



Impact Report

A year of action

April 2022 — March 2023

**FRIENDS &
FAMILIES**



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MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Friends and Families was established 21 years ago. Founded by our Chair to offer practical advice, support, and fun activities to children with a disability or impairments and their families in and around Plymouth.

We're on a mission to “support and empower families with children living with a disability or impairment. We do this by providing services and activities for the whole family so that everyone gets to live their best life”.



Our services

- Free and confidential Information, advice, emotional support and advocacy for parents and carers.
- Social and leisure events for the whole family as well as specific groups aimed at children, young people, or their siblings.
- Social action and volunteering opportunities for young people.
- Educational workshops for parents and carers to develop knowledge and skills relevant to their child and their impairment or disability.

Values

Inclusivity – Striving for a society that's accessible to everyone.

Determination – We won't stop.

Professionalism – Accountable for all we say and do.

Friendliness – Showing compassion and kindness everywhere we go.

Togetherness – Coming together to make good things happen.

We employ 15 staff (5 full-time, 6 part time and 4 sessional workers; total 7.43 FTE) and have 10 volunteer parent carers with lived experience of disabilities and additional needs who act as our advisory group. Based in the centre of Plymouth; we are also able to support families living in West Devon, South Hams, and East Cornwall.

Friends and Families believes that we should live in “a world where families and their children, irrespective of their disability or impairment, can reach their full potential and thrive”. In 2022/23 we have worked together with our families, funders, and delivery partners in helping make our vision real for the 1,178 families accessing our services.

Strategic priorities

Throughout this year we have been focused on delivering our 5 strategic priorities. These were developed in partnership with our families and reflect our determination to ensure that the core of our work keeps the needs and aspirations of our families at the centre of all we do.

- 1 Grow our existing offer to reach more families.
- 2 Develop the quality of our work internally & externally.
- 3 Campaign on issues important to our families.
- 4 Broaden our age focus to include Early Years and Transitions.
- 5 Celebrate the impact and outcome of our work that maintains sustainability.

We hope that this report brings to life how we made a difference in the lives of our families; and that it has only been possible because of the passion and commitment of our wonderful team of staff and volunteers.

Kay O'Shaughnessy
Chair



Tim Tod
CEO



OUR SERVICE OFFER

Last year, in the Plymouth area there were 8,283 children identified with Special Educational Needs, of which 2,693 children were supported by an Education and Health Care plan. Many of these families struggle with the assessments and ever-changing eligibility criteria that need to be met to access the support for their child; for others accessing this entitlement has been further hampered by additional challenges in their lives, such as poverty and mistrust of statutory agencies. It is this group that we especially support.

We welcome self-referrals; and do not require an assessment or diagnosis to access support. We know that the support is vital regardless of a formal diagnosis when waiting lists for assessments, consultations, treatment, and therapies are long.

We currently offer the following services

- ① **ParentCarer** – One-to-one information, advice, support, and advocacy (helping with Disability Living Allowance Personal Independence Plan form filling through to advocating and supporting families at structured meetings). Advocacy at meetings such as Team Around Meetings, Education Health and Care Plan Reviews, Multi-Agency Meetings, Child in Need Meetings, Tribunals and many more. Workshops facilitating Peer to peer support (Wellbeing, resilience, and capacity building) Subject specific support and learning (Makaton, challenging behaviour, BSL, System navigation, paediatric first aid, safeguarding, sex and relationships) and activities - without their children!
- ② **Making Sense** – Providing a mix of support and activities; lead and facilitated by a parent with their own lived experience. For children and young people with profound and multiple learning disability aged 0-25. Attend with parent/Carer.
- ③ **Fun and Freedom** – Supporting young carers with a disabled sibling. Lots of fun with weekend clubs, days out, trips away and activities. A chance to make new friends in a similar situation.
- ④ **Adventure Club** – Providing activities. Open to any child/ young person with a disability or an additional need aged 0-25. Need to attend with Parent/carer.
- ⑤ **Youth Adventure** – Providing a mix of activities and social events. Aged 14 -25 young people with a disability or an additional need. Aim for them to attend independently – with support from high ratio of sessional staff.
- ⑥ **Little Steps together** – Is our new group for parent/carers with a child aged 0-5 with a disability or awaiting diagnosis. Fun activities to support child development. Opportunities to meet other parents and carers.
- ⑦ **Dads club** – Is our newest group where we are encouraging dads to enjoy coming together, doing activities and providing peer to peer support.
- ⑧ **Lending Library** – Specialist toys and equipment such as a Beach Wheelchair, McLaren Major Special Needs Pushchair, Weighted Blankets, Sensory Toys. Families can borrow for up to four weeks to try equipment to see the difference it may make for their family. We provide information and support with grant applications to purchase specialist toys and equipment.
- ⑨ **Sensory Room** – This can be booked by our families free of charge. Children and Young People can explore their Sensory Needs and access emotional regulation.
- ⑩ **Families together** – 24 times a year we organise events that bring the whole family together for a session of fun and socialising – this usually attracts over 30 individuals (approximately 15 families); and then we host parties twice a year where we have space for 100 to participate – these are always free and are usually at the end of the summer holidays and at Christmas.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Grow our existing offer

Peer to peer support

Since October 2022 and with the ongoing support from the Big Lottery Partnership Fund, the Association of Directors of Children Services, the NHS and Health Education England we have been working in partnership with a range of agencies to:

Develop a range of approaches that evaluates the different ways someone with lived experience of both having a disability or impairment and poor mental health can add value to others facing similar challenges and the impact of their association.

Evolve and establish the role and responsibilities of Peer Support Workers so that it is well understood and valued across relevant agencies.

Contribute to the development of the competency framework needed to underpin the role of Peer Support Workers so that there is a clear pathway of ongoing professional development that ultimately embeds the role as a valued practitioner.

As a result, we now have recruited a team of apprentice PSW all with lived experience of neurodiversity where as a result of their ongoing training are stepping up into specific areas of work supporting young people as they move towards adulthood; and specific projects highlighted elsewhere within this report.

When asked to describe peer support, our newly appointed Apprentice explained:

‘It is important to highlight that peer support isn’t clinical, it’s about walking alongside those who need an extra bit of support rather than leading them. Peer support work has been set up to fill in a gap that’s often missing within health services. It’s designed and lead by those who have personal life experience with mental health, disabilities and/or additional needs. Specifically in my role at Friends and Families, both peer support workers here have life experience of neurodiversity.

Each pathway for every individual who engages with peer support is different and this is the best part about it! It’s about building a relationship and getting to know each other. Those who have been through diagnoses and clinical avenues have gained an invaluable amount of knowledge about what is and isn’t always helpful.

As a peer worker my aim would be to get to know ‘who you are’ and overtime hopefully be able to support you in recognising what is out there that could be valuable to building self-esteem and purpose. This can look different for everyone and can go at a pace that is best for you, as an individual.’

Last year 1,287 families accessed our charity. Below indicates if they linked into our activities, our one-to-one support, or both.

April 22 - March 23

Families	1,287	100%	Numbers of families supported
Activities	991	77%	Attended just activities
Support	154	12%	Attended just support
Activities & support	180	14%	Attended both activities and support

INFORMATION, ADVICE, SUPPORT AND ADVOCACY

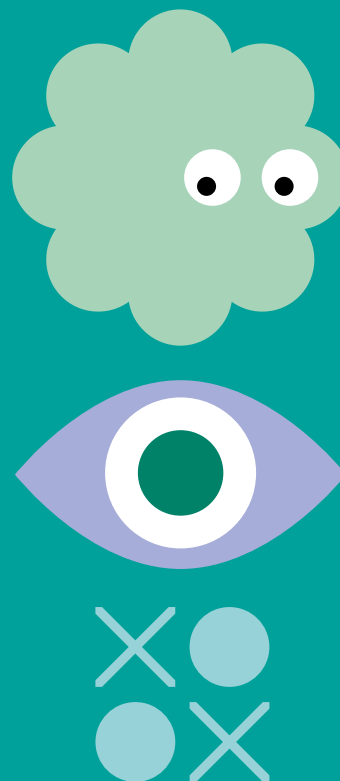
The focus of our support are families often struggling with many aspects of their lives (emotional, financial, organisational – (school/health/systems, structures, thresholds, and eligibility etc).

Some of our support is one-off such as help with filling in often very complex and daunting forms (Disability Living Allowance & Personal Independence Payment).

Both processes take on average 3 hours to complete the forms as each form is over 50 pages long and ask very detailed questions which can be very daunting – especially as parents are not often aware of the level of specificity needed to help assessors come to appropriate conclusions.

A key feature of our work is to provide space for our parents to meet with others and learn about conditions, develop key skills, and understand more about processes, organisations and systems set up to be useful to them and their child.

Other support goes on much longer and can be complex and multi-directional.



Disability Living Allowance (DLA) & Personal Independence Payment (PIP) April 22 - March 23

April 22 - March 23

Applications	Number completed and submitted	Successful	Value
Disability Living Allowance	85	95%	£225,906
Personal Independence Payment	27	95%	£126,711*

Payment

*On the basis of a 95% success rate, this calculation is approximate. This is based on the lowest mobility and care, and dividing by the number of applications we have supported with.

ACTIVITIES

Below is a summary of our activities for the year. As can be seen many of our participants attend many activities, and the numbers will include all participants attending when appropriate (child, their siblings and their parents).

April 22 - March 23

	Number of sessions delivered	Average number of numbers of participants per session	Total attendance for the year
Group Activities			
Family	20	45	887
Youth Adventures	20	12	235
Adventure Club	20	22	442
Fun & Freedom	20	25	520
Making Sense	20	8	148
Little steps together	18	8	144
Total	118	120	2,376



WORKSHOPS

A key part of our service offer is to organise and deliver workshops and courses for our families that provide space for learning, peer support and hopefully some fun! Below are the workshops and courses we delivered last financial year.

Parent focused workshops	Attendance
Makaton Level 1	10
Makaton Level 2	10
Challenging Behaviours:	7
Cookery course for families with a Neurodiverse child	4 parents and 6 children
Parent/Carer virtual evening support group	8
Glass Making Workshop	10
Carers Day with nutrition and mindful art	8
Coffee Morning with Plymouth Information and advice service	10
Makaton Taster Session	7
Deputyship and Power of Attorney Workshop	10
Coffee Morning with an Occupational Therapist	10
Managing Stress Workshop	2
Deputyship and Power of Attorney Drop in:	6
Makaton Level 1	12
Makaton Level 2	12
Coffee Morning with Plymouth Information and advice service	9
Glass Making Workshop	10
Coffee Morning with a Speech and Language Therapist	8

**WE SUPPORT
AND EMPOWER
FAMILIES WITH
CHILDREN
LIVING WITH
A DISABILITY.**

**WE DO THIS BY
PROVIDING
SERVICES AND
ACTIVITIES FOR
THE WHOLE
FAMILY SO THAT
EVERYONE GETS
TO LIVE THEIR
BEST LIFE.**



DEVELOP THE QUALITY OF OUR WORK – INTERNALLY AND EXTERNALLY

Re-branding

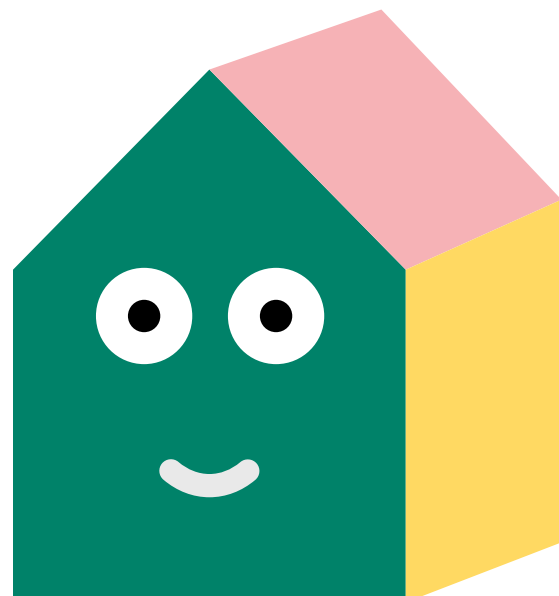
We successfully undertook and implemented a re-branding project including a new logo, brand guidelines, merchandise, clothing, letterheads and posters/pull-up banners. This project was supported by designers, 51 Studio and Altitude and included developing a brand asset library and website re-design. Feedback from our families has been positive, in particular the new booking system process on our website.

Parent-Carer Advisory Group

Identifying a variety of ways our families are able to provide feedback, and therefore evidence the impact of our work, is ongoing. We recognise the importance of providing a number of different opportunities for the voices of those we support to be heard. During the 2022-23 year we continued to develop a range of approaches to harness the lived experiences of our families into our developments and current service offer. We now have a WhatsApp group which creates a quick and easy way of getting feedback on specific areas of concern or interest.

Self-Assessment of Level 1 of the Trusted Standard

Following the appointment in January 2023 of our part-time Head of Quality Assurance, we will be adopting the Trusted Standard framework in self-assessing our systems and processes across all 11 Quality Areas (Governance, Planning, Leadership & Management, User-centred service, Managing People, Learning & Development, Managing Money, Managing Resources, External communications, Working with others and Measuring Impact and Outcomes). Our aim is to be in a position to be externally assessed by the end of Quarter 2 in 2024).



CAMPAIGN ON ISSUES IMPORTANT TO OUR FAMILIES

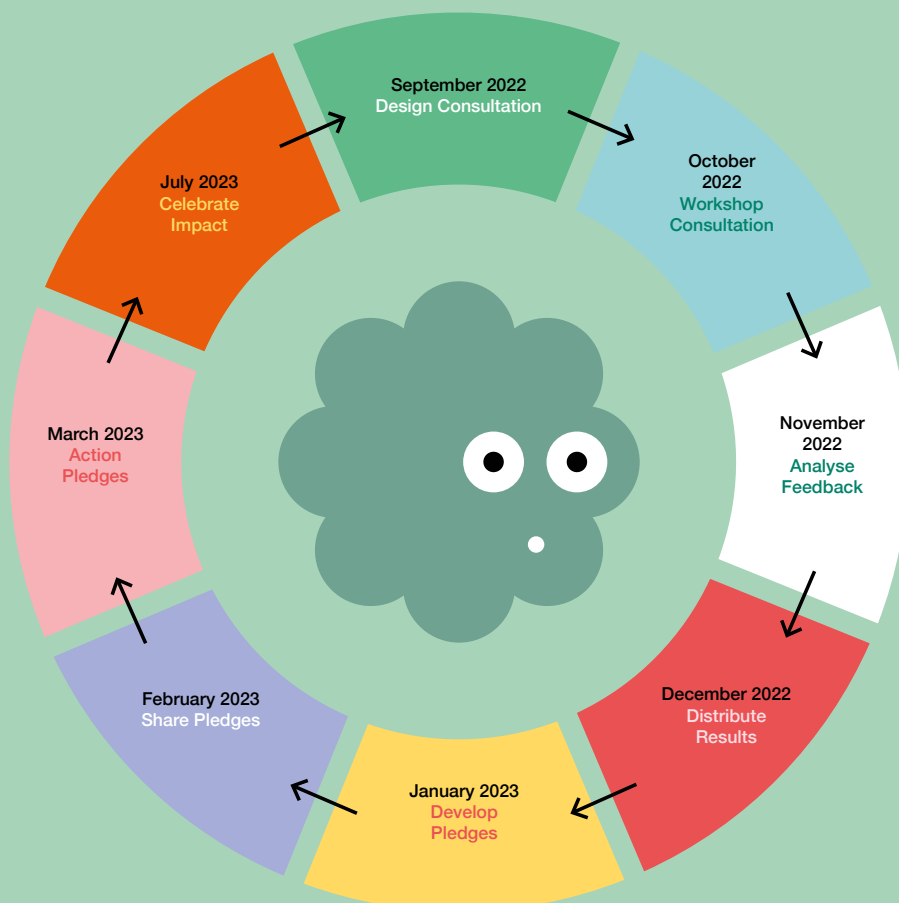
Advocating on behalf of the families we support remains centre to everything we do; our families often feel unheard and we are here to work alongside them to grow their confidence, and to campaign on issues important to them.

Our families have said accessibility is an ongoing challenge they face; this was a key area of focus in 2022-23 and will continue to be so in the 2023-24 year. With the support of funding from NHS England our two Apprentice (Neurodiverse) Peer Support Workers spent 1 day a week throughout the year mapping our social, cultural and recreational venues across the city in partnership with Sociability (www.sociability.app) - a fantastic new nationally developed free app created by individuals with lived experience of disability “helping disabled people find accessible places”.

They attended conferences and schools, getting the “Sociability” app out into the public consciousness. They attended a radio interview with Omnium, a local station that focuses on people with disabilities in the area raising awareness of the App.

We are also very conscious that although our charity’s focus is on families with disabled children that the output from this project will benefit the whole population where accessibility is an issue (adults, older people and people pushing prams!)

We have finalised the content of an on-line booklet of all activities and hobbies across the city with clear links to the accessibility element of this app. This year we will be designing and publicising this resource; enabling our families an opportunity for their children to try out something new.



BROADEN OUR AGE FOCUS TO INCLUDE EARLY YEARS AND TRANSITIONS

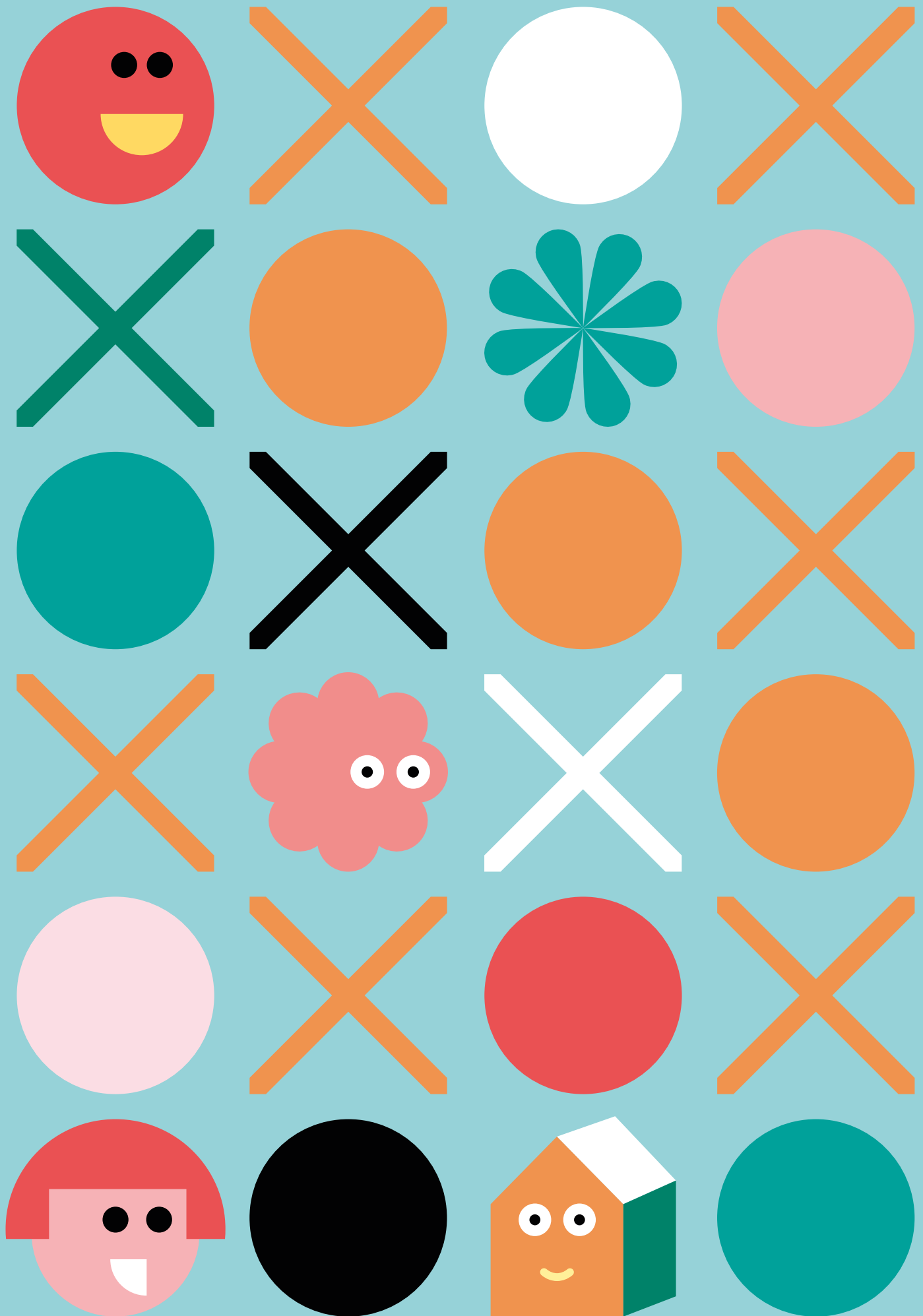
Little Steps Together was a project that became implemented to support the lack of provision within the Early Years and provide additional support, particularly in the aftermath of COVID. Following feedback and comments from families wanting to join in with Adventure Club but felt unable to due to the age of their child. We started to think of what we could do to meet the needs of Early Years and what provisions are available. From discussions with Barnardos and Larks Children's Centres, it became clear that this was a high level of need.

Following this, Little Steps Together was created running playgroups and activities. It provided a space that differed from stereotypical toddler and baby groups. It became a space for parents/carers and their child with a disability. Not only was the child able to access different areas of play designed to support their development, it became a place for parents and carers to access peer support.

We ran various playgroups and activities such as Rhyme Time, Moo Music, Aquarium Trips and Gym Bubbas. To keep the group manageable, we limited it to five families at a time. The total number of families who accessed our group was 47, 13 of which attended multiple times.

Multiple feedback we have received is being able to attend a group without fear of judgement and being included. The amount of information and advice they receive from others is valuable and helps them on their journey. There is no pressure on the child to engage with activities but rather allows them the freedom to explore play and sensory needs at their own pace.

The introduction of our two Peer Support Apprentice Workers, and the Peer Support Programme has grown over the past 12 months; with us developing great partnerships with both CAMHS and the Adult Autism Team in offering support for young people transitioning from children to adult services. We have had four team members attend the external Peer Support Worker training, run by the University of Exeter, and are committed to continuing this staff development opportunity in the 2023-24 year.



CELEBRATE THE IMPACT AND OUTCOME OF OUR WORK

We have identified three evidence based impact and outcome monitoring approaches:

1 Seligman’s PERMA Wellbeing theory) to underpin our outcome measures.

Positive emotion



Engagement



Relationships



Meaning



Accomplishments



According to Seligman’s (2011) model, Positive Emotions refer to hedonic feelings of happiness (e.g. feeling joyful, content, and cheerful). Engagement refers to psychological connection to activities or organizations (e.g., feeling absorbed, interested, and engaged in life). Positive relationships include feeling socially integrated, cared about and supported by others, and satisfied with one’s social connections. Meaning refers to believing that one’s life is valuable and feeling

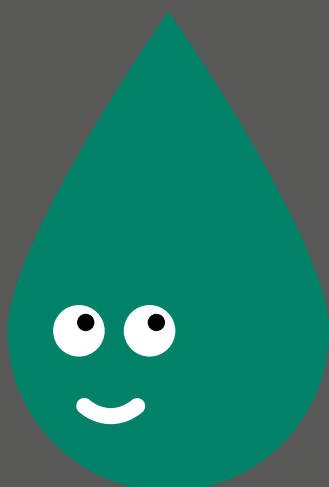
connected to something greater than oneself. Accomplishment involves making progress toward goals, feeling capable to do daily activities, and having a sense of achievement. Seligman (2011) advanced that these five pillars contribute to overall well-being, are important areas that people pursue for their own sake, and can be defined and measured independently of one another.

② Skills Builder Universal Framework to assist progress at an individual level. There are 8 areas of potential focus, and an individual can choose breadth and depth that suits. The eight areas are:



'The Skills Builder Universal Framework shows how to build essential skills at every stage of life. Breaking the skills down into 15 teachable Steps, this supports all learners to not only recognise and articulate what they can already do, but also to identify areas of focus to develop their skill set further.'

The Step descriptors within the framework give learners and facilitators the flexibility to identify the areas of focus most relevant at a given time or within a given context. Viewing the framework as a roadmap overview of progression, rather than a linear 'tick-list', means skill development can be personalised and adapted to suit.' skillsbuilder.org



③ VIEWS

We have embedded Views database in order to record quantitative and qualitative information in relation to the families we are supporting.

WHAT OUR FAMILIES SAY

We encourage parents and young individuals to actively participate by sharing their thoughts and experiences. With consent, we also post photos, allowing them to visually express their opinions.

On the next few pages, you'll find a glimpse of the wonderful feedback we've received from both parents, conveyed through words, and their children, communicated through heartwarming pictures.

This dynamic combination of textual and visual input helps us better understand and cater to the needs of our community. We are grateful for the active involvement of all those who contribute to making our Facebook page a vibrant and supportive space.



I have been with friends and family for a few years now and have had lots of help with forms and information, days out for my older boy with other young careers to give him a break from the stresses of home life and workshops for myself to have that switch off time. But the one session that I thoroughly enjoyed and will be signing up to each year is the Christmas wreath making workshop. I had such a blast talking to other mummy's that are in similar situations, having a good laugh, enjoying the crafting and the yummy cake and hot chocolate. It was a lovely evening and can't recommend it enough.

DA

Friends and families have been awesome for us as a family. I will forever be grateful to them all, even families themselves who have helped us in the past. Especially B for helping us on that ice skating visit and the follow up after or make sure we were ok.

CB

We felt so supported when H helped us to fill out some forms for H but would also need to mention today's Pizza making activity. It was E's first-time taking part in an activity and she was really nervous and shy but I know she was so well looked after by the team as she has asked to go on more!

HB

Friends and Families have offered us some wonderful opportunities otherwise would not have had. To be around other people who understand and not judge is priceless.

NS

I'm not sure who had more fun, myself or L. Thank you for arranging it and your time given to making us feel welcome.

JC

Friends and families has been a life-line for us. Enabling our children to take part in activities, but also helping me meet lovely new people. Only those that are carers understand other carers. I have met such lovely mums that have become my friends.

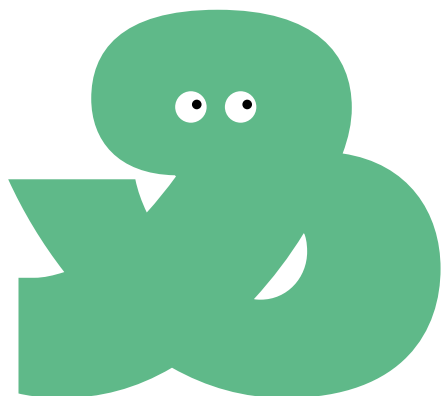
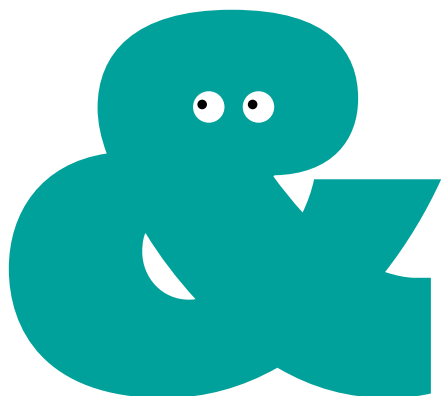
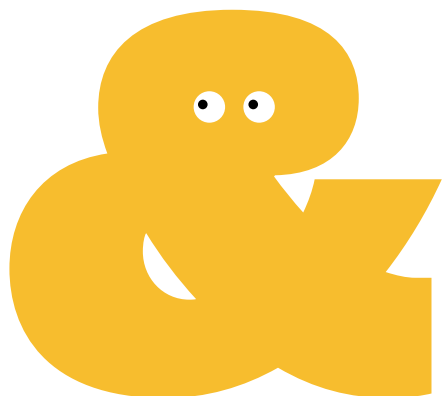
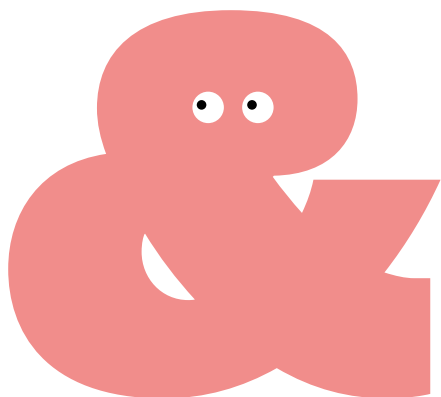
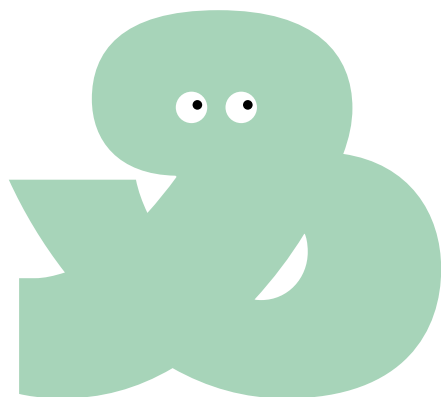
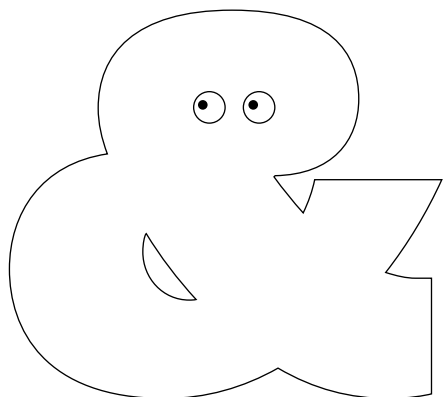
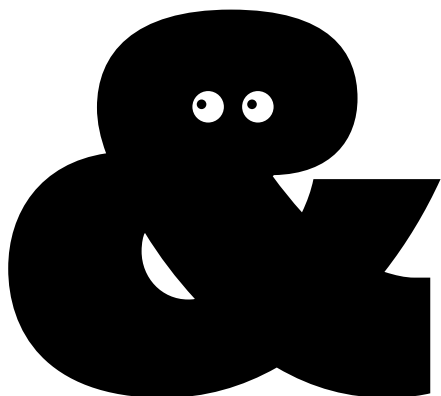
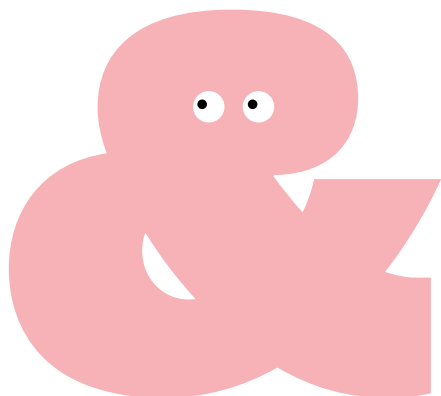
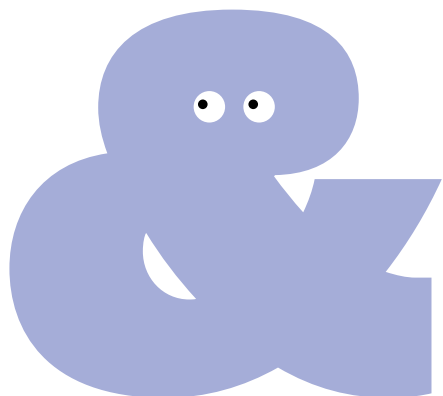
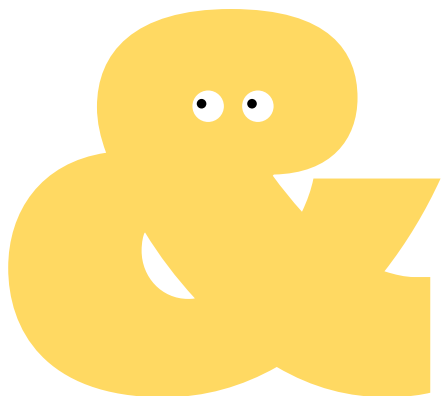
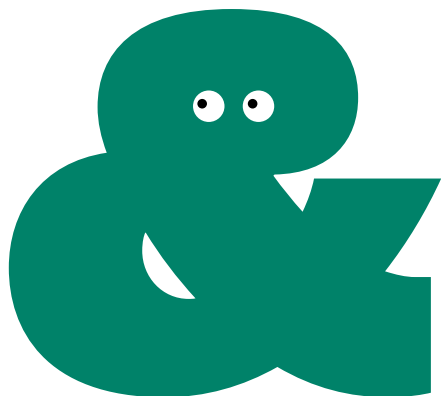
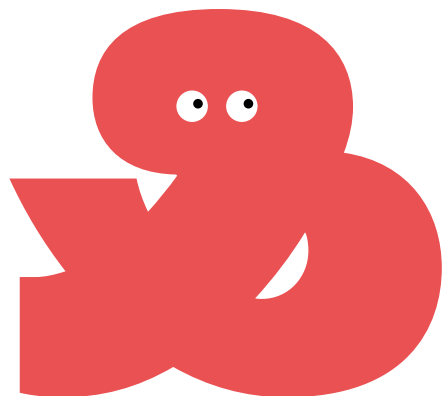
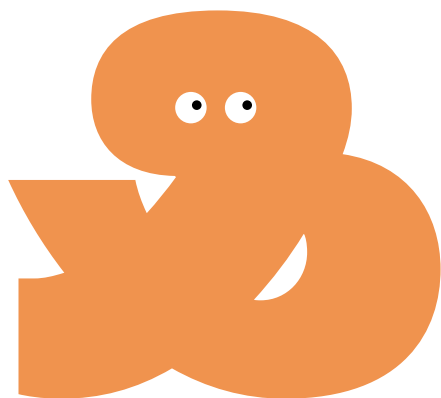
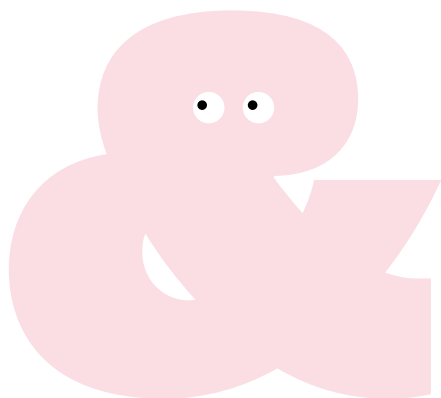
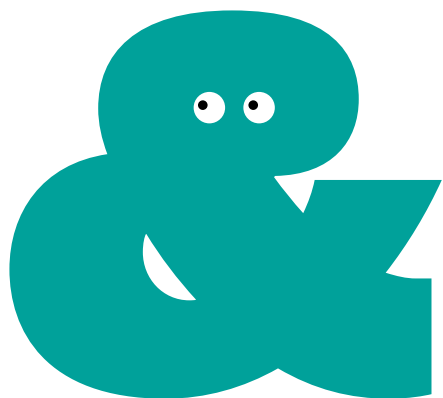
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**FRIENDS &
FAMILIES.**

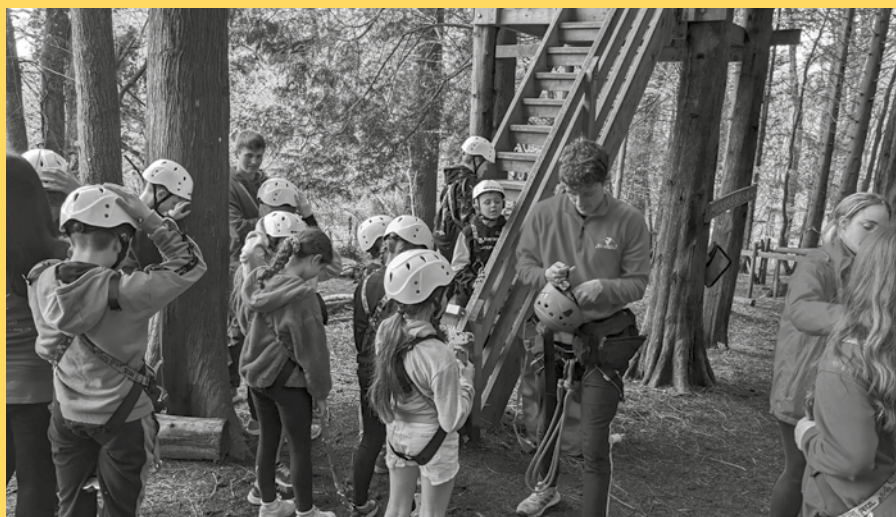
**A WORLD WHERE
FAMILIES AND
THEIR CHILDREN,**

**IRRESPECTIVE
OF THEIR
DISABILITY OR
IMPAIRMENT,**

**CAN REACH
THEIR FULL
POTENTIAL
AND THRIVE!**







CASE STUDIES

Sometimes the only way to fully illustrate our work and its impact is through the use of case studies. On the next few pages, the case studies will highlight some of the complexities facing our families and the way in which we try to maintain a high level of flexibility in our approaches.



CASE STUDY ONE

The child is in foundation year and is on the ASD pathway and paediatricians suspect she has Global Developmental Delay, Autism and Communication Difficulties. Through meeting the family, it was clear they felt very unsupported and did not know what support or services were available. They had numerous referrals made but had no idea to who and for what. The child attends half day in foundation year as they do not eat or drink in school, mum has to collect her every day at 12pm.

From initially meeting with them, we set a plan in motion and arranged regular Team Around Me (TAM) Meetings and invited their Family Support Worker and PIAS along. From these meetings, mum could discuss what she wanted her child to achieve which was to enjoy school, start to communicate, and eat or drink. A plan was made for mum to sit with the child in school and encourage to eat lunch. This meeting enabled her to understand what support they already had in place and any interventions they are waiting on such as Speech and Language Therapy.

It was suggested that the family attend our Sensory Room regularly so we can explore their sensory needs and their idea of play. The plan was to communicate with their class teacher things she enjoys to replicate in school. This also gave another opportunity to explore communication methods. Through these regular sessions our practitioner built a relationship with the child and we began to explore different sensory aspects and it then became clear, they enjoyed sprinkling items such as fabric, water and fibre optic lights.

Through the regular TAM Meetings, this was feedback and overtime mum reported that the child would be really excited to attend school in the mornings through repeating 'school' repetitively. The class teacher informed us that through adapting different levels of sensory play which we explored had brought out more confidence and established a relationship.

Previously they would not be in close proximity to other children choosing to walk away, now they will play alongside. This was a huge step.

Eating was still an issue and various ideas were trialled such as using a small quiet room with no other children, introducing children, eating in the classroom, trying the main dining hall before it became busy and during. Eventually, through the idea of replicating a tea party with a toy without mum present, the child ate her lunch. This was a huge celebration and mum was so pleased. From this, the school hours will increase gradually to try and get the child in school fulltime.

Overtime, they had grown more confident and engaging in advance play in the Sensory Room. This included imaginary play by make shifting the beanbags into a bed for their teddy. Something that they had not previously engaged with before and is a huge step in terms of development.

The TAM Meetings also prompted a EHCP to be submitted to ensure all these interventions are implemented throughout their education setting.

We will continue to support the family through the education process and alongside the school, help the child be in education fulltime. The family have now independently booked onto our activities separate to the support provided to encourage socialisation and meet others for peer support. This shows that they now feel empowered to access other services and support that they did not feel they could do initially.

During 2022-2023 the family accessed six TAM meetings, had 14 sessions in the Sensory Room, attended three LST Playgroups, three Adventure Club Activities, and had three parent support appointments.



CASE STUDY TWO

This family first contacted us in the summer of 2021 for a Soft Play session. Mum attended with three of her four children. Our practitioner noticed a shy older primary school child together with a very lively pre-school aged boy; as well as a baby being held by mum. We explained to mum the full range of potential services that could be accessed not just for her, but for all her children, and this encouraged further conversation around support we could offer. We then discussed her neurodiverse teenage son, who had dissociated himself from the world and had stopped communicating, going to school, or coming out of his room.

We supported mum in putting a plan together for her teenage son who took part in a couple of our Youth Adventures group activities, where a significant number of other the young people attending also identified as neurodiverse. The young person continued to access support from one of our apprentice Neurodiverse Peer Support Workers using skills builder and PERMA wellbeing tools to support him in setting some goals for the next phase of his life. He attended more Youth Adventures activities and Mum has enrolled him on to Mindjam sessions to try help him with a supported pathway onto further education as he progresses towards adulthood.

Over the same period Mum has continued to access support in developing a range of coping strategies not just for her eldest but for the younger ones also struggling with their own additional emotional and learning needs. She has secured her second son a space at a specialist school after a prolonged absence from school, which is a huge achievement, he attended centre-based sessions with his youngest brother and built positive relationships with staff.

Mum engages regularly in our mainstream programmes with her sons actively participating in our Adventure club programme, accessing our Plymouth Music Zone sessions as well as our Boccia activity programme for inclusive sports. The youngest now attending Little Steps Together, where he explores the different activities alongside a cohort of small children with additional needs. The family also access the Maclaren buggy from our lending library to enable family days.

Mum has achieved a real sense of empowerment for their future as a family that was compromised by the complexity of their situation when she first made contact over two years ago.



FUTURE PLANS

Inevitably because of the ongoing challenges faced by many of our families our overriding priority is to ensure that all our services continue to offer the range of opportunities currently available. By this time next year, we aim to grow our delivery team through the recruitment, training, and deployment of volunteers. We also have plans to improve the centre and its spaces for group and one-to-one work. We have also set ourselves the ambition of being successfully assessed as a Trusted Charity in readiness for further growth and development.

THANK YOU!

In 2022-23, our generous supporters helped us to raise £237,000 through donations, grants, events and other activities, which meant we were able to deliver services for disabled children, young people and their families across Plymouth and the surrounding area. We are very grateful to everyone who kindly supported our work.

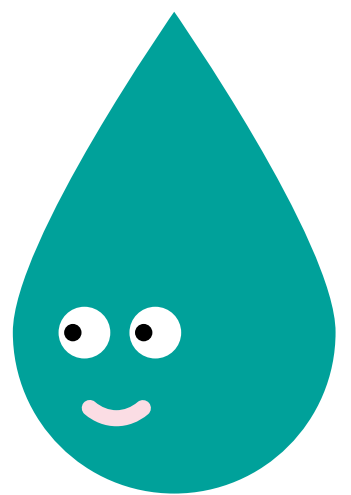
Association of Directors of Childrens Services South West	Make Some Noise
Active Devon	Neighbourly – B&Q
The Big Lottery	Neighbourly – M&S
The Core Youth Project, Saltash	New Continental Hotel
Devon Community Foundation	NHS England
Devon County Council	Norman Family Charitable Trust
Devon Partnership NHS Trust	Plymouth City Council
Health Education England	Plymouth Octopus Project (POP)
Livewell Foundation	Rotary Club
Lush Retail	Tesco Egguckland Store
	Westcountry Schools Trust



CONCLUSION

The previous pages are a snapshot of our work, which reflects the importance we attach to keeping our service offer as wide as possible, as for many of our families their experience of help is often very narrow and siloed. We work hard to create pathways to our services in ways that make that first contact as easy as possible. We adopt a positive psychology approach (using PERMA+ framework) in all that we do. By engaging in the way we do it has enabled families to find a way forward that truly helps in tangible way and ensures that we remain true to our vision for there to be “a world where families and their children, irrespective of their disability or impairment, can reach their full potential and thrive”.

Tim Tod
CEO Friends and Families



Impact and outcomes for our
families accessing our service
April 2022 — March 2023

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