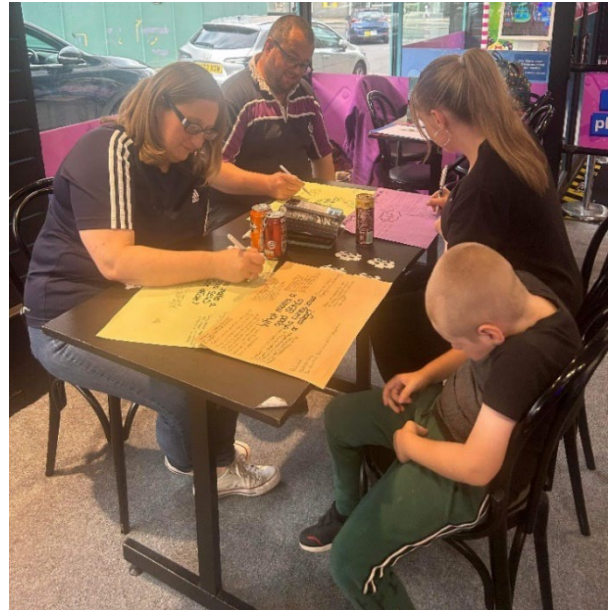


## **SOUTHAMPTON PARENT CARER FORUM - A YEAR OF REACHING OUT AND BECOMING A FORCE FOR POSITIVE CHANGE**

Southampton Parent Carer Forum (SPCF) has been working hard to engage with families and increase reach since they relaunched last year.

The forum looked at different ways to engage with as many families as possible in their first year. They found holding swimming sessions on Saturday afternoons a great way of engaging dads to come along, as well as working parents and parents of young people with complex needs.

The forum held soft play sessions where they chatted to families about their experiences of services while their young people enjoyed the bouncy castles and slides; and they put out feedback sheets so those who didn't want to speak could record their thoughts and views. Amy the chair said



“The forum is trying to reach out to seldom heard families including families who have English as a second language or where a child doesn’t have a diagnosis. By running sessions on sleep difficulties, challenging behaviour, or anxiety at coffee mornings families get a chance to speak to the forum about these issues which builds trust and a relationship with the forum.

The forum holds events at Board, a local board game café in the City which is great for older young people. Some of the staff are neurodiverse themselves so the young people enjoy speaking to them as positive role models and the forum gets to chat to the parent carers and hear about their experiences of services.

Picture: Matthew - Winner of the competition to design the parent carer forum’s new logo





Picture: families at Board in the City

The events also help reduce the isolation many families experience. At a family event last summer one mum said *“Thank you for giving me the opportunity to get out the house today”* and a newly single dad said *“This has given me the confidence to take the boys out on my own.”*

During the year, 293 parents carers attended events. The forum’s Facebook group has 458 members and over 2,000 followers. The forum gave out over 5,000 ‘Beat the Blues’ bags via schools encouraging parent carers to take a break (with a hot chocolate and biscuit) and find out about the forum. They issued 114 food bank vouchers and delivered 6 training events for parents.



Picture: Beat the Blues Bags

By collecting feedback from families and representing them in strategic meetings the forum is already making some changes. They have been working on the Local Offer to make sure that information about support is accessible and comprehensive.

They have made improvements to school transport including running training for transport staff. Parent carers have conducted mystery shopper visits with their children to try to encourage museums, swimming pools and other cultural providers to be more disability friendly.

The forum has made improvements to the local Holidays and Activities Food programme for children getting free school meals to make sure it is more SEND friendly. Since becoming involved, feedback from families of SEND children is much more positive.

The forum’s Chair, Amy Kendall said *“As a forum representing parents and working to improve services we know there is still lots to do, but it feels like a great start.”*

The forum produced a great report on their first year and their plans which include reaching out to more schools, and recruiting more parent reps to sit on strategic decision-making groups to ensure that parents’ lived experience is heard by practitioners. The forum’s report on their first year can be found [here](#).