



Our Voice Counts!

Issue 01
January 2011

A network for parents of children with complex additional needs.

Government commits £800 million to short breaks for disabled children.

This four-year investment will support local authorities to fulfill their new statutory duty to offer a range of short breaks to families. It comes into force in April. An evaluation of short breaks found that 88 percent of families surveyed were benefitting; but services need to be better targeted so that all families have access to a wide range of support. In North Somerset we hope that our forum can contribute significantly to improved planning, so that this can be achieved for children and their families.

North Somerset Council Supports Our Forum!

Children's Services in North Somerset recognise the vital importance of involving parents and their children in the planning and delivery of services. There are already lots of examples of good practice but we need to step up to the next level and involve parents routinely.

The Parent Forum shows how much appetite there is for real dialogue between parents and services and the enormous potential to involve parents much more in future. We would like to continue, and further develop this partnership.

The unprecedented reductions in public spending which we are now facing mean that engaging with parents is more important than ever. There is an opportunity (indeed a necessity) to completely re-design services for children. We are determined to involve parents throughout the journey. If we make full use of all your ideas, experience and skills then we may be able to provide better services even with significantly less funding, and we will certainly be better able to prioritise resources. As a starting point, we are proposing a new group to plan and undertake parent engagement with service re-design and we would like to invite the Parent Forum to take part in this.

These are challenging times but they are also an opportunity to do things better.

John Wilkinson

Assistant Director of Children
& Young People's Services

Jane Routledge

Head of Complex Additional
Needs Service

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Events and Details

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This is *your* forum. Get involved and find out more. For more information on dates and future events see the back page.



Our Voice Counts!

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Welcome to Our Voice Counts' first newsletter.

I am thrilled to finally be able to write something on paper rather than sending out yet another email!

This last year for Our Voice Counts has been very positive. It has also been a steep learning curve, full of implementing and reviewing the plans and processes that were established in Phases 1 and 2 of the participation programme. We are still learning as we go along, but we now have a model in place that can be taken forward when our funding ends in March, with established working groups and a committed steering group. We also have huge support from the most senior levels in the Local Authority for making participation a success.

Our aim for the coming year is to continue working in partnership with the Local Authority and to become more involved at the planning stages of services. Our Voice Counts can be a very influential and powerful group, bringing about changes to benefit our children and families and developing the services we really need. This will only happen if enough parents get involved, so please give us your support. It is a unique opportunity to really influence what happens in our Authority, so let's not waste it.

As most of you will be aware, I am stepping down from the role of Chair in April, although I will still be just as committed to Our Voice Counts and involved in the steering group. The role is an enjoyable one with lots of opportunities to gain new skills, improve existing ones, meet new people and get to know decision makers within the Authority. Without a Chair, Our Voice Counts can not continue, so if anyone is interested please contact me.

Vicki Shaw, Chair

Parents Forum Open Meeting

at The Winter Gardens, W-s-M
For parents and carers of children
with complex additional needs
and those who work with them
Thurs. 10th March, 2011
Registration from 9am
9.30am - 2.30pm including lunch.

To register contact:
enquiries@nsppf.org.uk
or call 07561 512072

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The journey so far..... we have come a long way since we started working to set up our forum; since our first “planning alternative tomorrows with hope” meeting more than two years ago; since our first Open Forum in April 2010, when 80 parents and professionals met to plan for the future! We are now planning our third Open Meeting (the last to be funded by Together for Disabled Children).

We look forward confidently to working in partnership with North Somerset Council, to develop our children’s services in this time of austerity, when the input parents offer will be crucial to fine-tuning essential services and spending money wisely.

So what have we done?..... parents have met education services to discuss improving partnership working with schools, and enthusiastically contributed to the development of enhanced autism provision in mainstream schools, due to open after Easter this year.

Our health group continues to focus on effective key working and the importance of advocacy for children with complex needs. They have been invited to contribute to training for paediatricians and medical student assessments at the BRI, to improve awareness of our children’s additional needs during treatment. One of our members is the forum rep with the Local Involvement Network (health and social care) and the group also hopes to contribute to developments in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

Our inclusion group last focused on services to support transition into adulthood and hopes to soon meet with the social work lead for the new transitions team. We will consider the new transitions review (year 10) guidance and meet with transitions youth project staff. Our next focus in March will be Early Years.

Parents with a particular interest in social care issues and short breaks developments have been invited to join the family resource centres’ steering groups, at The Firs in Weston-super-Mare or at St Barnabas, Portishead. Parents asked for activity evaluation forms to be available on-line and are eager for local councillors to become more aware of how crucial these services are to our quality of life – they will be invited along to see for themselves! The Family Information Service has introduced us to their “We Can: Disability Directory” and parents have reviewed and commented on the draft of this eagerly-awaited document.

So, what next?..... our focus is on sustaining our forum for the future. The next Open Meeting will take place on 10th March. We hope you will be able to come! We are collecting comments and advice on our agenda for the workshops; go to our website to find out more - contribute your suggestions on the message board, via our facebook group or via email or telephone. If you want to take an active role contact us directly...

Maggie Potter, Programme Lead

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Upcoming Event Highlights

Have Your Say

At Steering Group and Open Forum Meetings

Find Out More

With participation Training

Influence The Future

At our PATH plan review



Upcoming Events Schedule

25th January 2011: [Steering group meeting](#)

9.30 – 12 noon, The Campus Conference Room 1
to set the agenda for the Open Meeting

9th & 10th February 2011: [Training on effective involvement and participation](#)

9.30am for 10am start. Finish 3pm, The Campus Conference Room 1

Day 1: joint training with professionals & parents together

Day 2: Parents-only training – building skills for effective involvement and participation

18th February 2011: [PATH plan review - sustaining the forum post-31st March](#)

10am for 10.30am -1pm, The Campus Meeting Rooms 1-3 (next door to library).
Paula Edmondson to facilitate

To set the programme for the coming year and provide a basis for future planning & sustainability of forum

10th March 2011: [Open Forum Meeting](#)

From 9.30am – 2.30pm, Weston area Venue TBC

Six-monthly open meeting for parents and professionals

March/April 2011: Policy & planning sub-group

9.30 – 11.30am, Backwell

Meeting to finalise and submit monitoring forms for phase 3

Our Voice Counts! Working in partnership with



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