

February 2023



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## Welcome from Victoria Courtis - Interim SEND Lead

Welcome to February's newsletter. My name is Victoria Courtis and I have recently taken the role of interim Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Lead following our previous Head of SEND Caroline Marriott leaving the service. For those who don't know me I have been working for the SEND Team for nearly 7 years and since starting my career at MKCC I have had a number of roles with the most recent being the EHC Service Leader. I have been a qualified teacher for 18 years with experience teaching across the primary age range and have had a number of senior leadership roles, when I was promoted to Inclusion lead this is where my real interest for SEND grew and I gained my SENCO qualification which enabled me to make a real impact to the pupils we worked with. I am passionate about improving the outcomes for all our children and young people in MK and look forward to building on our successes and leading the team to ensure all our families feel supported as we move forward.



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## PACA Land of Lights

PACA families visited Gulliver's Land of Lights on the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> December 2022.

PACA was fortunate to receive funding from the Winter HAF programme from Milton Keynes City Council. This enabled 209 children/parents who are PACA

members to attend the [Land of Lights Festival at Gulliver's Land](#) the week before Christmas.

The feedback we have received once again highlights the need for access to activities alongside other families:

*"I am so thankful for everyone who organised this event and made it possible, as I wouldn't have been able to afford to have taken my son without your support. Memories truly made tonight. We will never forget it."*

*"Thank you so much for this wonderful event. We had an absolutely wonderful time. [Child's name] was in a world of his own and to see the amazement on his face was an absolute pleasure. Thank you so so much."*

*"Thank you so much for an amazing evening. We've had a difficult year and this gave my family the boost we needed and has helped us feel more festive."*

*"This event was lovely as my child could walk round freely with no demands, wasn't too busy or noisy."*



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## SEND Place Planning

Good progress is being made on the five identified priorities to ensure that there are sufficient high quality places for our children.

- Work has been completed at Romans Field School to provide two additional classrooms and the works at Stephenson are progressing well
- The unit at St Paul's will open in September and a short term accommodation solution has been found whilst works for a longer term solution are progressed
- A specification has been drafted to address demand for 16-18 year olds and this will shortly be going out to find suitable provider(s) via the council's commissioning teams
- The council has made a bid to central government for funding to support the delivery of a new all through school for children with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC). A response is expected this side of Easter. In the

meantime the council is exploring which site(s) could be available and suitable for the delivery of this school

- A local process has taken place to establish a provider to offer places for children with high complex needs. The council is finalising the arrangements with that provider and will soon be able to share more detail about the new provision and how and where it will be delivered



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## Have you recently had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) Annual Review?

If your child has had a review of their EHC Plan in the Autumn term (Sept - Dec 2022) please could you complete this short questionnaire to help us to review and improve the service we offer.

[Complete the EHCP Review Survey here](#)



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## Meet the team - Sarah Austin Inclusion Practitioner Team Leader

Hi, I am Sarah Austin, Inclusion Practitioner, Team Leader, for the Inclusion and Assessment Team at Milton Keynes City Council, SEND. My colleagues and I work with Early Years Providers, Schools, and families to support children with SEND. I love my job and have a real passion for championing inclusion.



It all started for me around 17 years ago, when I worked as a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) and Early Years Practitioner in a pack away pre-school in MK, where I enjoyed working with children with SEND and their families to support them and make a difference. After 3 years, I went on to work for Milton Keynes City Council as an Area SENCo supporting Early Years Providers located within the South West Area of MK, and as a Portage Worker, where I had the pleasure of supported many families with children who have SEND and complex needs within their homes, and this is where my experience and skills are played to their best. I went on to work for Speech and Language Therapy, Complex Needs Team at MK Hospital, Child Development Centre, before returning to work for the Inclusion Team at MKCC, 7 years ago, as an Inclusion Practitioner and Team Leader.



In my spare time, I enjoy spending time with family, friends, animals, and with nature. If you see me around, please say hello.

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## Local Offer update

You may have heard that we are updating our SEND Local Offer website, which we are excited to say, is nearly ready! We hope that the website will be more informative and easier to use. We would love to hear your thoughts on the current site whilst we continue to work on the new site, please direct any feedback to [local.offer.feedback@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:local.offer.feedback@milton-keynes.gov.uk)

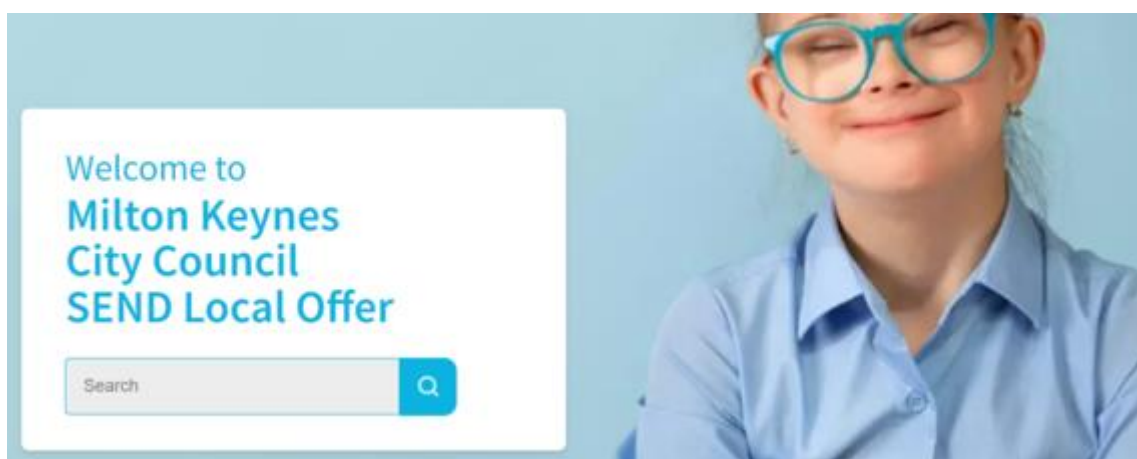
So what will be new on the site?

- A brand new Health Conditions and Disabilities area
- An update on our Preparation for adulthood section
- More mental health and wellbeing information and resources for young people, parents and carers and staff.
- A new and updated SEND Directory which can be filtered to find local events, and activities and services to support you and your family
- A calendar of SEND specific events and activities in and around Milton Keynes
- A leisure and things to do section

And much more!

For now, you can still access everything on our current [SEND Local Offer](#).

**Come and say hi to the SEND Local Offer team at the [SEND information day](#) on Saturday 4th Feb!**



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## Phase Transfer - Is your child transitioning at school?

The SEND Team are working hard to finalise placements for phase transfer children. If you have a child with an EHCP who is either due to start school, transition between year 2 and year 3 in an infant school or is currently in year 6 and is transitioning to secondary school you will be receiving confirmation of their next school placement on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> February 2023. This confirmation will come via email and will be with you by 12pm. If you have any questions following the placement letter you can contact our SEND Support line (via phone 01905 857825 or [email](#)) and the staff will be able to arrange a call back with a member of the SEND Review Team.

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## Speech and Language Therapy update

Milton Keynes Children's Speech and Language Therapy Service have shared an update on their current referral process.

### **How long is the wait for the first appointment?**

The average wait to assessment for pre-school children is 18 weeks and school age is 52 weeks.

### **What is the cause of the delay?**

- Increased number of children to be seen following Covid 19
- Increase in the number of EHCP requests needing an initial assessment
- National difficulties with recruiting Speech and Language Therapists
- Increase in referrals

To find out what the service is doing to help and to find out more information please visit the [Speech and Language Therapy update leaflet here.](#)



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## 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.

**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.](#)**



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**SEND Drop In Day**



## SEND Drop-In Session at the Moorlands 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.

Wednesday 01 March 2023	1:00 – 2:30 pm	<b>Moorlands Family Centre</b> Beanhill Local Centre, Dodkin, Beanhill, Milton Keynes MK6 4LP
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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](mailto:Contact@mksendias.org.uk)



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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:SENDSupport@milton-keynes.gov.uk)

The [Holiday Activities and Food \(HAF\)](#) programme is a national targeted programme funded by the Department for Education for children in receipt of benefit related Free School Meals that delivers programmes during the Spring, Summer and Winter school holidays.

During Winter, we had 4,000 sessions attended during the 4 day programme that ran 20<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> December with a range of enriching sessions that included visits from reindeers, caving, multisport camps, with trips to Gulliver's land and the Land of Lights.

The Spring HAF programme will be taking place 3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> April and seeks to deliver another bumper packed range of enriching activities, with the addition of a central online booking system to improve the booking experience.

More details will be available on the [HAF website](#) in March 2023.

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## Milton Keynes Gallery SEND Events

Milton Keynes Gallery host a range of SEND specific events and activities through the year. As well as hosting the events, MK Gallery have put together a range of social stories for their events to support people with SEND. To find out more and to check out their social story, please follow the below links.

- [Supported Studio](#) | Every third Saturday of the month | £5
- Relaxed Cinema Screening | 12<sup>th</sup> February, 11am | [Puss in Boots: The Last Wish](#) | £5
- Relaxed Exhibition Viewings | [19<sup>th</sup> February, 10am](#) | [19<sup>th</sup> March, 10am](#) | from free-£11.50
- Art Together: Family SEND Workshop | 16<sup>th</sup> February, 11am-12:30pm & 2-3:30pm | £5 per family | [Art Together](#)
- SEND Exhibition Tour | [11<sup>th</sup> March | 11:30am](#) | [8<sup>th</sup> April | 11:30am](#) | £5 per family



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## Mental Health Charity Shout Out:

We all have mental health, just like we all have physical health. Sometimes we feel well, and sometimes we don't. Our mental health can be impacted for lots of different reasons. Sometimes the small things can affect us more than we realise. Below are some local charities who are able to support your child's mental health and wellbeing.

### YiS Milton Keynes:

Young people's mental health: education, outreach and counselling.

Services offered:

- Education and outreach
- Wellbeing Coaching
- Therapeutic Counselling
- Early Support and wellbeing hubs

### Arthur Ellis:

Mental health support.

- Support for you
- Support for parents, schools and GPs

- Support for business

*"By 2025, we want people across the UK to be using our Bananas and Doughnuts to actively manage their mental health and well-being in work and day to day life and have the ability to support anyone that comes to us for support without a waiting list or threshold."*

#### Mind BLMK:

In Milton Keynes, we have a central Wellbeing Centre (based on Midsummer Boulevard) where we offer peer support and our bereavement by suicide support service. We also have a Community Garden project at York House in Stony Stratford and work across the community to promote better mental health and wellbeing.

#### Mind Jam:

Emotional support for Children & Adolescents through Gaming and Game Design.

Online 1 to 1 mentorship and guidance for children suffering with anxiety, stress and social issues; through positivity, learning new skills and play.

A PACA parent who has used Mind Jam has given the following review:

*"We then were introduced to Our Mindjam mentor, Initially this was a video call with us as a family, My teen was then able to state their preferences for camera on or off, and which games they enjoy, which areas they are interested in learning about etc.*

*For our Teen connection is key, they need to know they can trust so building those relationships up is really important.*

*It's taken a few weeks of playing games my teen enjoys, online for my teen to build trust to then begin to extend into other areas or interests.*

*Our Mentor is doing what all our children need, Meeting them where they are and walking alongside them until they can take a step further."*





*By sharing this information, we are not endorsing or quality checking any events or activities, and parent/carer/families remain responsible for their own research. We recommend contacting providers directly.*

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## Short Break Vouchers

The online application process for Short Break Vouchers (SBV), for the year 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, to support children and young people with EHCPs, is now open. We will start processing applications on 1 March in the order we receive them. Vouchers will be posted out shortly thereafter.

More information and how to apply can be found on our [SEND Local Offer](#).

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## February Half Term Events

### **Saturday 11th, 14th, 15th and 18th: Thomley Disability Family Day**

Thomley offers days for disabled visitors and their families to come and play, meet new people and find much-needed support. Check out [their calendar](#) for all event information.

### **Sunday 12th and 19th: Top Jump SEND Sessions**

Lower lighting and calmer music, carer goes free and siblings can join the session. More information on [Top Jumps website](#).

### **Monday 13th and Wednesday 15th: Fields of Dreams cuddle and a cuppa.**

Relaxed sessions on the farm to meet the animals and chat with staff. For more information and to book [contact Fields of Dreams](#).

### **Wednesday 15th: Supporting Xtra Special Families Sensory Sensation**

- Craft/Play Zone
- Yoga Zone
- Sensory Zone

For more information [check out their Facebook!](#)

### **Friday 17th: MK Springers Gymnastics Centre**

Autism Bedfordshire are hosting various half term activities. More information can be found [here](#).

### **Friday 17th: Deaf Coffee Club**

Hosted by Access Bedford, along with various other social meet ups. More information about the coffee club, and their other groups can be found on [their Facebook](#).

### **Wednesday 15th - Saturday 18th: VICTA Photography Course with London Institute of Photography.**

Join VICTA and the LloP in trendy Brick Lane, East London, an area now extremely popular with London's edgy and artistic crowd, to learn how to take creative photographs in your own signature style. Head over to [this website](#) for more information about the course.

### **Other dates:**

### **Family Fund Ipad Workshops**

From designing Valentines cards to making movies Family Fund have a variety of online Ipad workshops for young people to access. Read more about their Ipad events [here](#).

### **Looking to get away?**

Hft have a holiday guide with information to help people with learning disabilities and those closest to them choose an accessible, disability-friendly holiday. Finding places to stay and more information can be found on [their website](#).



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## Family Fund Grants

Do you know about Family Fund Grants?

Family Fund grants are available for families on a low income, raising a child or young person aged 17 or under with a long-term disability, disabling condition or life-limiting illness. Grants depend on available funding.

To decide if your family is eligible for a grant, Family Fund look at your income and the impact of disability on your child.

For more information or to see if you're eligible visit the [Family Fund website](#).

## Tax-Free Childcare

If you get [Tax-Free Childcare](#), you'll set up an online childcare account for your child. For every £8 you pay into this account, the government will pay in £2 to use to pay your provider.

You can get Tax-Free Childcare at the same time as 30 hours free childcare if you're eligible for both.

You can use it to pay for [approved childcare](#), for example:

- childminders, nurseries and nannies
  - after school clubs and play schemes
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## 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!](#)

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## **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](#)*

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**Note: Please do not respond directly to this email.**

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



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