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## **Not business as usual, but certainly busyness as usual...**

While so many aspects of life are beginning to move forward, Family Voice Norfolk is attending an increasing number of meetings as almost everything moves online. We have become used to the different strengths of Teams, Zoom and some more exotic platforms.

Of huge importance to us is the fact that while we are meeting with professionals online, you are meeting with us online. We are grateful to everyone who takes the time to share information or anxieties in our closed Facebook group or via our Let’s talk... sessions. Everything you tell us is useful as we inform decision makers and commissioners about the realities of the lives of families with children and young people with SEND. We would never reveal your identity unless you asked us to, and make sure that no identifying details are passed on.

In this newsletter, you can find information that may be of use to your family, an insight into how we use what you tell us (and how vital that is), a special feature on support for young carers, and news of some of the key meetings we have contributed to in the last month.



## Norfolk County Council Adult Social Services – Your Voice survey

As we have faced the COVID-19 pandemic, many services from Adult Social Services have had to change to keep staff and service users safe. These include day services, nursing care, support for carers, personal assistants and more.

Adult Social Services want to hear about your experiences of these services during lockdown – either as a service user yourself or as a carer for someone who uses them. This short survey, which should take **no longer than five minutes**, will help NCC to plan how services are delivered in the future.

You can find the survey at <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/O6N57A/>

The survey ends at **midnight on 8 July 2020**.

## Minimum Income Guarantee

Young adults receiving Direct Payments were due to see further changes to the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) this year. This is how much 'income', even if solely from benefits, they could receive before they had to start contributing themselves to the cost of services that NCC had agreed they required under the Care Act 2014. NCC took the decision to mitigate the 2020 changes to the MIG and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) for four months at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The Government has indicated that it will look at the issue of funding reform as part of national changes and both local authorities and parent carer forums are calling on ministers to bring that forward as soon as possible. Provided this is done within a reasonable timescale, NCC has undertaken to continue the mitigation for the foreseeable future, subject to the financial demands on the council.

## Face coverings on public transport

From 15 June 2020, you must wear a face covering on public transport in England. You will be breaking the law if you fail to do so and could be fined. However, there are some people that this rule does not apply to:

- children under 11
- if you have a physical or mental illness or impairment, or a disability that means you cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering
- if putting on, wearing or removing a face covering would cause you severe distress
- if you are travelling with, or providing assistance to, someone who relies on lip reading to communicate
- if you are travelling to avoid injury or

escape the risk of harm, and you do not have a face covering with you

- if you need to remove it during your journey to avoid harm or injury or the risk of harm or injury to yourself or others
- if you need to eat, drink, or take medication, you can remove your face covering
- if you are asked to remove your face covering by a police officer or other official, for example to check your railcard

You can download a card to explain why you are not wearing a mask at [https://www.firstgroup.com/uploads/node\\_images/face-covering-exemption-extra-help-travel-assistance-card-12-06-20.pdf](https://www.firstgroup.com/uploads/node_images/face-covering-exemption-extra-help-travel-assistance-card-12-06-20.pdf)



## Virtual School SEND Forums

Recently Family Voice ambassadors attended a **Virtual School SEND Forum**, for head teachers, SENCOs and professionals within educational settings. Held via Zoom at the moment, this is a great place to hear how other settings are using good practice to support their children and young people. Having heard from many of you in our new Family Voice Members Chat Room and at our 'Let's talk...' sessions, we were able to share (anonymously, of course) the thoughts and fears families are having at this time, thinking about the return to school and what they would like to see put in place to support their child or young person.

The Virtual School gave a fantastic presentation on the **provision expected at SEN Support** (PEaSS), which parents can also access at <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/children-and-families/send-local-offer/education-and-training-0-25/special-educational-provision-we-expect>. This was an area that was identified at the recent Ofsted/CQC SEND inspection as needing improvement. They also showed the new Individual Needs Descriptors for schools to use when assessing children for SEN Support needs and EHCP assessment.

Another topic was the importance of preparing a student when transitioning from one educational setting to another. Norfolk Educational Psychology & Specialist Support (EPSS) has some very useful resources for schools and families to use, including a **back-to-school transition pack** with a 'my new school' booklet for students to complete, which helps prepare the student for all the new changes ahead of them. You can find this and much more on their webpage at [www.norfolkepss.org.uk](http://www.norfolkepss.org.uk). Dr Bianca Finger-Berry, the Critical Incident Lead Officer at EPSS, gave a fascinating talk on **trauma and how this affects a child or young person** and how to support them, which at the present time is particularly relevant.

Ambassadors from **Family Voice Norfolk** gave a **presentation on who we are and what we do**. Many educational settings did not realise they could join as affiliate members. They cannot join the Family Voice Members Chat Room or Let's talk... sessions – these are spaces where parent carers can speak freely to each other. But by becoming affiliate members they will hear about the events we organise for families and will be able to share information within their settings. This newsletter is also now sent to schools to share with their families.

Before COVID-19, Family Voice ambassadors would regularly visit educational settings for coffee mornings and events where they could chat to families and hear what was working well for them and what wasn't. Our ambassadors are very experienced and can signpost families to the organisations best suited to support them or offer them advice. As we cannot visit settings at the moment, we are adapting these sessions now and have arranged with some schools to hold virtual coffee mornings via Zoom. This is a fantastic opportunity for educational settings to engage with their families and hear their thoughts and concerns, to work with them to achieve the best outcomes for all children, and for parent carers to feel supported by one another.

We would highly recommend any professionals reading to attend the Virtual School SEND Forums, as they are a fabulous opportunity to gain knowledge and share good practice.

As Family Voice, we look forward to seeing some new faces at the next round of Forums and working with you. Find out more at <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/children-and-families/send-local-offer/about-the-local-offer/news-views-and-reviews/views/get-involved/send-forum-for-sencos>



We look forward to seeing you at the

## Family Voice Norfolk AGM

**Tuesday, 28 July 2020**

**6.30pm to 7.30pm**

The AGM will be held via Zoom, which most people can access and many of you will already have experienced during lockdown. Full joining instructions and AGM paperwork will be supplied after you register.

If you would like to take part, please let Bernadette know at [office@familyvoice.org.uk](mailto:office@familyvoice.org.uk).

If you are unable to join us, AGM paperwork can be viewed on our website shortly before the event. Please don't hesitate to get in touch if there is anything you would like to comment on.

If you are not able to access the online version and would like a hard copy of the paperwork, please let Bernadette know.

### Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) – free online learning

Positive behaviour support (PBS) is a programme for families of children with additional needs produced by Norfolk Community Health and Care and Family Action. It was developed originally to give group support to families of children who had been referred for assessment by a specialist team. These sessions have been developed during the COVID-19 outbreak to offer support to all families with additional needs.

There are six sessions, entitled: Understanding your child's needs and behaviours; The 'Bucket Model' and observing behaviour; Positive behaviour support plan; Communication; Sensory differences and routines; and Repair, reflect and restore. The sessions are free to access on the JustOneNorfolk website at <https://www.justonenorfolk.nhs.uk/childhood-development-additional-needs/behaviour-sleep/positive-behaviour-support-pbs>. There are lots of videos, links and activities to support families. During the sessions you can pause at any time to take part in an activity or take a break.

During the course you will hear the term **neurodevelopmental disorder**, which refers to conditions such as autism (autistic spectrum disorder, ASD), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). It is really important to remember that having a name for your child's condition does not alter how your child behaves.

The course will help you think about the messages your child is trying to communicate to you and give some practical skills and strategies to help you manage your child's behaviour in a positive way.



## Research about young carers during COVID-19

The pressures facing young carers during the COVID-19 pandemic have been revealed in new research by the University of East Anglia (UEA), which Caring Together has supported.

The restrictions of lockdown and the anxiety related to the risks associated with COVID-19 have been central to young carers' difficulties, increasing their caring load, preventing them from getting a break or from turning to their established coping strategies such as spending time with friends, going to school or engaging in a hobby.

Participants in the study spoke about the increased difficulties of managing the practicalities of supporting their families during the restrictions of lockdown, from not being allowed into shops to lack of access to transport. The loss of established routine has also had an impact on the physical and mental health of parents, which in turn has increased the caring burden on young carers.

The research report published in June calls for any child under the age of 18 living with a parent or sibling with substantial disability, physical health needs or mental ill health to be automatically regarded as a young carer during the on-going pandemic and supported accordingly. Also, that the stipulation of both the Care Act 2014 and the Children and Families Act 2014 that no child should undertake inappropriate and/or excessive care be given additional weight within this health crisis.

There are an estimated 800,000 young carers in the UK providing essential care for their families. However in light of COVID-19, health, social care and education systems in place to support and safeguard young carers and their families have had to make radical changes in how they meet the needs of



disabled and vulnerable people, potentially drawing their focus away from the often unheard voices and marginalised needs of young carers.

Over four weeks, the rapid response research project sought the real-time views of young carers, young adult carers, parents and youth workers in a bid to understand their needs and how these are being managed during the pandemic.

The work was led by Dr Kate Blake-Holmes, of UEA's Centre for Research on Children and Families (CRCF), and involved support organisation Caring Together and their lottery-funded Norfolk Young Carers Forum project.

Dr Blake-Holmes said: "The increase of pressure and stress for young carers was palpable within many of the interviews. Participants described not being able to 'get space' to manage their stress, with some describing school as the only place where they could get 'breathing space'.

"The young carers who took part in this study were very aware of the limited resources available to change things in the face of COVID-19 and its associated restrictions. Instead, they gave wider messages that they felt would be beneficial for young carers.

"All felt that awareness needs to be raised about what it means to be a young carer. This awareness raising was important for health, social care and educational services and staff, within the general public, and also, their own peer group.

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Young carers spoke about assessments both for the people they are caring for and themselves having been cancelled. While they understood the rationale for this, the uncertainty about when these would be re-arranged has left them feeling uneasy. Informal support had also been withdrawn, including individual arrangements families relied upon such as shopping delivery and childcare.

The lack of support from friends and wider family was keenly felt by the young carers and their families, while a strong desire for the routine and respite of school was prominent throughout the young carer interviews. Some were struggling to manage the requirements of home learning and described the practical barriers such as having to care for younger siblings or not having a quiet space to be able to study.

As schools reopen, the report recommends that teachers be mindful that some of their class may be young carers and that careful consideration be given to the support they require to return to school and re-establish themselves within the curriculum.

Dr Blake-Holmes said the work of organisations such as Caring Together was also crucial for the health and wellbeing of carers, as they are able to respond to young carers' needs in a flexible and proactive manner without the potential stigma of some statutory services. As such, the value of their work should be recognised and funded.

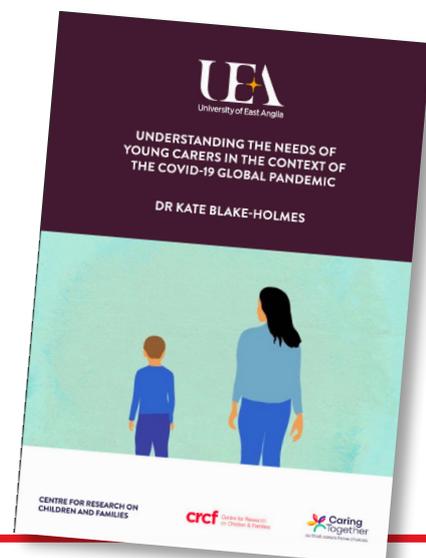
Andy McGowan, head of carer services at Caring Together, said: "We know that the lives of young carers and young adult carers can be very difficult at the best of times. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused additional problems for young carers, while at the same time making it harder for them to access support to help them in their caring roles or get a break from their responsibilities.

"It is essential that children and young people who are young carers are identified at the earliest possible opportunity and given the support that is so essential to them. While funding and resources are vital for this to happen, we also need to see a change in the level of awareness about young carers, their roles and their needs.

"This is particularly important in the context of education, where it is vital to ensure that not only are young carers supported to safely return to education, but also that the attainment gap between them and their peers is not widened as a result of young carers being unable to engage in learning during the pandemic.

"Research like this is vitally important for this to happen. We all have a part to play in supporting young carers and we will be working hard in the coming weeks to raise awareness of the challenges young carers are facing during this crisis and to prevent the imbalance they face in the classroom growing even further."

The report 'Understanding the needs of young carers in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic' is published by the Centre for Research on Children and Families. You can read it in full at <https://www.caringtogether.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/UEA-young-carer-CRCF-COVID-19-final-findings-v1.0.pdf>



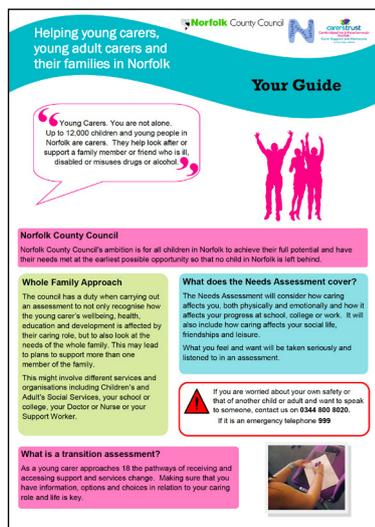
## Young carers: resources and support

Carers Matter Norfolk has a dedicated website for young carers at <https://www.youngcarersmatternorfolk.org/>



As well as the website, there are Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts, all with lots of sources of support and ways to reach out to people who can help and other young carers.

On Norfolk County Council's website at <https://www.norfolk.gov.uk/care-support-and-health/get-help-with-looking-after-someone/young-carers> you can download a *Guide for Young Carers and Families*, which explains that young carers are entitled to



a Needs Assessment, what is involved in having one, and how this might help.

There is also information for young carers turning 18 and becoming adults.

On the Caring Together website at <https://www.caringtogether.org/support-for-carers/young-people/nycf> you can learn more about the Norfolk Young Carers Forum. NYCF gives young carers and young adult carers the opportunity to raise awareness and make a difference about the issues that affect them and their families. After all, no one knows better than young carers themselves about what they really need.

With NYCF, young carers can:

- Meet other young carers who also want to make a difference
- Receive free training to improve skills and confidence
- Influence the direction of the Forum's work
- Work with Norfolk County Council and other relevant organisations
- Help improve awareness of young carers and young adult carers throughout the county
- Discuss issues, such as education and health services, with the people who make decisions
- Take part in local and national initiatives

On the website you can also view videos made with help from NYCF that help to explain to others why their caring role may open young carers up to being misunderstood and how to help them to cope with difficult circumstances.

All these websites have special sections about how COVID-19 has affected services and usual activities, and all these organisations understand that young carers – whether the cared-for person is a parent or a sibling – may have found lockdown even more stressful than for most. There are special arrangements in place to help during this difficult time, so don't hesitate to ask for help when you need it.



## Family Voice Members Chat Room – you said, we did...

Our closed Facebook group called **Family Voice Members Chat Room**, where full members of Family Voice can share freely in a safe environment, is growing in popularity and has already strengthened our contribution in meetings with the local authority, health and voluntary services. Here are some of the topics that have been discussed and how we have been able to carry them forward – always anonymously unless a parent carer specifically grants us permission to give further details.

- **EHCPs and Annual Reviews** – how have you found engaging with EHCP coordinators over the last couple of months?

*TBF pretty good whilst in lockdown, emails are being replied to within in a few hours.*

*Not really sure on how NCC policies work, seems to be no same thing for all coordinators and a lack of communication.*

*She has been really good. Did my son's annual review via Zoom, answers calls and emails.*

*I have continuously contacted my son's EHCP coordinator during this time and have only actually managed to speak to her once. This is Pre-COVID and during ... it is beyond frustrating. Might also be worth mentioning that she never replies to emails either.*

Family Voice Norfolk: a very mixed picture of some excellent practice and some really poor communication. We have fed your experiences (anonymously and removing any identifying detail) back to Nicki Rider, Interim Head of Education High Needs SEND Service, who is very keen to hear the experiences of parent carers. So please, keep telling us what is working or not working for you in the Chat Room.

- **Short Breaks** – your experiences during lockdown

*Very much a struggle – lots to do in Norwich, which is too far to access from Kings Lynn and West Norfolk. Not much at all that I'm aware of so not been able to access anything.*

*The pre-paid card worked well in lockdown when we were allowed to purchase items with it; otherwise we struggled to spend the money as a YP with extreme anxiety doesn't gain a huge amount from 'going places'.*

*I would have distinct reservations about increasing the use of PAs – we found it far too much responsibility in terms of becoming employers. We struggled to recruit anyone...*

*My main point is that DPs [Direct Payments] were meant to give us more choice but ... there are lots of other barriers to our CYP getting the experiences they need.*

*I think all PAs should be interviewed face to face before going on the register (training, DBS, experience verified by NCC) and being used by vulnerable families/adults. As far as I can tell, they are not. ... It feels like far too much of the serious responsibility of ascertaining if someone is suitable to care for such vulnerable children, young people and adults is left to families. Not ok.*

Family Voice: a wide range of comments, of course reflecting the fact that things have been very different for families in lockdown, but also referencing other issues that are problematic for families at any time. Many families have very much appreciated the flexibility of being able to use Short Breaks funding to purchase items for their children during this time. We have fed back to Children's Social Care and would like to thank NAS West Norfolk for their input.

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### ● Dentists

*I've had to cancel my son's last two appointments due to his anxiety and safety risk to the dentist while we are there ... professionals working with us and myself don't feel it's safe. A specialist dentist would be amazing, as many don't understand our children's needs and how to approach them.*

*My child used to see the dentist that came to his special school. It was more of a quick check than a proper examination. A few times, we saw a 'special' dentist who was absolutely fantastic. When my child left school, I tried to sign up to see a 'special' dentist... 'The system has changed' I was told. To see this dentist I would have to sign up with a 'normal' dentist and be referred! ... Not a good experience for me I'm afraid.*

*More specialist dentists would be amazing! We haven't been offered a specialist dentist. I only found out about them back in March at your FV conference. Our current dentist tries to interact with him but they don't get anywhere.*

*My son loves the dentist ... Just a normal dentist – the man is just really good with him, but then it could be because he likes dentist and Dr's etc. I'm unsure but he loves it.*

*I took my son years ago to our high street dentist for his first appointment. Within seconds the dentist realised he wouldn't be able to cope with my son and promptly referred to specialist dental services. We have been with them about 12 years now and I cannot praise them enough.*

Family Voice: this is a subject we are likely to return to as lockdown eases and dental appointments become more accessible (or don't). We have fed back this and further information to the Children and Young People's Health Network meeting.

### ● The Ofsted/CQC Local Area Inspection report

*I'm really pleased they identified the transition age group, it's been a complete cliff edge. I hope the support they offer to ALL SEND young people 18+ increases and they don't remain the forgotten ones.*

*I am concerned that the head of the children's committee said in the EDP things mentioned in the report were historic... they need to be honest with themselves that they aren't and they must address things otherwise things will just carry on as normal.*

*I am pleased that the inspectors report found those three key areas as a concern, as this definitely mirrors our experience!*

*I think the Ofsted/CQC report was spot on! There are some amazing people and services in Norfolk for Young people with SEND. But there are also a lot of confused, frustrated parents who find it extremely difficult to get the help they need.*

Family Voice: parent carer representatives from Family Voice Norfolk and other key parent groups in the county are involved in a series of meetings to address the Written Statement of Action that NCC needs to supply to Ofsted in September. This will guide ongoing work on the three areas of 'significant concern' – the quality and timescales of EHCPs, provision for 18–25-year-olds moving into adult life, and communication and co-production – and other areas that NCC knows need improvement. Our voices are being heard but this is only the beginning – there is a lot of work to do. We will ensure that parent carers' voices are clearly heard and involved.

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● **Mental health** – does support via Zoom work for your family?

*This is a difficult one. My son doesn't have friends per se and any online chat would have to be in his specialist subject and completely dominated by him. But we would love an online mental health appointment opportunity.*

*My son would certainly benefit from going back to school. He's tried a Zoom meeting but really couldn't cope with it. He just doesn't associate school and home at all.*

*We have tried group chats ... and a one on one video call with one of her friends, but she loses interest very quickly. She ends up wandering off leaving my phone (and her friend on the other end!) behind.*

*Our daughter has just officially finished school (nearly 18). She is in high need block and was at complex needs and as much as she struggled with some peers she is missing the YP in residential setting and her static class. She is mighty relieved school has finished but needs interaction with others. NANSAs are conducting Zoom chats with her, which we hope will move towards outdoor meetings. No friends though.*

*Whilst my son had full timetabled lessons and saw other pupils daily via teams, he then messaged friends from school at other times. The lessons have now finished... He would benefit from group chat organised by school. He has a tendency to be quite insular, so needs encouragement to engage with others.*

Family Voice: we have regular meetings with Adult Social Services, where issues are fed back, and also feed back to health and voluntary sector colleagues.

● **Communication and co-production**

*I'd like to see the child and young people's voice heard especially those with more complex needs and communication difficulties.*

*Actual communication would be a start... Us parents always have to chase them and you always get passed person to person and it seems from recent experience the workers don't communicate between one another also.*

*There should also be someone who can advise you about schools and what is appropriate for your child. ... they said they can't recommend as all mainstream are inclusive (even though we have clearly already experienced the opposite). Surely, they should recommend those that are fully inclusive. Otherwise, it's like running around in the dark!*

Family Voice: these issues were fed back in a workshop last week and response to them will be incorporated into the Written Statement of Action for Ofsted.

● **COVID-19 and return to school**

*My son's special school says my son won't cope as it is now has no 6th formers there or familiar teachers so looking at Sept. Where do I stand with employer as I am a key worker but cannot work if my son's not at college?*

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Contd from page 10

*My ASD boy has not had a risk assessment. He loves rules and keen to see they are adhered to so I would think very low risk to others ... The risk of damaging his mental health is entirely another matter ... He is living his best life in lockdown*

Family Voice: we feed back comments about returning to school at weekly meetings with Michael Bateman, Programme Director for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) & Alternative Provision. We understand that what is right for one family is not right for another. We have been encouraging the LA to see that flexibility and true person-centred services are better for everyone.

To join the closed group, go to <https://www.facebook.com/groups/674209366743395/about/>. If you are not yet a full member – membership is free to anyone with a child aged between 0 and 25 with SEND – fill in the form on our website at [www.familyvoice.org.uk](http://www.familyvoice.org.uk).



## Norfolk SEND Partnership (SENDIASS) audio booklets

Norfolk SEND Partnership has a range of booklets, available to download from their website at <https://www.norfolksendpartnershiassi.org.uk>, covering statutory processes within the world of special educational needs and/or disability (SEND) and useful information for parent carers.

Some of these booklets are available in audio versions. Go to <https://www.norfolksendpartnershiassi.org.uk/info-for-parents-carers/audio-information-booklets/> to access them.

Topics available include:

- SEN Support
- Who are we?
- Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP – An overview)
- Education Health and Care Plan – Reading and understanding
- What if I don't agree?
- SEND Mediation and Disagreement Resolution - Information for Families in Norfolk (from Kids SEND Mediation)

## Spending the R budget

At the meeting reported on page 22, Mrunal Sisodia described a way of thinking about the Government's lockdown-easing choices that sheds some light on decisions that otherwise are confusing. We all know that the R number is how many other people a person with COVID-19 on average will infect, and that this number needs to stay under one if the virus is not to spike. Mrunal described the R as being like a budget that the Government can 'spend' in different ways. By spreading the 'spending' and edging forward on several fronts – some children back to school, some leisure venues opening, some travel being possible – more areas can open up. If all the R budget is spent on e.g. all children going to school, then sports, places of worship, shops etc. couldn't reopen. It's a delicate balance and results are not easy to predict.



## Money Support Service and Welfare Rights teams

Money is a big worry for lots of people right now. If you're one of them, did you know that NCC has a Money Support Service and Welfare Rights team?

The **Money Support Service** is available if you're a Norfolk County Council service-user who needs help with budgeting.

Especially at the moment, loss of benefits or a job, a relationship breakdown, an increase in living costs or a need for better budgeting skills can have a sudden negative effect on your finances. If you have an illness or disability, or care for someone who has, money worries can lead to a vicious cycle of deteriorating health and difficulty managing bills.

The Money Support Service can offer help and advice over the phone.

Telephone 01603 223392 (option 4) or email: [MSS@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:MSS@norfolk.gov.uk)

It can offer:

- Budget training, with help to work out your income and outgoings to give you a better understanding of your finances.
- Money advice
- Support to reduce high bills
- Support with referral to debt management agencies
- Support with Disability Related Expenses within financial assessments

- Referrals to the Welfare Rights team to help with complex benefit issues where appropriate.

**Norfolk County Council's Welfare Rights Unit** are continuing to operate. The team is working from home and will not be visiting people, but contact is being made by telephone with conference calls to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) when necessary.

The Unit is still helping people with making claims for benefits, completing claim forms, contacting the DWP and challenging decisions, including appeals. Referrals from individuals with an NCC service or who have had a service in the past can be made direct. The Welfare Rights Unit can also advise organisations on benefits for support of their service users and provide training on benefits.

If you have an urgent case and need to speak to the unit please telephone: 01603 224447. Lines are open 8.30am to 5.00pm. Or you can email: [welfarights@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:welfarights@norfolk.gov.uk)



## family voice newsletter

We don't usually produce a newsletter in August, as so many families are away or taking a break from thinking about education and services. But this year is different and changes are happening daily. So the next newsletter will appear in August 2020. If there are issues that you would like to see covered, please email [comms@familyvoice.org.uk](mailto:comms@familyvoice.org.uk) or leave a message on 07535 895748.





Department  
for Education

## Consultation on School Admissions Code

The Department for Education (DfE) has launched a consultation on a revised version of the School Admissions Code, and would welcome your feedback. The consultation can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-school-admissions-code--4>. The consultation will run until **16 October 2020**.

The proposed changes to the School Admissions Code are intended to support **vulnerable children**. The changes would therefore potentially have significant implications for **children with SEND**. In addition, SEND stakeholders may have a particular interest in a specific recommendation about how the Code should provide for decisions about the admission of children and young people with **challenging behaviour**. The DfE is keen to hear from:

- Local authorities
- Schools, including academies and free schools
- Governing bodies and academy trusts
- Parents/carers

DfE understands that not only is the education sector facing challenges in supporting the country's children to ensure they can access education, but the current COVID-19 outbreak has affected everyone's lives in different ways. In particular, it is concerned that some of our most vulnerable children may experience gaps in their education because they are unable to secure a school place quickly during this unsettled period. The extended consultation period of 16 weeks, running into the autumn term, allows for disruption caused by both the school holidays and the phased re-opening and return to school.

A wholesale review of the admissions system is not proposed. The main round largely works well, but there are problems with the in-year admissions processes. Proposed changes include:

- Introducing a dedicated section in the Code for managing in-year admissions
- Introducing timescales for different stages of the application and decision-making process
- Requiring local authorities and admission authorities to provide information on their websites as to how in-year applications can be made and how they will be dealt with, including providing an application form for parents to complete when applying for a place.
- Requiring admission authorities to provide the LA with details of the number of places available when requested, to enable the LA to help parents identify schools with available places.
- Clarifying that parents must not be refused the opportunity to make an application, must be informed of the outcome of their application in writing, including if applicable the reason for refusal, and must be given information about the right to appeal.

The DfE previously committed to making a change to allow children adopted from state care outside of England the same priority for admissions as domestic looked after and previously looked after children. This consultation also explores this change and seeks to provide further clarity around the admission of service children and children of crown servants, alongside some additional minor drafting changes that will improve existing provisions.

The DfE has also published an **updated statement on the admission of summer-born children**. This is published here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/summer-born-children-school-admission>





## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about SEND support during COVID-19

As reported in the last newsletter, the Council for Disabled Children is publishing FAQs about many issues concerning children with SEND returning to school or receiving other services and the legal duties of local authorities and educational settings.

This is a complex area and parent carers have received varying responses from schools, but the published FAQs (already in the sixth edition) make very interesting reading and are clear in their answers.

You can find them all at <https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/help-resources/resources/frequently-asked-questions>

The answers frequently refer to the Government guidance that can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-send-risk-assessment-guidance> where you can access the latest guidance on 'Supporting children and young people with SEND as schools and colleges prepare for wider opening'.

### School test and trace procedures

If your child returns to school, the setting should inform you what will happen in the event of your child or another pupil starting to show COVID-19 symptoms.



It is important to remember that most people who catch COVID-19 have mild symptoms and get better quite quickly. It is very, very unusual for children to be badly affected.

Make sure your child's school has your up-to-date contact details – phone number, email and address – so that they can keep in touch easily.

There are slightly different systems for if:

- your child becomes ill at home
- your child becomes ill at school
- there is a case at school
- your child has been in 'close contact'
- there is an outbreak (more than two pupils or staff that have been in close contact test positive for the virus)

Your school or setting will give you clear guidance about what to do in all these cases and should keep you informed of what they are doing. If someone becomes ill at school, they won't tell you who – to protect anonymity – but they will tell you the outcome of any tests.

JustOneNorfolk has a section of its website detailing all the procedures above at <https://www.justonenorfolk.nhs.uk/test-trace/school-test-trace>



## Contact advice and information service

**contact** For families with disabled children

Contact, the charity for families with disabled children, has a range of ways to access information and support.

If you or your children are struggling to cope at home there are some useful tips and links at <https://www.contact.org.uk/advice-and-support/covid-19/coping-at-home/>

The new Contact closed parent Facebook page can be joined at <https://www.contact.org.uk/news-and-blogs/new-closed-facebook-group/>

You can also get in touch with Contact's Helpline team in a variety of ways:

<https://www.contact.org.uk/advice-and-support/our-helpline/> also gives a link to Contact's new Family Support 'listening ear' appointments. You might be struggling emotionally and looking for strategies to help you cope. Or maybe you just need to talk to someone who understands the extra challenges you face and who can point you in the right direction to get the support you need for your family. To help, Contact offers 1-to-1 telephone appointments with a family support adviser for parent carers looking for a listening ear, reassurance, and practical and emotional support.

Making an appointment is simple: visit the Eventbright page, choose the day (morning, afternoon or evening), and when you register, choose the time slot you want. Appointments are regularly updated and are subject to availability.

Contact also offers a live chat facility, accessed by clicking on the grey button at bottom right of the screen.

## SEND Tribunal national trial

In April 2018, the Department for Education began a national trial to extend the powers of the SEND Tribunal to hear appeals, and make non-binding decisions about, health and social care aspects of Education, Health and Care plans. The trial was due to end on 31 August 2020. However, given the understandable pressures local areas and families are under as a result of coronavirus, the Government believes it is not the right time to introduce any changes to this policy. It has therefore decided to extend the trial until 31 August 2021.

You can read more at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/extended-powers-send-tribunal-national-trial>

## Easy-read posters

A series of easy-read posters about various aspects of the pandemic is available at <https://www.keepsafe.org.uk>. These are free to download and use.

Please note that these will not be updated from 4 July 2020, so if there is a big change in Government advice, they may no longer be accurate.



## Short Breaks team further update relating to COVID-19

COVID-19 continues to have a significant impact on all services including Short Breaks. Specialist Short Break providers closed down for several months initially and some are planning how to reopen and offer specialist Short Breaks again. The services they will be offering are going to be very different from what they would usually provide, owing to the need for social distancing and ensuring staff and children are all safe in that setting.

In most cases, children will only be able to access a very limited number of sessions this year. The Short Breaks team will continue to work closely with providers who are reopening, to ensure that wherever possible children will be offered some sessions up to 1 September 2020 initially.

As there will not be capacity to meet the needs of more children, the team are not able to make new referrals to specialist Short Break providers at this time. The priority is to ensure that the children who currently receive these services have the opportunity to do so if sessions are available. However, the team will continue to offer the opportunity to all families to have a Direct Payment and will continue to review all services on a regular basis during the pandemic.

The Short Breaks team has therefore decided to continue to offer funding for toys and equipment to children who have a Short Breaks plan in place but who may not be able to access their usual level of services at this time. This offer is planned to continue **up to 31 August 2020**.

Any family with a prepaid debit card who still has funds in their Prepaid Financial Services (PFS) bank account can use the card to buy equipment. This includes outdoor play equipment, books, arts and craft materials, iPads, etc. to a maximum one-off spend of up to £500 per child. This money will be deducted from your Short Breaks funding as usual. Please either keep the receipts or preferably upload them to your PFS account.

If you do not already have a prepaid card, the team can buy items on your behalf. Please contact the Short Breaks team at [cs.shortbreaks@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:cs.shortbreaks@norfolk.gov.uk) and ask for a toys and equipment form or call 01603 692455. Please be aware that remote working means calls cannot always be answered immediately.

The same service can be offered to families of children aged 5 to 17 who submit successful Short Breaks application by 31 August 2020.



### Remember...

We are always keen to hear from you about the services you are receiving or would like to receive, so that we can inform decision-makers about what families really need.

- You can contact our **Membership Secretary Kate** on 07950 302937 or at [membership@familyvoice.org.uk](mailto:membership@familyvoice.org.uk)
- Or write to us at Family Voice Norfolk, PO Box 1290, Long Stratton, Norwich NR15 2HD.

- Or you can contact us via:



[www.familyvoice.org.uk](http://www.familyvoice.org.uk)



[FamilyVoiceNorfolk](https://www.facebook.com/groups/674209366743395/about/)



[familyvoicenfkc](https://twitter.com/familyvoicenfkc)

- Or join our **Family Voice Members Chat Room** on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/674209366743395/about/>
- Look out, too, for our **Family Voice Let's talk...** sessions, which are held on Zoom.



## Hope – support for parent carers of children with autism

Caring Together is pleased to be able to offer a free online course for parents and carers of children with autism – the Hope programme.

The Hope Programme is a six-week online group peer-support course based on positive psychology, mindfulness and cognitive behavioural therapy originally developed by Coventry University. It covers topics such as mindfulness, goal setting, anxiety, fatigue and stress management, healthy eating, physical activity and working with health care teams.



This is offered free of charge to up to 100 parent carers across Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and Norfolk thanks to funding from Carers Trust as part of a partnership project led by Carers Trust Heart of England in partnership with Caring Together, Northamptonshire Carers and Hope For The Community CIC.

Groups of up to 50 parent carers go through the course together over the six weeks. Each session takes up to two hours to complete.

Two facilitated six-session courses will be held – the first from **13 July to 17 August** and the second from **24 August to 28 September**.

The course is not delivered in real time – carers can do as much or as little as they like at their own pace. The group does have some live sessions, for example, live mindfulness meditation sessions supported by facilitators.

Some of the Caring Together staff are going to be trained as facilitators so they can give more support and assistance to parent carers taking part.

The original programme was externally evaluated by a university and found that parents who took part reported improved mental wellbeing, improved quality of life and feeling more resilient and confident.

Before attending the course, parents experienced clinical levels of anxiety (64%) and depression (32%), which dropped at the end of the course to 30% and 6% respectively (results published in 2019 in the *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 'Self-Management Support Intervention for Parents of Children with Developmental Disorders: The Role of Gratitude and Hope', which you can read at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10826-018-01308-1>.)

Parents' feedback included:

*I've enjoyed learning about mindfulness and having the different techniques to change my emotions. This will have a positive impact on my future. This course was introduced to me at a time when I needed support and it has been an invaluable experience.*

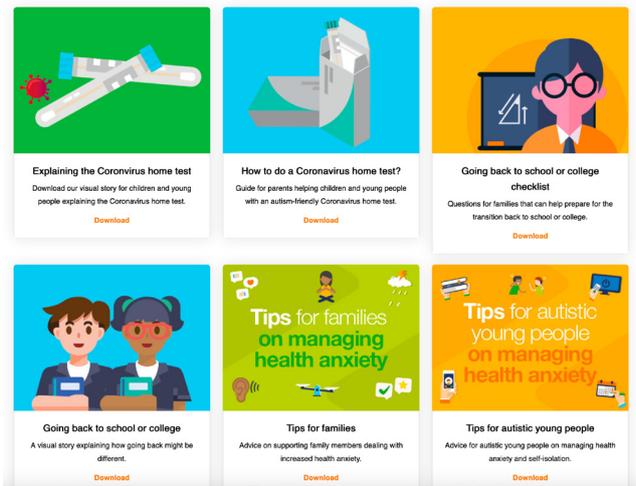
If you or a parent carer you know would like to register interest, please email [hello@caringtogether.org](mailto:hello@caringtogether.org) or ring 01480 499090.



## Resources for families

Ambitious about Autism has a wealth of resources covering many aspects of the pandemic that may be particularly troubling or difficult to understand for children and young people with autism.

Go to <https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk> to find social stories, posters, planners and information to download and share.



## Libraries reopening

From Monday 6 July, 12 of Norfolk's libraries will be reopening, with the rest to follow in the coming weeks. For a full list visit <https://bit.ly/2NGxMtB>

Thank you to everyone who has supported libraries online since the lockdown began – from watching Bounce and Rhyme videos to downloading a record number of eBooks. This digital offer will continue even as libraries open up.

The returns policy has been extended so items borrowed before the closure are still being automatically renewed. Items borrowed following the reopening will need to be returned on time.

If you do wish to return items, you'll still be able to do so via the drop-box or self-service kiosks and items will be quarantined for up to 72 hours.

Changes have been made to make things safe so please check before you leave home. Customers are asked to only visit the library on their own or in pairs, and there is a one-way system through every building. Make sure you have your library card with you as you will need it to access the building.

## Learning disability dietitians

Did you know that in the Learning disability team of Adult Social Services there are learning disability dietitians? During the COVID-19 pandemic, an increasing number of people are having difficulty maintaining a healthy weight, either because illness has reduced their interest in food, or because lower activity and other factors are causing them to put on weight. Healthy eating is important for keeping a healthy immune system.

The learning disability dietitians can be contacted as follows:



Louise Sillett (West/North): 07468 710018

Melissa Goodall (South/North): 07468 709850

Jo Gravells (City): 07468 709854

Emma Banham (East): 07468 709616

Or email: [lddiet@nchc.nhs.uk](mailto:lddiet@nchc.nhs.uk)

## Norfolk County Council Scrutiny Committee: Children's Services Covid-19 Response

On 23 June 2020, the Scrutiny Committee looked at NCC's Children's Services Covid-19 response. The meeting was held virtually but unfortunately technology (or possibly those operating it) failed and the meeting was rescheduled for 29 July 2020. You can view it in full on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMkzcEVIIFY>

Family Voice Norfolk asked a question of the meeting, directed at Sara Tough, Executive Director of Children's Services, and based on issues that had arisen from what parent carers had told us about their experience of lockdown. There was a word limit for the question, so we had to be succinct. Sara Tough replied to our question in writing before the meeting.

### Question from Family Voice Norfolk:

Family Voice Norfolk captures the views and experiences of families with children and young people (CYP) with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and shares them where it matters.

Children and young people with SEND are not a homogenous group. They are individuals with differing circumstances.

Some are struggling without their usual support and education. Some are thriving outside a school environment. One outcome of the pandemic could be an increased understanding that children are different. More flexibility could mean an education better suited to each child.

How is the LA increasing its understanding of the needs of CYP with SEND and working to individualise the ways they are supported?

### Response from Sara Tough:

*Firstly we would like to thank Family Voice Norfolk for raising this question. FVN were mentioned in the recent Ofsted/CQC Area SEND Inspection report with the lead inspector stating '...Family Voice is tenacious in the challenge that it offers to area leaders. Many very positive changes are the result of Family Voice championing the rights of families. Area leaders have listened and taken action accordingly, particularly since 2018...'. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that they are now championing children within SEND in the context of COVID.*

*We know that Family Voice, and three of the other main parent/carer groups in Norfolk for SEND, have been working with Children's Services staff throughout the past 3 months of the pandemic*



on our approach to mainstream and special school support for children and young people. Specifically, last week, the issue that FVN have raised through this question was discussed; in the context of the numbers of pupils increasing in schools and the way that Learning & Inclusion services are supporting and challenging schools to include pupils and/or provide support for home learning. These Services have:

- Established dedicated advisers to work with schools at a cluster level
- Issued expert advice and guidance through the SEND Inclusion teams
- Continued the Inclusion help line for schools throughout the pandemic
- Issued new guidance and Risk Assessment template for schools based on DfE COVID guidance
- Agreed that Individual family queries will be managed through a 'single point of contact' via the SENDIASS

Throughout the pandemic we know that the Learning & Inclusion services, within Children's Services, have mobilised all staff to support the efforts of early years settings, schools and colleges to provide educational support within settings and in the home environment. Feedback from staff in these services and feedback from schools has also identified this issue, i.e. that many children are coping well with the situation, some are thriving and some are finding the ongoing situation increasingly difficult. This of course is mirrored within families themselves and each situation is individual.

These Services will continue to meet with the parent/carer groups as part of the COVID recovery work and also as part of the ongoing improvements to Services following the SEND inspection. These teams are now working on a new plan, to start from September, to build support around schools, settings, colleges and communities; doing this in a way that considers the unique and individual circumstances, not only of children and families, but also of our education providers.

This new way of working, starting in September, will also align directly with the date when the formal response to Ofsted inspection outcome is submitted to Ofsted. The parent/carer groups are co-producing this plan through three workshops in July and these will all contribute to the whole range of services planned for September onwards.

A parent carer told us...

Do you

know what occurred to me today?

Many people at the minute are worried for themselves and their children about an uncertain future, health, jobs, security, social interaction and so much more. They're absolutely right to be concerned and I feel for each and every one of them. I wouldn't make light of anything they are worried about, because it's a worrying time. My heart and soul worries about all my friends and family, too.

But I wonder how many people realise that's our life every day, worried about an uncertain future, wanting the best but not knowing. We SEND families are strong because we live this life every day and face it with determination and a let's-get-on-with-it attitude. It's exhausting!

Your brain never switches off.

I hope after COVID-19, SEND families are given the help and peace of mind they need to not for ever live in a world of uncertainty for their loved one.



## Family Voice Let's talk...

Our online sessions for parent carers are still developing as we create new ways to make online sessions a useful way for parent carers to share their experiences and for Family Voice to capture their views so that we can represent as wide a range as possible in the meetings we attend. Here are three ways that we are moving forward with **Let's talk...**



## Let's talk... coffee morning

for Catch 22 parents on

Thursday 16 July from 1:30 to 2:30pm



Parent carers will need to contact their Catch 22 school to join. Schools should be letting them know about this opportunity to get together in a virtual way.

If other educational settings would like a similar get together, do contact Bernadette at [office@familyvoice.org.uk](mailto:office@familyvoice.org.uk)



## Let's talk...



## about school summer holidays

on Saturday 18 July from 10:30am to 12pm

Are you looking forward to them or dreading them? How will these weeks be for children and young people who have already spent months at home? What will they need to get ready for a very different 'back to school'? What do schools need to know to make this possible?

What do *you* need to navigate this unusual period?

## Let's talk... with special guests

Several practitioners and professionals have mentioned that they would value the opportunity to tell parent carers about new systems and procedures and hear from them in return about their views – directly. Some of you will remember our Family Voice Family Chat sessions, where we invited an expert to talk about a subject of interest to parent carers and enabled you to ask questions and exchange views. We'd like to do something similar digitally with Let's talk... Who would you like to hear from? Let Bernadette know at [office@familyvoice.org.uk](mailto:office@familyvoice.org.uk) and we'll do our best to make it happen.



## Parent carer forums: updates from the Eastern Region and National Network

At a recent online meeting with representatives of other parent carer forums organised by the Eastern Region of Parent Carer Forums (ERPCF), we were able to share information about how different local authorities in our region were adapting services during the COVID-19 pandemic. We also heard a national update from Mrunal Sisodia, Co-Chair of the National Network of Parent Carer Forums. The NNPCF is in regular touch with Government departments, ensuring that SEND is not forgotten. Here are the key messages we learnt from the meeting.

Generally, mainstream schools have been better than special schools at explaining to parents how 'bubbles' etc. will work to keep children and young people safe. Special schools do also have a difficulty in bringing students back in a socially distanced way. Already often full to overflowing, they struggle to find ways to keep groups separate.

All areas present had examples of schools explaining systems in a way that parents felt were designed to deter them from sending children back. Communication is so important and not all schools were managing this well.

Parent carer forums had fed to the NNPCF examples of additional barriers being put in place by mainstream schools, such as a doctor's note being required, or risk assessments that put the needs of the school before the needs of the student. Neither of these is permissible and the Government, in response to information from the NNPCF, has clarified its instructions.

Mrunal reported that there is a tension between messages that the Government is giving settings. On the one hand, they must take back as many children with SEND as possible. On the other, they must take back as many children as possible. These two requirements are not always easy to balance.

The NNPCF is making strenuous

representations to Government that it should be the most vulnerable who are catered for first, but it isn't always happening.

Many parents have reported that schools' risk assessments are not being announced as such and parents often do not realise they are taking part in a statutory process that should be being co-produced with them.

Exams are going ahead in 2021 but the NNPCF is working hard to ensure that any changes do not adversely affect children with SEND. For example, there is talk of a narrower curriculum but it is important that more practical subjects, often more accessible to SEND pupils, are not dropped.

Ofqual is consulting on proposed changes to some exams. Go to <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-changes-to-the-assessment-of-gcses-as-and-a-levels-in-2021> to contribute **before 16 July 2020**.

Mrunal gave an example of parent carer forums being able to affect Government guidance. Southend PCF informed via NNPCF about difficulties of some young people with SEND wearing face masks. These exemptions are now included in Government guidance.

The NNPCF sees its role going forward as speaking up for a *rebalancing* of whose needs the Government focusses on. It needs to be understood that children and young people (CYP) have been affected more than anyone although they are less at risk from the virus. Shielding older people has affected their job and education prospects *especially for disadvantaged CYP*.

NNPCF are also pressing for work to accelerate on the SEND Review that was begun at the end of last year. A comprehensive spending review is likely to coincide with it and there had been hope for some more money in the SEND system, but this now looks unlikely.

