

## **Shropshire Parent and Carer Council Preparing for Adulthood Navigators Project.**

Preparing for adult life can be more challenging for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families. Certain experiences help us prepare for life as an adult; for young people with SEND this should be recognised in the support they receive.

Shropshire Parent and Carer Council (the Parent Carer Forum in Shropshire, PACC) listened carefully to children and young people with SEND and their families experiences and wishes relating to preparing for adult life. Sarah Thomas, Shropshire PACC's Influence and Change strategic lead explained, *"What we heard from families through the work that we did was that there was a significant lack of information for parent carers (about preparing for adulthood). It felt like a bit of a black hole. They felt emotionally, really challenged by the whole thing because it was scary."*

PACC found that young people with SEND when preparing for adult life wanted the same things we all do, such as to have a job or vocation, to have friends, support, be part of a community, to have a say in how they live their lives and to be independent and living in their own home. They produced a report, ['A Sense of Purpose and a Home of My Own'](#) which focussed on what parent carers and young people with SEND needed to ensure they have happy, meaningful lives as they become adults. They worked with partners, such as those in social care and preparing for adulthood leads to explore options for improving support. They applied for some funding from the Learning Disability and/or Autism funding (held by the local Integrated Care System) which has supported the development of the PACC Preparation for Adulthood Navigators Project. The Preparation for Adulthood Navigators are available to help SEND families understand what support and provision they can access to support young people in their journey to adult life. They provide information about post-16 education options (including supported internships), managing finances and benefits, employment and volunteering opportunities, mental capacity, and parent carers' role in decision-making, opportunities to spend time away from the family environment, annual health checks, friendships, and more.

The forum is hearing really positive feedback about the project, particularly around social opportunities for young people and information on education provision and Education Health and Care Plans. Denise, PFA Navigator and parent carer herself, gave an example of how the project supported one young person and their family coming back to Shropshire after being in and out of area residential school. "He didn't know what he was going to be doing and where or how to access services. The family felt very much on their own in terms of working out what happens next. He'd come from a very supportive environment with an education, health and care package, and he needed to build a whole new support system and network from scratch. The family felt isolated." The PFA navigator was able to link the family in with support, such as social and volunteering opportunities for the young person and information to support his parents. The parent carer told the forum "I feel the navigators understand (things) from a parent carer perspective which makes such a difference. We would not have survived this last year without the information support from navigators. He has an amazing social life and a lovely group of friends".

The forum also run a Buddies Social Network which is a parent carer led group facilitated by the forum. Young people and their parents go bowling once a month or to things like the theatre or go for walks bringing families together in a really fun and relaxed way.