

APRIL 2023



**PARENTS
OPENING
DOORS**
PARENT CARER FORUM



PODS

SPRING 2023

Newsletter

What's included

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Christmas Party 2022

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Easter 2022

**GET
INVOLVED**

and spot the Crowns
throughout the Newsletter! Let
us know how many you spot!

Company/Charity number: 1150871



Foreword from Elaine Pearce, Project Manager



We hope this year's Newsletter finds you and your family well. As we move further into 2023 things finally seem to have settled on the Covid front, however we now all have a fresh challenge to face in the form of the 'Cost of Living' crisis.

Here at PODS, we are only too aware of the detrimental impact this has had on our community, we have been working hard to support families during this challenging time. This includes running a Telford & Wrekin Warm Hub, giving both our members and the wider community the opportunity to visit a warm welcoming space where they can access activities, free refreshments, and meals to take away. Aside from this, during the Christmas period we piloted our new 'Present Exchange Tree' which was a roaring success, we received over 100 donations, which were distributed to many excited children and their families over the festive period.

In last year's newsletter we spoke about the relocation of our offices during the height of Covid, which had been no easy feat to accomplish, and the thought of moving again sent chills down our spine. However, despite us and our members welcoming the new central location with its improved accessibility, it quickly became apparent that we were outgrowing our new space at an alarming rate, so the long arduous task of finding a new 'home' began back in February last year with us finally moving to our new premises in October.

2022 turned out to be a pinnacle year for PODS, one in fact that was of epic proportions that we could never have envisaged in our wildest dreams. Not only did we finally find a place we can call our 'home' we were fortunate enough to win not just 1 but 2 prestigious awards, 'Pride in Our Community' and the 'Queens Award for Voluntary Services'.

The relaxation of Covid restriction meant that all our usual activities such as, Easter egg hunts, Picnic in the Park, coach trips and Christmas events were able to go ahead as normal, much to the relief of everyone, as they have become a staple part of our annual offerings and something many of the families look forward to.

This year is also lining up to be another amazing year, firstly we celebrate our 15th birthday (may have to consider a little party), we have plans for a foot for a Tea Party to celebrate the Kings Coronation, 2 volunteers have been invited to attend to a Royal Garden Party at the Palace and we have numerous plans to extend our service offer to ensure the community we serve have access to the support and facilities they require in order to live their lives to the full.

Our database continues to grow at an unprecedented rate, with no signs of it slowing anytime soon, despite this we remain here for each and every one of you, whenever you need us. Now more than ever we require support from our amazing volunteer teams as without them we would not be able to keep the level of service going, so THANK YOU, to each and every one of you, you are truly amazing.

Our team of volunteer befrienders has steadily grown over the last 12 months, and we are delighted to have been able to return to 'in person' meetings and support sessions. However, the demand for our befriender support has grown exponentially and we are always keen to recruit new befrienders, if you would like more information on the role, please contact kerrie@podstelford.org.

The Parent Carer Forum has also welcomed new volunteer parent reps on to our steering group, who are working alongside existing members ensuring your voices are heard and represented. The last 12 months have seen the completion and signing of a new 'Working Together Charter' to ensure that services across, Health, Social care, Education have agreed to work together in a co-produced manner alongside parents to improve and deliver the best possible service.



Our family groups have continued to be delivered across Telford, ensuring they are accessible to as many families as possible, with Blists Hill remaining a firm favourite. This year we are looking to bring together the family group and the befriender group so families can access both services in the one place.

Since moving to our new home, we have added to our range of afterschool clubs, we now deliver Coding, Lego, Minecraft, Sensory and Activity sessions, with other offerings in the pipeline. Please let us know of any other clubs you would like to see introduced.

Our fundraising and events team has been delighted to be able to return to events and fundraisers out in the community to help raise vital funds and spread the word about the amazing work we do. They still continue to run our ever-popular raffle and will be using the funds raised to put on exciting activities and events over the coming months.

In recent months we have seen the new appointment of a PFA (Preparing For Adulthood) Navigator role, this role has come about from feedback from parents/carers and made possible by funding from Health services. It supports and advises families with children and young adults aged 14-25 who are struggling to navigate the transition into adult services/lives.

Finally, I would like to thank every single person that has supported us over the last 12 months, be that as Parent Rep, Befriender, Volunteer, donator etc, without you we would not be able to help and support as many families as we do, so thank you very much for all you have done, no matter how big or small, you have truly made a difference.

Please enjoy reading the rest of the newsletter to find out more about what we have been up to and our exciting plans for the future.

We hope to see you all very soon,

Elaine Pearce

Project Manager



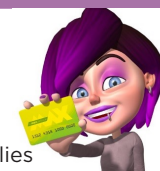
Max Card

We are proud to be an ongoing distributor for the Max Card Scheme. Not heard of Max Cards before? Not sure what they are?

The Max Card is designed to make days out more financially accessible for families of children with additional needs/disabilities and/or Foster Families, by helping families save money on great days out both locally and throughout the UK, they can even save you money on UK holidays.

They can be used at locations such as castles, zoos, bowling alleys and even discounts on holidays. Take a look at the Max card website www.mymaxcard.co.uk for more information and to discover which venues are available in your chosen area. If you see a suitable venue listed, follow the online instructions on how to use your Max card for that particular venue in order to gain your discounted entry.

Please note that Max cards can NOT be purchased online, they can only be brought from a verified supplier, like ourselves. To qualify for a card, you must live in Telford & Wrekin or the wider Shropshire area and be either a parent/carer of a child aged 0-25 with a disability or additional need or a foster carer. They cost only £3 and can be purchased from our PODS Hub or via family groups/events, please contact Elaine via email for more information elaine@podstelford.org. Only one card is required per family, each card lasts at least 18 months.



Meet the PODS Trustees

Jon Mills (Chair)

Hello there, I am Jon, currently the chair of the PODS trustees. It is such a pleasure to see how much the PODS team including our fantastic volunteers is doing to support children, young people and families in Telford and Wrekin.

As a social worker of nearly 31 years post qualifying experience (!!) and a parent of three adult children with special needs, I really do appreciate everything our wonderful team does, and how difficult it can be for families to manage to carry on in caring for children with complex and often unnoticed or unrecognised needs. I would like to thank everyone in PODS for their hard work, commitment and love and care.

I look forward to us being able to do even more in the future as we seek more and more creative ways to bring in funding so that the great work can continue. Very best wishes to you all, I'm sure I'll see many of you in social events later in the year. Jon.

PS. Sorry about the photo I hope it doesn't scare anyone, please don't let babies see it, they always cry when they see me!

Nicola Jones

My name is Nicola Jones and I have been a trustee for PODS for a year now, I come from a teaching background and have taught a variety of outdoor pursuits, swimming, and core skills, to both disabled and non-disabled students. I saw massive value in the work PODS does, which encouraged me to get involved. Just recently I was privileged to be asked along to a family group they held at Blists Hill, where I met potential new families who wanted to access PODS, and the help they can provide. All staff were very welcoming, very warm, calm and patient, this was a privilege to see and gave me a much better understanding of what PODS was about. Staff were really experienced and held out the helping hand these families needed.

The work PODS does is amazing, and really do help others, it was evident that their knowledge and experiences helped these family considerably. I feel very honoured to be part of the trustees for this great charity.

Sarah Hall

I have recently been pleased to have been invited to join the Trustees of PODS, following expressing an interest in becoming a volunteer with the organisation. I am a qualified and registered Social Worker, and have completed 22 years working in Telford and Wrekin Children's services, mainly within the Early Help and Strengthening Families Service, 13 years of which I have been Team Manager. Part of my role was to liaise regularly with the PODS team, from which I saw the fantastic support and opportunities that were provided for so many families. I've recently left my role to enable me to support in my family business and so wanted to offer my time to support as a volunteer where possible, I have been inspired by the dedication commitment and experience

of the PODS staff I've worked with and am looking forward to continuing my relationship with them as a volunteer.

I have 2 sons aged 17 and 23 and have had recent experience of an adult diagnosis of ADHD within my immediate family.

Phil Gillum

Phil has spent 44 years in banking with the Lloyds Banking Group in both retail and commercial banking roles. After he was made redundant, he secured a position at a large pension company and has now been there 4 years. Phil was a Trade Union (unite) Rep for 34 years. Phil is married with 2 grown up children, he is currently our longest serving Trustee and oversees our finances, grants, and accounts.

Kwabena Agyemang (Kubby)

My name is Kwabena Agyemang (Kubby). I am Managing Director of a Health and Social Care company who support people with complex and additional needs. My background is predominantly working in care and support those in need. Growing up, so much was done for me and family to support us, therefore, I like to give back in terms of support community groups and charities. I hope I am able to help and support PODS in any capacity needed to help the group thrive further.

Adam Wagstaff

Adam has 2 children and has been a trustee for approximately 4 years, he has a background in marketing and digital media with vast experience in websites and various social media platforms. He became involved with the charity through his work and was overwhelmed by the support on offer and the positive impact on the community, so made the decision to become involved himself.

Join the PODS Befriender Team



Do you have some spare time to spend listening and supporting other parent carers on a 1:1 basis?

PODS Befriending Scheme offers emotional support, and some practical strategies, to parent carers who have a child with a disability or additional need. Many parents find it invaluable to have another parent to talk to who can understand and listen, without judgement.

All our Befrienders are parent carers and have that relevant lived experience.

Why not become a PODS Befriender and support other local parents and strengthen our local community?

Following on from successful training, DBS checks will be required.

For more information or to express interest, please contact kerrie@podstelford.org or call: **07309 753044**



Parent Carer Forum Update

Who?

I'm Jayne Stevens, your Strategic Co-ordinator. Most of you will know of my role as the lead of the PODS Parent Carer Forum, where I'm responsible for Participation and Co-Production.

We are funded partly through Department for Education to be the officially recognised parent carer forum for Telford & Wrekin (there are forums all over the country).

Working closely with the wider PODS Charity team, and of course my team of Parent Reps and Champions who are out and about in the community listening and providing feedback to me.

Thank you to my team of Parent Reps who have supported my role over the last 12 months: Keiron, Liz, Tina, Simon, Karen, Cas, Kerry, Deb, and Sarah and to wider staff team.

We are representing families from Early Years, primary, secondary, young adults up to the age of 25 who have a disability, or an additional need.

When?

I work full time, so am available to chat and engage and link up with parent carers and wider families at a time to suit you.

What?

Gathering the views, wishes, feelings and experiences of local families – about the services they access, or would like to, or need to, highlighting opportunities and gaps. Also experiences around their needs and diagnosis, whether this be assessment, diagnosis journey, post diagnosis – we know the importance of sharing experiences and the need for support through the whole journey.

How?

I do this in a number of ways: direct contact at events, workshops or out and about in the community, the annual survey, emails, social media, phone calls, messages, at our events and trips, and via workshops that have been run. You can reach out to me at any time to discuss and share – your views are always welcome.

Why?

Families have a voice where it matters most to improve services and lead to better outcomes and life experiences of their children, young people, and wider families. Taking this straight through the strategic and senior meetings where it can have the most influence overall, and at a more local and individual level with schools and services they access directly.

Annual Survey

One of the ways we gather views of our families is our Annual Survey and here's an update of the most recent version, the main issues raised, and the responses from council, health and social care teams. Full report is shared on website or email jayne@podstelford.org. Your input into the annual survey has been particularly important. We have had an increase of respondents this year of 63%, with 61% from mainstream settings and 39% from specialist settings.

We have heard from families about their daily experiences through a wellbeing questions and more in depth analysis of local services. All this information is on a link to our website. This year, we have worked with council and health teams to ask them to provide feedback that we can report on in this newsletter.

"You as a Parent Carer / Carer - Please tell us how you feel as a parent carer about each of these areas and how your experiences in the past year have affected you?"



Introduction To: Designated Clinical Officer



Designated Clinical Officer for SEND

The role of DCO for SEND is to support health partners across the system to meet the needs of Children and Young People with SEND, in line with the Childrens and Families Act 2014.

Locally the DCO for SEND is employed by NHS Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and covers Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin.

The role of DCO for SEND is varied and includes:

- Oversight from a health perspective of education, health and care panels to discuss which children go forward for assessments and then if required have a formal plan (EHCP)
- Supporting health professionals to contribute to the Education, Health and Care Plan process
- Working with others in the local area to improve the quality of Education, Health and Care Plans.
- Supporting the SEND team at the local authority with questions and queries
- Promoting links between the SEND team, education professionals, social care and health services
- Supporting the commissioners and senior leadership team with regards to meeting and assuring the SEND health requirements

Working alongside commissioners and stakeholders including children and young people, parents and carers to identify and raise any commissioning gaps some of which may require joint commissioning to resolve.

Ensuring we can evidence a good local offer of health services and clear health journeys for those age 0-25 with SEND

The DCO for SEND meets regularly with PODs and IASS to understand the priorities for local families. The DCO also supports co-production and was active in the development of the Working Together Charter. One of the DCO's main aims for this coming year is to work more closely with CYP with SEND to hear their voice and support them to shape services for the future.

Volunteer Opportunity Parent Rep and Champions Recruitment

We know how much our families are committed and passionate about the SEND world and for those of us who wish to share their knowledge and help us in a more formal way we would like to invite you to be part of our team.

Views of families can be gathered in a number of ways and these may be led by parent reps eg. focus groups, through social media, community networks or specific topic meetings.

Would you like to help us develop and implement the 'Working Together' Charter?

How about representing the wider parent carer voice, to those who make the decisions?

Got something to say about services?

Full training available for this very worthwhile and fulfilling role. Be part of a team that supports you to "Make A Difference".

Please make contact with jayne@podstelford.org or 07775 342092 to discuss this opportunity further.

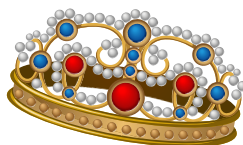
SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy

The SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy is currently under development and will take us through the next five years.

We supported a workshop for parent carers to attend in December, and another for professionals in January to develop a strategy over the next five years.

The event started with a presentation to highlight the need for a strategy, how it will be developed with partners including health and social care and how it all links with Alternative Provision, SEN Support and for children/young people with EHCPs. Workshop activities focussed on key questions and views gathered from parent carers were shared with professionals. There are pages and pages of feedback and comments and these will be fed into the strategy development to share with you later this year.

- Partnership Working - Local Area Partnership (System)
- Working Together (Coproduction) - Children, Young People and their Families
- Lived Experience
- Improving Outcomes
- Localised Provision
- Right Support in the Right Place at the Right Time



Here are some of the comments made by families, these are also reflected in conversations we have with families and are fed back into local services on your behalf.

Parent Carer & Family Carer Workshop



Workforce Development
Increased training for schools, partners and support services on hidden disabilities & Autism.

Short Breaks
Clearer understanding of Short Breaks Provision and access criteria.

Personal Budgets
Understanding the criteria about personal budgets, social care, education and health.

Mental Health Anxiety
Training and influence on behaviour in schools to support children and young people. Increase in awareness for support services, to provide signposting for families.

Support before an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)
What support is available for children, young people and their families, before an EHCP.

SEND & Alternative Provision

Annual Survey Highlights

Thank you 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. Our full report can be found on our website: [Family-Exp-and-Impact-Report-September-2022.pdf](https://www.telfordsend.org.uk/family-exp-and-impact-report-september-2022.pdf) (podstelford.org)

This is a representation of our family's wellbeing indicators as a snapshot of the survey: I have summarised key points raised by families (green) and the following responses (blue) have been given from Telford & Wrekin Council and NHS teams.

Please be reassured that ongoing discussions, action plans, SEND Partnership Agreements, are all ongoing as part of my wider Strategic Role in representing families with a range of needs.



Parent Carer Experiences

Worse here are:
Stress, Emotional Health, Friendships

Less worries for:
Leaving house, Physical Health, Feeling Happy

Child/Young Person Experiences (reported by Parent Carer)

Worse here are:
Friendships, Stress, Emotional Health

Less worries for:
Physical Health, Feeling Happy, Future

Parental Concerns

Throughout this report, the stressors are evident that families are facing struggles.

- We acknowledge that the recent years have been a challenging time for families, the local area SEND partnership has listened to feedback from parents and carers through regular communication meetings with PODS and IASS. Key themes are reported back to the relevant teams in education, health and social care.
- The Mental Health & Wellbeing page on the Local Offer provides signposting to commissioned, voluntary and community services that are available to support families in Telford & Wrekin
- Mental Health Services Directory can be found as part of this link (scroll down for info): https://www.telfordsend.org.uk/info/1/home/101/mental_health_service_directory

Health

The issues around diagnosis and access to assessment services remain a significant barrier to families and will come as no surprise to hear comments. Some families are involved in various different services which all have an impact on their lives and trying to manage and co-ordinate various appointments;

BeeU Delays, and the experiences speak for themselves, parents want to be trusted that they know their children best, and this is undermined by professionals and extended waiting times; Concerns around transition and moving into adulthood have been an issue for some of our families;

Wider emotional health needs of families that also needs support;

Response:

- We (NHS Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin (ICB) are grateful to PODS for producing the report, which gives us an opportunity to understand the lived experience for CYP with SEND and their families.
- We acknowledge that the report sets out a number of areas for development for health. These are areas which we are working hard to improve in co-production with local parents, carers and CYP.
- We particularly note the challenges relating to ASD, to improve this we are moving forward with plans to develop a system wide ASD working group to co-ordinate discussions regarding waiting times, referral criteria and support services on offer.

Education

Some families still need support around education.

- We have recently developed Telford & Wrekin SEND Working Together Charter alongside POD's parent carer forum. As part of the this charter we are encouraging sign up from schools to the Charter and asking them to undertake a Self-Evaluation of their co-production practices to lead to improvements in their practice.
- Support is provided to schools through SEND support services, these services provide advice, information and support for schools to support children and young people.
- More information about SEND services can be found on the SEND Local Offer. www.telford.gov.uk
- Drop In Sessions for parents to ask for advice and support are being arranged to start in the New Year, launching with an Annual Review Workshop in January 2023.
- The Preparing for Adulthood Team have been providing drop in support at Southwater working with Future Focus on a weekly basis.

... And again, better links with professionals

- We are always endeavouring to improve the communication from the SEND Team to parent carers and family carers.
- We ensure that we encourage schools to communicate with our teams to receive advice and support. The Telford & Wrekin SEND Working Together Charter support the work that we do with all partners and families and ensures that co-production takes place with families at all appropriate levels.
- The SEND Services hold a regular communication meeting with PODS & IASS, these meetings share key feedback and themes from parents and provide updates and information through a 'You Said, We Did' format. Services from across Health and the Local Authority attend the meetings as required to listen to the lived experience of families.



Social Care Services

Challenges in accessing social care provision or assessment is frustrating and where families have been told by national organisations, but local policies determine differently.

- A Short Breaks Statement has been drafted that defines support which can be accessed dependant on level of need. Short Breaks is now categorised as Universal / Universal plus, targeted support and specialist support.
- The eligibility criteria for accessing Children with Disabilities Teams is in the process of being revised to be more transparent and clearly define needs which meet the threshold for Social Care involvement and access to Specialist service provision. The criteria will also provide clarity on eligibility to access targeted support that will not require a social care child and family assessment.
- The targeted support offer is being developed further in line with the consultation responses we have received from local families. In addition to this we are working with local organisations to make their activities or services inclusive for all members of the community.

We have had requests around more information for adults, for children who are physically disabled and for wider siblings and ensuring the right information is available at the right time. Families are struggling with information, accessing information and need help with guidance around forms and are calling for a triage sort of system to support them with this, an easy to understand guide of what to expect and when and a more co-ordinated approach when dealing with more professionals

- The local offer is being updated on a regular basis.
- An 'A to Z' directory is being developed to provide information on all services in one place. This ranges from charity organisations which can provide grants for disabled children and young people, discounts including utility bills and transport, support networks and local services.
- An activity booklet has been produced to list all universal activities that are accessible for children and young people with additional needs.
- We have developed a 'we're coming to see you' document which outlines what questions are likely to be asked on your initial visit and the information we may require.
- The Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) offers support for young carers.
- A monthly newsletter will be launched in the new year.
- Social Care attend parent carer forums to exchange information and gather feedback.

Short Breaks Provision

There is a call for more holiday provision covering activities, PA support, Respite and parent carers reporting significant issues around recruitment and retention.

- A Playscheme offer will continue to be commissioned.
- There is difficulty in recruitment and retention of Short Breaks support workers nationally for children. We are working closely with providers to increase capacity for overnight Short Breaks and community support.
- We are working with adult social care providers to expand their service to young people which will provide more capacity but also support a planned transition for young people into adult services.



Autism in Schools Project

We have worked with Charlton (Secondary) and Dothill (Primary) over the past year on the North Midlands Autism in Schools Project.

The project includes a 'mini' parent carer forum in each school, and we have had the opportunity to meet with many families, sharing their views and experiences and feeding these into school discussions, understanding the process of diagnosis and signposting to relevant support offers.

The project also included webinars for staff on a range of subjects to see how to develop methods to make the school more 'autism friendly'.

We arranged a visit from a Sensory Bus experience to visit Charlton at the end of June; Uma Bhatia, who arranged the Autism Reality Experience had this to add: "The Autism Reality Experience is an innovative, immersive and hands-on training developed to give non-autistic people an experience of the sensory processing difficulties faced by autistic people. The session entailed a 20 minute experience in the Autism Reality Bus and a video training session to further understand the difficulties faced by people on the autism spectrum. The Sessions were well appreciated by all the attendees, sharing the feedback we received from the parents/carers.

This project also included a 'Building Confidence session for some students, via Autism West Midlands to support their resilience and strategies.

The project has been expanded into this year and we continue to run sessions on a monthly basis. If you'd like to read more about our work with Charlton check this link:

<http://www.charlton.uk.com/media/41985/newsletter-july-2022.pdf>



QUOTE

"Was a big eye opener and I'm already thinking of ways I can adjust a few things to help my child"



QUOTE

"This experience really hammered home how truly challenging life can be for an Autistic person in our everyday world"

QUOTE

"Thank you to PODS for giving me the experience of how having Autism affects people in everyday routine, I did the Autism Reality Experience this morning and found it very interesting"

Challenges at Home Sessions (Educational Psychologist Support)

Our 'Challenges at Home' sessions remain popular with our families, and we welcome attendance from anyone who is on a pathway for NeuroDevelopment conditions including Autism, ADHD, Anxiety, etc.

We are pleased to continue to run our sessions in person (at the PODS Hub)

and online sessions (MS Teams) with an experienced and Principal Educational Psychologist to support with issues at home.

Who? Family members who have a child/young person undergoing assessment or on the pathway for Autism.

Age Range? Open to 0-18 years from mainstream and special schools.

What for? For families to discuss home/life concerns and seek information and advice from Educational Psychologist team around emotional, behaviour, social, anxieties, routines, etc.

We use these sessions to support families to find solutions together and share experiences and offer mutual support in a safe and supportive place.

Please scan the QR Codes to book on the sessions



"Made me feel less lonely/isolated and know others have similar experiences"

"Made me think more about ways to help my son"

"Helped me to find some control of our situation. Helped me to explore different ways of managing x. Very positive and empowering"

"It was good to talk to other parents in similar situations. So you don't feel you are the only one going through it"



Working Together Charter



The working together charter has been developed over the past 3 years to support co-production and strengthen working together to ensure parent carer voices are included in all decisions and developments in the SEND World – across education, social care, and health. They are able to use these voices to help shape and involve local services.

Over the years we have had many conversations with families and feedback has always come back to communication and this led to development of the charter, learning from best practice and a Department for Education recognised project. The Working Together Charter (named by families) embeds 4 key principles to build 'TRUST'. They are:



These are the commitments we are making to our families together:

"We are excited to have developed the SEND "Working Together" Charter with our parents, carers, wider families and local partners.

"The Charter values our families as genuine partners and ensures they have a voice where it matters most, so children and young people with special needs have positive experience throughout their lives.

"Thank you for all your involvement, we look forward to 'Making A Difference' together"

- Jayne Stevens

Strategic Co-ordinator at PODS

"We are delighted to work together with PODS, our NHS partners and any borough family who wishes to get involved - to help children and young people with SEND lead happier lives. We are on their side, we want them to be our equal partner, to feel valued, cared for and to make their voice heard in the decision making for services that matter to them.

"This project will strengthen the Co-production journey in Telford and Wrekin. We will encourage other organisations across the borough, such as schools, health providers and other settings to sign up to the SEND Co-Production charter and to embed its principles in everyday tasks, so we can all keep the involvement of families at the heart of everything we do."

- Councillor Shirley Reynolds

(Lab), cabinet member for Children, Young People and Families

Social Care and Short Breaks

Staff attended an interesting conference ran in conjunction with University of Leeds (School of Law: Centre for Law and Social Justice), Cerebra and Disability Law Service. The conference was titled "Addressing commonly occurring social care difficulties encountered by disabled children and families".

It was a very interesting day and gave us a very good overview of the rights of families when accessing social care services for their child or young person.

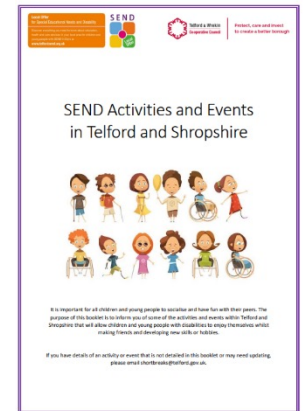
At time of writing we are currently working with Social Care Team, reviewing the Short Breaks Statement that has been consulted upon already. We are also in process of reviewing social care procedures alongside this and will be using our learning from the conference, alongside the parent carer feedback we continually gather.

The Short Breaks statement sets out a tiered offer of support – from Universal/Universal Plus, Targeted/Preventative support and Specialist Support.

Families have been given an opportunity to feed into these processes via a new council led Short Breaks Forum that now runs quarterly. There is also a Short Breaks activities booklet available for downloading on the council's Local Offer.

Find out more here: <https://www.telfordsend.org.uk/>

We continue to attend Short Breaks strategic meetings and these cover a range of needs that mirror the statement.



Introduction To: Group Manager and Designated Social Care Officer

The role of **DSCO** has been introduced to support high quality input and engagement of social care with the Education, Health, and Care needs assessments, planning process and the wider SEND framework.

At Telford and Wrekin Council, DSCO has been combined with the role of Group Manager for children with disabilities and will support with integration of services, developing pathways for those currently not known to social care and coordination of assessments and plans for children and families receiving social care and specialist support.

Current key priorities:

Review of existing criteria, policies and processes for children with disabilities teams.

Ensure social care and inclusive activities are included within the local offer to improve the information, advice and guidance for families through A to Z booklet of services, financial support, carer support and charities for children with SEND and an Inclusive activities leaflet to support the Local offer. https://www.telfordsend.org.uk/homepage/16/activities_and_events

Transition pathway - preparing for adulthood.

Participation in quality assurance of EHCP and social care advice.

Development of SEND champions role across social care.



PODS Events

We have a very diverse group and where possible we always try to cater for as many of our families as we can. Here is a little reminder of what events have taken place in the last 12 Months.

Throughout the 2022 School Summer Holidays PODS held many activities and events to help reduce isolation and help keep our families entertained.

Our most popular annual Coach trip is to the Seaside, we took two full coaches of super excited children and adults to Rhyl Beach, there were goodie bags handed out, drinks and snacks available on board the coaches as well as a game of I spy bingo to keep the youngsters entertained and a raffle of beach goodies on offer. The sun was shining, although we did have to wait for the tide to go out when we arrived but this did not stop our families having fun and making memories together, there was sand castle building, paddling in the Sea, beach games and shell collecting, some families enjoyed a stroll down the promenade to the fun fair and arcades, and of course who couldn't resist an ice cream and some fish and chip at the Seaside. As previous years the journey back, home was a lot quieter with lots of worn out snoozing children and adults.



On our second school holidays trip we teamed up with 'Contact' who provided some funding to help keep the costs down for our families, we took one full coach of our families to 'Wicksteed Park', the children and young adults enjoyed fun fair rides including a carousel, Dinosaur Valley theme park rides, mini Railway, experienced the world's oldest Water Chute, walked through the exotic bird aviary enclosure, saw the cute Meerkats in meerkat manor, and to top it off there was plenty of open space for the youngsters to run around safely to burn off some energy and enjoy a delicious Ice-cream.



We would like to say thank you to County Fundraisers in Dawley and Wellington Rotary Club for their financial support towards these PODS trips and to Elcocks Resin coaches for their wonderful service.

In October, we held a pumpkin carving workshop at our new PODS HUB, this event is proving to be very popular. Creative ideas were definitely flowing, it was lovely to see the whole family getting involved and working together to create their spooktacular creations. We would like to thank Lawley Morrisons for a Donation of some pumpkins towards this event.



Happy Healthy Active Holiday Scheme

Over the last few years PODS has successfully been supporting partner organisations with their delivery of the HHAH Scheme (Happy Healthy Active Holiday). With the move to our new Hub and its vast amount of space the decision was taken to run our own HHAH Scheme.



We choose to begin with a pilot scheme over the Christmas holidays. We ran the scheme for 4 hours a day over 5 days, the sessions took on a variety of themes and all included lunch for the children. 3 were held at our hub and included activities such as Christmas crafts, board games, biscuit decorating, Lego, Minecraft, and coding, with all sessions including some sport orientated activities. 1 session was held at Wrekin Forest school, where the children enjoyed making their own pizzas, playing on the zip line, and taking part in archery. For 1 session the families got to explore Blists Hill and it's recently opened adventure playground whilst keeping warm with cups of hot chocolate and chips!

We followed up the sessions afterwards with a questionnaire, enabling us to evaluate its performance. The information gained from the questionnaire will aid us in planning future HHAH schemes, ensuring they meet the needs of families. 15 families responded to our questionnaire, with 100% responding to say the scheme was good/very good. There was mixed views on the length of the sessions, with some families preferring the longer sessions and others finding them a little too long, moving forward we may look to run a mixture of session lengths.

These are some of the comments from families,

Thank you so much to all pods staff for the hard work in providing the holiday club, very much valued and appreciated.

My son enjoyed the crafts and being able to go and play games (table hockey).

Great variety. Good that transport and food was included.

Good variety of activities, food and snacks.

It was nice to see them both mixing and talking to other children.

Pods you are amazing! The kids were relaxed, themselves and had fun. Parents got time to talk and play. The longer session worked as didn't feel rushed.

Very relaxed, lots of options so my son could choose his preference. Also, as a family we felt very comfortable.

It was a wonderful day out, staff were excellent, and families. Felt so inclusive. Lunch for children and snacks was great. Thoroughly great day and an affordable price. Thank you so much.

Loved how everyone was accepted and it made my highly anxious child feel very at ease.



Parent Story

Our Experience with the new Makaton & Special iApps Partnership

About Me: My Makaton journey started when I had my son Alfie back in 2014.

Alfie has DS (Down Syndrome). I conducted lots of research into language programmes to assist and enhance his speech development and communication and discovered the amazing world of Makaton! I started with 'Makaton Signing for Babies' and then progressed onto Mr Tumble, Dave Benson Philips and the fabulous Signing Hands. My passion for Makaton was ignited as I saw first-hand the fantastic effect it had on Alfie. Enabling him to have a voice and relieving his frustrations, caused by lack of verbal communication skills. It allowed him to be included within his school and be able to communicate with staff and his peers. It has also really bought his speech development on.

This then led to me deciding that I wanted to progress further with Makaton so signed up to do my Level 1, 2, 3 and 4 Workshops.

In October 2021 I started '**Makaton With Alfie: What's It All About Alfie**' across all the major social media sites, were Alfie and I post daily Makaton Sign videos in order to spread awareness for Makaton far and wide.

The next natural step for me was to do my Makaton Tutor Training, which I successfully completed in September 2022, which then led me to start my business 'Sarah The Makaton Tutor' (www.sarahthetokatontutor.com)

I want to enable as many people across as many settings and environments as possible to be able to 'Talk Makaton'.

The Makaton & Special iApps Partnership:

As well as using Makaton with Alfie to help give him his voice and to develop his speech so his communication frustrations are removed, I also use Makaton to support his school learning, as does his school. Alfie attends mainstream Junior's. I use Makaton to help him with his spellings, reading, sentence formation, maths and subject topics, so I'm always looking for ways this can be more easily implemented. I was already using the full suite of Special iApps with Alfie to supplement his learning, so I was really happy when I learnt of the partnership between Makaton and Special iApps.

This new partnership is absolutely perfect as it really helps to embed his learning, allowing him to 'experience success' due to his prior knowledge and awareness of Makaton Symbols. To get the maximum benefit from this partnership I have bought the three-device membership. I have it set up on my iPad at home that Alfie uses, my mobile phone (so we have access when we're out and about, sat waiting for hospital appointments etc) and the 3rd device is his iPad he uses at school.

We can do independent learning at home & at school, or I can reinforce and further embed his school learning by working on the topics he is currently learning. We also love the facility to generate your own tailored resources. Alfie loves using the Special iApps resources. They are truly user friendly, and he is even teaching me different things to find within them on a daily basis! Its official, I'm being 'out-teched' by my nearly 9-year-old!

For the best results from this partnership, I'd highly recommend having the Makaton Premium membership package as that entitles you to have fuller access to all the Makaton Symbols from the Core Vocabulary within the Special iApps resources.

I can't praise this partnership enough and both Alfie and I look forward to what else develops from it in the future.

By Sarah & Alfie Case



Information about
iapps.org



Video Clip

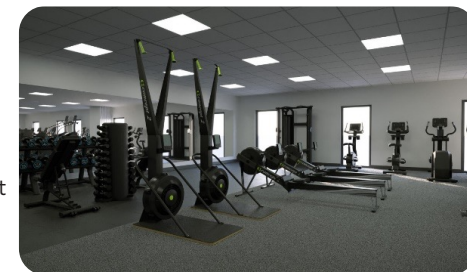
Inclusive Leisure Services

This last year has seen us invited to 'Inclusive Leisure' meetings and thanks to families input we have provided feedback into their strategy (thanks to all who have completed this) and with feedback from various other routes including Learning Disability groups, we are pleased to report an increase in offers to our families with disabilities.

- Ice Rink extra sessions
- Soft Play Area (at Ice Rink)
- Water Play sessions in Town Park
- New gym equipment that is accessible and meets

Current discussions around accessibility, specialist training for staff, concession memberships, new booking system and a clearer website for finding out about suitable session are all in the pipeline at time of writing.

As part of the work with Inclusive Leisure, we have received input from families regarding the Junior Play Park at Telford Town Centre and at time of issue of this newsletter, it should be opened - complete with new accessible equipment.



Transport



Home to School Travel Assistance - please remember to apply by 30 June 2023!

The Council looks to parents and carers to make arrangements for their (child)ren and young people to travel safely to their allocated school and or post 16 provider, where possible.

If you are unable to transport your child or young person and **if you meet the eligibility criteria listed on the Council's website**, the Council can provide travel assistance.

New applications for travel assistance (first time applications for September 2023:

All applications must be received by the Council by 30 June 2023. Applications received after this date cannot guarantee that travel training or travel assistance will be in place for the start of the new term.

Over 16 years of age: If your child is over the age of 16 and you have already received transport assistance, please re-apply by the 30 June every academic year.

Please do not submit your application until after the 31st March, once school placements are known and the new ICT system is implemented (see below for further information).

We have received a number of applications for the September term without a confirmed named school placement, please note that we are unable to accept these applications and will be notifying families that these applications will be rejected and that a new application will need to be submitted after the 31st March 2023.

For more information, **visit the Council's website:**

https://www.telford.gov.uk/info/20466/travelling_to_school/10/school_travel_assistance/2

Meet the PODS Team



Elaine Pearce
Project Manager



Jayne Stevens
Strategic Co-ordinator



Kerrie Seagrave
Member Support
Co-ordinator

PODS Hub

Early in 2022 it became obvious that despite having not long moved in, we were rapidly outgrowing our new office space. With no sign of our database growth slowing and many ideas in the pipeline, the decision was taken to find new bigger premises.

The long search began, we were looking for somewhere that had a large flexible amount of space on the ground floor, self-contained, accessible with outside space, in a central location with free parking and good public transport links. How difficult could it be! It turned out to be extremely difficult indeed, finally after 6 months of searching and many properties viewed, we finally stumbled on 1 Hawksworth road, we knew instantly this was the place.

Our move started at the beginning of October, and we had completely settled in by mid-November. Our new home boasts a permanent sensory room, as well as a room dedicated to our clubs such as Minecraft, Lego and coding, a further large indoor space for physical activities/games, it also benefits from an enclosed private garden area, and hopefully by the time you read this we would have commenced delivery of our life skills and cooking sessions using our kitchen facilities.

Visitors to our Hub have commented on its welcoming and calming environment with a light airy feel. Children and young adults have been enjoying the new space to run around in and explore, with many adoring the new sensory space.

Our vision is to have a one stop shop where families can visit a welcoming and inclusive place to access information, advice, support, activities, training, and volunteering opportunities to enhance both their mental wellbeing and physical health, improving their lives for the better.



**Our Hub is open Monday - Friday 9.30-2.30, so why not pop in and see us,
PODS Hub, 1 Hawksworth Road, Central Park, Telford, TF2 9TU.**



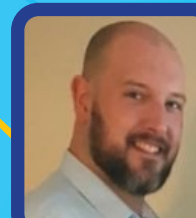
Uma Bhatia
Lego & Family
Group Lead



Jeannie Lear
SEND Engagement
Lead



Joanne Smith
Events and Fundraising
Lead



Matt Downes-Ward
PFA Navigator

Preparing for Adulthood

From Matthew Downes-Ward Preparing for Adulthood (PFA) Navigator

The purpose of the PFA Navigator is to help advise and support parent carers of young people with additional needs aged between 14 and 25. Following the feedback from PODS members, specialist schools and other SEND families, the PFA Navigator role was co-produced by the NHS, PODS and the Local Authority and created at the end of 2022.

As the PFA Navigator, I am here to help support young people and their families in their quest for independent living. This includes signposting families to services, discussing post-16 options (including education and employment), looking into life skills, addressing social inclusion, housing difficulties, and ongoing healthcare needs.

In the short time I have been in place I have been able to gather a bank of useful information and make the connections necessary to assist our families. Additionally, we began our Autism in Schools initiative; hosted the first of our PFA specific family groups (which are now a regular occurrence); and have begun arranging activities/sessions for our young people. We are in discussions to start hosting life skills sessions soon (including finances/benefits and food preparation/cooking) as well as arranging other specific events/sessions for our families and their young people throughout the year (such as workshops, movie nights, art classes etc).

Another aspect of this job is to provide feedback to help improve the services available. Therefore, I welcome any, and all, feedback in relation to your experiences in the following areas: education, employment, social inclusion, healthcare, housing, and life skills.

Whilst the position is still young, we have ambition and enthusiasm, and I look forward to sharing these moments with you all.

Please contact me if I can be of any assistance via email: matt@podstelford.org



Befriending Scheme Update

from Kerrie Seagrave, Member Support Co-ordinator

I want to start the Befriending Scheme Update by saying a very big 'THANK YOU' to our wonderful team of Befrienders, for their dedication, commitment, and their time. They are all parent carers themselves, and we appreciate them giving up their spare time to offer valuable emotional support to other parent carers.

As PODS Befrienders are parent carers, they all have the relevant lived experience, and they understand and know what it is like to go through challenging times. Our Befrienders offer support to families at the time of diagnosis or during those challenging times relating to their child or young person's diagnosis.

It's been a very busy year for the Befriending Scheme, with some of our Befrienders undertaking training in various subjects, including Mental Health and Domestic Violence. We have also run Befriender refresher training.

We have continued with our monthly Befriending Scheme Family Group, alternating between PODS Hub and Leegomery Community Centre. Our family groups offer families the opportunity to come and meet our Befrienders in a non-judgemental and welcoming environment our team are always ready to listen and offer support. Details of the family groups are shared on our weekly Ebulletin and on PODS open Facebook page, we also have a closed Befriending Scheme Facebook group where parent carers can share tips and ask any questions in a confidential environment.

We have recently held a Befriending Scheme Recruitment Event with a view to adding to our team. If you missed the event and would like to know more about accessing the Befriending Scheme or would like to become a Befriender yourself, we would really love to hear from you. You can email: kerrie@podstelford.org or call 07309 753044.

We're here for you, ready, with a listening ear and a cuppa. There are many ways you can access a PODS Befriender, a call every week, a catch up at PODS Hub with a hot drink, a chat at family group or even just a call when you need someone to talk too. Please remember we are here, and you never need to go through those tough times alone.

Kerrie & the Befriending Team xxx
HERE ARE JUST A FEW QUOTES FROM OUR BEFRIENDEES ON WHAT IT MEANS TO THEM TO HAVE A PODS BEFRIENDER...

I have been accessing the pods befriending service as of late due to several personal reasons. I would like to say the befriender that has been calling me on a regular basis, is so kind, caring and friendly, she actually listens to what I'm saying, she also helps by suggesting things that my help either myself or my son. If I want to cry she lets me get it out of my system. Without this service I think I would have locked myself away from everybody and things would have spiralled downwards. Thank you so much for supplying this service, I truly am very grateful.

My befriender rang me once a week sometimes more if needed, she was a real help, she helped me realise I wasn't alone and my feelings and my child's issues are acceptable, and it was normal how I was feeling! Without her I wouldn't of coped and understood my sons additional needs! Thank you.

She has been wonderful to talk too. Always listens and I get on well with her. I really like her. It truly is like having a friend. I look forward to my chats with her. I have felt like I have someone supporting me and someone who understands what I am going through.

The support I have received even in a short period has made such a difference. Just knowing someone else 'gets it' and is there to stand by my side helps immeasurably.

'The support and friendship I have felt from my befriender is amazing! She listens and knows how to put a smile on my face even when I am low. She's been a great strength by my side and helped me to no longer feel alone, and made me realize what a great strength it is to have a friend by my side to support and listen. Thank you.'



A Thank you Poem from a Parent

The load had gotten heavy
The way I couldn't find.
I was almost broken.
When I saw a face, so kind.

They led me to a place, where there were others just like me.
I felt heard, understood, and cared for, a way forward I could see.
They offered courses and days out, a listening ear, a hot drink.
Ed psych sessions, crafts and games, a safe space to sit and think.

These amazing people gave me hope against all the odds.
I am stronger now and that's because I am part of a group called PODS



A Parent's Story... Call me Alice

I was recently approached by someone I feel very lucky to now call a friend and asked if I would like the opportunity to share my story, in hopes of raising awareness and perhaps reaching out, if only to one family letting them know "you are not alone", help is available and asking for it is often the bravest thing you can do.

Seventeen years ago, I was lucky enough to meet my soul mate and life partner Kate. Although she wasn't a biological parent Kate soon became mom to our three children Michael (now 25) Natalie (now 22) and mason (now 17).



Our life was much like any other, days out tailored to mine and the children various needs, family holidays, birthdays, Christmas, and everything between. Like most of you we had our share of consultant appointments and specialists too, we would late find out that both Natalie and Mason also had Tourette's syndrome but we faced it like everything else, as a family.

In September 2021 everything changed, the children and I came down with a stomach bug, it was nothing too serious and Kate jumped into action with home-made soup, cuddles and Disney movies of course.

A week later Kate started the day well but by evening she had the same symptoms we'd had, stomach upset and feeling unwell. I stayed up with her that night getting drinks and hot water bottle but by morning there was no improvement. Upon helping Kate back to bed, she fainted.

At this point I called 999, she was obviously more dehydrated then either of us thought, and though she was upset at the thought of going to hospital she relented, and I packed a bag with essentials in. The ambulance came and paramedics decided that her blood pressure was a bit low so they would take her to Shrewsbury.

I was advised to call in a few hours for an update and hopefully we could arrange transport to pick her up. The 24 hours that followed that call are and will always be the most difficult of my life and I hope you excuse the lack of detail, on Sept 24th, just 24 hours after Kate was admitted to hospital, she passed away in my arms. Cause of death, a blood clot causing septicaemia and organ failure.

Our world was torn away without warning, I had lost my best friend, my soul mate, my carer, and our children had lost their mom.

What on earth were we going to do??

Kate had protected us so well from the world, but she was gone. I faced planning a funeral, and all of the legal matters involved, I hadn't even been to Aldi alone in 17 years how was Mason going to get to college? Did we pay that water bill? I know that's thready, but when you're in shock and grieving, nothing makes sense, but add that to what I can only describe as the most intense, never ending sensory overload imaginable and it still won't come close.

"I need help, we're autistic and my carer just died."

I'm not sure if that's word for word but it's pretty close.

I had seen PODS on Facebook, and I think Kate has asked another parent a question regarding an EHCP at some point but that was the extent of our involvement.

Elaine Pearce (PODS) was very quick to respond, I think she asked some questions but honestly, I was so afraid at the time, it's hard to recall, but I remember being extremely frightened. I thought that I'd be found unfit, all I could think was without Kate, I can't do this. How can I take care of our children when I can't take care of myself?

I remember the first time I met Elaine Pearce, she had asked if she could visit us just a day or so after I contacted her, she arrived with a fellow professional, a man she introduced as Kubby from (Be Happy) I cried through most of that first visit, Elaine offering comfort and Kubby taking notes, they met the children and formulated a short-term care plan.

That visit was so incredibly vital. The impression we were left with was "yes they're strangers, but they speak our language", and their message was clear "we can help! one step at a time, we can help".

The PODS team started to bring in other services, taking their time to explain the rolls these services could provide and of course get consent. Sally Moran from strengthening families, was (and I'm sure she wouldn't mind my saying) a tough visit! Although accompanied by Elaine, I recall a reaction of "don't bring her back" it's funny now when I look back because Sally is absolutely amazing, but we had never encountered someone with such a no nonsense work ethic. That's not to say she wasn't sympathetic or caring, far from it.

Through strengthening families, I had help with finances and very soon sally had outlined a plan and social services became involved.

For me personally social services were the most challenging, I found them very hard to work with, but I needn't have worried, they liaise with Sally, Elaine and Kubby and a care package was outlined for myself and the children.

Sixteen months on and our lives are very different, we have grief counselling, two lovely fulltime carers, new routine, no debt worries and the wonderful staff at PODS have become much loved friends, even Sally from strengthening families grew on us, she's a wonderful woman and we wouldn't have survived without her.

In a relatively short period of time and through that single Facebook cry for help we have been involved with more services than the entire seventeen years previously and I sincerely apologise if I haven't named someone.

The pride we had in never asking for help was great, but ultimately it put us at risk because nothing in life is certain, we could never have foreseen losing Kate and never questioned the role she played and what that meant. The many services involved with my family now are vital.

Being dependent on them does not mean we are not independent; our choices and actions are still our own. We are doing things now that I never dreamt were possible. We're fond of trips to Blists hill with PODS and thoroughly enjoyed the Queens Jubilee.

Our grief is still very raw, and every day is a challenge, but we never face it alone. We now have a whole network of wonderful people supporting us, I don't have to wonder or worry. if there was a message I'd want to convey here and if you've braved this to the end, it would be this.

Ask for help, you are not alone. A single message from a desperate, devastating situation was just the start for us. The help really is out there.

It's sometimes hard to imagine when you're traversing the ECHP process or fighting for the rights of your children, but I've been at rock bottom with no light or hope in sight. I promise you; **help is out there!**



This is an extract from an article written by one of our brave parent carers. To read it in full please scan the QR code.



A Year of AWARDS

Here at PODS like many other charities/organisations we started 2022 by getting back on track and returning to a level of normality, well so we thought! Little did we know that the year ahead was going to contain a whirlwind of emotions and excitement.

It all started back at the end of February 2022, when we took a phone call from our Local Authority, they rang to inform us we had been short listed for a local 'Pride in the Community Award'. We were astounded, we had no idea we were even in the running! This led, to us being invited to an official awards evening, in which the overall winner would be announced. Off we went with our posh frocks on and sat back and waited to come 3rd, to our amazement we WON! We were overwhelmed and cried our way up on to the stage to collect our award, how could our little charity have won such an award.



Telford Community Pride
AWARDS



However, our news doesn't end there, a month after the award ceremony we received a very important email, we had won yet another award! This one being the most prestigious award that can be bestowed upon a charity, the Queens Award for Voluntary Services, the MBE for charities. We were sworn to secrecy until the 2nd June, when it was officially announced by the Palace. The 2nd June was the perfect day for us as it fell on the day of our Jubilee party and Volunteers week, what a way to celebrate our announcement.

Many of our volunteers who cover a wide aspect of roles, fit in their volunteering around caring for a disabled child. This makes what they do extra special and important, which is truly worthy of recognition and it's vitally important to us that they are thanked and recognised for this. Our volunteers are an integral part of our charity and without them we would cease to exist. Their roles are entwined throughout our organisation, from Trustees who provide guidance and oversight, too those extra special volunteers helping with frontline services ensuring our community has the support it needs when they need it the most. As an organisation we are delighted that our volunteers hard work and dedication has been recognised at the highest possible level.

In August we held an official presentation evening at the World Heritage Site Ironbridge Gorge, there was over sixty PODS Charity supporters, volunteers, and staff in attendance, they were joined by the Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire and the Vice Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire. The Chair of Trustees, Jon Mills, received the prestigious award from Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire, whilst The Vice Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire awarded each of the volunteers with a pin badge. During the evening we also gifted 3 volunteers with a free night stay at a hotel of their choosing, made possible by the 'Room To Reward' program.



Volunteers at the Queens Award Night

Jon Mills, Chair of Trustees had this to say: "I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the PODS team and all our volunteers for their enthusiasm and endless desire to help and support as many families as possible, the impact they have personally made on the lives of PODS families is truly remarkable".

**DURING THE EVENING
VICE LORD LIEUTENANT, JENNY WYNN READ
OUT THIS EXTRACT FROM THE OFFICIAL CITATION.**

Parents Opening Doors (better known as PODs), a parent/carer forum that involves and supports families who have a child or young person with a disability or additional need. They also offer specialist/lived experience help to parents or carers of fostered and adopted children who often have specialist or complex needs. Fundamentally, PODs stop parents and families going into crisis therefore helping reduce the impact on local services.

PODs ensure parent/carer voices are heard as they work with strategic partners and the wider community in Telford & Wrekin. The organisation's motto of 'your views - your voice' is so apt and their work is unparalleled in the area - they make a real difference, shaping local services by providing the voice of families.

The charity rose to the challenges that the pandemic brought and continued delivery of the majority of services by adapting to new ways of working and embracing technology.

PODs are a shining beacon of what can be achieved with strong leadership and a dedicated, empathetic and compassionate group of very special volunteers. They are extremely worthy winners of the Queens award for Voluntary Service.

**Telford & Wrekin Council
published this statement.**

The work that Parents Opening Doors does, providing face to face support for families, reducing isolation and influencing the improvement of services is incredibly important and would not be possible without the commitment and dedication of all of the volunteers involved. We recently honoured PODs locally, when they won the Best Community Support Group Award at our Community Pride Awards in April this year. However, now being awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the very highest award a voluntary group can receive, shows the importance of what these charities do, and the positive impact that they are both having on people's lives. Congratulations and thank you for all that you do.



Telford Community Pride Awards

Training for Leisure Staff



Early in 2022 following on from customer feedback, Telford and Wrekin leisure services looked to improve their approach to disability and inclusion across the whole of its services. They embarked on a comprehensive inclusive leisure strategy, which was coproduced with local strategic partners including us, as the local parent carer forum.

As part of this strategy, it was agreed that staff across all sites would benefit from training around disability awareness and inclusion. PODS charity was approached to produce and deliver a bespoke training package based around the leisure services requirements. The objective of the training was to develop staff awareness of disabilities, improve their confidence when coming in to contact with disabled people and their companions, create an inclusive leisure environment for all, culminating in improved customer experience when accessing any leisure facility.

Subsequently, a training package was created which included information that was both factual and born out of lived experience of the course

facilitators. Training was delivered in person, with sessions lasting up to 2 hours, with a total of 9 sessions being delivered at varying sites and differing times, ensuring take up was maximised.

The training was both very well received and needed, with many attendees wanting further help and guidance. Lots of useful ideas and suggestions were put forward by attendees to help further aid the inclusive leisure strategy. The attendees were motivated and keen to ensure that the customer experience of those with disabilities was improved moving forward with greater customer satisfaction and accessibility. It was commented by many attendees that as the session was delivered by those with real life lived experience, this helped bring the greatest impact and had changed their outlook and approach to disabled people.

If you own or know of an organisation that would benefit from disability awareness and inclusion training, please contact Elaine for an informal chat to discuss our bespoke packages

elaine@podstelford.org

PODS and NEXTGENDONATE Partnership

NextGenDonate are proud and excited to be supporting PODS!!!

We are partnering with PODS to help inspire and grow donations for this vital community charity.

The contactless solution is able to reach existing and new donors, both as a donation point and through the use of QR Codes too, with website online donation at the PODS website coming soon. The contactless donation point looks this and can be stuck on any surface, if you or one of your friends sees one, just tap it with your phone, as you would to pay in shop and chose an amount to donate, or just access more information about PODS.

NextGenDonate will be working closely with PODS to reach new donors and widen the fantastic fundraising efforts that the PODS Team deliver for you.

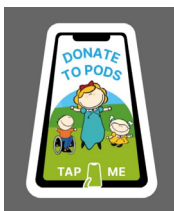
However, we also need your help and we have 2 things to ask please

1. Can you share the QR Code to all your contacts, the one you see here and on the back of this Newsletter will also be shared on Social Media too.
2. If you know any company that would like to sponsor a donation point at their site, for even a short period of time, please let us know.

And if you have any ideas for other places to look for donations, please let us know.

If you would like to know more about the new PODS donation points take a look at www.nextgendonate.co.uk.

We look forward to helping YOUR Charity grow.



PODS Fundraising



Although it has been another tough year financially for us all, we are extremely grateful for the loyalty and support from all our volunteers, supporters, and donors, and would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their continued support to PODS over the last 12 months.

We have had a fabulous increase again this year of volunteers so thank you

to each and every one of them for their continued dedication and support, without them the wonderful work we do simply couldn't go ahead. Also, I'd like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to our fabulous donors that have continued to support us including, Asda in Donnington Wood, Morrisons in Lawley, County Fundraisers in Dawley, Rotary Club in Wellington, Sinclair Football Club Telford, Severn Valley Railway in Kidderminster, Wynn Foundation in Shropshire, and many other smaller donors.

Without support and crucial income via grants, donations and fundraising and

volunteering our charity simply cannot continue to fulfil the purpose it was intended and reach out and support every one of you reading this Newsletter. We are very proud of all the events and activities that we manage to put on for our families, however it takes a lot of hard work to get these off the ground and behind the scenes we have an army of dedicated volunteers and staff who work tirelessly, spending numerous hours filling in forms, attending meetings with potential funders, researching venues and events, networking and organising for all our activities and events and liaising with our dedicated supporters who are very generous with their donations. If you would like to help out with any of our fundraising, activities or events, please contact events@podstelford.org

We started our Facebook page 'PODS Fundraising Group' in the first covid lockdown and it is still running

successfully 3 years on, we have regular online raffles with some wonderful prizes to suit all, such as, Chocolates and wine, perfume, children's toys and games, beauty hampers, electronic gadgets and lots of sweet treats, all proceeds of the raffles go towards the costs of PODS activities, groups and events, please take a look and take part if you can. Remember you have to be in it for a chance to win it.

We have been fortunate to hold a couple of fundraising raffle stalls throughout 2022, such as St Georges Primary School Summer Fete, and the Telford balloon festival, in which we took along our sensory tents to enable families to take a break and access some calming activities amongst the business of the festival. We have held raffles at our events too.

We held a fundraising fish and chip bingo evening in Dawley community centre and also a wonderful adult only crazy fun filled fundraising evening including quizzes, bingo and cheesy games at Caseys venue.

All money raised from events and fundraising will be used to help with further events, trips, activities, and support for our PODS families. Thank you to all that have supported us and or took part.

There will be further fundraising events throughout 2023-2024 so please keep a look out. Remember If you have any ideas for fundraising, activities and events or want to get involved, please get in touch:

events@podstelford.org



PODS Family Groups



PODS continues to reach out to families who have children/young people with a disability and/or additional need. The Family Groups aim to provide support and advice to the members in a non-judgemental friendly environment helping them understand their child's needs better and find out about the different services their child can access.

This year, the Family Groups have been well attended especially the Family Group at Blists Hill as it gives an opportunity for the parents/carers to enjoy the outdoors and catchup over coffee whilst the children are at school. We have also had a few families who Home School their children join in and enjoy craft activities and meeting other parents.

This year, in the Family Groups we celebrated the Carers Day by hosting a Mini Pamper Event for the parents/carers to join us in a bit of self-pamper/care and feel relaxed. We have also had Mindfulness colouring sessions, in which the parents/carers have enjoyed colouring thereby helping them feel relaxed and calm and we all know that as parent/carers anytime we get to destress and relax is a boon.

The Christmas crafts sessions was another well attended session, as always. The parents/carers enjoyed doing the Christmas crafts like candle jar making and basket decorating. The Family Groups continue to provide the members opportunities to discuss the challenges faced by their children and find out about the available support and advice in a friendly and relaxed environment for all the parents/carers.



Ironbridge Gorge Museum Passes

This year we continue to have our popular Ironbridge passes for our members to use, thanks to our collaboration with the Ironbridge Gorge Museum trust. If you're looking for something to do over the weekend or during the school holidays, then why not consider loaning some of our passes to allow you access to all the museums listed below.

The pass allows you to visit:

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

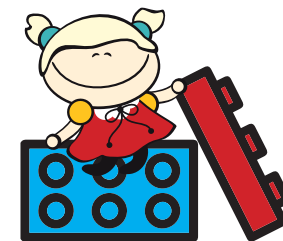
The offer entitles families of up to 6 people, free access to the Ironbridge Gorge Museums. Passes can be loaned out for a maximum of 5 days subject to availability and a small deposit, which is refunded on their return.

You will require 1 pass for each person including children over the age of 5, you will be able to visit any of the participating museums any number of times during your loan period. 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.

IRONBRIDGE
Valley of Invention



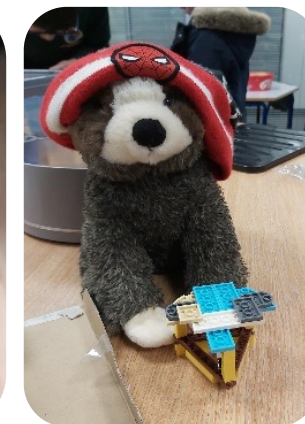
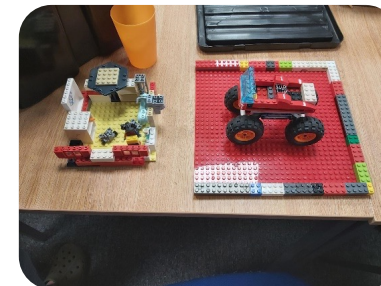
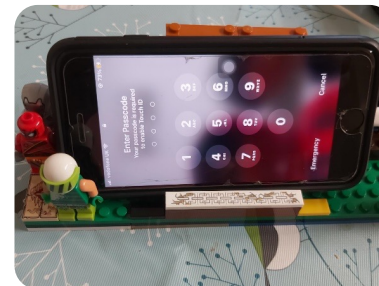
PODS Lego Club



The Lego Club has been setup with the aim of developing the social and communication skills of children/young people in a relaxed club setting making use of resource (Lego) that appeal to them. The Lego Club provides the children the opportunity to build models, talk about them, develop their listening skills, and learn to wait patiently for their turn.

The club is run at the PODS Hub, for an hour every week during term time. The children sometimes work together or build separately. Either way they join in to take a keen look at what others have built and share the Lego bricks with their peers. Besides sharing their Lego builds, we encourage the children to talk about any other achievements as well. This helps to develop their social and communication skills in a non-judgemental environment. The session usually ends with a quick game of Lego Bingo. The children enjoy the healthy competition and support each other.

The children are happy to attend the sessions and we have observed their confidence grow. They have started to greet and acknowledge each other thereby showing an awareness of social practices. It is these small wins which keep us motivated to provide a safe and inclusive place for the children in the form of the Lego Club, to help and support them achieve their potential. In case your child is interested to join the Lego Club please email Uma at uma@podstelford.org



PODS Activity Sessions

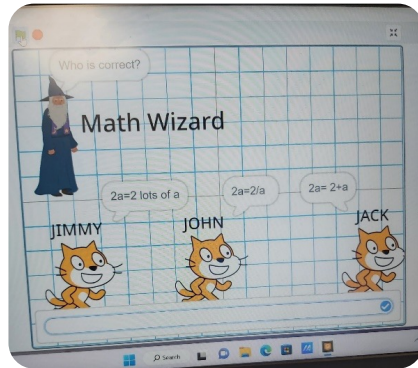


During term-time, we offer after-school clubs at the PODS Hub. We currently offer coding on Mondays, Minecraft on Tuesdays, Lego on Wednesdays, and a variety of activities on Thursdays and Saturdays such as games and crafts. Places can be booked through Ticketsource, which can be accessed using the QR code below.

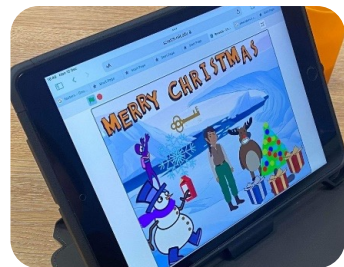
During Code Club, children are learning Scratch which is a visual block programming language. In Scratch the children learn to write code in its block like interface on the website thereby learning to think creatively and reason systematically. By using the visuals provided in Scratch, the children are able to create not only games but also text, stories, music, and animation.

Minecraft Club provides children with the opportunity to play Minecraft and Roblox in a social setting. Children have been working together on tasks such as creating villages, mining, and playing strategy games. Through feedback, parents and carers have noted that the sessions have benefitted their children socially and their children have formed friendships and confidence.

On Thursdays and Saturdays, we have PODS Activity Sessions, which offer different weekly activities to children, young people, and their families with sessions such as games, crafts and biscuit decorating. We have also had trips to Inflata Nation, Lower Drayton Farm and Wrekin Forest School. Originally known as Pears sessions, the programme aims to reduce isolation and build social skills and confidence.



Places can be booked through Ticketsource, which can be accessed using this QR code



Queens Platinum Jubilee Afternoon Tea Celebrations

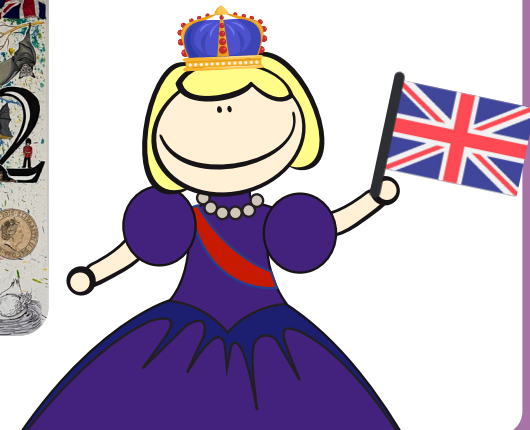


In June we hosted a wonderful traditional Afternoon Tea to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, who successfully reigned over our country for 70 years but sadly passed away aged 96 years old on 8th September 2022

We hired the Ironbridge Engine room (Enginuity Museum) at Coalbrookdale, the room looked beautiful decorated with traditional Union Jack colours and flags. A sit-down Afternoon Tea was served by the friendly and very accommodating catering and Events staff of Ironbridge followed by a fun filled variety of entertainment including a fabulous live singer Lisa, from Simply Vintage, who sang songs through the eras from 1940's onwards, there was a magician from Non-Stop Fun providing a magic show and balloon Modelling, we also had crafts and free access to the Enginuity Museum. To add to the fun and theme of the day, children and adults were welcomed to come along dress as a king, Queen, Prince, Princess, or Knight.

The event was well attended with over 120 of our members staff and volunteers joining in the fun. It was the perfect excuse for our staff to get glammed up, and if I do say so myself everyone looked stunning. We had special guest appearance from The Vice Lord-Lieutenant Jenny Wynn, Cllr. Raj Mehta Major of Telford and Wrekin and Sam Ives commissioner for Social Services.

One of our very talented young adult Members commissioned an amazing piece of Artwork to commemorate the reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II which now sits proudly in our new PODS Hub reception.



Sleep Workshops

Back in 2021 Health funded us to undergo specialised sleep training to enable us to deliver Sleep Tight workshops to parent and carers to assist them in formulating bedtime strategies, to better improve sleep quality for the whole family.

We commenced delivery of the sleep training workshops in February last year, these initially run over 5 sessions, following on from feedback the course was restructured to be held over 3 sessions, parents/carers reported that this new format was more suitable.

The strategies and methods taught within the workshops are designed to both facilitate your child falling asleep and remaining asleep. They are derived from tried and tested methods that take into account children's individualities and help you plan a routine that works for you and your family.

"This course has given me a lot of information, specially understanding the sleep cycle."

Parents and carers that have attended the courses so far had this to say about the course

"I've really enjoyed the session and I've found them very useful."

"I found this course very useful, some good information that I am taking away, thank you."

"Sleep course was very good and given a lot of ideas that I wouldn't have even though could affect my child when it came to bedtime."

"I am now feeling much more confident regarding the bedtime routine and positive that the changes I have started to put in place will continue and get easier."



The course is 3 sessions long spread over 3 weeks, it is essential that all 3 sessions are attended, each one covers a different topic/aspect which will slowly allow you to build a plan that works for you. If you are interested in finding out more or to request a place, please email elaine@podstelford.org

Easter 2022



Last Easter we were busy bunnies as we hopped around Telford to bring a bit of chocolatey cheer. The generous customers of ASDA Donnington Wood (some of which being PODS members) donated lots of eggs into our PODS trolley. Thank you to everyone who donated and to ASDA Donnington for providing us with the opportunity to collect eggs at their store.

Our team donned their bunny outfits to entertain children and young people during our Easter egg hunt at Admaston House, bunny home visits and a bunny appearance at Great Dawley Town Council's Easter event. We also worked with Dawley Town Council to provide activity sessions for local families at their holiday scheme. As you can see by the photos, families enjoyed themselves and we look forward to bringing more Easter fun in 2023!

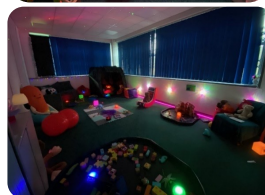
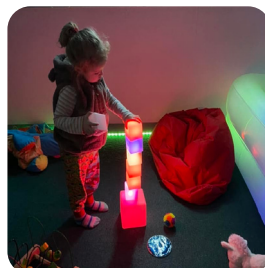


PODS Sensory Sessions



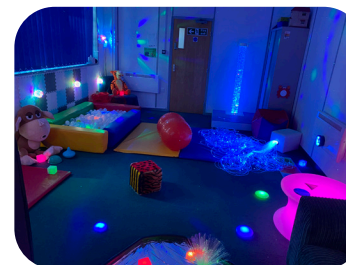
2022 saw our sensory sessions continue and expand as we moved into our new premises. We provide preschool sessions for children aged 0-4 years and sessions for children and young people up to the age of 25. Our sessions aim to provide children and young people with opportunities to engage their senses and develop areas such as social, cognitive, and fine motor skills. Sensory play is a popular way to help children to develop their understanding of their emotions and the world around them while reducing anxieties. Through fundraising and generous donations from PODS families, we have been able to equip and purchase new sensory resources for our dedicated sensory room. This has enabled us to help meet the needs of more young people and their parents or carers.

Sessions currently run on Mondays and Fridays and bookings must be made through Ticketsource. The sensory room can also be privately booked through Ticketsource. Please email jeannie@podstelford.org for more information.



New!

Check out our new sensory room!



Picnic in the Park 2022

2022 saw the biggest turn out with over 700 members attending our annual picnic in the park which was packed full with amazing fun activities such as Gaming van, go karts, bouncy castle, inflatable assault cause, inflatable slide, football shootout, wet sponge throwing, wizard school, soft play, archery, fun science, amazing face painting, glitter tattoos, sports equipment, many stalls and not forgetting our super value packed lunches. The weather was warm and sunny allowing people to enjoy a picnic on the field with their families and friends.

We were fortunate to have a special visit from two of local Emergency Services, the police and fire service, they brought along their vehicles for the children to look at and sit in along with some items of equipment for the children to experience.

Following on from last year's success we again decided to open up this event to the wider community not just our members, this is part of our ongoing strategy to promote and improve acceptance and understanding of the needs of our families.

To ensure the event was accessible to as many families as possible we hired out the MOBILOO, this is a mobile changing places unit. We would like to thank Telford and Wrekin Council for funding this as it made a huge difference to the families that used it, enabling them to stay and take part in the fun for the whole day.

So much work goes in to putting on amazing events like this and it simply would not be possible without our wonderful volunteers, and extra help from some of our members and their families, so a huge Thank you and well done, please let us know if you would like to help out with future events.



Loved every second of the day, my child was so happy she didn't know what to do first, face painting was a big hit as well as all the inflatables, topped off with an ice cream from the ice cream van.

We had a lovely time... was great to get out and meet friends.

Mobiloo made it possible to join in the fun all day instead of leaving early to deal with their personal cares.

Amazing day, so much to do, everyone was really happy, super organised day, picnic, lunches and snacks available to purchase saved me having to pre make them.

Christmas 2022

December was jam packed with festive fun, we had lots of crafts and decoration sessions leading up to our fabulous Christmas events. We put on three events this year; this allowed us to cater for the differing needs of our families.

Our first event was our very popular annual big Families Christmas party, we held this at our local Scout Hut as this proved to work well with accessibility and extra space allowing a quiet space, Santa's grotto, and a kitchen for in house catering. There was a snow machine placed at the entrance door creating a lovely festive scene for when our families arrived, the party included a disco, fun games, popcorn, buffet and a quiet sensory area, just to add to the magic of the party there was a very special visit from Santa himself and Mrs Claus, there was a purpose-built grotto where Santa handed out a gift to all children/ young people that attended. It was a very successful event with special thanks to our wonderful volunteers and staff that dressed up as Elf's again this year to help Santa, entertain the children and make sure the event went as well as it did, it was simply Magical.



Our second event was our Quiet Santa, this was held at our new PODS Hub, this is firm favourite with our families whose children struggle to cope with the sensory overload that goes with a big party. Again, there was a purpose-built grotto for Santa and Mrs Claus where children/young adults and their siblings could come and see Santa and receive a gift at their allocated time slot to prevent queuing, there was no flashing lights or music creating a calming environment allowing the child to still enjoy the magic of visiting Santa.



Our third event was arranged after listening to feedback from our families, we arranged a festive tea party to meet the varied need of our families, again this was held at our new PODS hub, families came along enjoyed some games, crafting, buffet and a visit from Santa, each child/young person that attended received a gift from Santa himself.



Be Happy Support Limited Job Advertisement Care Support Worker Required

Hourly Rate: From £10.50 per hour
Hours: Casual and Full time Positions

We are pleased to announce job opportunities for individuals looking for work in the health and social care sector. The successful candidate does not require prior experience or qualifications as full training is provided but past experiences are desirable.

We are looking for vibrant, caring, supportive and open individuals willing to share experiences with clients.

We provide support for clients with additional needs, complex needs, and autistic spectrum condition. The support we provide is vital to the daily routines and quality of life for all our clients.

Job role:

- Providing a person-centred support for a family.
- Supporting day activities and opportunities.

Person Specification:

- Must be over 18 years old.
- Motivated to support people in the community and in their own homes.
- Willingness and ability to support and participate in activities with client.
- Must be flexible and adaptable to client needs.
- Must have a creative, positive attitude and approach to supporting individuals and families.
- Ability to drive is desirable to the role.

Be Happy Support limited is a CQC registered provider and we pride ourselves in providing positive and innovative support and care for all our clients to improve their lives. As an employee, you will be fully trained and supported to developing your career and learning in the sector. There are many benefits and job security working with us with a keen interest in developing fantastic life experiences whilst supporting clients and their families.

All roles with us are subject to enhanced DBS checks.

To express your interest and for more information please contact us on:
Email: bhappyservice@gmail.com Phone: [07446987026](tel:07446987026)



Have you ever heard of Twincl?

Telford's own lottery, would you like to be in with a chance to win some money whilst supporting us at the same time? If the answer is yes, please scan the QR code below to find out more.

As always, all money raised from events and fundraising will be used to help with further events, trips, activities, and support for our PODS families. Thank you to all that have supported us and took part. There will be further fundraising events throughout 2022 so please keep a look out.



SAVE THE DATE

PODS PICNIC IN THE PARK

OPEN TO
EVERYONE

MONDAY 7TH AUGUST 2023

10AM-4PM AT CHARLTON SCHOOL, APLEY AVENUE,
WELLINGTON, TELFORD TF1 3FA

NEW
VENUE

Come along and join in the fun, we will have lots of
activities and workshops available on the day

For more information please contact Joanne Smith
by email joanne@podstelford.org or call [07816 643747](tel:07816643747)

Please **CHECK OUR
WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA**
FOR UPCOMING FAMILY GROUPS & EVENTS



Elaine Pearce

Project Manager

☎ 07540 049759

✉ elaine@podstelford.org

Jayne Stevens

Strategic Co-ordinator

☎ 07775 342092

✉ jayne@podstelford.org

Kerrie Seagrave

Member Support Co-ordinator

☎ 07309 753044

✉ kerrie@podstelford.org

Matt Downes-Ward

PFA Navigator

☎ 07305 014358

✉ matt@podstelford.org

PODS Charity

01952 458047

✉ support@podstelford.org

🖱 www.podstelford.org

📘 PODSForumTelford

🐦 PODSTelford

📷 podsbefriendingscheme

🏠 **1 Hawksworth Road,
Central Park, Telford, TF2
9TU**

