



**Reaching  
Families**

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# Impact Report 2022/23

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*Empowering families of  
children and young people  
with special educational needs  
and disabilities in West Sussex*



# Executive Summary

Our long-term ambition to create a one stop shop of services for SEND families took a huge leap forward in 2022/23 with the establishing of our new Benefits Advice Service that was fortuitously timed to meet the financial pressures of the cost of living crisis and all but completes the suite of services we originally hoped to develop when we first started the charity in 2008.

The new project builds on our information & training delivery on benefits and compliments a number of our other services, in particular the early support we provide parents of children undergoing diagnosis. We are now working with these families in multiple ways – matching them with a befriender, connecting them with other parent-carers, providing information and/or training on their child’s condition and helping them access DLA or PIP for the first time.

The cost of living crisis showed significant signs of impact on the families we support during 2022/23. Some were nothing short of financially destitute and Reaching Families proved to be their only source of support. Others were forced to cut back on clubs, activities, therapies and assessments that are vital to their child’s wellbeing and development.

Thanks to additional investment from NHS Sussex we were able to increase our delivery during 2022/23 and in doing so, meet more of the demand for our service that has increased exponentially since 2020. Analysis of our delivery over the period 2020 to 2023 shows demand for our work increasing by over 200%. There are no signs of this abating and we expect increasing demand again in 2023/24, particularly with requests for case work support from individual families unable to get help from statutory services.

Whilst we achieved record breaking levels of delivery during the year we did so without all the staff resources we need. Huge credit and thanks must therefore go to our existing team of staff and volunteers for their tireless work, self-sacrifice and dedication to supporting SEND families.

***“Thank you for being the place we go to for help. You are the foundation stone for so many families who are trying to build a secure and well supported life for our children.”***

# Our Year in Numbers



## Making Sense of it All

**2,000+** copies distributed/  
downloaded



## Animations

**35,000+** views



## Fact sheets

**10,000+** downloaded from  
our website



## Training

**1,414** parent-carers attended  
workshops and courses



## Benefits Advice Service

helped **298** families  
raise over **£3 million**



## Face-2-Face

**75** parent-carers participated  
in befriending



## Umbrellas

**240** parent-carers attended  
one of our groups



## Facebook Group

**1,261** new members

# 2022/23 Annual Survey

A record number of parent-carers (327) participated in our 2022/23 online annual survey. Of all the challenges faced by the families we support one in particular was striking – the cost of living crisis, which our research shows is taking its toll on the wellbeing of parents and endangering the wellbeing and development of children with SEND.

- **25%** of respondents are single or lone parents
- **13%** are unemployed
- **37%** rely on Carers Allowance
- **67%** said they struggle with anxiety, stress or depression
- **65%** said their greatest challenge is supporting their child's health and development
- **42%** of families have cut back on essential food shopping because of the cost of living crisis
- **49%** say it has affected their mental health
- **25%** are getting into debt
- **58%** say the cost of living crisis has negatively affected their child with additional needs
- **52%** have cut back or cancelled clubs and activities
- **48%** say they could not afford private assessments for their child
- **30%** have cut back on purchasing or replacing specialist toys or equipment
- **20%** have cut back or cancelled private therapies

***“Most of the £3,000 we spent last year was on private mental health support. This has all now stopped as our mortgage is about to go up by £600 per month.”***

# Making Sense of it All



Our new extended edition of Making Sense of It All, now including chapters and content on transition to adult life, has proved as popular as the original edition. We have now distributed over 20,000 copies of the book since first publishing it in 2013.

Following the release of the latest edition of the book, we used 2022/23 to update and add to our factsheet series and published two new animations – one on DLA myths, another on Reaching Families services. We also worked with NHS Sussex and West Sussex Parent Carer Forum in developing a child friendly animation on the Autism assessment process, to be published in 2023/24.

## Our Delivery

- **2,000** copies of Making Sense of It All distributed
- **10,000+** copies of our factsheets downloaded from our website
- **35,000+** views of our animations

## Our Impact

- **92%** of parent-carers said they had improved knowledge of how and where to find support

*“This book is worth its weight in gold.”*





# Benefits Advice Service



Given the enormous strain of the cost of living crisis on SEND families it was not surprising our new Benefits Advice Service was inundated with requests for support when it launched in March 2022. Within weeks of opening the project was working with a waiting list which has not abated since.

We advised and supported 298 families making 430 individual claims for Carers Allowance, DLA and PIP in our first year and helped them raise over £3 million in much needed income – impressive in any year, let alone a service undergoing pilot and development.

Many of the families we worked with were vulnerable and needed significant help with preparing, writing and editing their claims. Such was the demand on the project we increased the hours of our Benefits Advisor and recruited a part-time Benefits Support Worker to help with editing claims - doubling staff hours in the process. We hope to recruit additional staff next year to maximise the support we can provide vulnerable families including with appeals and tribunals.

## Our Delivery

- **298** families were advised on 430 claims for Carers Allowance, DLA & PIP
- **103** families were supported with editing claims

## Our Impact

- Families raised an estimated **£3 million** in claims for Carers Allowance, DLA & PIP

***“Thank you for the support completing my daughter’s PIP application, it was fantastic. The award means we can now afford extra tuition and therapy.”***

# Face-2-Face Befriending



It was a record breaking year for our Face-2-Face project with 75 parents of children undergoing diagnosis matched and supported by one of our volunteer parent befrienders. Thanks to two befriender training courses held during the year our team of volunteers has never been more diverse with befrienders representing children with a wide range of conditions including ADHD, Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Down Syndrome, complex needs and rare conditions. A number of our new befrienders are also bilingual which means the project is now better placed to support parents from minority communities.

We are enormously grateful to our volunteer befrienders for the unique contribution they make to our organisation. Their personal insight and experience is vital to helping new parent-carers take the first steps on their SEND journey.

## Our Delivery

- 75 parents participated in befriending
- 20 new befrienders were provided with specialist training

## Our Impact

- 68% of parents reported improved resilience and wellbeing
- 63% made new connections with other parent-carers

*“My befriender really understood how I was feeling and it was great she had had similar experiences to me which made her very empathetic. She was very supportive and knowledgeable.”*



# Training



No service more typifies the growth in our delivery over the last three years than our training programme, which has more than trebled in scale. In 2019/20 we delivered 33 workshops to 426 parents. Last year this figure rose to 113 workshops attended by 1,414 parent-carers.

Such is the demand for our training workshops they typically sell out within days, sometimes hours of being published. This is particularly true of the workshops we deliver in support of the West Sussex Neurodevelopmental Pathway, which aim to inform and empower parents of children undergoing assessment for ADHD, Autism and other neurodiverse conditions.



## Our Delivery

- **1,414** parents attended one of our training workshops and courses

## Our Impact

- **78%** of parents reported improved skills and self confidence
- **89%** said they felt better informed on the subject of their training

***“The Reaching Families courses I have attended directly led me to seek a diagnosis for my daughter. I have since attended their EHCP and DLA courses and have successfully got an EHCP for my daughter and DLA. Thank you.”***

# Umbrellas

Our Umbrellas support groups are vital to our outreach and having a regular presence in communities across West Sussex. We were therefore delighted that in 2022/23 we were able to extend our geographical reach by establishing two new groups in Burgess Hill and Chichester. We intend on starting a group in Shoreham in the Autumn of 2023/24.

Participation in Umbrellas continues to grow and during the course of the year 240 parent-carers attended one of our groups. Guest speakers and wellbeing activities helped build and maintain engagement. We are grateful to Carers Support West Sussex, Early Help, Learning and Behaviour Advisory Team, West Sussex SENDIAS, Specialist Nurses Team, West Sussex Portage and others for attending the groups and providing information and advice to parents.



## Our Delivery

- **240** parents attended one of our Umbrellas parent support groups

## Our Impact

- **68%** of parents said Umbrellas improved their wellbeing
- **65%** of parents said they had improved resilience
- **62%** of parents said they felt better supported by other parent-carers

***“I was very socially isolated before I found Umbrellas. I’d lost touch with other mums in my area because their experiences were so different to mine. I couldn’t face talking to anyone. Umbrellas has helped me find ‘my people’ and it has saved my mental wellbeing.”***

# Next Steps

We are always looking ahead to how we can develop our service and optimise the support we can provide SEND families. In 2023/24 our priorities are as follows:

1. Securing funds to invest in and develop the advice and support we can provide individual families
2. Investing further in our Benefits Advice Service in order to maximise the support we can provide vulnerable families including with appeals and tribunals
3. Continue to extend the reach of our Umbrellas support groups by developing new groups in Burgess Hill, Chichester and Shoreham
4. Recruiting an Information Officer to manage the editing of our information resources including a new edition of our parent-carer guide, Making Sense of It All
5. Diversifying our income to help minimise risk and achieve longer-term sustainability.

***“Reaching Families was a lifeline for me when I first joined. I have passed the details on to so many people as I cannot stress how helpful this service has been. Keep up the AMAZING work!”***



# With thanks to

Aspens

Autism and Social Communication Team (WSCC)

Bascule Charitable Trust

Carers Support West Sussex

Early Help

Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust

Garfield Weston Foundation

Learning and Behaviour Advisory Team

Metal Recycling Scheme

National Lottery Community Fund

NHS Sussex

Specialist Nursing Team (Sussex Community Foundation Trust)

Sussex Community Foundation

True Colours Trust

West Sussex County Council

West Sussex Parent Carer Forum

West Sussex Portage

West Sussex SENDIAS



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

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