



PODS

SPRING 2025

Newsletter



What's included

Foreword by Elaine Pearce, CEO

Meet the Trustees

Strategic Update from Jayne Stevens

Befriending Scheme Update

PODS Fundraising & Events

PODS Social Support Groups

Blossom & Bloom

Nurture & Grow

Perinatal & Infant Disability Support Update

PODS Christmas Party 2024

Picnic in the Park 2024

PODS Sensory Sessions

Ironbridge Passes

PODS Holiday Scheme

GET INVOLVED

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

Foreword from Elaine Pearce, CEO

A huge welcome to all our members, both old and new, we hope you enjoy reading through our latest Newsletter and gain some insightful information and learn more about the amazing work we do here at PODS.

2024 was another remarkable year for PODS which saw further development and expansion of our wonderful Hub, which has now become 1 of only 2 recognised disability specific Family Hubs in the UK. This development has proven transformative for the charity, enabling us to expand our service offerings to families ensuring we remain responsive to our community's evolving needs, providing the support they need at the time they need it the most.

In the last year we have implemented a new counselling service that is delivered by one of our existing staff. Alongside her lived experience as a SEN parent she has qualified as a counsellor, enabling her to deliver a whole encompassing approach to her counselling sessions.

Based on the success of the previous year's Christmas offerings including the addition of a Christmas Tea Party with Santa, we continued with the same set up this past December. Again, we received excellent feedback from all of our families and of course Santa himself, please find out more about our events last year further on in the Newsletter.

Having really settled into our new premises, which very much feel like home now, we have significantly expanded our sessions and activities. After-school clubs operate most days of the week, complemented by sensory sessions and weekend activities. 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. We have also been privileged to have been donated some new sensory room equipment from Newlife charity, which is due to be delivered in April.

In the last 12 months we have been delighted to host a few Tea Parties, with specific events for parent carers, giving them a few hours to sit back and relax whilst engaging in conversation with likeminded people who truly understand their lived experiences. In addition, we hosted a Tea Party as a thank you to the many volunteers that help keep PODS going throughout all areas of the charity, without these dedicated and selflessness individuals we would not be the organisation we are.

Our database continues to grow year on year, which is a testament to our sustained commitment to serving our community. Despite this unprecedented growth, our dedication to being there for each individual remains unaltered. 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.

Early last year following on from feedback from families and with collaboration from Telford & Wrekin Family Hubs we created a new role specifically designed to support families with babies and infants who have a disability. Louise, our dedicated Perinatal and Infant Disability Support Worker, is now fully established in her role and is busy supporting an array of families through home visits, sensory sessions and over the phone.

Halfway through the year and as part of our Family Hubs partnership work, we were approached and asked to develop and run a new under 5's stay & play session for infants and toddlers who have an additional need or disability. The obvious choice for planning and delivering these new sessions were Louise with her lived experience and Jeannie with her experience of working in SEND provisions and nurseries. The group started in September and were immediately a fantastic success with many families becoming regular attendees.

Kerrie continues to coordinate our ever popular and vital volunteer befriending team which has again this year continued to grow. Despite this growth the demand for our befriender support remains oversubscribed, resulting us being keen to recruit new volunteer befrienders.

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 in the past year, adding to its strength and diversity. They have seamlessly joined existing members, in their dedication

to ensure parent carers voices are heard through robust representation. Over the past 12 months, significant milestones have been achieved, including the endorsement of the '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. Following on from the success of the Autism in Schools project the forum has been crucial in leading the way with the national PINS project, to bolster connections with schools and bridge the gap between parents and education, supporting families to feel heard and their opinions valued when discussing their child's schooling experience.

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 saw the introduction of a Mental Health support group, held at our hub, with each session taking on a different theme, such as colouring, crafts and cake decorating, these sessions have proved to be very popular and will continue into this year.

Our team dedicated to fundraising and events is delighted to have participated in community events and fundraisers over the past year. This engagement is crucial for generating essential funds and promoting awareness of the incredible work we undertake. If you are interested in supporting us at events or donating, please contact support@podstelford.org

Our Preparing for Adulthood (PFA) Navigator, Matt is continuing his effort to support families with children and young adults aged 14+. This year has seen him run a 'test & learn' project around low level mental health support, this project has been extremely popular and was way oversubscribed, we are hoping to source funding to allow it to become a regular service. Matt also runs our Dad's support group which continues to be a lifeline to many of the dads/grandparents, enabling them to have the opportunity to chat and gain support in a non-judgemental environment.

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, Staff, Trustee 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

CEO



Meet the PODS Trustees



Nicola Jones (Chair)

Hello, my name is Nicola Jones, and I was appointed as the Chair of the Trustees in July. It has been a privilege to serve on the board of trustees for nearly 3 years. Being part of PODS has been an incredible honour, as I truly believe in its vision and the positive impact it has on numerous families in diverse ways.

PODS has grown significantly, now offering after-school clubs for children with disabilities, which greatly supports parents in navigating the challenges they face. Additionally, the organisation provides a hub for socialising and complimentary beverages, fostering a sense of community. I feel honoured to be part of such a dedicated team.

My professional background is in teaching, with a focus on educating young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in an alternative provision school. I initially joined PODS as a trustee because I recognised the immense value of its work, and I continue to witness the meaningful difference it makes in people's lives.

I have been fortunate to attend various events organised by PODS, including the open day, fundraising events at Telford Town Park, and the picnic in the park. During my visit to Blists Hill, I had the opportunity to meet potential new families interested in accessing PODS services. The staff consistently demonstrate warmth, patience, and professionalism, adeptly handling the challenges of engaging children with SEND. They are always prepared and ready to assist.

I also had the honour of participating in the Queen's visit and the King's coronation, both of which were impeccably organised and inclusive for families and friends of PODS.

I eagerly anticipate the future growth of PODS and its continued support for families and the community. A heartfelt thank you to everyone at PODS for their hard work and dedication to this remarkable organisation. Let's look forward to the future and see how PODS can gain even more recognition for its incredible contributions.



Sarah Hall (Vice Chair)

I'm Sarah, and I'm pleased and honoured to have been recently nominated as Vice Chair of PODS Trustees, a role which I really enjoy and value.

I have been involved with PODS as a volunteer and Trustee since January 2023, having been inspired to become more involved with the organisation following my previous role as a Team Leader within Telford and Wrekin Children's Services where I had regular involvement and liaison with PODS managers and was aware of the fantastic support and opportunities that PODS offered for families within Telford.

Since becoming involved with PODS as a volunteer I have been inspired and in awe of the breadth and range of the support, activities and events that are provided by PODS for families and children, the levels of commitment, dedication and knowledge shown by the staff team and the friendly and welcoming environment that is afforded to all. I have been involved in supporting with creative and inspiring events, sessions, trips and 1-1 work, during which I have met some amazing families and children. Every day is a learning opportunity for me when attending pods.

I look forward to continuing my positive relationship and role within PODS as a Trustee and volunteer, and feel pleased, proud and inspired to be involved with such a dynamic, diverse and supportive organisation.

Jon Mills



Hello there, I am Jon. 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!

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.

Sally Moran



Hello, my name is Sally, and I started volunteering as a trustee for PODS late 2022 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.



PODS Charity Myth Buster

How does PODS Charity work?

We often get asked questions such as: "How are we funded?" "Why do some sessions cost, whilst others free?" "Why don't we issue refunds?" "Why are some ages groups excluded from activities?"

Some people may understand how a charity works, but it can be a complicated process leaving others confused or under the wrong impression.



"Services/activities from charities should be free" - this could not be further from the truth.

In reality, this is completely the opposite. Charities are not naturally funded and do not have a source of income unless they generate one. This could be via fundraising, donations, grants, charges for events/activities or for service level agreements. The more financial support a charity receives the more it can do for the community it is there to serve.

Rest assured though; every penny that is generated is spent on the community we serve. As a charity we must use all funds raised for the running of the Charity and its good work, there are no shareholders or directors to take any profits or get rich from the charity.

How are we funded?

We are funded in many ways, however the majority of our funds come from grants or service level agreements (SLA), funding for us to deliver a specific service. However, every penny counts so any donation or funds, no matter how small, genuinely makes a difference as we are running on such a tight budget.

Why do some sessions cost, whilst others are free?

This entirely depends on which grants/funding we have received. All sessions, even those with a cost attached, are heavily subsidised. Take Blists Hill social group for example it costs us £160+ per session, we can take a maximum of 17 people, this equates to just under £10 per person, however we only charge £3 per person. Some sessions, like our 'Challenges at Home', are fully funded via an SLA meaning they are free to attend.

Why don't we issue refunds?

As sessions already run at a loss, time has already been allocated to this activity to organise/plan the session, regardless of whether the individual comes. In some circumstances we can re-advertise the spaces but, again, this takes time and planning which has a financial impact.

Why are some age groups excluded from activities?

Sometimes we are given specific funding to carry out a certain piece of work/activity, so any funds must be spent on that project, and we are not able to operate outside of those parameters on that particular activity. For example, the recent mental health activities for secondary school children we are putting on; we have been given a small pot of funding to test out a project with this age group and to monitor its effectiveness. This means any children outside of this age group would not qualify to take part at this time as the funding would not cover their sessions, resulting in us having no way of subsidising the sessions.

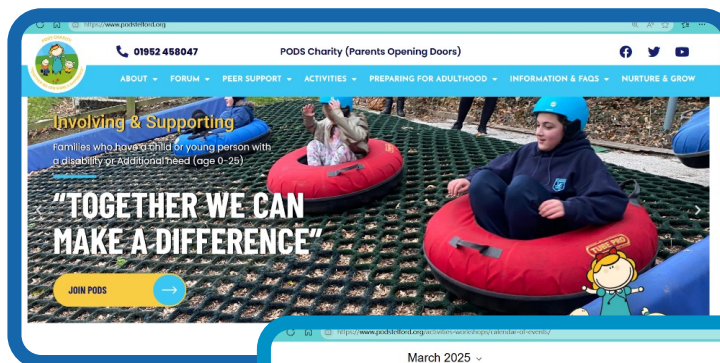
So please consider supporting us whenever you can as you never know the next session you attend may be funded/subsidised by your funds and possibly would have not gone ahead without them.

New Website and App

PODS has been longing to update their website for a long time and after many failed attempts to have it designed with our vision in mind, we joined forces with Teknet Digital who provided their services free of charge. They helped us to get the basic design in place, they then delivered some short training sessions enabling us to continue developing and creating the pages on our own. We are very pleased with the final result, we were looking for a professional but family oriented look, and feel we have achieved this, why not have a look for yourself, www.podstelford.org

The new website boasts an interactive calendar of events where you can seamlessly view and book onto our various activities and events. The site is full of valuable information and links, and provides insight into the support and services on offer. You are able to directly contact differing members of the team directly through forms/links, ensuring you get through to the right person. Parents are able to sign up to become a member, alongside a dedicated form for professionals to refer families in.

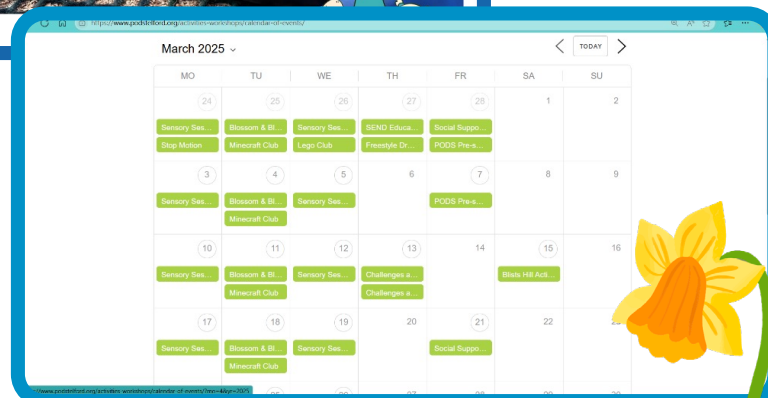
Following on from the website development, we were approached by App Monkeys who generously offered to convert our now completed website into an App! We felt this was a massive step forward and would allow families to have even greater access to our services, support and events. Our App PODS Telford is now available on the App Store and Google Play, so why not download today and be the first to find out about information and events, allowing you to book tickets direct from the App.



Download on the App Store



ANDROID APP ON Google play



Parent Carer Forum Update from Jayne Stevens

Participation and Co-Production at the heart of the Parent Carer Forum

Influence and change

We champion your parent carer voices and experiences to ensure that you are heard where it matters most and your voices inform and influence service changes across health, education, social care and wider teams.

Information provision

It is important to us that you receive timely and trustworthy information from reputable sources.

We aim to empower our parent carer and family carers with the right information at the right time.

Support Offer

It's important that we deliver support offers that meet the needs of our families, and we only do this through regular feedback. Our workshops, Challenges at Home, Preparing for Adulthood, PINS, Annual Conference, etc.

More information about these key work areas can be found on the Parent Carer Forum section of our website.



Family Experiences Report - Summary

Stress, Isolation and Loneliness and Emotional/Mental Health are the biggest factors affecting parent carer wellbeing.

The ability to access local community activities and physical health are more positive.

PODS Parent Carer Forum

2024 Review

WORKSTREAMS

- Health (BeeU, Mental Health, Hospital, Transformation)
- Education (EHCP, SEN Support, Alternative Provision)
- Social Care (Children with Disabilities, Strengthening Families, Short Breaks)
- SEND Family Hub (Cherry Blossom)



RELATIONSHIPS

- SEND Directors for Social Care, Children Services, Adult Services, Education, Health, Hospital, Trust
- Commissioners/Service Leads/Operational Teams
- Local MP and councillors
- NHPCP West Mids Management Board



OUR PEOPLE & NUMBERS

- Forum Lead (Strategic Co-ordinator): Jayne Stevens - 10 years experience!
- 10 Volunteer Parent Reps
- Social Media private group: 935 members
- Regular updates to over 2,000 members
- New members average: 40 per month



BEE-U DROP INS

- Bi-weekly drop ins for 80 families to access a 1:1 chat with trainee Clinical Psychologist.
- To answer any questions for families awaiting an appointment or on the assessment pathway.
- Wider links with Mental Health in Schools teams.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Workshops - SEND, Transport, Social Care Short Breaks Forum
- Senior Directors and Councillors surgery
- Opportunities for Feedback shared
- Wellbeing Conference March 2024 @Battersea
- Market Place Events / School visits and Parent Evenings



CHALLENGES AT HOME

- Supported 100 families at dedicated sessions (monthly Thursday mornings and bi-monthly evening sessions).
- Co-hosted with Principal, Ed Psych and support staff from Educational Psychologist team.
- Nominated and WON! NHS SEND Best Practice Award (London, March 2024)



PINS PROJECT

- 20 Primary schools
- Delivering NeuroDevelopment training, Sleep Training, Communication and Behaviour and working with schools to improve inclusive practices for neurodiverse children.
- We have organised 50+ coffee mornings and/or parent drop ins.



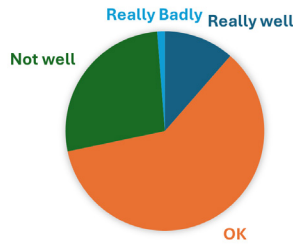
WORKING TOGETHER CHARTER

- Agreement at SEND Partnership Board (Dec 2024)
- Official Launch SEND Network January 2025
- Linking with PINS Project



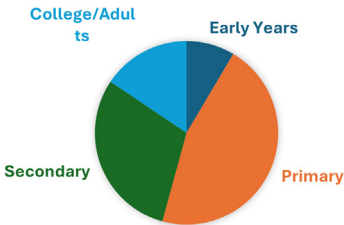
Parent Carer Wellbeing

How would you say you as a parent carer/family carer have coped over the last year?



Age Range for Child/Young Person

Child/Young Person Education Setting/Age Range



Parent Participation and Involvement

We asked parent carers and family carers what they thought about the Parent Carer Forum, their opportunities to be involved, sharing information, listening to and involved in decision making:

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

Do you feel like you've had enough information?

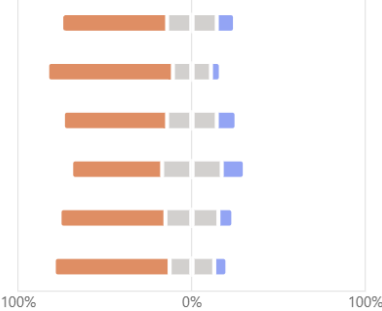
Do you enjoy reading our weekly updates?

Do you feel listened to?

Do you feel less isolated through the work of PODS?

Are we giving you enough opportunities to get involved?

Are we providing enough feedback to you?

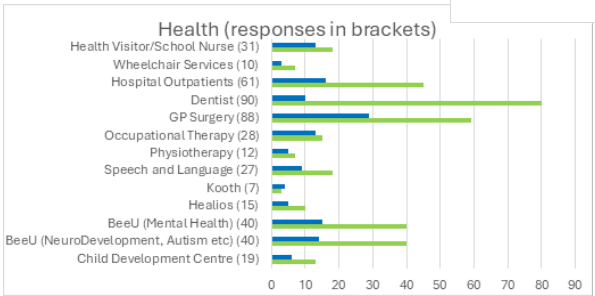
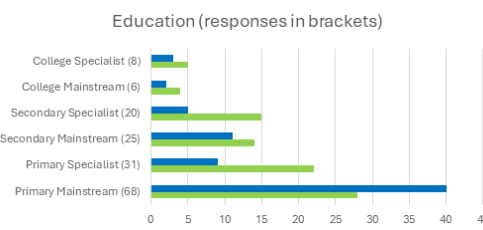
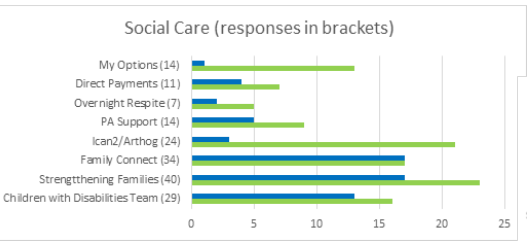


Service Provision Initial indicators

Overall findings below. Further details and analysis are available in our full report.

Blue indicates Poor/Very Poor

Green indicates Good/Very Good



Click here for full report



Who Are Our “Parent Reps”

The Parent Carer Forum 'Parent Reps' make up the Strategic Board we host as a forum. They all offer their time voluntarily and we are thankful for their support, passion and enthusiasm. They help us to make decisions about the focus on the forum and share wider experiences that they gather through groups and networks within the community.



They attend regular strategic meetings focused on their interests and where they have the most expertise. All of them are parent carers in their own right with a wealth of experience over many years. All Parent Reps undergo training to support their role and regular catchups and opportunities to meet.

Hello, I'm **Amen Owuna**, a proud parent of a wonderful son with Down syndrome. As a parent representative with PODS, I am passionate about connecting with and supporting other parents of children with special needs. I am also deeply interested in exploring and influencing policies that govern special needs provisions in the United Kingdom ensuring they are inclusive and supportive for all families.

I'm **Yas**, and I am 33 years old. I have two children. Ethan (age 12) who has childhood apraxia of speech, dyspraxia, hypermobility and sensory processing disorder. Lily (age 5) who has hypermobility and suspected ADHD. Ethan attends a specialist secondary school and Lily currently attends a mainstream primary. I stumbled across PODS many years ago when my son Ethan was first diagnosed in a frantic bid to try and find local families we could connect with. I have made some lifelong friends through PODS and would genuinely be lost without PODS. I decided to join as a parent rep just over a year ago and I love being part of the team. My areas of interest are speech and language, communication boards and transport. Outside of PODS, I am also a trustee for a charity called Mikey's Wish Foundation. This is a charity which aims to support those with speech, language and communication needs.

Carl Bailey my son is 6 and attends a special school. He has Autism, learning disability and a chromosome deletion. I became a rep in 2023.

About me: I'm the Service Manager for a local children and young people's charity, Challenging Perceptions. Supporting CYP with Mental Health, Learning Disability and Autism. Outside of work I'm a governor and EYFS Link for The Bridge School. I'm also a governor for Midlands Partnership Foundation NHS Trust, Co-chair and CYP lead for Telford Mental Health Forum and Chair of Directors at Park Lane Centre. I also sit on West Mercia Police advisory groups and SaTH hospital panels amongst other things. Due to my day job, I am involved in a lot of meetings across Telford, sometimes there will be overlaps with other rep's areas of interest.

Hi my name is **Simon Buckley-robins** I've been a pods parent rep for over 10 years, I'm been married to Mandy for 23 years and our daughter Emma is 21 years old she is non-verbal, autistic with severe learning difficulties and ADHD she went to the bridge school then willow tree now as an adult she goes to my options day service and has a Pa, the areas I'm interested in is short breaks and adult services and the inclusive leisure.

Hello, my name is **Sian**, and I am a Parent Carer Representative for PODS, and I joined this role in 2024. I am a proud parent to a wonderful five year old little boy who is autistic, non-verbal, and attends a specialist school. I have a passion for understanding and advocating for neurodiversity and through this forum, I aim to connect with other parents, share experiences, and foster a supportive space where we can celebrate our children's strengths. It is also a space to navigate challenges together, and champion acceptance and inclusion in our community.

I am always happy to speak with new people so please feel free to get in touch.

My name is **Keiron Warr** and I'm a long serving Parent Representative for over 10 years. Alongside my wife, we are legal guardians for our grandson who is on the autistic spectrum and attends mainstream education, with additional support from a specialist hub when required. My areas of interest are around commissioning and adult carers workstream areas, and I attend these meetings regularly and feed into the monthly strategic meetings.

My name is **Karen Jones**, I'm mum to 3 children aged 28 (Tom), 24 (Izzy) and 22 (Harry). My youngest son was diagnosed as Autistic at 18 months old. Harry has a learning disability and complex medical issues including epilepsy and issues with hypertonia & dyspraxia. Harry is non-verbal and uses an iPad to communicate. He attended The Bridge School for 11yrs followed by 5yrs at Overley Hall Residential School. I have been a parent rep with PODS for many years. Harry moved into his own home, with 1-1 24/7 supported living 4yrs ago. Transition, Supported Living and Adult Services are my areas of interest.

Tina is a single parent to Oliver who is 11 and attends The Bridge School. She has been a member of PODS/ Parent Rep for approx 7 years. Tina became a PODS Parent Rep to represent and offer support to the more severe /complex children and their families. She understands the feeling of isolation and not knowing where to go for support. Oliver is non-verbal autistic, has severe learning difficulties as well as complex medical needs such as bilateral vocal chord palsy, chronic lung disease (he is peg fed and oxygen dependant at times) he has a chromosome issue and a bilateral squint amongst other issues. Oliver is a Swan (Syndrome without A Name) as he has no overall syndrome diagnosed. Life has been very hard, but Oliver is always happy and loves life! Tina is also the Shropshire Parent Rep for Swan UK, Trustee/treasurer of The Bridge School PFA and helped run Shining Stars Sen Toddler Group for 7 years.

I'm **Liz** and I am the proud parent of a 24-year-old young man with Down's Syndrome, and I am deeply committed to creating opportunities for individuals with learning disabilities/difficulties to thrive as active, valued members of their communities. Everyone deserves the chance to live a fulfilling life and have the same opportunities as others. Together with another parent, I co-founded a community café that provides invaluable work experience for young people with additional needs while hosting inclusive activities for all. We also launched the Funky Friday Inclusive Disco, a popular monthly event where young adults with additional needs can dance, socialise, and connect in a fun, supportive environment. Additionally, I am the treasurer of Shropshire Rugby Rebels Disability Tag Rugby team, a fantastic initiative that brings people of all ages together to stay active, build confidence, and enjoy team sports. As a parent representative, my primary focus areas are supporting the transition to adulthood and advocating for opportunities that enable young adults with additional needs to socialise, gain meaningful work or volunteer experience, and live semi-independently.

I am **Lisa**, married to Grant and mum to 2 grown up children, and our 9year old son. They are all Neurodiverse – and life at home can be colourful and challenging in many ways! They are also all very bright academically, and subsequently this made getting any kind of support for them challenging as they mask their difficulties! My eldest 2 are still living at home and my dad also lives with us. My husband and I own a card shop, this can make life very busy at certain times of the year (ie Christmas!), but being self-employed allows us to have the flexibility to make sure everyone at home has their needs met! I am passionate about SEND needs being recognised and met and how this can be done especially when school are either not being helpful or simply not seeing any issues and helping to make sure that parents/carers and families voices are heard. In 2023, after receiving a diagnosis of Tourettes Syndrome for our son, I set up the Tourettes Action Telford Support Group as a way of providing peer support for ourselves but for many other families I knew were seeking support, advice and information. Through the training I did for this I gained valuable insight and confidence. When I'm not being mum, I play crown green bowls, I have played in the county team for over 20 years and participate in competitions regularly throughout the summer. It's a welcome break away from home life but is also inclusive and my son also enjoys playing now!

Challenges at Home Sessions

PARENTS
OPENING
DOORS
PARENT CARER FORUM

Who?

Family members who have a child or young person on pathway/waiting for Autism or Neurodevelopment condition

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

Challenges at Home
(daytime sessions)



Evening Sessions

bi-monthly | 6.00-7.30pm
MS Teams (online)

Please contact Jayne via email:

jayne@podstelford.org or call 0777 534 2092



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

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

"Gave us more confidence that we were doing the right thing for our child."

National Recognition and a Special Honour

The success of this project, and the key role that parent carers played in co-producing these sessions was celebrated by NHS England SEND Team earlier in the year and we were invited to London, to present our successful project and receive a Special Honour in SEND Best Practice, alongside health and education colleagues. It was a very proud moment for everyone involved. We have since provided a webinar to support co-production practices to NHS colleagues.

Jayne Stevens, our Strategic Co-ordinator, has this to add "I'm very excited and absolutely honoured that this has been recognised, it's the parent carer voices shared through their COVID experiences in 2021 and since that got this off the ground, and funding bids made to the NHS, support from LA Principal Educational Psychologists that have allowed this to keep going, and the fact we have the PODS Hub to host them - it's all really made a difference to local families"



PINS (Partnership for Neurodiversity in Schools)

This project has been running through 2024 and into 2025 as a nationally funded project. The approach has been developed to include a whole school approach for supporting neurodiversity, by offering good quality training for staff, understanding students experience of schools and a key element of parent support groups. 20 primary schools have been identified across Telford & Wrekin, and we have run family groups in them all, worked to deliver brokered training and attended parent evenings. PODS key role in this project is the school liaison and co-production opportunities, we have run a survey with parent carers (400 responses!) and this had led key discussions- at a strategic/operational level (led by Jayne Stevens, as Strategic Co-ordinator) and at a local level with schools by Uma Bhatia (our PINS Schools lead). We have worked with local NHS and Telford & Wrekin Council partners, and with the lead Project Management from Severn Teaching Alliance, to:

- Enable parent carers to share their knowledge and experiences of support and services via PCF representatives, with senior leaders of the school.
- Identify and promote opportunities where parent carers can contribute to service design and review with support from PODS Parent Carer Forum with School.
- PODS Parent Carer Forum have to facilitate a response to feedback in a solution focused way, to support Name of School improve the experience of families.

This opportunity has been a massive success for us as a forum, bringing closer links with the 20 designated "PINS" primary schools especially, and with wider professionals working with education settings.

Transport

We have held regular meetings with the Transport and SEND Departments again this past year.

We hosted a series of workshops for families over the summer holidays that gave an opportunity to hear from the Transport and SEND teams around the processes and eligibility criteria. Sessions were well received, and it gave an opportunity for families to provide feedback on what else was needed. This led to new additions to the FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) lists, and these are updated on the Local Offer - some of them are below:

"What happens to my travel assistance application when it is submitted?"

"I have been offered a mileage PTB how is this worked out?"

"I have been told a risk assessment will be completed to look at the mode of transport - what does this look like and what will I be asked?"

"I think my child is on a shared vehicle for too long - what guidelines do the transport team work to?"

"I have been informed that travel assistance has been approved - what next?"

"What information do I need to share on the application? If my child has an EHCP will the transport team know and have the detail?"

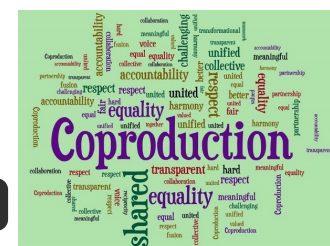
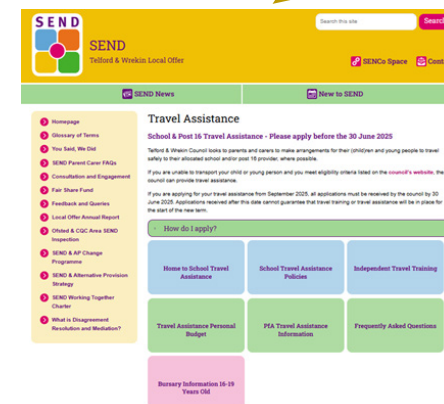


We have been assured that there are internal processes and system improvements, and we thank families for sharing their experiences. At the time of writing this article we are working through a 'timeline' and a flow diagram to support the process and answer any questions.

For more information, to access the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) please click on the link (online) or scan the QR Code below:



www.telford.gov.uk/info/20466/travelling_to_school/10/school_travel_assistance/4



(All responses to this survey have been anonymized to protect personal circumstances. No part of this survey may be used outside of PODS Charity, without further discussion and relevant permission. Thank you for your understanding).

I have provided a very brief overview here of the initial results from the Annual Survey. This is just one of

the mechanisms of sharing the Parent Care voice and experiences we use as a Parent Carer Forum. Wider discussions will take place with relevant professional teams to ensure that there is a method for providing feedback to you through a 'You said, we did' format.

The full report including parent carer anonymised comments will be available on our website: (PODS Forum section - surveys and reports).

BeeU Drop-In Sessions

We hosted a BeeU Drop-in group for families in April 24 at PODS Hub, for the newly appointed Assistant Psychologists to listen to families experiences about the BeeU Neurodevelopment (Autism, ADHD, etc service). This was a very busy session with 10 parent carers joining us, but not as much time as we'd hoped for individual discussions. We went on to have further conversations with the Assistant Psychologist service and decided to trial them working from the PODS Hub once a fortnight with 'bookable' appointments for families who are on the neurodevelopment pathway and awaiting appointments or news about the progress of their referrals.

All sessions have been fully booked with 81 families attending between May and December 2025.

"It was a great chance to discuss my daughter's current challenges and get additional help from BeeU. I wouldn't have had this help if I hadn't attended the 1:1 appointment. With what we discussed in the appointment and a consideration of my daughter's needs, the BeeU assistant psychologist took my daughter's case to panel the next day and BeeU used all the evidence I had emailed them over the time she was on the ASD pathway, and referred her for a mental health assessment themselves. My daughter then had an urgent MH assessment one week later. I would highly recommend the 1:1 BeeU drop ins to parents/carers".

"Attending the BeeU 1:1 appointment was a great opportunity to not only discuss my child's needs but talk to someone who listened and totally understood the challenges we were facing. I didn't feel rushed even though the time was limited and following the appointment the assistant psychologist supported us right up to our assessment. I would highly recommend and encourage parents/carers to book the 1:1 drop in sessions".

This offer is currently halted because the two ladies have moved onto other posts. Their support to the families was invaluable. We hope that this offer will continue in the future, and the conversations continue at a strategic and operational level to try to make this happen.

Your Voice...

As you know our strategic work around the BeeU experiences continues, and we have been very involved in the new tender development that is planned to go live in 2025. We have been working on tender documentation for Neurodevelopmental services and for Core Mental Health Services.

Conversations and experience sharing under the umbrella of Neurodevelopment have also included and ongoing: Tics and Tourette's, FASD (Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders) and PDA (Pathological Demand Avoidance).

Meetings include task and finish groups, workshops and focus groups, and meeting with commissioners, NHS ICB Chief Nursing Officer and Service Managers.

Healthier Together Website

Lots more information around these areas can be found on the Healthier Together Website too – have a look and let us know what you think as all these conversations are ongoing with plans for Task and Finish groups and further meetings...

Click on the website link (online) or scan QR code below:
<https://stw-healthiertogether.nhs.uk/parentscarers>



Tourettes Action ACTION Telford Support Group

This group is for parent carers / families who have a child that is diagnosed* with Tourette's Syndrome, to share experiences and gain peer support. We welcome families who are seeking more information about the condition, or advice about where to get support. Our sessions have given parents the opportunity to share their experiences with others who are on a similar journey and have given valuable insight into everyday lives of those affected by Tourette's. We have laughed and cried in these sessions! Tourette's Syndrome is unique and can be isolating for some children and families.

We hold regular drop-ins for families at PODS Hub and plan for two 'social' gatherings for whole families, including siblings twice a year. One of these was held at the end of January 2025.

To find out the details of next session, please visit PODS Website:
www.podstelford.org/activities-workshops/calendar-of-events



*If your child is on a pathway or awaiting diagnosis you are still welcome to join the group.

Education – SEND Change Programme



PODS Parent Carer Forum is involved in the SEND Change Programme to ensure that parent carer experiences and voices are heard in any developments, they are provided with up-to-date information and opportunities to get involved. There are local meetings, and we are part of regional discussion across the West Midlands too. Whilst this is a snapshot at time of writing this newsletter, there are regular bulletins shared via the Local Offer and wider networks. At time of writing, it has been reported that 80 parent carers have attended the Talkboost training mentioned below, and 1800 children have been assessed (nb Telford & Wrekin/Shropshire data).

ELSEC (Early Language Support for Every Child)

Over recent years the number of children being identified as having a speech, language or communication need has significantly increased. It is not clear why this has happened, but it has been noticed at both a local and national level. The Department for Education have selected Telford and Wrekin, as one of 9 areas in the country, to trial a project named Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC).



The ELSEC team is made up of people from both health and education and they work with children, their parents and professionals to improve outcomes for children, with early intervention being key.

Talk Boost is the main intervention programme used in schools as all schools have been offered free training and given free resources to run it over the last 4 years. ELSEC is also using Talk Boost as the main intervention programme with all children in Year 1, Reception and the pre-school year, in ELSEC schools. This means that every child who requires support with language and communication is supported from an early age.

We know that speech, language and communication skills are important to help children access the wider curriculum, make friends and manage feelings. The ELSEC team are supporting staff in schools and parents to develop these skills to help all children in their care.

For a full list of settings involved, resources for supporting speech, language and communication and further information on the ELSEC project please visit the Telford and Wrekin SEND Local Offer page: SEND & AP Change Programme - SEND - Local offer

National Standards and Inclusion Services (formerly Ordinarily Available Provision)

The development of National Standards is underway to clearly define what "good" means in identifying and supporting the four areas of special educational needs.

We have taken a close look at what we currently know about the resources available at the Local Authority level.

A detailed analysis of what is currently offered (you might know this as SEN Support), Evaluating current practices, working with schools and providers to encourage inclusion.

This piece of work was also highlighted in our conference in February focusing on "SEND Education". You can find the report from this on our website.

Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan

The SEND and AP Improvement Plan is a three-level approach designed to help students in both AP and mainstream school settings. By identifying students' needs earlier and providing targeted support in regular schools, the plan aims to address these needs promptly and prevent unnecessary exclusions.

If you wish to provide feedback or ask questions as a parent contact Jayne Stevens at PODS Parent carer Forum:
Jayne@podstelford.org or call on: 07775 342092



Social Care and Short Breaks

Our conversations continue with the social care team and around the short breaks offers.

The current statement is updated regularly and the full details of this can be found on the Local Offer.

One of the main ways that parent carers and families can share their experiences is through the Short Breaks Forum. This brings service leads, managers and commissioners together with families to discuss services, ask questions directly and make decisions about provisions for children up to the age of 18 years. These 'forums' are held at PODS Hub and the dates for 2025 are as follows: April (eve), July (day), September (day), December (eve). All dates will be confirmed via short breaks and PODS newsletter.

The short breaks statement is also reviewed at these forums. The statement provides all the information for a child with a disability and the criteria and information for short breaks offers across Universal (Plus), Targeted and Specialist Offers.

Wider strategic meetings are held regularly where we discuss service provision, family experiences, themes, and provide information.



Nurture & Grow

In Summer last year PODS launched an exciting new service 'Nurture & Grow' to meet a need within the SEND community by providing specialist staff to offer tailored support within the community.

Nurture & Grow's aim is to provide essential support to families in need by offering tailored support for individuals with additional needs or disabilities. The service focuses on creating a nurturing environment where our clients can thrive and access the wider community with person-centred support. We strive to encourage independence, develop skills, and build positive relationships. For families, it offers a vital chance to recharge, knowing their loved ones are receiving the highest standard of support within the community.

Nurture & Grow reflect PODS' commitment to helping families to feel supported and understood. Our highly trained dedicated staff mirror the high standards and ethos of PODS, providing the care and commitment we would expect for our own children.



Employee spotlight, meet Tammie one of our first Personal Support Assistants!



Hi, my name is Tammie, and I'm a Personal Assistant with Nurture and Grow.

I am passionate about helping families navigate challenges, access resources, and build resilience. I genuinely care about the well-being of the families I work with, and I am excited to get to know each family, child and young adult, understand their unique needs, and offer tailored support that makes a real difference.

Nurture & Grow

Support in the community by the community!



Nurture and Grow provides specialist PA support for children and young people aged 0-25 with disabilities and additional needs.

We are accepting new support clients who are self funding.

We offer fully qualified and highly trained personal assistants providing 1-1 person centered support, tailored to your needs.

Our service can include:

- Help accessing community based activities and events.
- Support sessions at our purpose designed Hub.
- Afterschool/wraparound care.
- Development of independence and life skills.
- Increasing confidence and social interaction.



Please follow the QR code to apply.

 nurture@podstelford.org

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



Inclusive Leisure

The leisure team are now running offers for the wider disability community and these include ice skating, skiing and tobogganing, soft play, swimming and gym offers. To support families their staff have received relevant disability awareness training.

You can find out more about their offers by visiting their dedicated page on their website:

www.telfordandwrekinleisure.co.uk/info/33/inclusive-leisure

Law Commission Review

We have been monitoring the work around the Law Commission Review and following progress. As part of the consultation exercise there have been online meetings, workshops and briefings which we have encouraged families to attend. PODS Forum has also responded to the review, with input from Parent Reps and the annual survey results.

Key focus areas of the review are to recommend a solution to the patchwork of legislation that currently governs social care for disabled children, to improve how the law on social care for disabled children fits in with the law relating to social care more broadly, to review the outdated language and definitions underpinning the law on social care for disabled children.

Sleep Workshops

We currently have 5 staff members trained as Sleep Practitioners, enabling us to deliver Sleep Tight courses on behalf of the NHS. These sessions are aimed at parent/carers who have children or young adults with 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 not only delivered by trained staff, the facilitators have real lived experience, giving them valuable insight and understanding of your unique situation. 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 have been designed with SEND in mind, they help you plan a routine that works for you and your family.

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

"I found the whole course helpful; it made me realise I'm not alone. There is not a food or bad routine its whatever works for yourself and children."

"Fantastic course with a great group, facilitator was engaging, informative and made us all feel more confident and able to improve things whilst also being realistic of the challenges we all had."

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

"Thank you, it was an excellent course, I learnt a lot, it was fun and engaging."

"Relaxed environment, able to ask questions, really helpful."

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



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, schools and a range of community groups. Our training sessions are facilitated by staff members who bring a genuine understanding of disability, offering 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 and benefit from firsthand accounts of what living with a disability is truly like. 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

Toilet Training

This year, PODS received funding to host toilet training sessions, providing valuable support to families navigating toilet training with children and young people with SEND. We ran three interactive sessions where families came together to share experiences and gain practical tips. Parents explored the use of toilet diaries, created their own "poo" and received helpful resources to take home, including a social story. The sessions were filled with laughter and information, leaving families with greater confidence and knowledge to start their toilet training journey. Topics included the importance of hydration, what to avoid, and how to implement their own successful strategies. We're so proud of the positive impact these sessions had on families, helping them feel supported and informed as they take this important step!



If you and your family feel you need support in toileting, please check out the eric website www.eric.org.uk, this provides valuable information to aid in your toilet training journey.



PODS Social Groups

From Matthew Downes-Ward

Our PODS Social Groups provide social opportunities and activities for our young people. These activities are often linked to a shared interest to help stimulate social interaction, whilst also being held in a calm, familiar, environment.

We have been fortunate enough to be able to expand our social offering this past year from purely Hub-based activities, such as drawing and gaming, to outings to local facilities. These outings have been supported by some familiar faces to help lessen anxiety and are aimed at promoting both social interaction and independence. We have held a number of successful sessions this year at the bowling alley, climbing walls, high wires, and crazy golf, with more contacts having been made throughout the year to ensure that we will have even more to offer.

Some of our amazing young people have also made some fantastic suggestions for future activities and have even volunteered to assist!

So come along and have a go and we look forward to seeing you all soon.

Please contact me for further details on: matt@podstelford.org



Mental Health Programme – Test and Learn

From Matthew Downes-Ward

This past year we have been approached to trial a programme to offer low-level mental health support for young people aged 11-18. With only 12 spaces available for this trial, we were overwhelmed with requests as over 80 young people registered their interest!

This programme aimed to showcase some common activities/strategies available for young people to help improve their mental health. These include: Animals, Art, Cooking, Exercise, Outdoor Walks, and Music. Each young person was encouraged to reflect on these activities to see how they felt before, during, and after, to help improve their own self-awareness.

Whilst we have only had the opportunity to run this trial for a short time, the feedback has been fantastic. One young person in particular has started attending the gym with their parents and has taken to drawing as a way to de-stress. Whereas another young person enjoyed it so much that they have started cooking more for their family and have offered to volunteer their time at future PODS activities and events! I'm sure you'd all agree that this is truly amazing. I'd like to thank all those who took part, it has been wonderful seeing you all grow closer together over the course of 6 weeks. I hope you not only had fun, but made some friends along the way, and I hope to see you at future events and activities.

Due to the overwhelming interest this programme generated we are hopeful that there will be future opportunities to provide this to a wider audience, so watch this space!

For further information please contact me on: matt@podstelford.org



Preparing for Adulthood (PFA)

From Matthew Downes-Ward

Preparing for Adulthood Navigator

Preparing for Adulthood focuses on young people with additional needs aged between 14 and 25. There is a general lack of support for this age group, or a lack of knowledge of what exactly is available, leading young people to experience additional difficulties such as stress, anxiety, and depression.

As the Pfa Navigator, I am here to help support young people and their families. This includes signposting families to services, discussing post-16 options (including education and employment), support with life skills, socialising, housing difficulties, and healthcare needs.

Having listened to family feedback we have hosted Wills and Trusts Workshops, Home to School Transport Workshops, and have trialled a new Mental Health Programme over the course of this past year.

Additionally, we have been present at Post-16 Transition Events across Telford and Wrekin, and the British Association of Supported Employment (BASE) Conference, to keep up to date on what options are currently available for our young people and what good practices are happening elsewhere in the UK.

We have really stepped up our engagement with schools and directly with families, having supported over 100 families this past year alone, and have been approached by numerous schools to advise on adjustments and strategies for specific students.

We have also increased our young person's social offering this past year, including a number of outings into the mix, and it is our hope that we will be able to increase this further this coming year. It has been a very busy, but fulfilling, year and we're looking forward to seeing what the new year brings!

Please note that a large part of this role is to provide feedback at a strategic level, with the intention of improving the services available. With that in mind, I would greatly welcome any, and all, feedback in the following areas: education, employment, social inclusion, healthcare, housing, and life skills.

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

MenSpace

From Matthew Downes-Ward

It can be very isolating being a parent/carer of a child/young person with additional needs. It can be even more so for the men in our lives who often do not feel like they can be vulnerable and share their own concerns without being judged.

For that purpose, we have established the MenSpace male support group. This group is an open and non-judgemental space for men to get support from other men.

We have a dedicated WhatsApp group and monthly meetings to catch-up over a coffee, occasionally we swap out the coffee for a pool table or gym equipment!

Everyone is welcome and any suggestions for activities to include in these meetings are always appreciated.

Even if meeting as a group isn't your thing, we're here to help as best we can.

Please contact me for further details on: matt@podstelford.org





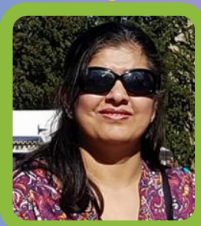
Elaine Pearce
CEO



Jayne Stevens
Strategic Lead:
Parent Carer Forum



Kerrie Seagrave
Member Support
Co-ordinator



Uma Bhatia
Family Engagement &
Education Lead

Meet the PODS Team

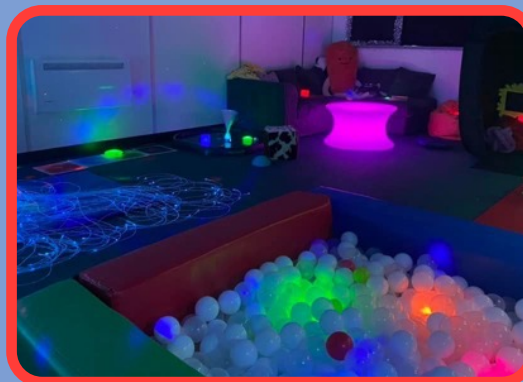
PODS Hub

This past year saw another big leap forward for PODS Charity and our already established Hub, we were delighted to be asked to become a specialised Family Hub for disabled children, making us only the second one in the UK. This also helped us to cement the foundations and collaboration within the local Family Hubs network, already in place through our perinatal and infant support offer. Following in the footsteps of existing Telford & Wrekin Family Hubs we asked our community to give our Hub a name, and they could of not choose better with 'Cherry Blossom', a fitting name for a place that supports disabled children and their families to grow and blossom.

Our hub is a comprehensive one-stop-shop where families can find an inclusive and welcoming environment to access a wide array of information, services and resources. Our all-encompassing space provides information, advice, support, activities, training, and volunteering opportunities, all geared toward enhancing both mental health, well-being, physical health and reduced isolation, ultimately contributing to a positive impact on everyone's lives.

We are located on the ground floor making us easily wheelchair accessible, in a central Telford building, 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. We also have a mobile hoist for those who are unable to transfer out of their wheelchair. All staff are first aid trained, and we have the benefit of a defibrillator on site.

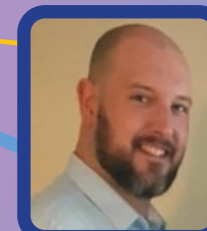
Visitors to our Hub have commented on its welcoming and calming environment with a light airy feel. Children and young adults enjoy the space to run around in and explore, with many adoring the new sensory space and garden.



Joanne Smith-Martin
Events & Fundraising Co-ordinator



Jeannie Lear
SEND Engagement
Lead



Matt Downes-Ward
PFA Navigator



Louise Browne Quinn
Perinatal & Business Support
Co-ordinator.

Befriending Scheme Update

from Kerrie Seagrave, Member Support Co-ordinator



I would like to begin this update on the Befriending Scheme by extending our heartfelt thanks to the incredible volunteers who make the Befriending Scheme possible – our wonderful PODS Befrienders. Their commitment and dedication to help and support fellow parent carers is what makes the Befriending a success. The support they offer really makes a difference to the lives of our families. Thank you for all that you do!

Each of our Befrienders is a parent carer themselves, this means they have the valuable lived experience that allows them to truly understand and empathise with the challenges faced by families caring for a child with a disability or additional need.

Our Befrienders can offer the support via telephone, in person, or at our Social Support Groups.

The parent carer and Befriender decide between them how often they will have contact. Sometimes one conversation can be enough, other times a Befriender may support parent carers over several months. Every Befriender receives training and on-going support to make sure they are comfortable and confident in their important role.

We come together as a team every month to discuss new ways we can support our families. In a world that often feels like it's moving faster than ever, their compassion and commitment provides a much-needed source of support and understanding.

I would also like to thank the parent carers who have so generously opened their hearts to us, we know how difficult this can be. We hope that the connections made through the Befriending Scheme bring you the comfort, support and strength that everyone deserves. Your resilience continues to inspire us all.

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



A Parent's Story:

Their Experience with the Befriending Scheme

My calls with my Befriender have been an absolute god send, genuinely. She listens to every word despite the fact I can sometimes waffle on, she listens, and she remembers everything I've told her. She has been instrumental in making me feel seen, heard and not alone.

Our phone calls give me that little piece of "normality" in life, it feels like I'm speaking to a colleague or a friend, as me the person, not just mum. My child being non-verbal and me being on my own, means sometimes I can go a couple of days without verbally speaking to someone (by that I mean an actual back & forth conversation rather than essentially just talking AT my child and getting nothing back). I do speak to my mum and dad most days but it's usually by texting so to have a full conversation for an hour is just so lovely - I really value that. We always have something to have a really good chat about, even when we've been having a good week and there are no dramas to share, and I think that's why I feel like I'm talking to a friend, it's not a case of "oh you've had a good week, great, I'll call you next week then". She's been here for it all, we've laughed, I've cried, I've had days where I've been ranting about things, angry, upset, happy, she just takes it in her stride, and I ALWAYS come off the phone feeling a huge sigh of relief and happy having spoken to her.

I was really quite hesitant to join the service because I didn't know if I'd feel awkward talking to someone I didn't know but when we first started talking, my Befriender just had a wonderful way of coaxing conversation out of me and before I knew it, I felt like I could say anything, there are never any awkward silences. She is super flexible, there have been numerous times I've had to cancel or move to another day and again, she just accepts it for what it is, she never makes me feel bad for it.

I think the thing I love most about her is the way she celebrates the little things with me. Life's little wins! I often send her videos of things my child has done (that to parents of neurotypical children, probably seem insignificant) but she just gets it, she gets how big these things are for us, and she is always so delighted that I've shared those things with her.

My Befriender is one of those people in life that is an absolute wealth of information and knowledge and if she doesn't know the answers, she knows who to ask to get the answers! There have been a few times I've asked her things, and she gets back to me with an answer ASAP and when you feel lost and unsure, having someone like that is absolutely invaluable!

She has a wonderful way of making me feel like 'super mum' even on days where I feel like I'm failing my child, she picks me back up with reassurance and positivity, it has truly been a joy to speak to her.

This scheme honestly makes such a huge difference to families.

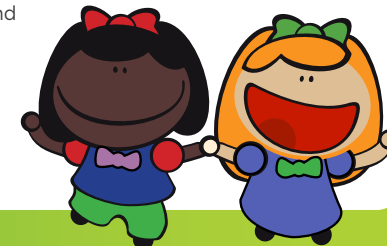


PODS Buddy Scheme

We understand that it can feel overwhelming and even a little scary for new families and parent carers to attend our social support groups, events, workshops, and other activities. Whether you're new to PODS or an existing member, walking into a room full of people who might already know each other can feel intimidating. You might worry about where to sit, whether anyone will speak to you, or if you'll feel out of place. That's why we have the PODS Buddy Scheme, a friendly, supportive service designed to help make your first steps into our groups and events easier and more welcoming. Our PODS Buddies are parent carers who have all been in your shoes. They understand how difficult it can be to take that first step, and they're here to make sure you feel supported, welcome and comfortable. Before the event or group, your Buddy will reach out to you to make arrangements of where to meet. On the day, they'll meet you either outside or at the door, walk in with you, and stay by your side throughout the event as if you've attended with a friend. They'll introduce you to other parent carers, help you feel at ease, and ensure you don't feel alone.

Our Buddies are here to help you become a part of the wider PODS family, offering you reassurance every step of the way.

If you'd like to find out more or have a PODS Buddy, please don't hesitate to get in touch. We're here for you! All you need to do is contact, Kerrie via email: kerrie@podstelford.org or call: 07309 753044.



PODS Counselling Service

PODS Counselling Service offers help and support that is specifically designed for parent carers of children and young people with a disability or additional need. We understand that the emotional and physical demands of caring for a child with special needs can be challenging and can sometimes feel overwhelming. That's where PODS Counselling Service can step in to provide that valuable support for parents and carers, helping them to work towards achievable goals to get them on the right path to wellness.

We know that parent carers often face emotional challenges themselves, leaving them feeling anxious, frustrated, isolated and lonely. Our Counselling service provides a safe space for parent carers to talk about how they feel and share their experiences. It is designed to help parent carers navigate the emotional complexities of caring for a child with a disability.

The service has proved valuable for parent carers who feel isolated or unsure of how to cope with the unique difficulties they face. Many parent carers can find it hard to share their experiences with friends or family, but our trained counsellor can offer non-judgmental support. Our Counsellor has experience in SEND, LD and Autism and is ACCPH registered. All sessions will be tailored to your unique circumstances.

PODS Counselling Service offers a range of benefits for parent carers, including:

EMOTIONAL
SUPPORT

STRESS
RELIEF

COPING
STRATEGIES

IMPROVED
WELL-BEING

Individual counselling sessions start from £35. Parent carers can self-refer into the service, meaning they don't need to go through a professional to access it. Once referred, they will have the opportunity to meet with our trained counsellor to have a free 30-minute initial consultation.

Parent carers can often feel as though they must put their own needs aside in order to care for their child or young person. PODS Counselling service ensures that parents are not alone and helps them to prioritise their own emotional health.

To request an initial consultation or for more information on our Counselling service please contact, Kerrie Seagrave, Member Support Co-ordinator:

Email: kerrie@podstelford.org **Telephone:** 07309 753044.

Quote from a parent carer that has accessed Counselling through PODS...

"Excellent sessions, initially I tried to get through things alone, then I took the brave step - that I'm so proud of to book sessions. It's helped me so much, with my anxieties, confidence and wellbeing. One to one has helped me so much I remember key points Kerrie has told me to use in my day to day life when I need it and it helps.

Kerrie's SEN knowledge greatly helped in my sessions, it's a journey, there may be some ups and downs but worth the journey and end result. I'm Stronger - I try not to doubt myself so much. I'm happier, healthier I know it's OK to not be ok at times but what's impacted me a lot is my increased energy levels since the sessions, having more strength, and holding onto more positive thoughts. I highly recommend it, it's OK to feel worried, if you are unsure whether to give it a go and pay - for me it has definitely been worth it!"



PODS Perinatal & Infant Disability Support

I'm Louise and PODS Perinatal & Business Support Co-ordinator, I have gained a wealth of experience in my journey, we had a postnatal diagnosis of complex needs shortly after my son's birth. Now all my children are in school I hope to create a difference in my role to ensure no one has to go through this journey alone, like my family.

Over the past year, we have continued to develop our perinatal and infant offer, we have warmly welcomed and assisted numerous families across Telford & Wrekin through our peer-led program.

This year I plan to continue ensuring no family are left feeling unsupported. I will do this by continuing to offer guidance and compassion for the journey ahead, I am here to provide a listening ear, attend appointments, visit at home, explain unknown jargon and offer practical advice. Whatever families may face, every step of the way I will be available.

No matter what challenges arise, I will be there to ensure families feel cared for and valued. Supporting families is a cause close to my heart, and I am grateful for the wonderful connections made this year. I look forward to further enhancing and growing this essential service in the year ahead.

If you or a family you know have a child aged 2 or under and they could benefit from my support, please contact me on louise@podstelford.org or 07767975592



Blossom & Bloom

This year, PODS have had the pleasure of introducing a new SEND Stay & Play session: Blossom & Bloom, tailored specifically for children aged 0-5. We opened our doors for the first time on the 17th of September, and since then, have welcomed some truly wonderful families into our space.

Our SEND Stay & Play sessions run every Tuesday from 10:00 am to 11:30 am during term time, offering a fun and engaging environment where children can explore, play, and learn. Each week, the activities are designed around a unique theme, keeping things fresh and exciting for both the children and their parents.

In addition to the hands-on activities, we occasionally welcome special visitors to share valuable information from external services. For example, Talking Childcare has recently joined us to provide extra support and guidance. These expert visits are designed to offer families helpful resources and insights that support their children's learning and development.

While the children enjoy the structured activities, parents and caregivers also benefit from the opportunity to connect with others in the same boat. Over a warm cup of tea, they can share experiences, exchange advice, and build meaningful friendships.

At Blossom & Bloom, we believe that these sessions are more than just playtime—they're a chance for both children and their families to feel supported, included, and part of a warm community. We're so excited to continue growing together with the families who join us each week.



Blossom & Bloom

Blossom & Bloom is a stay and play session for infants and pre-schoolers with SEND aged 0-5.

Fun activities every week, come have a coffee, meet other parents in our welcoming and inclusive environment.

Every Tuesday during term-time 10-11.30 at
PODS Hub, 1 Hawksworth Road, Central Park,
Telford Tf29TU



By Andrea Nelson, DEI and Community Engagement Manager, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust

In 2024, the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust launched 'Here to Help', a long-term project to improve access to our museums for people with additional needs.

We had already rolled out Sunflower training to front-of-house staff, and 2024 was the opportunity to expand our range of services for audiences with hidden disabilities and SEND. The Trust, a heritage conservation and education charity, put together a project team of representatives from across departments to work on this – with PODS' support along the way!

A highlight of the project, in December, was a Calm Christmas grotto at Blists Hill Victorian Town, made possible by external funding and dedicated to children or young people with SEND. Sessions were longer, parents could talk to the Trust in advance about what adaptations could be made to suit their child's needs and the staff were specially selected as they had knowledge of SEND. The sessions on the weekend before Christmas sold out and we had brilliant feedback from parents.

At the same time, thanks to funding received from three private trusts and foundations, we also launched sensory bags for visitors at Blists Hill Victorian Town. The brightly coloured bags, which feature the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust and Sunflower Scheme branding, were provided by MyWorkWear, a company in Telford. They contain items including ear defenders, pop fidgets, spiky light up balls, squeeze stress balls, a wooden kaleidoscope, and wooden twist and lock blocks, all specially chosen to soothe visitors to the museum who may become stressed, agitated or anxious due to sensory input or overload.

Our next major project is the creation of a Sunflower Room at Blists Hill Victorian Town, a calm space at Blists Hill (the Trust's biggest and busiest museum) where diverse groups of people can find privacy and quiet. It is expected to be used by people with special educational needs and disabilities, mental and physical health conditions. It is also available to parents who wish to breast feed or bottle feed young children in a quiet space. It will contain sensory toys and equipment, sensory tents, ear defenders and baby changing mats, among other things.

Throughout the year the Trust has called on PODS for support and advice, from training members of our staff and volunteers to giving advice on specific projects. We look forward to continuing to work with PODS and PODS families in 2025!



Ironbridge Gorge Museum Passes

IRONBRIDGE
Valley of Invention

We are delighted to once again be offering our members access to the renowned Ironbridge Gorge Museums, made possible through our ongoing collaboration with the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust. So, if you're seeking something to do over the weekend or during school holidays, why not explore the option of borrowing our passes? The passes grant you access to the all of museums listed below, providing a fantastic and cheap way to spend your family time.

The pass allows you to visit:

- Blists 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 (parking charges may apply) 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 and also gain a discount in some of the shops and food outlets.

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 passes are returned by the agreed date.

Max Card

This year we continue to be a distributor for the Max Card scheme. For those of you that are unfamiliar with Max Cards or unsure about their benefits, allow us to provide some clarity. The Max Card is specifically designed to enhance the affordability of family outings for those with children who have 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. Savings can range from a few pounds all the way up to gaining free entry at some venues.

For an up-to-date 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, please note the way in which to redeem the offer varies for each venue so please follow the instructions on the website. It's vital to note that Max Cards cannot be brought online; they are exclusively available in person 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 (**please note: from the 1st April 2025, Max Cards will cost £4.50**) 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 Kerrie via email at kerrie@podstelford.org.



Happy Healthy Active Holiday Scheme

This year we have further developed our SEND specific holiday scheme, with support from Telford & Wrekin's school holiday funding offer. Following on from the last few years success, we held sessions through the Easter, Summer and Christmas holidays and as well as engaging activities and new experiences, all sessions included lunch for the children and young people.

During Easter holidays they took part in Easter crafts and Egg hunts, we also visited the Lego and Sealife centres in Manchester and Telford's own Hoo Zoo.

Over the Summer holidays we were fortunate enough to be able to facilitate a total of 15 sessions, these included coach trips to Rhyl, Apley play barn, Conkers and The Tramway Museum, alongside these we ran weekly trips to Blist Hill Museum and held inhouse sessions at our Hub which included Gardening, a Tech & games session, Cake decorating and a Craft session.

Over Christmas we started off with a Yule log decorating session, followed by a visit to Blists Hill and finishing off with a trip to Airea 51. These sessions were well attended and a pleasure to facilitate.

At the time of writing this we are unsure of the funding options available for this year, however rest assured we have plans afoot to deliver some form of sessions throughout the holidays.



Calvert Lakes

Founded in 1976, The Lake District Calvert Trust is the inspiration of John Fryer-Spedding, whose vision was to enable people with disabilities to benefit from outdoor activities in the countryside.

Calvert Lakes provides adventure breaks and holidays for people with disabilities. They help children and adults with a range of disabilities overcome challenges and experience the benefit of the great outdoors. They have a fully accessible building with a sensory room, mobile hoists and adapted activities, ensuring that everyone is included despite any barriers or limitations they may face.

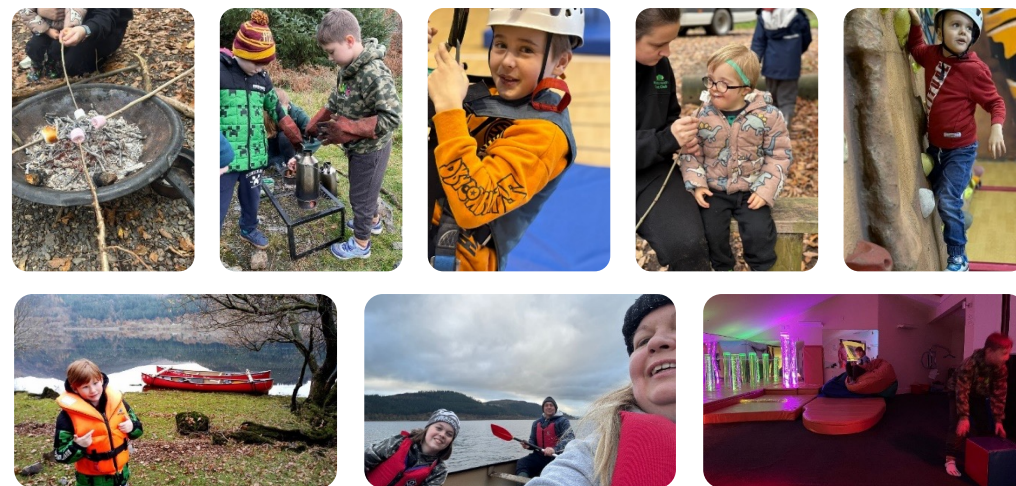
Their highly-trained staff use experience and empathy to break down barriers and truly connect with people, creating a fun, inclusive environment that gives them the confidence to try new things.

At the Beginning of November PODS took some families along to Calvert Lakes, for an action packed weekend. They took part in swimming, canoeing, rock climbing, bushcraft, abseiling, and went on giant swings, finishing off their day in the games room of an evening where they played table tennis, table football and pool.

One family said after the trip "What an amazing adventure weekend in the Lakes, an amazing place, I felt so emotional that even Isaac being physically disabled and wheelchair bound was included and took part in everything. Thank you PODS you really are an amazing group x"

Another parent commented "I think it is clear that Calvert are amazing how they can facilitate engage and include individuals with more challenging needs in their activities - adventure holidays for all to enjoy"

We are currently researching funding options to help subsidise another trip, making it more affordable for families. We estimate costs would be around £150 per person for 3 days/2 nights, this includes all activities, accommodation, equipment and all meals, please note that transport is NOT included. Places will be extremely limited, if you would be interested in coming along, please email elaine@podstelford.org to register your interest.



Open Day

2024 saw PODS hold their second open day, which again was a resounding success, inviting families old and new to meet the dedicated team and put a face to the name. It allowed them to explore the amazing facilities on offer and provided an insight into the array of services and support available. As a more relaxed and fun event it helped by breaking down barriers to members who may have struggled to access our facilities and team previously, highlighting to them the welcoming and non-judgemental environment.

The day 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 Fodens Solicitors. This collaborative approach ensures that families have access to a comprehensive network of support, tailored to their unique needs.

As with last year our attendance far outweighed our estimate, with approximately 150-200 people attending. The overwhelming turnout showcased the community's enthusiasm and eagerness to engage with the services we offer. It is a fantastic achievement to be able to reach out to so many families ensuring they are aware of the services available to them and the ability to establish connections.

Families were able to purchase refreshments such as, hot dogs, drinks and doughnuts whilst the Children enjoyed taking part in the day's activities, such as a bouncy castle, face painting, circus tricks, photobooth and a quiz all about the PODS team.

As we reflect on yet another successful Open Day, we are enthusiastic and inspired to continue developing further 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, we hope to see you there.



Contact us:

01952 726111 | fodens.co.uk
info@fodens.co.uk

Here at Fodens we've really enjoyed getting to know the PODS families and the PODS team. You may have seen us at one of our legal clinics at the centre or one of the open days, you may even have had a little trip on the Fodens bus at the open day.

Supporting our local community is really important to us as an organisation and we have been really moved by the hardwork of the PODS team to support families in Telford. We realise that life is unpredictable at the best of times, we are here to offer legal services to help and support you through life's challenges. We offer legal services in property and private client matters.

Our property experts can help you when you are buying, selling or transferring your home, but our expertise also extends to commercial property matters too.

Whilst our private client services help prepare you and your loved ones for every step of life, including Wills, Lasting Powers of Attorney and assisting in administering an estate when a loved one passes away.

Making a Will is one of the most important legal steps you can take to make sure that those who depend on you are looked after when you are gone. This is particularly true when a loved one who depends on you may have higher needs to be considered.

Using a legal adviser that will take the time to understand your individual circumstances is absolutely key. Outright gifts to beneficiaries may not be the best option if the loved one is in receipt of benefits that you may have fought long and hard to secure. The beneficiary may also lack the capacity to manage their own finances. As such, it is important to explore how you can ensure that loved ones are looked after, it may be that a trust can be a good way of continuing to provide for a family member well into the future.

Whilst Wills can make provisions for dealing with your affairs after you have passed away, a Lasting Power of Attorney is vital to ensure that someone you trust is legally able to make decisions on your behalf if you are unable to. Having Attorneys in place who really understand your family dynamic and the needs of your family members is really important.

Lifetime trusts might also be a consideration to help provide for loved ones with additional needs.

Nobody knows for certain what will happen from one day to the next, but we're here to provide help and advice on how best to plan for the future regardless of what lies around the corner.

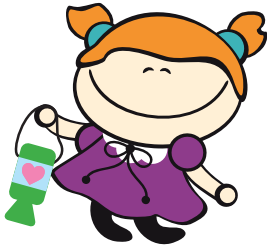
Find out how we can help and talk to one of our professionals today.



PODS Fundraising

Fundraising is a vital component of supporting Charity organisations like PODS, and the success of these often relies on the dedication of both organisers and donors. PODS, in its commitment to making a positive impact, has embraced various fundraising strategies, including fun events, online raffles, in-person raffles at events, fundraising stalls, tabletop Sales, even staff and PODS members taking part in charity runs and mountain climb.

The PODS community's collective efforts, along with the generosity of numerous donors, have allowed the Charity to flourish and drive meaningful change. As we progress, our ongoing success will depend on blending innovative fundraising strategies with the steadfast dedication of our donors.



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 Social Support Groups for Parent Carers

PODS remains dedicated to supporting families with children and young people who have disabilities and/or additional needs. Our Social Support Groups are designed to offer support and advice in a non-judgmental, friendly environment, helping members better understand their child's or young person's needs, learn about the various services available to them and feel less isolated.

Our Social Support Group at Blists Hill continues to be particularly popular, especially among new families. This group provides an opportunity for parents and carers to enjoy the outdoors and connect with other parent carers over coffee while their children are at school.

Another popular group was the Tile Decoration session, during which the parent carers enjoyed exploring their creative sides. These sessions reminded us of the importance of taking time for ourselves, something we often forget as parent carers.

To celebrate Carers Day, we hosted an Afternoon Tea for parent carers. The event was lively and provided a much-needed opportunity for relaxation and enjoyment. Additionally, our quarterly Mental Health drop-in sessions offer a non-judgmental space for parents and carers to chat. During these sessions, many have found mindfulness colouring to be a calming and relaxing activity.

In our final group session, we had a wonderful time decorating cakes with Christmas themes. The session was messy but thoroughly enjoyable, with some Home School families joining in with their children.

Our Social Support Groups continue to provide valuable opportunities for members to connect, discuss the challenges their children face and learn about the support and advice available, all within a friendly and relaxed environment.



PODS Activity Sessions

At PODS, we offer a diverse range of after-school clubs throughout the week, all hosted at the PODS Hub. Our weekly schedule includes Stop Motion Club on Mondays, Minecraft Club on Tuesdays, Lego Club on Wednesdays and Themed activities on Thursdays and Saturdays.

Minecraft Club provides children with a collaborative platform to work together, solve problems, and express their creativity. Activities such as building, minigames, and mining foster social interaction and boost confidence.

Stop Motion Club allows children to unleash their creativity through stop motion animation. These engaging sessions help them develop storytelling skills by creating unique animated videos using objects like Lego bricks, minifigures, and hand drawings. The club also promotes qualities such as sharing, patience, and peer support.

On Thursdays and Saturdays, children enjoy a variety of activities including games, crafts, pizza making, trains, construction, and visits to Blists Hill. We also organize trips to ice skating and soft play sessions, offering children diverse sensory experiences both indoors and outdoors.

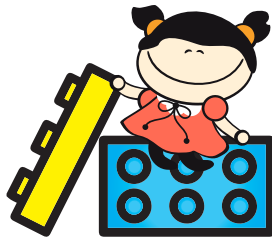


PODS Lego Club

The Lego Club offers children the opportunity to construct models using Lego bricks, discuss their creations, enhance their listening skills, and practice patience while waiting for their turn.

The club is held weekly at the PODS Hub during term time. Children eagerly share their builds and observe their peers' creations. The club's non-judgmental environment fosters the development of social and communication skills through various Lego-based games and activities. The sessions provide a fun and engaging atmosphere, making children enthusiastic about attending and participating. In one of the sessions, we also had a special visit from a therapy dog, Pepper, which was loved by all the children. This visit added an extra layer of joy and comfort to the session, further enhancing the positive experience for everyone involved. The presence of a therapy dog aided in the children feeling less anxious and calmer in the session.

The Lego Club continues to provide a platform for creative expression in a supportive and enjoyable setting.

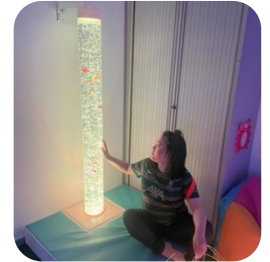


PODS Sensory Sessions

In 2024 our sensory sessions continued within our PODS Hub dedicated sensory space, these proved to be as popular as ever. We cater for children and young adults of all ages with dedicated sessions for preschool 0-5 years, primary, secondary and adult sessions. Our sessions are designed to offer engagement, relaxation and a calming environment. These activities foster development in various areas, including social, cognitive and fine motor skills. Sensory play is a well-received method, that aids children and young adults in understanding their emotions and the world whilst helping to reduce anxiety and social isolation.

Through fundraising and a recent grant from NewLife Charity we are continuously improving our sensory rooms offer and equipment. Sessions run Mondays & Wednesdays after school whilst pre-school sessions run on a Friday morning.

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



Parent Story 'Toby' by Dawn de Haan

I created this fabric art piece on my sewing machine with scrap fabrics and net for my nine-year-old son, Toby, it hangs next to his pillow and brings him comfort because it's about him.

A little about Toby -

He loves 'The Starry Night' painting by Vincent Van Gogh, Japanese Cherry Blossoms', nature and stargazing. These interests are reflected in this art piece I created. Also, he is always the first to point out a rainbow and the Wrekin on the way home from our adventures. The whale was an addition from some scrap fabric from Wrekin Sewing Bee to symbolise whale song. I can envision Toby singing or softly humming with the whales while gazing at the stars. Toby is Autistic and he loves to sing or hum to himself always, although not in a crowd. He especially likes Rick Astley, with "Never Gonna Give You Up" being his favourite song. The musical notes in the binding surrounding this art piece represent Toby's beautiful singing voice and his deep connection to music which helps with his self-regulation. Toby likes to hide a lot and prefers not to be noticed by people outside his immediate family. This art piece depicts Toby hiding behind blooms, showing a sense of happiness and contentment away from the humdrum, noise and too many people! He also loves Ice Cream; you'll find a cute button. His favourite flavour is bubblegum.



You might notice that the binding has a mistake and is a bit wobbly. I considered correcting it, but decided to leave it as a reminder that it's okay to make mistakes. Toby hasn't even noticed, and he still loves it. I included roosters in this art piece because our surname means "rooster" and this is part of his identity. The rooster weathervane in the moon spins in all directions, just like our Toby having worn a hole in our rug (true story!). Also, we recently went to Calvert Lakes in the Lake District thanks to PODS and Toby's favourite activity on the Saturday was spinning on the spinny swing under his own momentum. Spin, Spin, Spin. Both Toby and myself are diagnosed Autistic, along with 2 of his brothers and most likely his adult sister who is on the pathway. It's just who we are and we're all different. On the rear of this art piece is a fabric pocket which I designed to put little loving supportive paper notes in for Toby's eyes only.

Designed and Made by Dawn de Haan



PODS Events & Trips 2024

2024 was filled with fun, creativity, and community spirit as we embark on a series of exciting charity events and trips, here's a sneak peek at what went on:

Volunteers' Afternoon Tea: We treated our wonderful PODS volunteers to a sit-down afternoon tea; this was a time for us to say thank you to them for their support and dedication in helping to make a difference to our families and community.

Valentine's Crafts: Love was in the air in February with our Valentine's Crafts event. Families join us for a relaxing, enjoyable, creative crafts session, we made beautiful handmade gifts, cards and cookies.

Telford Balloon Festival: as always, we were thrilled to be part of the Telford Balloon Festival, bringing our sensory tents to provide a safe and calming space for families. If your young ones feel overwhelmed, our tents offered a peaceful retreat where they can relax and enjoy the festival at their own pace.

Coach Trip to Tramway Village in Crich: in the crisp Autumn air we hopped on board for a memorable coach trip to the Tramway Village in Crich. Explored the historic trams, enjoy the scenic views, and took a step back in time. It was a fantastic outing for all ages, combining education and entertainment.

Halloween Pumpkin Workshop: We kicked off the spooky season with our Halloween Pumpkin Workshop! Families come together to carve and decorate pumpkins, creating masterpieces that lit up the night. It's a perfect way to get into the Halloween spirit.

Look out and join us for more fantastic events and trips this year and help us make a difference in our community. Your participation and support mean the world to us, and we can't wait to share these special moments with you!



Easter 2024: An Egg-ceptional Adventure!

This Easter at PODS was bursting with egg-citement, fun, and unforgettable moments! We kicked things off with a delightfully messy Easter bonnet and cooking session that had everyone laughing, creating, and tasting their way into the holiday spirit.

THREE EPIC DAY TRIPS

Legoland & Sea Life Manchester:

Our first adventure was a combined trip to Legoland and Sea Life in Manchester. At Legoland, kids unleashed their creativity by building speedy Lego cars to race on the crash ramp, constructing colourful houses, and crafting their imaginative masterpieces. After a fun-filled morning, we headed to Sea Life, where magic awaited. From standing in the skeletal jaws of a shark to touching a starfish and wandering through the underwater tunnel surrounded by turtles, fish, and sharks, the awe on the children's faces was priceless.



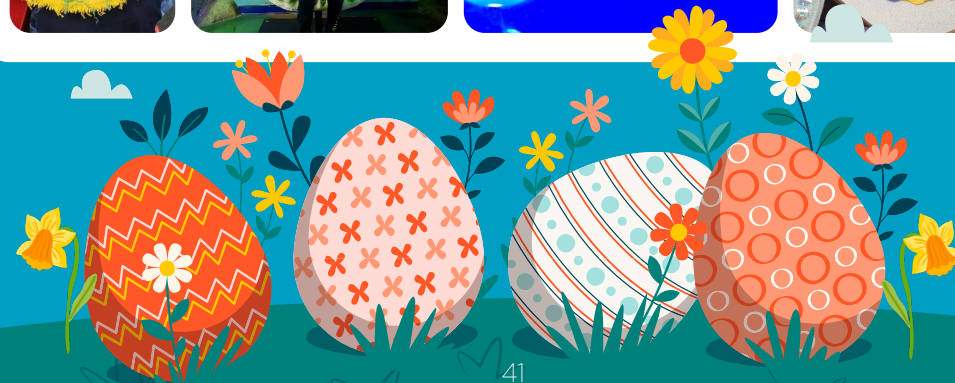
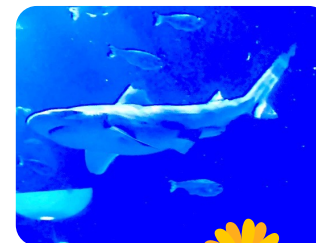
Hoo Zoo in Telford:

Next, we ventured to Hoo Zoo, where families got up close and personal with a delightful variety of animals. From cuddly bunnies and curious cats to scaly lizards and cheeky meerkats, there was something for everyone! The excitement continued outdoors as kids raced around the play area, bounced on the giant jumping pillow, and zipped down the thrilling zip wire.

Blists Hill Victorian Town:

Our final trip was a journey back in time to Blists Hill Victorian Town. Children stepped into the past, exchanging modern money for shillings at the bank, marvelling at quirky remedies in the pharmacy, and learning the art of candle-making. Experienced a strict Victorian school lesson—shhh, no talking allowed! Of course, no trip was complete without a visit to the old-fashioned sweet shop, bakery, and chippy, followed by a runaround at the fantastic accessible playground.

To top it all off, every child who joined our Easter events received a special chocolate treat, thanks to the generous Asda Donnington customers who contributed to our trolley collection.



Picnic in the Park 2024

This year's Picnic in the Park Fun Day was spectacular! The much-loved annual event surpassed all expectations, drawing a record-breaking crowd of over 900 people for a day brimming with joy, laughter, and a celebration of togetherness.



Hosted once again at the expansive grounds of Charlton School, the new venue proved to be the perfect setting for this vibrant community gathering. With its wide-open spaces and lush greenery, the school provided an idyllic backdrop where families and friends could relax, connect, and revel in the lively atmosphere. Picnic spots dotted the grounds, and the air buzzed with the excitement of outdoor festivities, creating an unforgettable day of fun and unity for all who attended.

PODS Picnic in the Park is a celebration of community, connection, and joy! Families, friends, and neighbours from all walks of life came together to create a vibrant atmosphere filled with laughter, shared moments, and a true sense of unity. The event brought together people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds, making it a beautiful melting pot of diversity and camaraderie.

Every detail was thoughtfully planned to ensure there was something for everyone. Kids and adults alike enjoyed timeless favourites like face painting, slime-making, and bouncy castles, while more adventurous spirits explored the climbing wall, circus workshop, and adapted bikes. Highlights of the day included an immersive interactive dome, a gaming van, exotic pets, football skills sessions, and even a visit from emergency services! Charlton School's spacious and accessible facilities provided the perfect setting, ensuring everyone could enjoy the day to the fullest. The inclusion of the Mobiloo meant that attendees with additional care needs could stay longer and make the most of the festivities.

Of course, no picnic is complete without amazing food, and PODS Picnic in the Park delivered in style. Guests were treated to delicious picnic boxes, warm tea and coffee, and mouthwatering cakes, adding a tasty touch to an already unforgettable day.



This was truly an event to remember, capturing the essence of community, charity, and celebration. With huge thanks to our amazing volunteers and staff and Charlton School.



Christmas 2024

This year's Christmas events were nothing short of spectacular, filled with joy, laughter, and a sprinkle of magic! The festive season kicked off with a series of enchanting activities that brought families together in the most delightful ways.

Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus, and their merry band of elves made special appearances throughout the festivities, spreading cheer and wonder. Children's eyes lit up with excitement as they met Santa and shared their Christmas wishes. Even the Grinch graced us with his playful antics on the dance floor.

Family Parties with DJ Dancing and Delicious Food

Two grand family parties were the highlight of the season. With a lively DJ spinning festive tunes, families danced the night away, creating unforgettable memories. The air was filled with the aroma of delicious food, and everyone enjoyed a feast fit for a king. Santa and Mrs. Claus handed out presents, adding to the joy and excitement. The surprise appearance of the Grinch on the dance floor led to hilarious and wild dancing.

A Quieter Tea Party with Gentle Music

For those seeking a more serene celebration, the quieter tea party was a perfect choice. Gentle music set the mood as families enjoyed a visit from Santa in a more relaxed setting. The tables were adorned with wonderful festive cakes, and the atmosphere was filled with warmth and cheer.

A Calm and Quiet Santa Experience

Understanding the needs of all families, a special quiet Santa experience was organized. Without music or flashing lights, this event provided a calm environment where families could visit Santa without any waiting. Each family was given a time slot, ensuring a stress-free and enjoyable experience for the young ones and their parents.

This Christmas season was truly magical, offering something special for everyone. From lively parties to serene gatherings, the events brought the community together in celebration of the most wonderful time of the year.



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



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