website:

www.shropscommunityhealth.nhs.uk/childrens-occupational-therapy

Please see resource pack at bottom of Shropcom Children's Occupational Therapy page.

(P17 of pack refers to sensory difficulties)

NB: Please let us know if you want anything printing off and sending to you – we're happy to support with this.

Website links:

Sensory processing disorder network (SPD network) www.spdnetwork.org

www.thesensorysmartchild.com



Speech and Language Therapy Redesign

Thank you to families who have attended the workshops to discuss the redesign of the Speech and Language Therapy and for anyone who provided input and feedback. Further consultation work will take place very soon (if not already by the time you receive this newsletter) via a short survey. This will influence not only the stages of redesign but also ongoing service improvement.

The input from families so far has been really invaluable and Alison Parkinson, Clinical Services Manager for Targeted Children's Services has this to say:

"The feedback we have received from the focus groups so far has been about increasing the offer for Parents and similarly for education settings- with a focus on us sharing skills and knowledge. So the redesign enhances the offer of training and coaching for parents and education staff and other practitioners. This will be available for parents and setting staff of children and young people across mainstream, special schools and colleges locally. We will be providing Information in a parent handbook about the services available which will be available soon. We aim to launch the first week of April though some of the changes are already being piloted and some will be developed later in the Spring and Summer. With Parent and settings support we will be able to develop systems for sharing information about how well we are doing and for continuous improvement"

PODS would like to say thanks to all those that have supported us over the last 12 months...



Progress of ASD Assessment Waiting Times

As you know we have been working with BeeU and the wider Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust who run the BeeU service (incorporates core offer, alongside BEAM, Kooth and Healios). We were invited to a meeting in December by the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee – led by Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire Councils and shared families experiences in a very powerful environment. This has led to a series of meetings and we have had this statement shared regarding the updated service offer:

Cathy Riley, Managing Director, Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (MPFT), was invited to give an update on the waiting times for autism assessments.

MPFT is the lead partner in BeeU and works with The Children's Society, Healios and Kooth.



Cathy told us

"For those children and young people who have been referred to specialist mental health services because of suspected autism spectrum disorder, the wait has been long and unacceptable. For this I would like to apologise."

Following investment from the clinical commissioning group at the end of last year, BeeU has recruited an ASD assessment team who will assess those children and young people who have been waiting over 12 months.

The team started to undertake ASD assessments in September of last year and started with 294 children and young people.

By January, this had reduced to 220 young people on the waiting list. 117 of those have been waiting over a year and 103 have been waiting under a year.

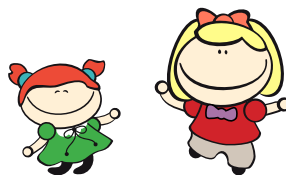
BeeU is working in partnership with another organisation who is going to assess the 40 children and young people who have waited the longest and will contact the families direct.

By the end of April 2021, BeeU plans to have started the assessments of all 220 children and young people still waiting.

BeeU continues to accept new referrals and their aim is to get within the NICE guidance of good practice that all children and young people wait for a maximum of 12 weeks from referral to the start their assessment. And to maintain, or reduce, that over time.

If you have been waiting for more than a year for this process, or are going through this process right now, it would be great to hear from you so you can share your experiences and understand what is going on from the parents point of view.

Importance of Diagnosis



We have lots of conversations, on more than one occasion when we've talked of a diagnosis being important, and a 'quick' tick box exercise on social media highlighted the importance for our families:

43 parents ticked: "It means that I will understand my child better and be able to put the most appropriate interventions in place"

26 parents ticked: "It means that I will get help from school that's not available without a diagnosis"

17 parents ticked: "I can answer my child when they ask why do they struggle or do certain things"

15 parents ticked: "It means there is a better chance of support being provided for my child later in their life with Further Education and Employment."

12 parents ticked: "It means we will have 'answers'"

We've discussed this recently with lead of the Emotional Wellbeing Panel, which is now the key route into the assessment pathway. The referral for this assessment is led by schools and you can find out more information about it here: [Emotional Health and Wellbeing Panel - SEND - Local offer \(telfordsend.org.uk\)](https://telfordsend.org.uk)

Emotional Health and Wellbeing Panel

Extract from Local Offer: *"The aims of the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Panel (EHWP) are to support schools and young people, by providing advice to schools, to signpost services and to ensure the students with the appropriate level of need are referred to BeeU. This should mean that the young people get the help they need in a timelier manner and that only the appropriate cases being referred on to BeeU".*

However, we are hearing from families that there have been barriers to accessing the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Panel. We are in the process of collecting case studies from parents about the experiences of the panel process (good and not so good) and if you'd like to be part of this, please get in touch with us. Please be reassured that continued discussions are taking place.

Learning Disability Annual Health Checks

for young people aged 14+ during Lockdown

Learning disability annual health checks are for adults and young people aged 14 or over with a learning disability. They give people time to talk about anything that is worrying them and means they can get used to going to visit the doctor.

Despite lockdown, learning disability annual health checks are a priority for GP practices and as such are still available under current restrictions.

Although changes will vary from practice to practice, some appointments may now take place over the phone or virtually, via online consultations, or if needed face to face. You can talk to your GP about what type of appointment is best for you.

Please also be assured that the necessary infection prevention and control measures, as well as personal protective equipment, have been put in place to make practices safe to attend.

This is what you can expect to happen at a health check:

§ A physical check-up including heart rate, blood pressure and taking blood and urine samples (if necessary)

§ A chat about staying well, the medicines you are taking, as well as any health problems you might be dealing with (such as asthma or diabetes)

§ A talk about conditions such as epilepsy, constipation and problems swallowing (which are more common for people with a learning disability)

§ A check to see if your vaccinations are up-to-date and if you have any other health appointments, such as physiotherapy or speech therapy

§ Some health advice on healthy eating, exercise, contraception or stopping smoking

§ As well as support, if needed, for family and/or carers.

If your GP practice hasn't offered you an annual health check, just give them a call.

For any other advice and guidance on learning disability annual health checks, please call the Community Learning Disability team on: 01743 211 210. For further information on learning disability annual health checks, an easy read guide and a short video are available to view which have been produced by Mencap add in link here: <https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/health/dont-miss-out/dont-miss-out-annual-health-checks>



Top Tips for Supporting your Wellbeing

I wanted to share this with you that was picked up from Contact charity page, something I've tried to do through these past months especially when we're not sure of what's happening next:

"We know it's not easy looking after a disabled child and finding time for yourself at the best of times, but if you can try and set some routines and boundaries around being at home you will reap the rewards"... These are some top tips, and I've added some of the things I do to give you an idea? If you have ideas of your own and want to share them let us know and we'll develop our own 'top tips' sheet and get it on the website!

- Set an alarm, get up at your normal time, have a shower, get dressed. Keep to your morning routine as much as possible.
- Get as much natural light and fresh air as possible – try and get out for a little walk in the day, or sit by a window. If you're working from home, I've just brought my hubby a 'sunlight lamp' for the office and he tells me it certainly helps!
- Take breaks and eat your lunch. Keep well fed and hydrated. Have a stretch, go for a walk, keep moving.
- Stay in (virtual) contact with your friends, family and colleagues. Embrace the video call, maybe phone people if you'd usually text, video call if you'd usually phone. We're all just a virtual contact away! I know that many of us are 'zoomed out', but a message via text, or sending a funny postcard, something to drop on the mat and vice versa, gives a smile.
- If you're working from home, set your boundaries as part of your routine. Work creeps into our home life easily at the best of times – turn off that laptop, unplug it and put it out of sight somewhere!
- Try to limit your news intake, both TV and digital - keep yourself informed, but allow yourself some escapism". Get a funny book, or a magazine to have a quick flick through or if you're on Facebook, find a funny meme's group – I've got a cat addict one – it makes me smile every day!

Here are some more ideas to support the widely acclaimed model of 5 ways to wellbeing (remember this from your resilience packs?).



PODS Befriender Scheme Update



Last year we relaunched the Befriender Scheme for parents and carers of children with disabilities or additional needs aged 0-25years. It is open to anyone who is a member of PODS who feels that they would benefit from some emotional support, you can self-refer. (Joining PODS is really easy, just head over to <https://www.podstelford.org/become-a-member-of-pods/> and fill in the details).

Our trained Befrienders can offer you support in a variety of ways, we have a newly trained Team of Telephone Befrienders who can call you to offer both emotional and practical support, and we have a range of services we can sign post you to. Things have not been easy these past 12 months for anyone and unfortunately, we have not been able to support you through visits, family groups and meet ups for coffee but we are still here for you and hope that normal services will soon resume.

You may be new to the area and would like support in knowing what services are available, in the future you may want someone to support you in going to your first family group where you would meet other parent/carers in your situation, this is what our team of Befrienders do, they are all parent/carers that have been in your position and fully understand the challenges faced by you and your families.

It doesn't matter if you haven't received a formal diagnosis, or if you have and feel completely isolated and lost in it all, we are a non-judgemental and friendly team.

If you feel that you could benefit from our Befriender Scheme, please contact: lin@podstelford.org

We are also looking for new team members to join us in offering support to people, the training to become a Telephone Befriender is currently being offered as online training due to the current restrictions and can be done in an evening, weekend or any time to suit you (we do hope that full training will be able to resume when restrictions are lifted). If you feel that you could offer an hour a week or fortnight, whatever you can offer someone will benefit from, to support someone who needs a friendly voice please email me: lin@podstelford.org I would love to hear from you.

Remember we are here for you,

Lin and
the PODS
Befriending
Team



Telford Mind

Telford Mind is an independent voluntary organisation that is affiliated to national Mind. It exists to promote and support better mental health in Telford and Wrekin.

Telford Mind offer a Listening Support Line, Drop In's, a Calm Café and many more services. To see what they offer, visit their website: [Our Services - Telford Mind \(telford-mind.co.uk\)](https://www.telford-mind.co.uk)

Telford Mind Listening Support line

Current opening times:

Monday- Thursday

10am-8pm

Fridays 10-5pm

07434 869248

talk2@telford-mind.co.uk

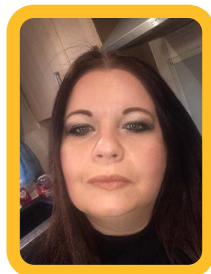
Working to ensure that nobody faces a mental health problem alone

Meet the PODS Team

Elaine Pearce

Project Manager

I joined PODS in early 2017 after attending an event, I was inspired by the work and support offered, this encouraged me to become more involved. I initially enrolled on the Parent Rep training and started out as a volunteer, attending meetings to represent the voices of our members. Later on, in the year I assisted Jayne to deliver more Parent Rep training. In 2018 I started a paid role and am the current Project Manager, overseeing the day to day running and ensuring we have enough funding in place to continue our vital role. Me and my husband have 4 children, Kimberley who is 17, Twins Ryan and Luke who are 10 and 8 year old Ben. Ryan has many additional needs including Autism, Epilepsy, Sensory Processing Disorder, OCD, ODD, Dyslexia and Hypermobility plus a few others. From my own experiences I have a good understanding of the difficulties faced by families surrounding diagnosis and support. My passion is to help, support and make a difference to as many families as possible.



Jayne Stevens Ba(Hons)

Strategic Co-ordinator

I got involved in participation work after attending a parent support group (led at the time by Parent Partnership Service) and realising that the importance of sharing my experiences and gaining support in doing so. This led to me becoming a co-founder of Parents Opening Doors in 2008 when it started its life as a Parent Carer Forum, which still remains at the heart of the Charity. Over the years I have seen it grow and expand, with support from parent carer reps over the years and wider team members. My current role is Strategic Co-ordinator and I lead on all things 'participation'. This means that parents and professionals work together, recognising each other's expert knowledge, to design, develop and improve services across health, education, social care and with community partners. As the Charity has expanded, parent carer voices also come from the other areas of our work and collate into the 'forum' element of the work that I'm so passionate about. My husband Lee and I are parents to Matt (age 20) who studies at a specialist college where his needs (Autism Spectrum Condition and co-conditions diagnosed in his primary years) are met and is just in process of heading into transition and reviewing wider opportunities. His sibling Jess (age 17) is a regular face at PODS events in the Summer and she studies in Birmingham. On a personal level, I enjoy live music and dancing, cooking with my family, and have a passion for reading.

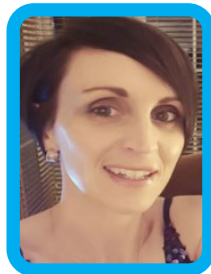


Kerrie Seagrave

Administration Co-ordinator



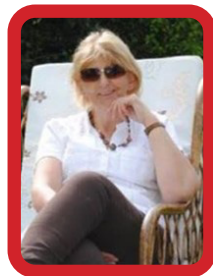
I have been PODS Administration Co-ordinator since June 2017, I look after the members database, produce the newsletters and weekly E bulletins amongst other tasks. Being part of the PODS team is extremely important to me, as I know from personal experience just how much being a member of PODS and accessing the Befriender Scheme can help a parent. I became a member of PODS in January 2014, the first time I attended a PODS Family Group, I felt very alone and isolated, as myself and my family had recently moved to Telford and didn't have any family or friends in the area. This soon changed and I felt very supported by PODS. My Husband and I are parents to Jack who is 16 and currently studying for his A Levels and Lilly who is 9 and attends The Bridge School. Lilly has Autism, a Learning Disability and other additional needs. When I have some spare time, I enjoy going to the gym, running and spending time with my family.



Lin Morris

Befriender Team Lead

Hi, my name is Linda Morris but I like to be known as Lin, I came into PODS 3 years ago when I was working with the Fostering Team in Telford and Wrekin as a training co-ordinator, before that I had been a Foster Carer for children 0-21 for 20 years alongside bringing up my own family, some of those children/young adults had been diagnosed with ADHD, Autism and Learning Difficulties also supporting young Mum's with Learning Difficulties in their pregnancy and difficult first weeks of becoming a parent. Many of the Foster Children still stay in touch and I am happy to have been part of their lives. My children are all married now, and they all took up caring professions being a Foster Carer, Nanny, and working with people with Dementia. I have 3 Grandchildren and 2 Great Grandchildren, all of whom I love to spend time with, although my eldest Granddaughter and 2 Great Grandchildren live in Perth Australia. My hobbies are gardening and visiting places of interest and of course going to Australia and Malta which is where my one Daughter lives.



Joanne Smith

Events and Fundraising Lead

Hello, my name is Joanne. I have been part of the PODS staff team since October 2019, my official job role is Events and Fundraising lead, although like all the PODS team we all chip in with a bit of everything as the saying goes - "team-work makes the dream work!" I joined the team shortly after attending our first trip to Rhyl beach as new members in August 2019, I was impressed and overwhelmed with the work and support offered to me and my family whilst attending the trip that day by the staff. I felt that I could offer a sympathetic and understanding of a variety of disabilities, from my own life experience and knowledge around physical disabilities and mental health and understanding the stresses this could bring on a whole family unit. I have previously worked in a special needs school, and as part of a community support team in Lichfield. My family and I moved to Telford from Lichfield, Staffordshire, in February 2019, I have 3 sons, a 23-year-old with mental health issues of ASD, ADHD and BPD, a 20-year-old son with severe physical disabilities such as Cerebral Palsy, wheelchair bound, Epilepsy, Scoliosis, tube fed, to mention just a few. And a pleasant and helpful 9 year old. Although I have a very busy and hectic life, I do try and find a little time for myself to enjoy my own personal hobbies of arts, crafts and sewing.



Uma Bhatia

Lego & Family Group Lead

Hello, I am Uma. I joined the PODS team in October 2019. I have 2 children Vani, 18 and Om, 8 years old. I became a PODS member in early 2015 shortly after my son's diagnosis of ASD. I found the much-needed support network in PODS. The Family Groups and workshops run by PODS were very useful and I regularly attended these sessions. I also developed a peer network of friends at the PODS sessions - we all have children with additional needs and could relate with each other's experiences and challenges. I have been through some very challenging times bringing up my son with additional needs. I also realised that sharing of my experiences and learnings could help other parents / carers in similar situations. I am motivated to work for the betterment of the special-needs community in general. In PODS, I found an avenue to express myself and work with a group of likeminded people determined to make a positive difference in the lives of families with kids with additional needs. I have undertaken the Parent Rep training and am also a trained Befriender. I was involved in the successful pilot run of the Lego Therapy Club. I now work as the Lego and Family Group Lead for PODS. I love interacting with children and parents/carers and find the engagement at Family Groups and Lego Club very rewarding. In my spare time, I enjoy doing Sudoku, singing and watching movies with my family.



Sensory and Resilience Bags

Throughout the pandemic we have been highly aware of the pressure and challenges brought on by being confined to the house and cut off from the all-important support. We looked to come up with a way in which we could support both the children and adults through such a difficult time. Then bingo we had an idea, we could create sensory bags to reduce the boredom for the children and resilience packs for the children/adults to give them some hints and tips on things to try and a little bit of pampering on the way.

We were grateful to secure some funding from Dawley Hamlets Parish Council and The Community Foundation and set about creating over 100 of each, we then delivered these free of charge in a Covid secure way to our members. These bags brought a little ray of sunshine in some families toughest times.

This is what our families had to say,



Thank you so much for the sensory bag it really went down really well thanks again

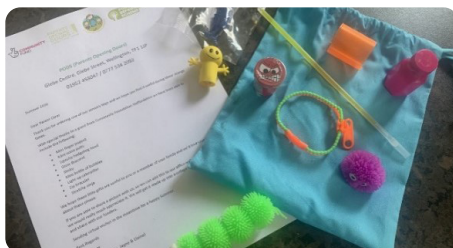
Thankyou so much for this it's wonderful! H loves anything mindfulness and it's his favourite thing to do at school. Can't wait to try out all the activities! Xx

Thanks Pods for my much needed Resilience pack xx

Thank you so much pods Ls loving sensory bag

Thank you so so much pods for Js sensory bag delivered today she loved it

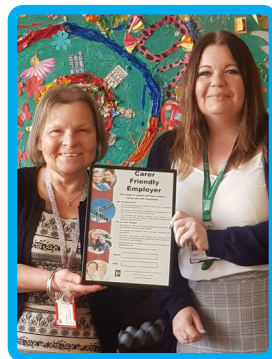
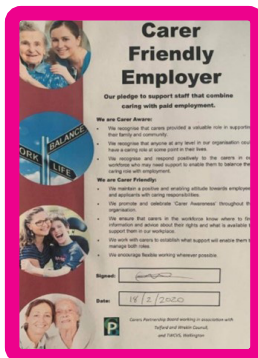
Thankyou so so much for the sensory pack we received for our boys it was so lovely and they are having a great time after school picking 1 item out of the bag and making a story up about it to get them into a calm relaxed state of mind x thankyou x



PODS receive a Carer Friendly Employer Award & The Mayor & Leader Recognition Award

Whilst Covid has been bringing negativity to the world, here at PODS we have had a shimmer of positivity and joy, we have been awarded 2 fantastic awards that demonstrate how hard we care, support and work.

Before any of us had even heard of Covid we had applied to be classed as a 'Carer Friendly Employer', just before the first lockdown we were delighted to be informed we had been recognised as a carer friendly employer. We were delighted and humbled to receive this award, it highlights that not only are we there for our members, but we also care greatly about those we employ. We pride ourselves in employing a diverse workforce which includes parent carers and are honoured that this has been recognised. We believe that carers have just the same ambitions and desires to work as everyone else and that they should not be placed at disadvantage because of their responsibilities, given the opportunity they can be a huge asset to any employer.



Earlier this year we were awarded our second achievement, the Mayor & Leader Recognition Award. I don't think we have ever felt so proud (maybe and exception when we meet the Queen), this award was in recognition of all the work we have carried out in the community. Our members and their families are central to everything we do, we have dedicated our time to supporting them in every way we can to make their futures a little brighter and their lives a little easier. We do not ask or look for any thanks, but we must admit it is a lovely feeling to be recognised for all the work we do.

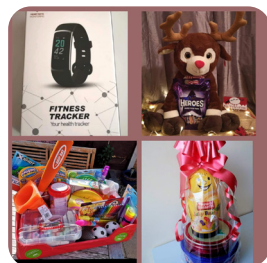
Thanks to all our present, future and past members for making our jobs so amazing and fulfilling, we are looking forward to meeting and supporting you in 2021.



PODS Events and Fundraising

Why do we Fundraise?

The way in which funding and grants are given is constantly changing, this means we have to be more sustainable. We are making every effort to raise our own funding through the many events and fundraising activities we create for our families/members. Raising funds is important to the continued survival of our charity. Without support and crucial income our charity simply cannot continue to fulfil the purpose it was intended. Fundraising is not just a means of raising money, but a way to promote our non-profit charity and a way for our families/members to come together for a common purpose. We have a very diverse group and where possible we try to cater for as many of our families as we can. We have a fabulous, dedicated team of volunteers and staff who work tirelessly behind the scenes spending numerous hours filling in forms, attending meetings with potential funders, researching venues and events, networking and organising for all our activities, and liaising with our dedicated supporters who are very generous with their donations.



PODS New Facebook Raffle Page

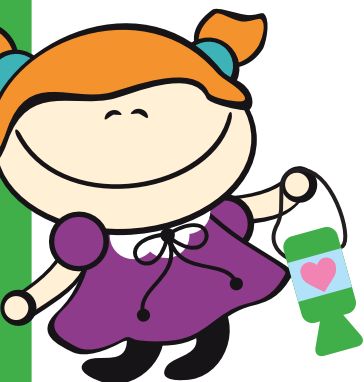
With Covid-19 putting a halt on our fundraising events since Summer 2020 we decided to set up a Facebook Raffle page 'PODS Fundraising Group' to help raise some of the much-needed funds that PODS needs to help sustain itself. This has been going strong since the launch in August 2020, we hold regular and were possible weekly raffles which are drawn live, there have been some fantastic prizes, fabulous donations and some very lucky winners. Some of the prizes have consisted of a summer outdoor toy hamper (kindly donated by Asda), a Kindle Fire tablet, perfume, baby products hamper, sweet and treats hamper, jewellery, lots of wine, chocolates, a child's donated bike, Yankee candles, Halloween treats, and our big Christmas raffle with over 20 prizes to mention just a few. We have raised just over £1000 so far with thanks to our donators and regular supporters. Why not find us on Facebook, like, share and join in...As the saying goes "You have to be in it to win it". If anyone would like to offer any donation prizes, then please contact Joanne Smith by emailing: joanne@podstelford.org



EVENTS

Unfortunately, our regular face to face events have been cancelled due to Covid-19, we need to keep our members and staff safe. We have taken on the challenge like so many others and turned to online activities via Zoom, holding craft sessions and coffee and chat sessions. As soon as it is safe to do so we will be planning to meet again face to face and plan to put on some exciting events, until that time arrive please look out for our regular online sessions and please stay safe.

We would like to say thank you to Asda Community Champion, June Walker and County Fundraisers for their generous donations throughout the year 2020. Sending a huge thank you to our supporters and volunteers for their continued dedication.



PODS Family Groups



PODS Family Groups serve as a lifeline for parent/carers to access support and know about services available for their children. In this year of the pandemic, we successfully moved the Family Groups online. The endeavour, as always, was to reach out to as many families as possible.

We have successfully conducted a number of outdoor groups for children in the Town Centre, in line with the Government's guidance, during the summer holidays and the October half term. All these groups were very well received and appreciated by the members. During these groups, the children enjoyed playing with different play equipment provided by PODS as well as a scavenger hunt and other playful activities. The aim is always to keep the families feeling connected and less isolated, especially in these tough times. This year, the Christmas Crafts Family Groups for parents was held online - a good number of members participated to make Christmas wreaths and candle jars in addition to joining in the catchup and playful banter. The positive response from the members encouraged us to hold an online Christmas Quiz and also a Christmas Carol singalong session. It was great collaboration with excitement and lots of fun while spreading the Christmas cheer. In the run up to Christmas, we also held online events to make Christmas crafts with the children. The children created some fascinating Christmas wreaths using pom-poms and handprint Christmas trees.

The New Year started with virtual science experiment groups for the children. These groups were scheduled to timings such that the children could attend them after having finished their online/home schooling. The science experiments groups received a very good uptake, engaging the children and adults alike. We plan to hold more of these Science experiments groups in the future. In the coming days, we have scheduled online children's crafts groups on the themes of Valentine's Day, Chinese New Year and Mother's Day. In the current times, these groups, though held online, do help us to check on our members and touch base with them. It also helps our members to express their views and share any concerns and get access to peer to peer support. All these interactions are of great significance to the parent carer forum and help in making a positive difference in the lives of our children.

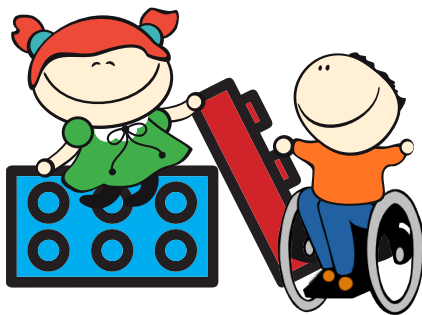


PODS Lego Club

PODS started the Lego Club last year with a bunch of enthusiastic children interested in playing with Lego bricks. These children were soon working together to make fascinating Lego models. As part of Lego play, they were making friends and developing social and communication skills.

The children had barely settled down in the weekly club, that came the pandemic leading to the lockdown in March 2020.

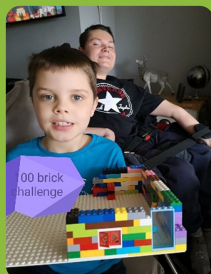
With the sole aim of ensuring the children have an outlet to interact with their friends and express themselves, the Lego Club was moved to online sessions. The children adapted well gradually and started building their Lego models on their own while also sharing their thoughts and experiences with friends at the online sessions. The children also enjoyed playing the online Lego Bingo every week. The Lego Bingo winner would get the privilege to choose the Lego build project for the week, and all the children would excitedly give it a try. We also had 'Show and Tell' sessions wherein the children would talk about the models they had built. One child volunteered to provide the DJ services to the group playing the winner's favourite song.



The adaptability, calmness and resilience shown by these children is the driving force of the Lego Club and keeps me motivated too. There has been increased uptake of the Lego Club with a number of new children and their parents/carers expressing interest in joining the Club. PODS is planning to start another Lego Club shortly.

Thanks to the Lego Club children, we now have a **LEGO** acronym, giving it a new meaning and dimension:

Looking out for each other and **E**xcitedly **G**etting together while having **O**odles of fun!!



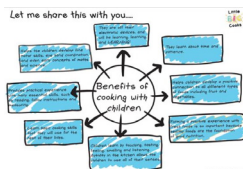
PODS Cookbook 2020

In May 2020, we were given a wonderful and much needed positive opportunity, to join forces with Little Big Cooks to produce our very own PODS Cookbook!



We hoped that during such difficult times that the Cookbook would help encourage our families to get together in the kitchen and get baking during the Lockdown. Baking is not only a lovely activity to do as a family, but also a great addition to those home schooling and is a great life skill. It can help children and young people explore with different textures, smells and types of food.

Let me share this with you...



All our families needed to do to be involved was bake anything they wanted too! It could have been a cake, evening meal or lunch. They then recorded the ingredients and method on the sheet we provided and sent that along with some memory making photos. Each page was given a fun fact about their recipe.

Lots of our families took part and the Cookbook was a great success, we have some very talented bakers amongst our PODS family, and we're proud of each one of them and their families.

The photos below show just some of the amazing recipes in the Cookbook:

[illegible]

PODS Elf Visits



Here at PODS, we love a good Christmas party and some Santa visits, however as last year progressed it became increasingly apparent that we would not be able to carry out our normally selection of Christmas festivities. With the year having been particularly difficult for many families it was extremely important to us that we continued to celebrate the Christmas period in some way. Then came the idea, if we can't bring our families to our Christmas events, we will take Christmas to them!



In late summer we set about planning a Christmas response that Covid could not spoil and would bring a little bit of magic to all the families. Our idea was for the staff to dress as Santa's Elves and to drop of presents to children on their doorstep, whilst observing social distancing. Then came the question, how will we hand over the presents? Idea number 2! We brought some walking sticks from a local charity shop and then our amazing Jo turned them into sparkly candy canes to hang the presents on (problem solved). We decided as all children have different likes and dislikes, we would give a choice of gifts, they were teddy bears, chocolate, and craft sets. This meant the parents/carers could choose the most suitable and that all children would be able to receive a gift.



The children were all incredibly excited and overjoyed to have the elves visit them and some had even made cards. As staff we were overwhelmed with the response from the children and absolutely loved every minute, it was so delightful to see so many smiling happy faces after such a challenging year. We are also immensely grateful to have received a grant from Tesco and Asda to enable us to deliver over 230 gifts to families.



This is what our members had to say about the Elves,

"Elisha was so excited to see Elf Elaine, she said it was the best day ever. Thank you for all the brilliant things you all do at pods xx"

"Harley was so pleased with the lovely surprise he received from elf Lyn x"

"Harry was absolutely made up with his present, thanks PODS XX"

"After such a long time due to COVID with no visitors and the only knocks on the door being deliveries; we had real actual elves, how amazing is that! Children were so happy and excited. Thank you xxx"

PODS Picnic in the Park with a Difference!

As many of you will be aware, for many years we have held an annual 'Picnic in the Park'. Year on year this event has grown and been one of our most popular and eagerly anticipated events of the year, however last year Covid had other ideas and did not seem to like our plans. As a team we were massively aware at how isolating and challenging last year had been, we were desperately hoping that restrictions would ease, and we would be able to create some sort of event to enable people to come together once again and reduce the isolation.



Our prayers were answered, and we were delighted that restrictions relaxed enough so that we could put on an event, but a little saddened at the same time as we had so many fantastic plans and our fundraising/events team had already started working on ideas.

August's event was ran on the same day as normal and the weather was not too bad, just a little rain at the start, all the restriction that were in place at the time were fully adhered too. The day was spilt up into sessions, each session was further spilt into 'bubbles', we had a selection of activities on offer and each bubble moved round so they could experience each one.

All in all, everyone had a great day, it was fabulous to see so many happy faces and everyone enjoying themselves. It had seemed like such a long time since we had caught up with our members and was great to chat with them and find out what they had been up to. Our members also enjoyed being able to get out of the house and meet up with others. Here are some photos from the day.

We are keeping everything crossed and hope you are too that we can be back this year bigger and better than ever.



Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust Free Visit

Once restrictions are eased, and the museums are open again why not take advantage of our museum passes. As a member of PODS and a Carer of a child/young person with a disability or additional need, you are entitled to this amazing offer brought to you by PODS in conjunction with the Ironbridge Gorge Museum trust. The offer entitles you the carer and up to 5 other people of your choice free access to Ironbridge Gorge Museums for a whole week. Not only that you can also claim 15% off your purchases in the Museum shops when you spend over £5.

The pass allows you to visit:

- Enginuity
- Coalbrookdale Museum of iron
- Darby Houses
- Jackfield Tile Museum
- Coalport China
- Museum of the Gorge/Tollhouse
- Tar Tunnel
- Broseley Pipeworks

You will require 1 pass for each person (including children) with a maximum of 6 available at a time, each pass will be valid for 1 week and you can visit any of the participating museums any number of times. Passes are allocated on a first come first served basis, if you would like to use the passes please contact Elaine either by email elaine@podstelford.org or through our Facebook Page. All passes must be collected in person, there will be a £5 deposit per pass that will be refunded when the pass is returned by the agreed date. Passes can only be used with a valid form of photo ID and the carer it has been issued to is present. A full copy of the terms and conditions will be given to you at point of loaning the passes.

This offer is made in recognition of the important and valued role you have as a Carer and only available to PODS members.



Max Card

The Max Card is designed to make days out more financially accessible for families of children with additional needs/disabilities and Foster Families. All Families need to do is simply show their Max Card upon entry to a venue that supports the Max card scheme, this will allow them free or discounted admission. The scheme is designed to help these save money on great days out both locally and throughout the UK. It can be used at locations such as castles, zoos, bowling alleys, discounts on holidays and much more.



Visit www.mymaxcard.co.uk for more details. The Max Card is available at a cost of £3 from PODS family groups/events or via contacting Elaine via email elaine@podstelford.org. Only one card is required per family, each card lasts at least 12 months.

Virtual Funky Friday

A Disco in your Lounge!

Funky Friday is an inclusive disco for young adults aged 15+ with special education needs or disabilities, which takes place on the third Friday of each month. Before the pandemic the discos were held at the Navy Club in Newport, with over 40 young people attending each month.



When COVID 19 struck the physical discos were cancelled, which of course was very disappointing. The young people who attend love dancing and seeing their friends each month, so the Funky Friday team tried to think of a way to carry this on. Inspired by Jay's Virtual Pub Quiz the team asked the fab Funky Friday Music Mix DJs if it would be possible to go online with the disco. They guys looked into it and had a think about what online platform would be best. Facebook was not an option due to copywrite issues with playing music. In the end Zoom was chosen for easy access. Back in March 2020, Zoom was new to many of us, so the Funky Friday team has a practice disco with 5 people to see if it would work! In April 2020 Virtual Funky Friday was born and has been online every month since then.

Some people do worry about using Zoom, but we have tried to make it as safe as possible. Disco participants are all put on mute on entry to the disco so that everyone can enjoy the music without interruption. Private chat is turned off – only public chat/messages are allowed so they are visible to all. One of the Funky Friday team acts as a moderator and monitors the chat for any problems or queries. Screen sharing is also turned off so that nobody can surprise the event with unusual pictures! The DJs and the team monitor who is at the disco. Anyone acting inappropriately would be removed from the disco, but thankfully this has not happened to date. Of course, it isn't the same as the real discos but at least it gives everyone the chance to join in an online social event, see their friends and have a dance in their lounge or kitchen each month. Some of the benefits of the online disco are that ALL AGES are welcome at the Zoom discos. Also, the discos are FREE! It's also easy to request music directly to the DJs via the chat function.



Just like the real discos, Virtual Funky Friday has themes. People can either dress up or have a real or virtual background to match the theme. Often there are prizes for best dressed or best background. Last year everyone enjoyed the Halloween disco and the Christmas party. For February 2021 there is Valentines theme and the 19th March disco sees the return of the popular 80s theme.

So, we know lots of people are struggling through these lockdowns and restrictions, but Virtual Funky Friday hopes to make people feel a bit less isolated and get active by dancing at home. The Zoom details to join in can be found on the Facebook page Funky Friday Inclusive Disco. You can also message through Facebook with any queries or suggestions.

Huge thanks to our amazing Music Mix DJs who work hard to bring us Funky Friday each month. We really appreciate everything they are doing to support the disco. So, dig out your fluorescent t-shirt or your leg warmers and big-up your hair and join us 7 – 9pm Friday 19th March for Funky Friday's 80s party night. Don't forget to request your favourite 80s dance music through the chat facility. See you there! Bring a Friend! (Virtually of course). Contact: Liz Bickford-Smith by

PODS Family Quiz



Questions

1. Can you name any of the seven dwarfs?
2. Complete this film title, Harry Potter and the philosophers _____?
3. What is the capital of America?
4. Who won the football world cup in 2018?
5. Who was the first man on the moon?
6. What is the largest planet in our solar system?
7. What animal is this? It has 4 legs, is black and white and eats bamboo
8. When was the battle of Hastings?
9. What is the name of Doctor Who's spaceship (Blue Box)?
10. Who says "Luke I am your Father"?
11. Who's nose grew longer every time they told a lie?
12. What is the tallest mountain in the world?
13. What does a caterpillar turn into?
14. What is a baby sheep called?
15. What colour is Sonic the Hedgehog?



Colouring Fun!



PODS COVID Experience Survey – March 2021



We are collecting thoughts and experiences regarding COVID-19.

The information is used to understand the needs of our families, and to evidence these in discussions we hold at strategic and operational level with directors, service leaders and commissioners, across health, social care and education.

This is a very short snapshot survey and will take just a few minutes to complete.



If you wish to be entered into a prize draw to win a £50 shopping voucher, please complete your name/email/telephone details at the end of the survey.

To take part in the survey, please scan the QR Code here:



PODS Family Quiz Answers



1. Sleepy, Dopey, Grumpy, Sneezy, Happy, Doc and Bashful
2. Stone
3. Washington DC
4. France
5. Neil Armstrong
6. Jupiter
7. Panda
8. 1066
9. The Tardis
10. Darth Vader
11. Pinocchio
12. Mount Everest
13. Butterfly/Moth
14. Lamb
15. Blue



PODS HELPLINE

(Supporting families with disabled/Additional need children aged 0-25 years)

Are you in need of some guidance or information? Would you like to access our Befriending service or maybe receive a call from one of our staff?

Then please give us a call or email us!

Hello it's PODS,
how can we
help?



01952 458047

info@podstelford.org

Calls will be answered between 10am-4pm Monday-Friday, outside these hours please leave a message.



Please CHECK OUR WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA

FOR UPCOMING FAMILY GROUPS & EVENTS



Jayne Stevens

Strategic Co-ordinator

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☎ 07775 342092

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