

December 2022



Welcome from Susan Akhtar

I am very pleased to be introducing this SEND Newsletter with you as Chair of PACA MK jointly with the local Authority SEND team. We are an independent forum for parent carers of children and young people with disabilities or additional needs who live in Milton Keynes.



We share our experiences with decision makers to bring about real change to develop local services and to make lives better for our families. We work closely with the Local Authority and Health and are pleased to share our voice is being heard. We would really encourage you to share your thoughts with us at our [events](#) or by [email](#).

A few examples of our work with the Local Authority are looking at improving [Short Break](#) provision for children and ensuring the Holiday Activity Fund offering includes substantial provision for our children, improving the [Local Offer](#) and we are pleased this will be completely revamped and be more accessible over the coming months. If you haven't had chance to look at it recently, do have a look on the [Local Offer](#). We are also working with Health to look at how Children are diagnosed with Autism and ADHD in the BLMK area.

We are very keen to continue dialogue with everyone involved to improve attendance, reduce exclusions and improve outcomes for children with SEND.

It's been a long half term but we are looking forward to 2023, we are also very excited to share that our annual [SEND Festival](#) is returning in person in February 2023 please save the date and see further details below.

This newsletter has some ideas below of things to do and places to visit. If you have any feedback please do get in touch.

Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas or Happy Holidays.

Susan - Chair of PACA

New interim arrangements for SEND services

Many of you will be aware that our current Head of SEND, Caroline Marriott, will be moving on to pastures new on Friday 16 December. We wish Caroline all the best in her new ventures and thank her for her significant contribution to SEND in MK.



We will not be replacing Caroline immediately, but instead will be taking some time over the next few months to assess what a new Head of SEND role will need to look like in the context of what we know are significant and growing demands for our schools and partners in this area. One change we will be making, for example, is for special school place planning and projects arising from it to be led by Simon Sims and Dominic Williams in his team, as Simon already take responsibility for this in the mainstream. Another will be to transition the Children with Disabilities team over to our Head of Family Support Services – Children’s Social Work – Candice Boatswain. I will also be taking a stronger lead in our future strategy for SEND.

However the new Operational Lead for SEN Services will be Victoria Courtis. Many of you will already know Vic in her current role and I am sure you will be reassured that we are in capable hands as she steps up into this area.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any comments or concerns.

Marie Denny - Group Head of Education, Children’s Services

Support over Christmas

We are really please to share that our SEND Support Line will still be open over the Christmas period. Please see below our Christmas opening hours.

SEND Support Line: 01908 657825



Tips to support children and young people with SEND over Christmas!

Here are some tips that may help through the festive period.

- Use a calendar or visual timetable to prepare for Christmas
- Consider decorating your house gradually, e.g. You could put the tree in place, decorate it the day after, then put up the decorations even later so that it is a gradual adaptation
- Limit the number of presents and they could be left unwrapped if preferred
- Some people with ASC dislike surprises so they might need to know what their presents are going to be before Christmas day
- On Christmas day try to keep the daily schedule the same as far as possible to avoid even more change to routine
- On Christmas day give some 'Christmas-free' time on the daily schedule, this may be some quiet time with a favourite activity in a 'Christmas-free' zone when other people are opening their presents
- Please find additional advice from the [National Autistic Society \(NAS\) and their tips during Christmas](#)



Resources and activities to try at home

We have put together some activities, with visual instructions, that you might like to try at home with your children.

- [Making moon sand](#) and [an ingredients list](#)
- [Winter walk checklist](#)
- [Shaving foam fun](#)
- [Christmas finger paint templates](#)
- [Christmas cookies recipe](#) and [ingredients list](#)

[The SEND Local Offer](#) also has a variety of [ideas, strategies and resources](#) to help children and young people with SEND.



Holiday activities and food (HAF) programme

Free activities and food from 19 to 22 December for children, young people and their families who are in receipt of benefit related Free School Meals. Use this [link](#) to take you to the website to view the programme where you will be able to contact providers directly to book a place.

We are also excited to announce that [PACA](#) have been successful in securing additional HAF funding to support all families who have children with SEND with the opportunity to attend Gulliver's - Land of Lights, free of charge, on the 19, 20, and 21st December.

Sessions will start at 6pm for registration and enter the Land of Lights at 6.30pm promptly for the allocated time slot.

To book a place at PACA's Winter Activities and Food Programme session please use this [link](#) – places are limited, so please book early.



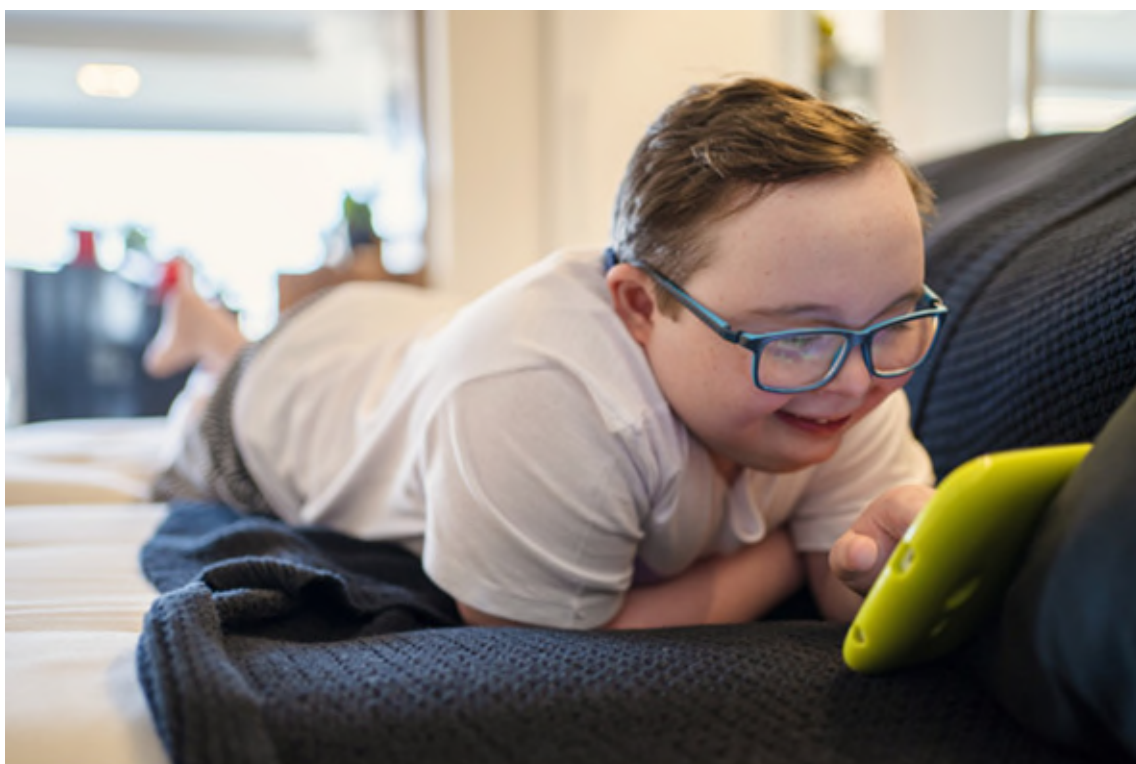
Online safety over the Christmas period

Over the festive period your child may be spending more time on their Ipad, phones or laptops. The [NSPCC](#) have put together information and support to [keep children safe online](#).

NSPCC have partnered with [Ambitious about Autism](#) to bring [online safety tips, advice and activities](#) specifically for parents and carers of children with SEND. They cover [how to support children with SEND talking to people online](#), [supporting online wellbeing for children with SEND](#) and various [online safety activities](#) to do with your child.

[Barnados](#) offer [free parent webinars](#) about online safety, as well as their [5 top tips to keep your child safe online](#).

1. Be as interested in your child's digital life as you are in their school life
2. Discuss what healthy and unhealthy online behaviour looks like
3. Encourage your child to use age-appropriate sites
4. Enable your child to have digital access in the same physical space as you
5. Discuss how information can be shared online and agree privacy settings



How to use the SEND Local Offer

The team have produced a video to support you in using the Milton Keynes SEND Local Offer. The video shows which information you will find within the headings on the home page and pages you might find useful.

[Watch the SEND Local Offer video here](#)

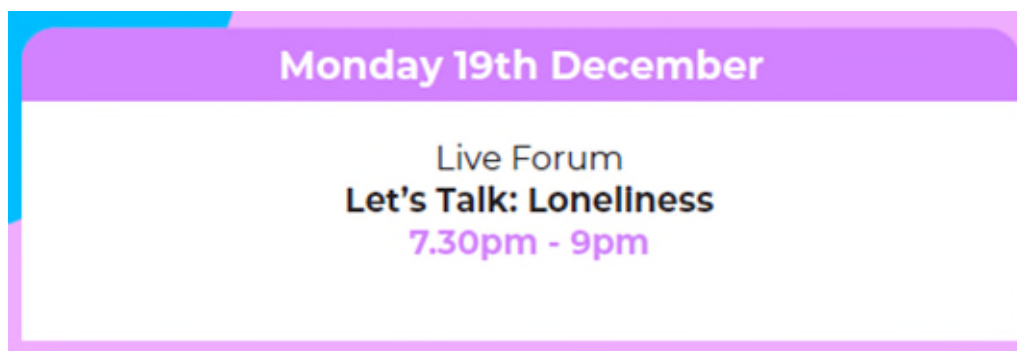
Feeling lonely at Christmas

Christmas can be a time of excitement for many children, young people and their families, however, it can also be stressful and lonely for some individuals. There are several websites offering support and advice on how to cope during this busy time.

- [Christmas and mental health - Mind](#)
- [Top tips for looking after your mental health at Christmas | Mental Health Foundation](#)
- [YoungMinds | Mental Health Charity For Children And Young People | YoungMinds](#)
- [Mental health services - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

[Kooth](#) are hosting online [live forums and discussion boards](#) over December to support families. On the 19th December they will talk about Loneliness, if you're interested in this event you can [sign up to Kooth](#).

If you or someone else is at crisis point, call 999 or go to A&E



Parent programmes:

Our parent programmes have been popular and we are excited to share some new dates in 2023 for our autism in teenagers programme.

Autism in teenagers

A parent and carer programme with Specialist Teachers and Educational Psychologists. The programme consists of five sessions followed by an in person get together with the opportunity to ask Specialist Teachers questions and meet other parents and carers.

Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA)

'My child has anxious thoughts and feelings which are leading to school avoidance. What can parents and carers do to support a return to school?'

This workshop is for parent and carers and is ran by Educational Psychologists. The workshop will be available on repeat, and you will only need to join one workshop.

Feedback from our recent Parent Programmes

'More sessions! Really enjoyed these and thank you for the sessions!'

'Excellent! Very helpful and knowledgeable trainers. The sessions have helped me understand my child's behaviours and enabled me to support him so much more. Thank you!'

'Fantastic sessions delivered in a really professional manner. The guidance we have been given is invaluable'

We would love to hear your feedback if you have attended any of our parent and carer workshops or programmes. Please let us know your thoughts by [emailing us](#).



SEND Drop-In Session at Daisychain Family Centre

Need help with the special educational needs processes relating to education, health and social care?

Find out what support there is for children with additional needs and how our services can support you.

Come and meet [MK SENDIAS Service](#), [PACA MK](#), [Carers MK](#) and [MKC SEND Local Offer](#).

Tuesday 17th January, 1-2:30pm at Daisychain Family Centre.

SEND Drop-In Session at the Daisychain Family Centre



Need help with the special educational needs processes relating to education, health and social care? Find out what support there is for children with additional needs and how our services can support you.

Tuesday 17 January 2023	1:00 – 2:30 pm	Daisychain Family Centre Melrose Avenue, Bletchley, MK3 6PS
-------------------------	----------------	--



A statutory service offering confidential and impartial information, advice and support. The service supports children, young people (0-25) with special educational needs and/or disabilities as well as their parents/carers.

T: 01908-254518 | E: Contact@mksendias.org.uk



Parents and Carers Alliance

Parent Forum - An independent and voluntary group of parents and carers of children and young people with disabilities or additional needs.

T: 01908-257828, 07852526057 | E: pacamk@gmail.com



Carers MK are dedicated to supporting the wellbeing of unpaid family carers in Milton Keynes.

T: 01908-231703 | E: mail@carersmiltonkeynes.org



An opportunity to find out more about the 'SEND Local Offer' and the SEND Team offer of support.

The SEND Team includes Educational Psychology Service; EHCP Specialist Teaching Team; EHCP Review Team; Inclusion Specialist Teaching Team; EHCP Assessment Team; Sensory Team; Children with Disabilities (CWD)

T: 01908-657825 | E: SENDSupport@milton-keynes.gov.uk

SEND Festival

[Book the date in your diary - Saturday 4th February 2023](#)

[MK SEND Information, Advice and Support Service](#) and [PACA MK](#) are holding their annual [SEND Festival](#) event for parents and carers of children and young people with SEND. There will be workshops for parents and young people to attend, information stands by various local organisations, health services and MK local authority. A free crèche will be available for parents to book and refreshments will be provided as well.

Meet the team: Alison Erwood - EHC Review Officer



Hello, I'm Alison!

I have been working in education since 1995, initially as a Nursery Nurse, progressing to a Teaching Assistant and graduating with a BA (Hons) Education degree as a teacher in 2006. My interest was in Special Educational Needs so I studied to gain a Masters Diploma in SEND, whilst also fulfilling my role as an Assistant Headteacher at a primary school in Luton.

In 2018, I was very fortunate to gain a role within the SEND Team at Milton Keynes City Council, where I now work as an EHC Review Officer. I really enjoy the variety of work and the regular liaison with children/young people, parents and schools.

Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with my adult children, gorgeous grandchildren and friends. I also love MotoGP, walking, knitting, reading, eating out, watching Masterchef and Bake Off, then practising new recipes at home.

Useful contacts and SEND Directory on MK Local Offer

The SEND Local Offer Team would be grateful if you could complete a [short survey](#) to help us update the [useful contacts](#) and [directory information](#) on the SEND Local Offer. We are asking for your views to let us know what you consider as 'useful contacts' and how we can shape our directory.



Christmas Events

[Request a letter from Santa](#)

[RNIB](#) is helping to deliver the magic of Christmas by making sure all children with a vision impairment can receive a very special festive letter.

If you know a child who would like to receive an accessible letter (be that braille, audio or large print), then please get in touch clicking the button below and completing the form.

[Thrift Farm Father Christmas SEN Sessions](#)

- Saturday 17th December and Sunday 18th December

What you can expect from the session:

- 50% reduced capacity (maximum group of 15 people in total)
- Reduced sound during the experience
- Allocated time to reduce queues
- Caring and understanding staff.

[MK Gallery relaxed cinema screenings](#)

[Roald Dahl's Matilda the Musical \(Relaxed\) - MK Gallery](#)

- Sunday 18th and Friday 30th December

Strange World (Relaxed) - MK Gallery

- Thursday 22nd December

These screenings have sensory friendly adjustments which aim to reduce over-stimulation and create a relaxed and welcoming environment. Short break vouchers accepted.

PACA HAF Land of Lights

- 19th, 20th and 21st December

Embark on a visual voyage across the Land of Lights, exploring 12 vivid dream worlds of imagination and illumination.

Supporting Xtra Special Families Christmas Event

- Tuesday 20th December

Three zones of fun for your family:

- Craft and play zone
- Music zone
- Sensory zone

Book by Tuesday 13th December

Climb Quest Autism friendly and SEND Sessions

- Wednesday 21st and Wednesday 28th December

Climb Quest have produced a social story to support your child's visit, as well as this they have a hoist available, lowered music and extra staff on hand during your visit.

Relaxed Christmas Grotto

- Saturday 21st December

Celebrate the most magical time of year with a visit to Bletchley Park's Relaxed Vintage Christmas Grotto.

SEN Skating at Woburn Emporium

Join the fun and come along to an exclusive SEN ice skate. Everyone can enjoy the ice and can either use traditional skates or twin bladed ice skates for added

stability. One carer is free with any child or adult with SEN. Wheel chairs will be allowed on the ice and the music and lights are switched off for these sessions and the capacity is limited.

[Makaton Christmas on Sky Q](#)

Makaton are delighted to announce that a Christmas topic has been added to the Makaton destination page on Sky Q and Sky Glass with a range of festive films and programmes chosen by the Makaton community. Simply search 'Makaton' to access the Makaton friendly pages.

Upcoming events from [PACA...](#)

Keep an eye out for [PACA's upcoming events](#), including a Weaving Workshop for parents and carers at MK Gallery on 10th January 2023 (6pm-8pm - £5 per person)

Check out your nearest [children and family centre](#) to see what free and fun activities they are hosting over the Christmas break.

**We want to wish you all a lovely Christmas and a
Happy New Year!**



MK SENDIAS Service

MK SENDIAS Service will be closed over the festive period, from Friday 23 Dec to Monday 02 Jan (inclusive).

We will re-open on Tuesday 03 January 2023 and will respond to any messages left during holidays as soon as possible.

The SENDIAS team wish you all a merry Christmas and happy new year.





Sign up!

We produce this newsletter half termly. If you are not receiving this directly and would like to, [please follow this link to sign up.](#)

We welcome your views on the newsletter and any ideas you have for future editions, please share your views via [email](#).

[Sign up here!](#)

This newsletter has been co-produced between and the MKCC SEND Team and Parents and Carers Alliance MK.

PACA is an independent forum for parent carers of children and young people with disabilities or additional needs who live in Milton Keynes.

We share our experiences with the SEND Team as an independent voice representing what matters to families in MK. We do this by taking an active role in meetings such as the Short Breaks Steering Group, Local Offer Group and Additional Needs and Disabilities Strategy Group.

The idea for this newsletter came from our regular meetings with Caroline Marriott, with the aim of keeping parents informed and up to date with the latest developments in SEND.

If you are a parent and would like to join PACA MK, or would like to know more about us, please visit [PACA MK](#)

Note: Please do not respond directly to this email.

For SEND queries email: [SEND support line](#)

Stay connected with Milton Keynes City Council:

