

MARCH 2024

PARENTS
OPENING
DOORS
PARENT CARER FORUM

PODS
BEFRIENDING
SCHEME



PODS

SPRING 2024

Newsletter

What's included

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Max Cards

Ironbridge Passes

PODS Holiday Scheme

Easter 2023

GET INVOLVED
and spot the Easter
Eggs throughout
the Newsletter!
Let us know how
many you spot!

Company/Charity number: 1150871

Foreword from Elaine Pearce, Project Manager

A warm welcome to all our members, both longstanding and new, we hope you like reading through our latest Newsletter, and children enjoy spotting all the hidden Easter Eggs. As always, we remain here for each and everyone of you regardless of the challenges you face. We strive to be an inclusive organisation who is open and accessible to everyone.

The year 2023 marked a significant milestone for PODS as we established ourselves in our new home, the PODS Hub. This strategic move has proven transformative for the charity, enabling us to expand our service offerings to families. This ensures that we remain responsive to our community's evolving needs, providing unparalleled support.

In the midst of the ongoing 'Cost of Living' crisis affecting the nation, PODS has actively responded by extending support to the broader community. We have distributed warm packs to the most vulnerable members of society, organised warm hub sessions to provide a welcoming space for socialisation with complimentary hot beverages, and facilitated the use of office space at our hub for those working from home. This commitment reflects our dedication to making a positive impact during challenging times.

Following the success of our gifting tree last Christmas, we have taken the decision to make it an annual occurrence. We would like to take this opportunity to extend profound gratitude to all those who generously contributed toys and gifts, thereby providing crucial support to numerous families, and bringing joy to their lives.

Benefiting from our new premises, we have significantly expanded our sessions and activities. After-school clubs now operate nearly every day of the week, complemented by sensory sessions and specialised groups tailored for young adults aged 14 and above. The development of our sensory room has led to collaborations with local schools, allowing their students regular access to a serene and nurturing environment, enriching the holistic aspect of their education.

Last year has been one of Royal proportions, with 2 volunteers attending a Royal Garden Party at the Palace, a Tea Party to celebrate the Kings Coronation and then the amazing opportunity to meet HRH Queen Consort when she visited Telford.

Our database continues to experience unprecedented growth, a testament to our sustained commitment to serving our community. Despite this exponential growth, our dedication to being there for each individual remains unwavering. Now more than ever we require the support of our remarkable volunteer team to assist us in delivering our vital services. We express our sincere thanks to each and every one of you; your contributions are truly amazing 😊.

In response to feedback highlighting the insufficient support for parents with infants who have disabilities, we have taken proactive steps to address this gap. Thanks to funding from the recently established Local Authority Family Hubs, we are excited to introduce a new role within our charity. Louise, our dedicated Perinatal and Infant Disability Support Worker, is available to provide assistance and guidance to parents expecting or caring for a baby with disabilities. Her expertise encompasses a range of areas, offering valuable advice, emotional support, and a compassionate listening ear to those navigating the unique challenges of parenting in these circumstances.

Our team of volunteer befrienders has continued to steadily grow over the last 12 months, however, the demand for our befriender support has grown exponentially and we are always keen to recruit new befrienders. This year has also seen the introduction of PODS Buddies, who can accompany new members to sessions and groups, breaking down barriers and anxieties allowing more people to access our services.

In January this year we were delighted to launch our new counselling service which is headed up by our very own Kerrie who has worked incredibly hard and gained her qualifications to practice. She is able to support individuals from the age of 18 years upwards be they parents, carers or young adults. For more information or an initial consultation please contact kerrie@podstelford.org



Central to our charity's core is our Parent Carer Forum headed up by Jayne. The steering group, a crucial component of the forum, has warmly welcomed several new volunteer parent representatives. Collaborating with existing members, they are dedicated to amplifying your voices and ensuring robust representation. Over the past 12 months, significant milestones have been achieved, including the finalisation and endorsement of a new 'Working Together Charter'.

This charter serves as a commitment from services spanning Health, Social Care, and Education to collaborate in a co-produced manner with parents. Our growing connections with schools and broader partner organisations further empower us to ensure that our children and young people have access to the most fitting and beneficial services available.

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 brought together the family group and the befriender group so families can access both services in the same place, they also underwent rebranding to PODS Social Support Groups, following consultation with our members. Many of the sessions now take on themes, such as crafts, mental wellbeing and pamper sessions.

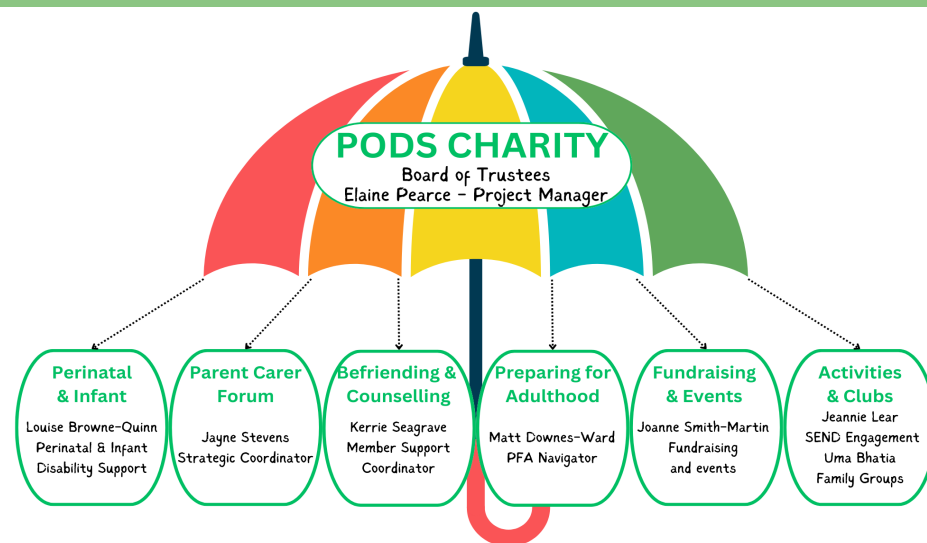
Our team dedicated to fundraising and events is thrilled to have resumed participation in community events and fundraisers. This engagement is crucial for generating essential funds and promoting awareness of the incredible work we undertake. We're actively maintaining our well-received raffle, and the proceeds are utilised to organise exciting activities and events.

Our Preparing For Adulthood (PFA) Navigator, Matt is making strides to support families with children and young adults aged 14+. He has facilitated regular support groups for the parent carers and suitably themed sessions for the young adults around their interests such as drawing, Anime and games. He has also recently started a collaboration with the NCS service to provide life skills sessions to those aged 15 and over.

Finally, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to each and every individual who has supported us over the past 12 months, whether as a Parent Rep, Befriender, Volunteer, Donor, or in any other capacity. Your contributions, regardless of size, have been instrumental in enabling us to assist and support numerous families. Thank you sincerely for making a difference through your valuable efforts and support.

We hope you enjoy reading our newsletter and hope to see you all very soon, please keep a look out in the coming months for new services and exciting initiatives coming later in the year.

Elaine Pearce
Project Manager



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 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 2 years 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 was invited to join the Trustees of PODS over a year ago, 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 Gillam



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 5 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.



Sally Moran

Hello, my name is Sally and I started volunteering as a trustee for PODS late last year and I'm really enjoying being part of this fantastic organisation.

I work for Telford and Wrekin council in Children services, as part of the early years and strengthening families' service and I have also worked at various special needs schools and facilities locally during my career.

I have seen first-hand the amazing benefit, help and support PODS offer to families I have supported through my career and feel very privileged to be part of this amazing organisation and look forward to many years of involvement with PODS.

I have first-hand experience of the challenges of additional needs within a family both personally and professionally and I'm very thankful for PODS for their understanding, and inclusion of the families as a whole in Telford.

Tony Wakeman



My name is Tony Wakeman, I am a former member of the Armed Forces and have spent most of my adult career (23 years) serving around the world with The Staffordshire Regiment. I have been happily married to my Wife Stephanie for 34 years and have four daughters.

Now retired from the forces, I work at RAF Shawbury as the Service Delivery Manager, ensuring Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Women who fly, have great accommodation, facilities, and support services, so they can concentrate on what they do best.

I have an autistic grandson Max who is very much a loveable character. Understanding that life is going to be a challenge for him and there are many others who are disabled and autistic, I wanted to give a little back to those who need it, and this is why I became a Trustee of PODS.

I want to offer organising and fundraising skills to the strong team that already exists and of course help with the mundane which has to be done. Having a strong "can do" military ethic, no task is above me and I am led by humility.



Introduction to the Parent Carer Forum

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.

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.

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:

Open
Communication

Feeling
Welcomed
and
Cared for

Feeling Valued
and Included

Working in
Partnership

Jayne Stevens, Strategic Co-ordinator at PODS, says: "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".

Commitments have already been made by local councillor (Shirley Reynolds), senior management and Directors.

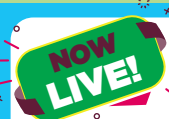
Next Steps:

It's important to us, here at PODS, that this project also feels like it 'belongs' to our families directly.

I have plans to expand the development of the Working Together Charter, working with schools and settings and wider services across health and social care. I propose that this will be partly funded from the DfE Participation Grant and supported by Parent Rep volunteers:

- Walk in our Shoes – sharing family experiences and stories (case studies, film, animation)
- Appreciative inquiry approach: working with professional teams and families together
- Listening: developing the right skills to work effectively in partnership with families.

All of this to strengthen the co-production charter Values and Principles.



Working Together Charter

The following was reported to PODS Charity Board of Trustees in Spring 2023:

You will know the importance of our involvement and messages around 'co-production' and working with families to represent their views at strategic meetings 😊

As a snapshot, I'd like to share with you, one of our biggest successes this year: the launch of the 'Working Together' Charter.

"The SEND Code of practice says that children, young people and their families should be involved in all the decisions that are about them at all levels; we believe that this charter keeps the involvement of families at the heart of what we do"

The working together charter has been developed over the past three 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.



SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy

The strategy sets out Telford & Wrekin's local area's vision for children and young people aged 0-25 years with special educational needs and/or disabilities and for children and young people who are accessing or may need to access alternative provision (AP). It is a partnership document across the council, NHS and third sector services recognising that children and young people with needs will require and receive support from across education, health and care services.

Find the full document here: https://www.telfordsend.org.uk/info/1/home/61/send_strategy

From Jayne Stevens, Strategic Co-ordinator:

"We welcome the development of the SEND and Alternative Provision Strategy.

It's important to our families that they are heard and that the services meet the needs of their children and young people in education and alternative provisions. The strategy values our families feedback so far and we will continue to provide experiences to ensure they access the right support, in the right place, at the right time.

We continue to work with our parent carers and wider family community and our partners across education, health and social care. We are pleased that The Working Together Charter is embedded within the strategy and links with the priorities and outcomes, building on key messages, and strengthening trust".



Welcome To Our New Parent Reps

Our Parent Reps play a vital role in accessing the community, representing wider parent carer views and experiences, and linking in with wider services:

We had a successful recruitment campaign last year and we are pleased to welcome 4 new Parent Reps to our Parent Carer Forum:

Yas: has a particular interest in Speech and Language needs. Yas has successfully fundraised for a charity called Mikey's Wish who work with another charity 'Communication Station' to produce communication boards which have been installed in some of our local schools and settings.

Amen: Using her personal experience to support experiences around complex young people's needs across education and health.

Lisa: Neurodiversity and accessing mental health services. Lisa is also responsible for setting up the local branch of Tourettes Action.

Carl: interest area Hospital (SATH) and Hospital transformation work, young people's mental health, early years and Police work areas. Carl also runs the local charity Challenging Perceptions in Woodside.

New reps to the team supplement our already established team of who we have:

Keiron:
Commissioning, strategic planning

Liz:
Housing, Post 16, community inclusion

Tina:
Early Years, Shining Stars group, complex needs

Karen:
Post 16 Education, links with Shrewsbury College

Simon:
Short Breaks (Post 18), social care and direct payments

Cas:
Short Breaks and social care (under 18s)

PARENTS OPENING DOORS PARENT CARER FORUM

GET INVOLVED IN SHAPING LOCAL SERVICES FOR FAMILIES WITH DISABLED/ADDITIONAL NEEDS CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Families share their experiences and voice where it matters most, to shape services and lead to better outcomes and life experiences of their children, young people and wider families.

We work with local services including Health, Education, Social Care and Wider Partners, inc Voluntary Sector.
(Part funded by Department for Education to fulfil our strategic role)

To hear more about PODS Parent Carer Forum, please contact *Jayne Stevens*, Strategic Co-ordinator
by email: jayne@podstelford.org or telephone: **07775 342 092**

www.podstelford.org

1 Hawksworth Road, Central Park, Telford, TF2 9TU
Company/Charity number: 1150871

PODS Parent Carer Forum

Key Work Areas

PARENTS
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Annual Survey Highlights

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We received over 200 responses to our Annual Survey this year, and findings were reported at the beginning of the year.

There's an awareness that the challenges faced by families with children in mainstream or specialist settings often share commonalities. Both types of settings present unique obstacles, yet families encounter similar hurdles in accessing appropriate support, navigating systems and criteria, advocating for their children's needs, and seeking inclusive, targeted or specialist education or care.

Recognising these shared challenges can promote a more unified approach to addressing the needs of all children with disabilities or special educational needs, regardless of their educational setting.

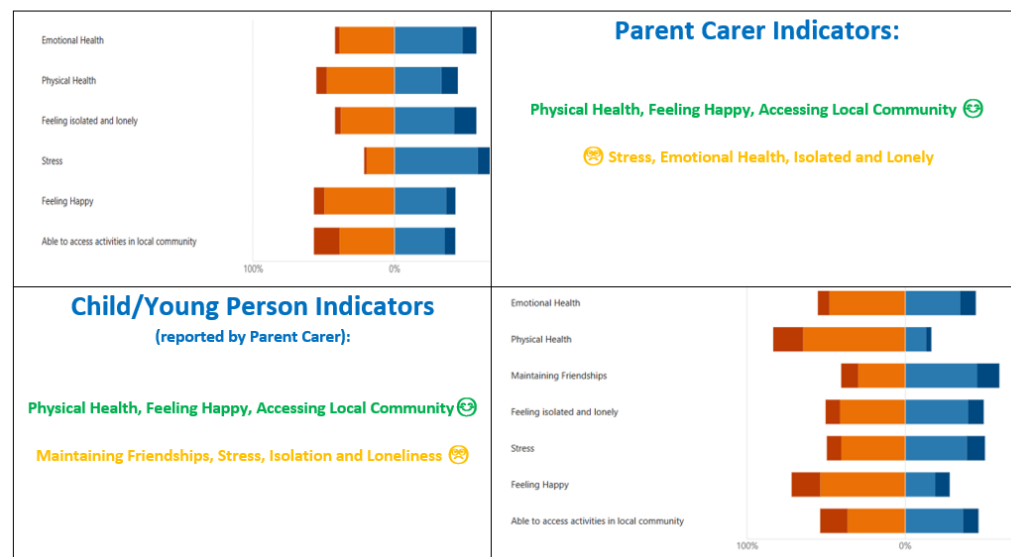
Celebrating the achievements and milestones of children and young adults with disabilities and additional needs is incredibly important. It helps create a positive and inclusive environment that values their unique strengths, talents, and accomplishments. By sharing these celebrations, families not only spread joy and pride but also contribute to raising awareness and understanding within their communities.

With this in mind, we asked families to share their celebrations, and changes they would like to see in the next twelve months. We now have a "wish-list" of considerations, and whilst some of these are underway from previous reporting, we will continue to work through those wishes.

We have included 'wellness' indicators which mirror national reporting, and the summary results are on page 6 of this report.

You will be pleased to know the SEND Action Plan that is reviewed regularly at the SEND Partnership Board that includes Health, Education, Social Care, and other voluntary partners is available for public review, and also includes actions from the SEND/CQC SEND Inspection.

WELLBEING INDICATORS – PARENT CARER AND CHILD/YOUNG PERSON (q3 / q7)



Full report can be found here:

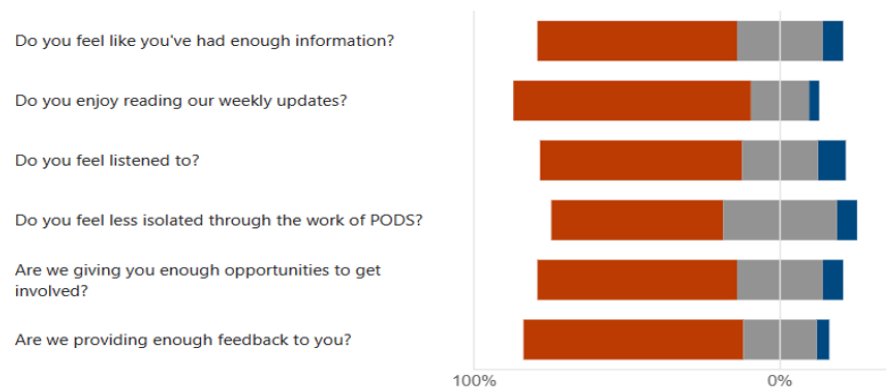
<https://www.podstelford.org/2024/02/05/pods-parent-carer-forum-experience-report-2023/>

Our Annual Survey reporting demonstrates the value of our Parent Carer Forum in the findings below:

PODS PARENT CARER FORUM FEEDBACK

It's important to PODS, that we provide evaluation of our own service (q21) and these results reflect questions regarding the Parent Carer Forum element of the Charity:

Yes very much so A little bit Not as much as I'd like



Speech, Language And Communication Needs Update

The Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) workstream meets on a monthly basis and has representation from parent carer forum (inc PODS Parent Carer Forum), health, social care and education including schools and early years settings. Back in 2021 we agreed the vision that “speech, language and communication is everyone’s business” this means that everyone has an important role in supporting a child’s speech, language, and communication skills. Since 2021 we have rolled out a number of initiatives across the system to ensure that practitioners working with children, and their parents can support speech, language and communication skills.

These have included Talk Boost in early years settings and primary schools, Talk Boost is an intervention to support speech, language, and communication skills. Many children across the area have benefited from this support, speak to your child’s school or early years settings to find out more about Talk Boost. You can also look at the Talk Boost Parent Hub for activities and strategies you can use at home.

The Children’s Speech and Language Therapy Service has redeveloped their website with the support of parents, the content on the website is regularly updated so please take a look. The children’s SLT service also have a useful Facebook page which has regular updates with links to national campaigns.

The Children’s Speech and Language Therapy Service also have an advice line which can be accessed without a referral to the service, this is an opportunity to call to speak to a SLT for advice about your child’s speech, language, or communication. The advice line has received over 350 calls! Speech and Language Therapy Advice Line number: 01743 450800 (option 4)

As a workstream we are keen to make sure that information about all of the support available for speech, language and communication needs can be found in one place. We are working on developing an area on the Healthier Together website which is similar to the Neurodiversity Support Information.

<https://www.shropscommunityhealth.nhs.uk/childrenspeechlanguagetherapy>

Children's Speech and Language Therapy

The website and our Facebook page have lots of advice about how to support children and young people’s speech, language and communication or their eating, drinking and swallowing.

The resources on this site will:

- Help you know more about how communication develops.
- Give you some ideas about how to help your child.
- Tell you about services for children’s speech, language, communication, eating, drinking and swallowing.

Our advice line offers help if you cannot find the information/support you need on this site.



Neurodiversity Update

Children and Young People’s mental health services locally mirror the national picture, and this has been a pressing issue for several years now, despite the increased awareness, demand outweighing resources, the factors contributing have been excessive waiting times, funding, lack of integration, shortage of specialist staff, increased youth mental health. We know there needs to be substantial investment and policy changes – some of that is local, and some of it is part of regional and national discussions.

We regularly have conversations regarding the impact of a diagnosis and the reasons why it’s important.

“I will get help from school that’s not available without a diagnosis”

Families tell us that:

“it means that I will understand my child better and be able to put the most appropriate interventions in place”

“I can answer my child when they ask why do they struggle or do certain things”.



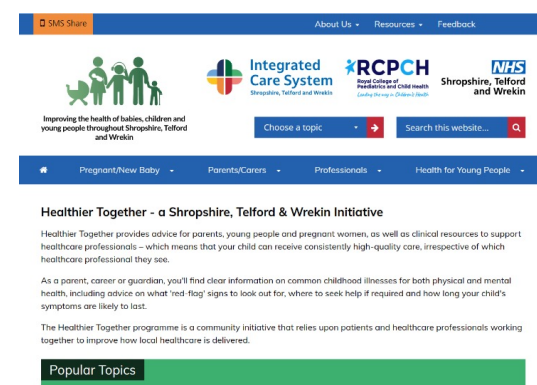
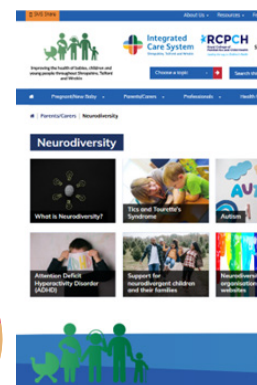
Update from Health Team: Work has taken place over the summer to develop a webpage which includes a range of local support available to neurodiverse children and young people and their families. Overview of whole website can be found here: Home (stw-healthiertogether.nhs.uk) This is the Neurodiversity part of website: Neurodiversity (stw-healthiertogether.nhs.uk)

• MPFT’s BeeU service complete autism diagnostic assessments for 5 - 18 year olds across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin. As is the case nationally there are often long waits for autism diagnostic assessments, and we appreciate that waiting can be difficult. Following feedback from parents the service have now started to send a letter to children, young people and their families if they are waiting for an autism diagnostic assessment. This letter includes confirmation that they are on the waiting list, although there is a long wait. The letter also includes suggestions of support available and encourages families to contact the BeeU service if their circumstances have changed.

• A new Assistant Psychologist was recruited to BeeU in October 2023. The focus of this role who will be to primarily work to support children and families who are on the waiting list for ND assessments. The assistant psychologist has already made contact with many families who have been waiting the longest for diagnostic assessments.

Wider Health Needs

The Healthier Together Website has a range of Information for many health needs and the link to the site is here: <https://stw-healthiertogether.nhs.uk/parentscarers/>



What is ELSA? (Emotional Literacy Support Assistants)

It is an educational psychology led intervention for promoting the emotional wellbeing of children and young people in schools. As part of our initial ELSA training in October 2023 led by Co-Principal EPs Dr Jane Park and Dr Meryl Newton, the Educational Psychology Service updated our professional development session on supporting neurodiversity and emotions. Working with 26 new ELSAs we shared research and resources to ensure that, regardless of diagnostic status, the strengths and needs of our neurodivergent learners can be understood and met from within schools' available resources.

The Educational Psychologist and LSAT teams continue to move forward with our Autism Education Trust Professional Development strategy across the Early Years, Schools and Post 16 programmes. In October 2023 Dr Jane Park and Lead LSAT Sarah Court ran a 'catch up' session for new Autism Leads in schools and post 16 settings in Telford & Wrekin. Our next step is to establish regular network meetings for Autism Leads in order to support implementation of good autism practice in our schools and settings.

We are very pleased to be working so closely with the Co-principal Educational Psychologists, and they continue to support us with the Challenges at Home sessions, and with 1:1 support referrals for families who have attended our general sessions. Please contact jayne@podstelford.org to find out more about this offer.

Intro To: Paediatric Epilepsy Nurse Specialists

Louise and Kirsty are Paediatric Epilepsy Nurse specialists covering Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin and Mid Wales. They are both experienced children's nurses with a variety of experience.

They are hospital based and they work to support the identification and reduction of health inequalities in the care of children and young people living with epilepsy. They also contribute to the improvement of health information required for Education, Health and Care Plan's, specifically for children and young people living with Epilepsy and SEND. Supporting children with special educational needs and disabilities is a large part of their role and something they are both keen to develop and improve over the coming months.

They also regularly meet with children and young people within the outpatient's clinic setting, as well as acute setting, such as during admission to the children's ward at Princes Royal Hospital. They provide a telephone help line for families to discuss any concerns related to epilepsy. This may also involve referral to other services to help support children form a holistic approach.

Contact Details: Louise Edmunds 01952 565937 / Kirsty Wagg 01952 282889

Child Development Centre: New Advice Line

A new advice phone line to provide support to families who have children waiting to be seen at the Child Development Centre, or for those who have very recently been seen for assessment. If your child is on the waiting list you can call the service and speak to a specialist practitioner about your child's needs. The specialist practitioner will give you advice and sign post you to services and resources which may help your child and you as a family.

If you are eligible to access the advice line you should have received a letter from the Child Development Centre.

Please contact the CDC if you think you should be eligible but haven't received a letter.

Challenges at Home Sessions

PARENTS
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(With support from Principal Educational Psychologist team)

Support sessions whilst you are awaiting an assessment of NeuroDiversity (Autism, ADHD, etc). You can join one or more, come once, or again.
Open to all family members.

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: emotions, behaviour, social, anxieties, routines, etc.

Daytime Sessions
9.30-11.30am
PODS Hub, Central Park

Evening Sessions
6.00-7.30pm
MS Teams (online)

Please contact Jayne for up-to-date information and dates for Spring/Summer 2024 via email: jayne@podstelford.org or call 0777 534 2092.

"Gave us more confidence that we were doing the right thing for our child. And some techniques to think about to help him".

"Enabled me to share my experiences with the intention of preventing or limiting acute incidents".

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

"Felt more confident to make some tweaks in our family life"

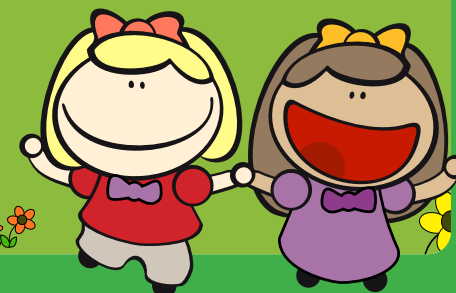


Daytime sessions at PODS Hub



Evening Online Sessions

Search PODS Ticketsource to book now by scanning the QR code.



Shropshire Rugby Rebels



Shropshire Rugby Rebels have been playing non-contact Tag Rugby in Telford for about 20 years now. The club is for children from age 5 and young adults who have any kind of special need. Tag Rugby coaching gets us fit and helps us to build social skills and enjoy being part of a team.

The club has regularly played in Tag Rugby tournaments over the years, in the UK and Ireland. In October 2022 a few players and coaches went to the inaugural Tag Rugby Festival in Venice, Italy and had a great time! We're hoping to revisit Venice in the near future, as well as holding a tournament at the Hornets in Telford.

We train at Telford College Sportsdome on Tuesdays 6-7pm during term time. Unfortunately, wheelchairs are not allowed on the pitch. The cost is £2 per session, and we'd love some new players to come along and try it out, first session is free. [Contact Catherine on 07846683573](mailto:contact@shropshire-rugby-rebels.co.uk).



A Parent's Success Story

During the second lockdown, Maggie was still attending school due to her SEN needs. Maggie's teacher called me to say that she was struggling to teach her at school because they couldn't get her to sit still. Maggie was struggling at home with regular violent meltdowns.

Maggie has ASD and ADHD and finds it hard at the best of times to sit still, lockdown hit her very hard, as all of her activities such as football, swimming and playing on her bike with her friends had all stopped so she had nowhere to release her built up energy.

I looked around and one of the first things I found that opened up after lockdown was the ice rink. Maggie had only been skating a couple of times previously and spent most of the time on the floor and she wasn't even interested in skating or ice hockey but I was desperate for her to use some built up energy on something so she gave it a go.

The first session saw her taking the whole hour just to be able to skate once around the rink without clinging on to the sides. From day one she was hooked and now nearly 3 years later she has found her talent! Even better...no more violent meltdowns! Maggie spends nearly every day at the ice rink and as she skates you can literally see all the tension fly off her.

Maggie plays for Widnes Wild Academy, Midlands Wrekin Raiders u16's girls and Telford Wrekin Raiders Senior team. Maggie is also currently trialling to play for England and has got down to the last round and is waiting to hear if she has made the team.

Of course, her biggest achievement so far is getting to the final round to play for England with team selection trials on Thursday 18th Jan, but even better than that she has made so many ice hockey friends! Maggie has always struggled with friendships but never seems to when she's on the ice. It has given her the world of confidence and now spends her time making others feel welcome by teaching other children at the SEN session and public skate sessions at Telford Ice Rink.

By Hannah Whitmore.



Communication Boards

You may have noticed a communication board that looks a bit like this one (or exactly the same) in your setting or play area? If so, did you know that this are the work of one of our new Parent Reps, Yas. She is a supporter of Mikey's Wish – a charity raising awareness of Verbal Dyspraxia/Apraxia of Speech.

To further support communication and our work with Inclusive Leisure, the boards have been purchased and will be installed in all local leisure centres. Please keep an eye out for them and let us know if you have used one.

The one pictured right is in PODS Charity offices at Central Park.



Representing PODS at the Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace



On 3rd MAY 2023, Jon the Chair of PODS trustees and Sarah, fellow trustee attended the Royal Garden Party held at Buckingham Palace. This was in recognition of PODS being awarded the Queens Award for Voluntary Services in 2022. It was a fantastic experience and Jon and Sarah were proud to be representing all the volunteers from PODS.

It was a brilliantly sunny day and there was a long queue of guests dressed in their best outfits, including some in national dress and military uniforms. As the event was only 3 days prior to the Kings Coronation, there was lots of preparation of seating stands and barriers taking place in The Mall. After going through security, we entered the huge palace gates and stepped into what seemed surreal surroundings, due to the vastness of the palace itself and the huge gardens. It was hard to believe we were inside the grounds of Buckingham Palace, and we took plenty of opportunities to take photos.

We enjoyed listening to brass bands, catching glimpses of the King and Queen and other Royal Family members, and seeing the finery and the sea of colours of the outfits was unforgettable. We had delightful food including coronation chicken sandwiches, beautiful cakes, scones, fruit tarts and several cups of tea.

Meeting with some of the other guests was one of the highlights of the day, and we were able to proudly discuss the fantastic work of PODS and the support of all the volunteers. We both felt proud and honoured to have been invited to represent PODS on such an occasion.



Queen's Visit



We are honoured to share a remarkable moment in the journey of PODS. Recently, we had the privilege of meeting Her Majesty, the Queen Consort, who graciously acknowledged the vital work we do in supporting families with disabled children. In this unique opportunity staff, volunteers and 3 of our wonderful young people had the pleasure of presenting her majesty with gifts and sharing our purpose and journey. This encounter has only strengthened our commitment to the compassionate mission we call PODS.

In the presence of royalty, we were reminded of the profound impact our community has on the lives of those facing unique challenges. PODS, as a beacon of support, stands tall with an unwavering dedication to supporting families with disabled children, creating a space of understanding, resilience, and care.

As we reflect on this extraordinary moment, we express our gratitude to each member of the PODS family — the families we support, our tireless volunteers, and the wider community that stands by us. Your efforts make a difference, and the recognition from Her Majesty further underscores the significance of our shared mission.

Whilst In the presence of the Queen consort we had the immense pleasure in displaying artwork created by Natasha, one of our members, in honour for the late HRH Queen Elizabeth II jubilee, The Queen consort was impressed with the level and skill of the artist, we are proud to say this artwork is now displayed in Southwater Library.

In the spirit of continued dedication, let us reaffirm our commitment to supporting one another. Together, we can create a world where every family feels heard, understood, and embraced.

Thank you for being a vital part of our journey. The PODS family is stronger and more resilient than ever.



King's Coronation Afternoon Tea Celebrations



PODS hosted a regal celebration in honour of the King's Coronation at the Ironbridge Gorge Museum. The picturesque setting provided the perfect backdrop for an afternoon of grandeur, filled with delectable treats, live music, and exhilarating entertainment.

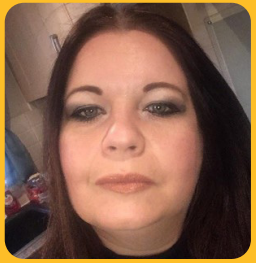
The highlight of the celebration was undoubtedly the Afternoon Tea, a feast fit for Kings and Queens. The museum's hall was transformed into a haven of sophistication, adorned tables dressed white linens and celebratory arrangements. The menu featured a delightful array of finger sandwiches, freshly baked scones with clotted cream and jam, and a selection of pastries – all served with the finest teas and coffee.

As guests indulged in the sumptuous tea offerings, the air was filled with the captivating rhythms from Epic Volume, a dynamic live band that brought a contemporary twist to classic tunes. The talented musicians set the perfect tone, creating a lively atmosphere, Attendees couldn't help but tap their feet and sway to the rhythm, adding an extra layer of jubilation to the event.

The festivities were not limited to the adults; children were treated to a magical experience courtesy of Non-Stop Fun, a renowned children's entertainment company. The little ones gathered around in awe as a skilled magician captivated them with mind-bending tricks and illusions. Laughter echoed through the air as the children participated in the interactive magic show, creating memories that will surely last a lifetime.

This event not only paid homage to the historical significance of the King's Coronation but also showcased the ability of Ironbridge Gorge Museum and PODS Events to curate unforgettable moments for attendees of all ages.





Elaine Pearce
Project Manager



Jayne Stevens
Strategic Co-ordinator



Kerrie Seagrave
Member Support Co-ordinator



Uma Bhatia
Lego & Family Group Lead

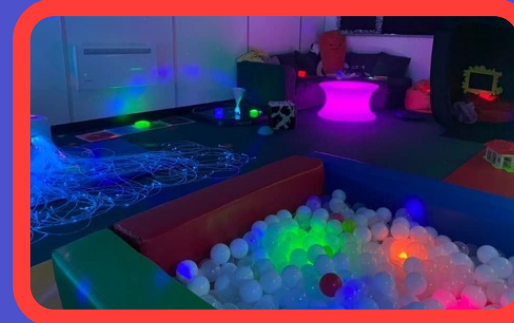
Meet the PODS Team

PODS Hub

Our envisioned goal has become a reality, as we now proudly offer a comprehensive 'hub' a one-stop-shop where families can find an inclusive environment to access a wide array of information and resources. This encompassing space provides information, advice, support, activities, training, and volunteering opportunities, all geared toward enhancing both mental health, well-being and physical health, ultimately contributing to a positive impact in their lives.

Located on the ground floor of a central Telford building, our Hub is designed to be wheelchair accessible, featuring enclosed outside garden space, free parking, and convenient public transport links. It boasts various dedicated areas, including a permanent sensory room, spaces for clubs like Minecraft, Lego, and coding, a sizable area for physical activities/games, and a fully equipped kitchen for our cooking sessions, and hopefully by the time you read this we would have commenced delivery of our life skills scheme.

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 Hub is generally open Monday – Friday 9.30-2.30, so why not pop in and see us, but please do check we are open before you travel.

PODS Hub, 1 Hawksworth Road, Central Park, Telford, TF2 9TU.



Jeannie Lear
SEND Engagement Lead



Joanne Smith-Martin
Events and Fundraising Lead



Matt Downes-Ward
PFA Navigator



Louise Browne Quinn
Perinatal & Infant Disability Support Worker

Parent Story

Tourettes Action Support



After receiving a diagnosis of Tourette Syndrome for our son I contacted Tourettes Action who signposted me to their nearest support group, unfortunately these meetings are based in Haunchwood, Nuneaton and are primarily attended by Birmingham and other families local to that area. Our son doesn't travel well so it just didn't meet our needs. So, the seed was planted to find something or create a support group nearer to home.

Having been supported by PODS for several years I made an off the cuff comment to Jayne – and suddenly that seed was being sown. I contacted Tourettes Action again and they put in place everything needed to support us getting things set up – Jayne and I did the training and PODS have offered their space as a setting for the group. And here we are planning our 2nd group session after the first one was so well received!

The primary objective behind running this group is to offer peer support to families or individuals with a Tourettes Diagnosis – but as PODS are actively involved in the session, we also welcome parents who are seeking support with either obtaining a diagnosis or need advice. I remember when we first suspected Tourettes for our son I spoke to Tourettes Action on their helpline (details at the end) and the information and support they provided was amazing...and things/behaviours we hadn't even associated with Tourettes suddenly had a possible explanation. These are the snippets of information we hope to share in the groups.

Tourettes Syndrome is a 'spectrum' it's not just the swearing or severe tics that people often hear about and that is portrayed in the media, and just like when you receive ANY diagnosis for your child it's always such a relief to find out you're not on your own, that there are others are experiencing the same or similar. Some may have more difficult symptoms to manage – some may be sailing through life and only have a few tics that are easy to manage.

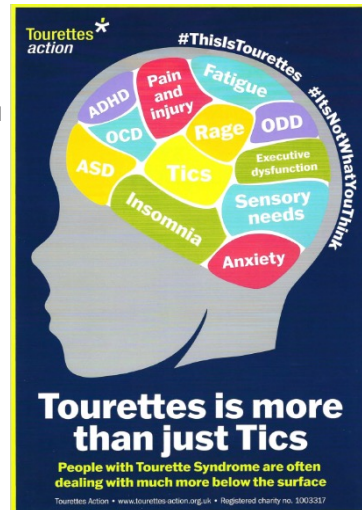
In our 1st Tourettes Action Support Session there were discussions between parent-carers around their diagnosis journeys and ideas about support, how it made us feel and just generally putting our little Tourettes world to rights! I had also wanted to offer sessions where children would also be welcome – discussions be more 'child-friendly' this we agreed on and the next session was then planned to be within the school holidays with a few crafty activities for the children who can hopefully make some valuable connections themselves! Tea, coffee, and squash is available at each session and currently FREE to attend!

Even after only 1 group it feels so reassuring to know we are not on this journey alone – and I'm excited to see where these sessions take us! Already some interesting conversations being had and I'm hoping to link these in through PODS and the Local Authority to create a better understanding in the area and the SEND team around Tourettes Syndrome.

Helpdesk Callback service:
Email help@tourettes-action.org.uk

FAQ
<https://www.tourettes-action.org.uk/63-faqs.html>

What are the Symptoms of Tourettes Syndrome?
<https://www.tourettes-action.org.uk/19-symptoms-.html>



Preparing for Adulthood

From Matthew Downes-Ward Preparing for Adulthood Navigator



The PFA Navigator service is here to help support young people and their families in their quest for independent living. This includes signposting families to services and discussing post-16 options (including education and employment), independence, social inclusion, housing, and healthcare.

This past year has been a whirlwind of meetings and conferences that has seen our bank of information and contacts grow immensely, with our regular PFA Open Room groups becoming an ideal way to share this information with families. Specific subjects of interest already discussed include Care Act Assessments, Benefits, and Lasting Powers of Attorney; with additional workshops already planned for the coming year. We are also pleased to see that documents shared with other services are being used more widely, and are informing practices, which is a more obvious example of the impact this service has already had.

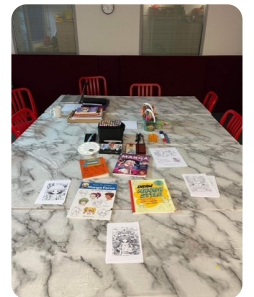
Our PODS Social groups, for young people aged 14-25, are now a regular feature. Starting with Anime Drawing and Board Games these sessions change and grow along with our young people and their interests. We also developed age specific sessions of our wider activities to engage our young people and promote social interaction. Over 2024 we hope to extend our sessions to include 'Outings' to local social and leisure locations. So, watch this space!

By the end of 2023, our new Life Skills offering has started coming together, and we look forward to growing this offer in line with the needs and interests of our young people to help them grow into positive, independent, adults.

From a strategic aspect, we continue to attend meetings with educational settings, health services, leisure services and the Local Authority to consult, and pass on families' feedback to improve local services.

We welcome any feedback regarding your experiences of services; or suggestions for sessions that would benefit our young people and will do our best to help.

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 would like to start the Befriending Scheme update by thanking our incredible volunteers who make the Befriending Scheme possible, our wonderful PODS Befrienders. Their commitment to enriching the lives of other parent carers is the driving force behind the success of the Befriending Scheme. Each story shared, each smile exchanged, and every moment of companionship created through their efforts all helps to make a difference in our family's lives.

Each of our Befrienders are parent carers themselves, they all have the relevant lived experience to enable them to understand and empathise with families during the challenges faced by having a child with a disability or additional needs. Our Befrienders are dedicated and committed to supporting others, we meet monthly as a team to discuss how we can support our families further.

In a world that often seems to move at an ever-accelerating pace, it's comforting for our families to know that there are spaces like PODS where genuine connections are made. Our Befriending Scheme stands as a testament to the power of friendship, kindness, and the shared desire to create a more compassionate community.

We work hard to match parent carers with common interests and experiences, to ensure that the bond they form becomes a lifeline of support and understanding.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the parent carers who have opened their hearts to us, that have shared some of their most difficult moments with us and that we have seen grow in confidence. Your courage in seeking support is truly inspiring, and we hope that the bonds formed through the Befriending Scheme bring you the warmth and comfort that everyone deserves.

Our PODS Befriending Scheme Family Groups have now joined up with PODS General Family Groups to create PODS newly named PODS Social Support Groups. The groups have been very well attended and success, with some lovely supportive conversations happening. Our Befrienders also offer support at those groups too, if you would like to have a chat with a Befriender at the groups, please let me know.

As we look forward to the upcoming months, we will continue to support our families in any way we can, whether that's a call every week, a catch up at PODS Hub with a cuppa, a chat at Social Support Group or even just a call when you need someone to talk too. Please remember we are here for you, in the heart of PODS, you are never alone, you are part of a kind and caring community that values each member.

If you would like to become a PODS Befriender or would like to find out more about having support from a Befriender, we would love to hear from you. You can email: kerrie@podstelford.org or call: 07309 753044.

Kerrie & the Befriending Team xxx

Here are just a few quotes/messages from our Befriendees:

"I just wanted to thank you for yesterday I really appreciated you coming around and having a chat I am thinking about what we talked about, and I will message you soon. Again, thank you".

"My Befriender rang me once a week sometimes more if needed, she helped me realise I wasn't alone."

"From first contact with PODS my Befriender has been a brilliant support, she is always willing to listen with no judgement just kindness and understanding, it's been such a big help and I'm very grateful to have someone with knowledge and lived experience to go to for help and chat things through with, she's really easy to talk to and isn't fazed by random teary breakdowns!"



PODS Counselling Service

We are thrilled to share some wonderful news with you all! As part of our ongoing commitment to supporting families with disabled children, we are excited to announce the launch of our NEW Counselling Service at PODS!

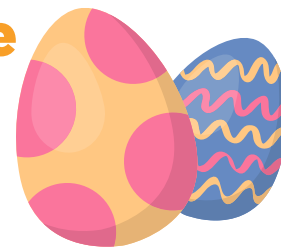
To further enhance the holistic support we provide, we are introducing this valuable addition to our services, offering a dedicated space for emotional well-being.

Our Counselling Service aims to create a safe and nurturing environment for parents and caregivers, it will provide a safe space for you to express, explore, and heal, working towards achievable goals to get you on the right path to wellness.

At PODS, we understand that each family's journey is unique, and we are committed to fostering a community of care, understanding, and resilience. Our experienced Counsellor is here to support you, offering a confidential space where you can express your thoughts, concerns, and triumphs.

Thank you for being an integral part of the PODS family. We look forward to walking this new path of support together!

For more information or to book an initial consultation please, [contact kerrie@podstelford.org](mailto:kerrie@podstelford.org)



PODS Buddy Scheme

Supporting Parent Carers Every Step of the Way!

Parent carers, we hear you! We know that the thought attending support groups might be daunting, but with the PODS Buddy Scheme, we're here to make it as easy as possible.

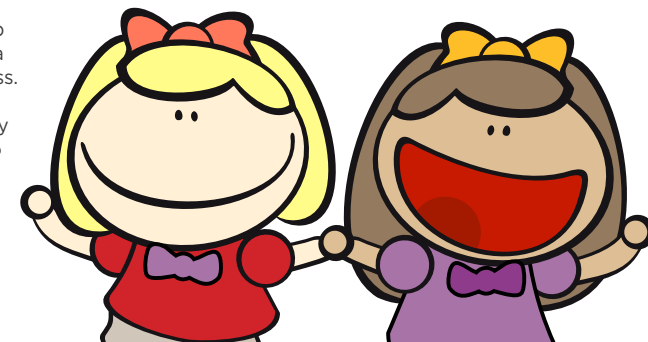
Our mission is to create a nurturing environment for parent carers, where anxiety takes a back seat. Connect with a PODS Buddy who understands, shares experiences, and provides the support you need to take that first step.

To access a PODS Buddy, all you need to do is contact: Kerrie via email: kerrie@podstelford.org or call: 07309 753044. Let us know which group you would like to attend, and we can arrange for a dedicated PODS Buddy to meet you at the door and walk in with you, they will stay with you throughout the group, because strength comes in unity!

We hope that our PODS Buddy will help you rediscover the joy of being part of a supportive community without the stress.

Embrace a supportive network that truly cares. Say goodbye to anxiety and hello to a community that gets it!

We're here for you.





PODS



Introducing Our New Counselling Service!

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SUPPORT

At PODS, we understand that life can be challenging, and everyone deserves support. Our new service is a safe space for you to express, explore, and heal, working towards achievable goals to get you on the right path to wellness.

Individual Counselling sessions
Parent Carers or Young adults 18+
Confidential & Judgement free
Tailored Support for Your Unique circumstances
ACCPH Registered & Qualified
Experienced in SEND, LD and Autism
Sessions start from £35

For more information or to book an initial consultation please,
contact kerrie@podstelford.org



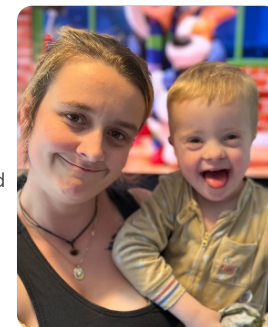
PODS Perinatal & Infant Disability Support Worker

I am Louise and PODS new Perinatal and infant disability support, I have gained a wealth of lived experience in my journey, we had a postnatal diagnosis of complex disabilities shortly after my son's birth. Now my son is in school, I am hoping to create a difference in this role to ensure no one goes through the journey alone like we had too.

My desire is that no one feels alone when receiving a perinatal or infant disability diagnosis, I hope to provide support and guidance for the journey ahead. I will help in a manner of ways, such as being a listening ear, attending appointments, explaining unknown jargon, and offering practical advice. Whatever families may face, every step of the way I will be there, ensuring families are supported is the most important thing to me.

We have been working hard over the last year to integrate this role into our local NHS and council offer, we have delivered our leaflets at Princess royal hospital in the scanning department and postnatal ward and met with midwives to help further our reach and ensure those families that need my support know I am here for them.

I can be contacted via email louise@podstelford.org or phone 07767 975592.



PODS Events & Trips

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 reflection on what has taken place during the last 12 months.

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

PODS Charity organised their popular annual inclusive coach trip to the beautiful scenic Welsh coastline, Rhyl in North Wales. The initiative aimed to provide a memorable experience for children and young adults with additional needs and disabilities along with their families, fostering joy and creating lasting memories. Our charity's dedicated Staff and Volunteers worked tirelessly to make the journey accessible and comfortable for all participants. As the coach rolled into Rhyl, the excitement among the children was palpable. PODS Staff, equipped with empathy and a deep understanding of the unique needs of each child, ensured that every participant felt supported throughout the journey. From assisting with boarding the coach to facilitating inclusive activities on board the coach, I 'spy bingo is always a big hit! The sunlit pier, sandy beaches, and the vibrant atmosphere of the seaside town set the stage for a day filled with laughter, sandcastle building, and paddling in the sea. For many of the children, this trip marked a rare chance to break free from the routine of daily life, offering a sense of adventure and exploration. As PODS continues to champion inclusivity and support for individuals with additional needs and disabilities, it reinforces the belief that every child, regardless of ability, deserves the chance to explore the world with a sense of wonder and belonging.

October Half term was filled with enchanting laughter and spooktacular delights at our Halloween Party! Held at our Hub our haunted gathering was a bewitching blend of games, activities, and a feast that left little ghouls and goblins howling for more. The party kicks off with classic games like "Musical Statues," The excitement continued with the "Wrap a Mummy" challenge, as little monsters use rolls of toilet paper to transform a willing grown-up into mummies in a race against time. In the spirit of the season, we've transformed the office doors into enchanting trick-or-treat stations. The little trick-or-treaters ventured through the spooky corridors, knocking on each door to discover delightful surprises. The highlight of the evening was the spine-chilling buffet featuring ghoulish delights. From monster cheeseburgers, vampire cookies, frightful fruits, and monster eyeball cupcakes, our culinary creations satisfied even the most daring taste buds.

We also held our very popular fun-filled pumpkin carving sessions; creative ideas were flowing, ranging from eerie grins to whimsical characters. It was lovely to see the whole family getting involved and working together to create some very spooky pumpkins.

We would like to say thank you to County Fundraisers in Dawley and Wellington Rotary Club for their continued and very valued financial support towards these trips and activities, and to Longmynd Travel for their excellent Coach service.



Happy Healthy Active Holiday Scheme

Last year saw us further develop our holiday scheme, following the successful trial in December 2022. Sessions were held throughout the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays, and all included lunch for the children and young people. Following feedback, the sessions were of differing durations, taking on a variety of themes, activities and trips, to ensure the children and young people have access to as many experiences as possible, in a timeframe to suit their needs.

During the Easter holidays they took part in Easter bonnet making, egg hunts, crafts and science sessions, with visits to Carding Mill Valley, Project Farm and Wrekin Forest School.

Over the summer holidays we were fortunate enough to be able to facilitate a total of 9 sessions, these included trips to Rhyl, British Ironworks, RAF Cosford, Ice skating ring and The Crocky Trail, alongside sessions at our hub such as, gardening, tech & games, and cooking where a PODS Cookbook has been developed.

Over Christmas we fitted in a trip to Cadbury World, Blists Hill and Airea 51 as well as a craft and pizza making session at the hub.

All sessions are followed up afterwards with a questionnaire, enabling us to evaluate its performance. The information gained from the questionnaire aids us in planning future holiday schemes, ensuring they meet the needs of families.

These are some of the comments from families,

Can't fault PODS. They are all wonderful people working together to put smiles on faces and making things possible.

Thank you for all you do and the opportunities you give us to get out.

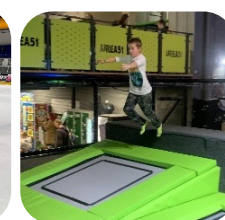
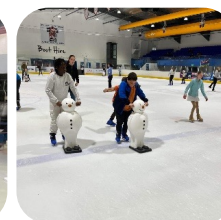
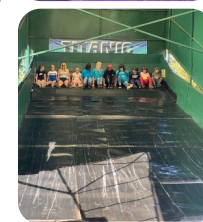
Keep up the great work! thank you so much for a great day out, I wouldn't be able to do or afford.

Great activities by great staff thank u for making it possible.

I love PODS and without them I wouldn't have taken my kids to half of the places as it just would not be affordable for me.

We had a lovely time, my child really enjoyed himself, it felt like it was planned and timed well, a nice touch to buy the children lunch, it's the second time we've been to Blists Hill with PODS and I really appreciate the opportunity to go out in a social group with like-minded parents who understand the nature of autistic children, it provided the children with a chance to genuinely relax and freedom to explore either alongside others in the group or individually.

Very grateful to PODS for all activities offered, to go where the kids feel accepted and parents can get out of the house without worrying is a lifeline. Thanks to everyone involved.



Open Day

2023 saw PODS hold their first open day, which was a resounding success, it turned out to be an extraordinary event, where we welcomed families old and new, offering them the opportunity to experience our facilities at our newly established hub, alongside the chance to connect with our dedicated team, providing an insight into the array of services and support we offer.

The day also provided a platform for families to engage with vital partner services, reinforcing our commitment to building a strong support network for our members. Families had the chance to liaise with representatives from Strengthening Families, Autism Hub, IASS, Barnardo's, and Foden's Solicitors. This collaborative approach ensures that families have access to a comprehensive network of support, tailored to their unique needs.

With an estimated attendance of around 50 individuals. To our delight, the response far exceeded expectations, with approximately 200 attendees turning out to partake in the day's offerings. The overwhelming turnout showcased the community's enthusiasm and eagerness to engage with the services we offer.

Families were able to purchase refreshments such as, hot dogs, drinks, and doughnuts whilst the Children revelled in the day's festivities, enjoying the delights of a bouncy castle, face painting, and being taken for rides in Foden's classic minibus.

As we reflect on the resounding success of our first Open Day, we are energised and inspired to continue fostering connections within the community. The overwhelming attendance points to the importance of such events, reinforcing our commitment to providing a hub that serves as a focal point for support, information, and shared experiences.

At PODS, we are immensely grateful for the support of our community, and we look forward to building on this success, please keep a look out for details of this year's Open day which will be held on Saturday 22nd June, we hope to see you there.



Disability and Inclusion Training

At PODS, our commitment to fostering a truly inclusive society goes beyond words—it's a mission we actively pursue through our Disability and Inclusion Training. What sets our training apart is the authenticity brought by our dedicated staff, individuals who have real-lived experience navigating the challenges and triumphs of living with and caring for disabled children.

In recent years, we have collaborated with numerous organisations, tailoring, and providing bespoke training sessions. Among our valued partners are the Army, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, various services within Telford & Wrekin Council, and a range of community groups.

Our training sessions are facilitated by staff members who bring a genuine understanding of disability, offering firsthand insights that textbooks and lectures often lack. This authenticity creates a unique and enriching learning experience, allowing participants to connect with the material on a deeper level. We understand that every organisation is unique, which is why our Disability and Inclusion Training is designed to be flexible. Whether you're a business, school, or community group, our sessions can be customised to meet your specific needs and challenges. We believe in providing practical, applicable knowledge that directly addresses the concerns and goals of your organisation.

The purpose of our training is to empower attendees with the confidence to engage meaningfully with disabled individuals. By fostering a greater understanding of hidden disabilities, our sessions break down stereotypes and misconceptions, creating an environment of respect and inclusivity. Participants will leave with practical tools to navigate encounters with disabled people, promoting genuine connection and inclusivity.

Unlike visible disabilities, such as an individual in a wheelchair, hidden disabilities are often misunderstood or overlooked, making it challenging for individuals who experience them to feel seen and understood. Our training sheds light on these often unseen challenges, encouraging empathy and paving the way for a more inclusive environment where everyone feels valued.

Whether you're an organisation seeking to enhance your team's understanding or an individual looking to broaden your perspective, PODS Disability and Inclusion Training offers a transformative experience. Join us on this journey toward a more inclusive world where everyone can thrive, regardless of their abilities.

To discuss how our Disability and Inclusion Training can be tailored to meet your specific needs please contact [Elaine on 07540 049759 or elaine@podstelford.org](mailto:elaine@podstelford.org)



Twinkl



Telford's Twinkl lottery offers you the opportunity to win cash prizes while simultaneously supporting our cause. If you're interested, simply scan the QR code below to learn more. As is our tradition, all funds generated from events and fundraising initiatives will contribute to organising additional events, trips, activities, and providing support to our PODS families. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who has supported and participated in our endeavours.



PODS Fundraising

I would like to start by saying thank you to each one of PODS Volunteers, for their continued loyalty, 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 who 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, several local Freemasons Masonic Lodges Foundations, Rehire UK and many other donors.

Without support and crucial income via grants, donations, 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 organizing 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 get in touch with events@podstelford.org

We hold regular online raffles with some wonderful prizes to suit all ages, 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. We never miss a chance for a raffle at our in-house events and coach trips, remember you have to be in it for a chance to win it.

Some other ways that money has been raised this year has been through our members kindly donating gifts and their valuable time to us, our annual fun-packed Picnic in the Park, a dazzling and very entertaining Bingo and Quiz night. Our energetic PODS Staff and supporters took part in the Kick Ass Endurance Run at Weston Park, well done to all involved in that. Also, we had some parents that took the extra step, literally by climbing Snowdon in aid of raising funds for PODS, Thank you, Emma and Rachel.

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

There will be further fundraising events throughout 2024-2025 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 Social Support Groups

PODS Social Support Groups continue 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.

The Social Support Group at Blists Hill has continued to be popular giving an opportunity for the parents/carers to enjoy the outdoors and catchup over coffee whilst the children are at school. This is one of the groups our new parent carers like to attend which helps them to know more about PODS and meet other families.

This year, we celebrated the Carers Day by hosting a Pamper Event for the parents/carers to join us in a bit of self-pamper/care and feel relaxed. The event was organised during both day and evening times to enable more families to attend.

We have also had Mental Health Drop-in sessions, in which the parents/carers have enjoyed colouring tiles thereby helping them feel relaxed and calm in a non-judgemental environment.

For the Christmas session this year the parent carers enjoyed decorating cupcakes based on Christmas themes.

This past year we established our new dad's group, MenSpace, where male carers have a friendly and confidential space in which to share their concerns and experiences. The monthly meetings have been growing in popularity and have helped fathers understand their children's conditions and receive some much-needed peer support.



Ironbridge Gorge Museum Passes

We are delighted to offer our members access to the renowned Ironbridge Gorge Museums, made possible through our collaboration with the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust. If you're seeking weekend or school holiday activities, why not explore the option of borrowing our passes? This grants you access to the multitude of museums listed below, providing a fantastic way to spend your leisure and family time.

IRONBRIDGE
Valley of Invention

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

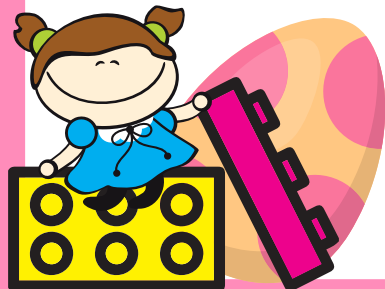


The offer entitles families of up to 6 people, free access to the Ironbridge Gorge Museums. Passes can be loaned out for a maximum of 5 days subject to availability and a small deposit per pass, which will be refunded on their return. You will require 1 pass for each person, including children over the 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 by email elaine@podstelford.org All passes must be collected in person, there will be a £5 deposit per pass that will be refunded when the pass are returned by the agreed date.

PODS Lego Club

The Lego Club provides the children the opportunity to build models with Lego bricks, talk about them, develop their listening skills, and learn to wait patiently for their turn.

The club is run weekly at the PODS Hub during term time. The children are always keen to share their builds as well as see what their peers have built. The non-judgemental environment of the club helps the children to develop their social and communication skills through various Lego based games and activities. The children are happy to attend the sessions as it provides a fun environment for them to learn and socialise.



PODS Activity Sessions

At PODS we offer a variety of after-school clubs throughout the week. All clubs operate out of the PODS Hub. The week starts with Stop Motion Club on Mondays, Minecraft on Tuesdays, Lego on Wednesdays, and Thursdays/Saturdays have varying themes.

The Minecraft club provides the children with a platform to work together, problem solve and be creative. The various activities involved such as building, minigames, mining all help foster social interaction and confidence in the children.

The Stop Motion Club provides the children an opportunity to unleash their creativity by learning and engaging in stop motion animation. In these fun sessions the children and young people develop their art of storytelling while creating their own unique animated videos using objects like Lego bricks, minifigures and hand drawings to tell their story. The club also helps children and young people to develop qualities like sharing, waiting for their turn and helping their peers.

On Thursdays and Saturdays, the children and young people enjoy a variety of activities like games, crafts, pizza making, yoga, trains, and construction. During these times, we have also arranged trips to Inflata Nation, sessions in Arthog Outreach and Wildlife Trust. The children and young people have enjoyed all the sessions exploring different sensory experiences both while cooking and being outdoors.



PODS Sleep Workshops

Early in 2021 we had several staff members trained as Sleep Practitioners, enabling us to deliver Sleep Tight works on behalf of the NHS. These sessions are aimed at parent/carers who have children or young adults who have an additional need/disability, to assist them in formulating bedtime strategies, to better improve sleep quality for the whole family.

The sessions cover a range of topics and are delivered by trained staff members who have real lived experience in the field. 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.

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

"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."

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

"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'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."

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



PODS Sensory Sessions

In 2022, our sensory sessions not only continued but expanded significantly with our move to new premises. Catering to children aged 0-4 years in preschool sessions and extending to children and young individuals up to 25 years old afterschool, our sessions are designed to offer sensory engagement opportunities. These activities foster development in various areas, including social, cognitive, and fine motor skills. Sensory play is a well-received method, that aids children in understanding their emotions and the world, whilst reducing anxieties.

Through fundraising efforts and generous donations from PODS families, we've enhanced our sensory room with new resources. This expansion allows us to better address the needs of more young individuals and their parents/carers. Sessions are scheduled during school times Mondays and Fridays for preschool or early evening Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday for older children and young adults, booking is required through Ticketsource (please scan QR code).

Additionally, our sensory room is also available for private hire, for more details, please contact jeannie@podstelford.org.



Easter 2023



The sun was shining, the flowers are blooming, and PODS Healthy and Active Holiday Club geared up for an egg-citing Easter extravaganza! We kicked off the holiday club with an Easter egg hunt that had our kids hopping with joy.

The children enjoyed an easter egg hunt around the Hub and received a little chocolate treat at the end and for those little crafters, there was an egg-ceptional Easter crafting station to let their creativity run wild. Think bunny ears, easter bonnets, colourful egg decorations, and a visit from the Easter Bunny.

What's a holiday club without a little mess? We had gooey slime-making and explosive volcanos; the children thoroughly enjoyed the slimy wonders of creating their very own colourful concoctions.

We had two coach trips to two fantastic destinations: Wrekin Forest School and Project Farm. At Wrekin Forest School, our young explorers enjoyed nature and all the fun and freedom it brings, they also took part in some adventurous activities such as archery and shooting and made pizzas on the outdoor fire pit. It's a perfect blend of education, adventure, and excitement. But that's not all – we rounded off the holiday club with a trip to Project Farm. Families got to meet, feed, and pet some adorable farm animals such as cows, goats, pigs, ponies, and chickens the children enjoyed the wonderful experience on the farm and took away some wonderful memories to treasure.

Thank you to the lovely customers at Donnington Asda for their donations of Easter eggs, Nex Gen, AVR hire.com and others.



Max Card

We take great pride in our continued role as a distributor for the Max Card scheme. If you're unfamiliar with Max Cards or unsure about their benefits, allow us to provide some clarity. The Max Card is specifically crafted to enhance the affordability of family outings for those with children having additional needs, disabilities, or foster families. This valuable card facilitates savings on various local and nationwide attractions, including castles, zoos, bowling alleys, and even holiday discounts throughout the UK. For a comprehensive list of available venues in your preferred area, visit the Max Card website at www.mymaxcard.co.uk. If you find a suitable venue, follow the simple online instructions to utilise your Max Card and gain discounted entry.



It's crucial to note that Max Cards cannot be acquired online; they are exclusively available through verified suppliers, such as PODS.

To qualify for a card, you must reside in Telford & Wrekin or the broader Shropshire area and be either a parent/carer of a child aged 0-25 with a disability or additional need, or a foster carer. The cost of each card is just £3 and can be conveniently purchased at our PODS Hub or through family groups/events. One card per family is sufficient, and each card remains valid for at least 18 months. For more information, please reach out to Elaine via email at elaine@podstelford.org.

Picnic in the Park 2023

This event, which has become a much-anticipated annual affair, exceeded expectations this year with numbers attending reaching over 800, with an array of activities that brought people together for a day of fun, laughter, and most importantly, charity.

The decision to move the PODS Picnic in the Park Charity Fun Day to a new location, to Charlton School was met with excitement and curiosity. More spacious grounds were needed to meet our growing number of attendees, and the school grounds provided the perfect backdrop for a day filled with outdoor festivities. Attendees were greeted with lush greenery, inviting picnic spots, and a sense of community that set the tone for the day's events.

PODS Picnic in the Park Fun Day is not just about raising funds for a noble cause but also fostering a sense of community bonding. Families, friends, and neighbours came together to enjoy the festivities and share moments of joy. The event became a melting pot of diverse backgrounds ages and abilities creating an atmosphere of unity and camaraderie.

We left no stone unturned in ensuring there was something for everyone. From traditional face painting, slime making, bouncy castles, dancing, an immersive interactive Dome, Exotic pets, go-carts, football, a visit from the fire brigade, and much more, the event catered to a wide range of interests for all age groups. Charlton School's facilities allowed a safe and accessible environment for these activities.

No picnic is complete without delicious food, and the PODS Picnic in the Park did not disappoint. With on-site catering of picnic boxes, tea/coffee, and cake.

The event was an overwhelming success, capturing the essence of community, charity, and celebration. With huge thanks to our amazing volunteers and staff.



Christmas 2023



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



Our very popular annual Big Families Christmas party, was done a little differently this year, we tried out a new venue, Sinclair FC Social Club in Ketley, this gave us more parking and the feedback from families was very positive saying they liked the fact that dance floor was in the middle of the hall and all seating was around the edge allowing them to see and monitor their children at all times, another change we tried was having two separate timed parties, this seemed to work well, proving a calmer atmosphere due to lower numbers. There was no need for a snow machine due to a lovely coating of snow that fell on the morning but despite the snow that day it was very well attended and all had a wonderful time, the children visited Santa and Mrs. Claus in the Grotto and each received a gift, they enjoyed music, dancing, and games from the amazing DJ Gary (Music Mix DJ Services), they even had a visit from the Grinch who found some festive cheer and joined the children for a dance! And of course, the food, it was a help-yourself buffet style which went down exceptionally well, it was a successful and magical day for all.

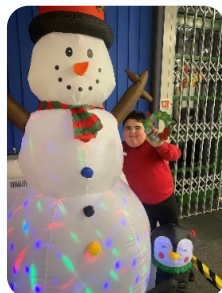
The Festive Tea Party was held at our PODS Hub, families came along and enjoyed a calmer environment to our big Christmas party, there was gentle background music and a few games such as pass the parcel and musical statues, they enjoyed a scrumptious buffet, and each child had a visit to see from Santa and Mrs Claus in their very festive Grotto each child/young person that attended received a gift from Santa himself.

Quiet Santa was held at our PODS Hub, this is a 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, no flashing lights or music creating a calming environment allowing the child to still enjoy the magic of visiting Santa.

For a second year, we had our Christmas Gifting Tree in our Hub reception, people graciously donated Christmas gifts to put under the tree to help share some festive Joy to the disadvantaged in our community, the remaining gifts that were left just before our Hub closed for the Christmas Holidays were donated to the children's ward at the Princess Royal Hospital in Telford.



Thank you to all our wonderful volunteers and staff that make these events such a great success.



PARENTS
OPENING
DOORS
PARENT CARER FORUM

PODS
BEFRIENDING
SCHEME



SAVE THE DATE

PODS PICNIC IN THE PARK

OPEN TO
EVERYONE



MONDAY 5TH AUGUST 2024

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

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



Please CHECK OUR WEBSITE, SOCIAL
MEDIA AND TICKETSOURCE LINK
FOR UPCOMING FAMILY GROUPS & EVENTS



PODS Charity

01952 458047

✉ support@podstelford.org

🔗 www.podstelford.org

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