

1.00pm SESSION TWO A: What isn't working well (Part 1)?

- Introduction from Sarah Thomas from Parent Carer Council Shropshire (PACC)

PACC is the Parent Carer Forum for Shropshire, we are an independent, experience led organisation, and all of the staff team and trustees are Parent Carers and Family Carers. We work with the Shropshire SEND families, supporting children and young people 0-25, across all conditions and levels of need. We speak to Shropshire SEND families every day and listen to their experience of raising SEND Children and Young people in Shropshire, what we are sharing with you today reflects that experience.

What isn't working well in the SEND system? There are numerous things that have combined to get us where we are now and while money isn't the answer to everything I am going to start there. The right level of funding does enable sufficiency, which is fundamentally what the SEND system is missing, sufficiency to meet demand in the right way. It means that too often the services needed are not available. We know about the huge waiting times for autism and ADHD assessments and Speech and language support, but in Shropshire we also see limited education options, with too many families struggling to find the right school or college for their child, limited options for breaks from 24hr caring responsibilities for families who are struggling to keep going, no Learning Disability diagnosis pathway which impacts access to other services and support for some of our most vulnerable young people and a lack of supported living opportunities so that young people can have a home of their own.

Local Government, the education system, the health system have all faced repeated cuts to funding, which increases waiting times and decreases the quality of support received. Long waits for advice, systems under stress, high turnover of staff, children and young people feeling forgotten and parent blame, all combine to escalate difficulties, creating a cycle of increased demand and crisis.

So, if we put funding to one side for now what else do we need to address? Shropshire SEND Families are clear about what isn't working in the SEND system.

There is a lack of **training and understanding** resulting in too many practitioners across all services not understanding their roles, what they can and cannot do and how they can join up with other services, alongside a lack of understanding of how SEND impacts learning, communication and behaviour in different environments.

There is **a focus on fixed and inflexible approaches**, rather than person-centred and needs led support. A lack of a willingness to do things differently, especially in schools, is damaging children and young people. This isn't just an issue at an individual school level but at a system level, with an education system that fundamentally teaches children and young people what they can't do, rather than what they can. We need equity, with all children and young people being given the same opportunity to succeed, not a version of equality, where everyone is treated the same and forced into the same box.

Poor communication and a lack of clear information is something that families raise with us time and time again. Families rarely feel listened to by teachers, Social Workers, doctors, plan writers, it's an issue across the whole system, even though guidance says that the voice of Parent Carers and CYP should be at the centre of decision making. They don't know what support their child is receiving and even more importantly what support they aren't. They too often get passed from one service to another, lost in gaps and forgotten, all the time needs escalating.

All of this inevitably results in **poor relationships and increased conflict**, not just for Parent Carers or Family Carers, but also for children and young people with SEND. Feeling valued and having a sense of belonging are fundamental to everyone's mental health and wellbeing, instead too many SEND families feel forgotten and alone. Too often the people they speak to don't understand their lives and the challenges they face on a daily basis, instead the narrative of families wanting something for nothing and being the problem, grows. Is it any surprise we have a mental health crisis in the

SEND community. Managing conflict takes time and resources and in an already stretched system only reduces capacity further.

Finally, and not surprisingly SEND families want **better outcomes** for their children and young people. The SEND system is not delivering good lives for the children and young people who rely on it, low chances of employment, increased chance of being in the criminal justice system, poor health, early death if you have a Learning Disability and increased risk of suicide if you are autistic. The SEND system needs to work better together, the lives of children and young people is about more than just school or college and even when they are at school education needs to be about more than just passing exams. We are not effectively preparing young people with SEND for adulthood, they are not supported to build their confidence in new environments, build friendships, to self-advocate, to look after their health, be active, to plan for the future. We need to value what these young people can do and enable them to succeed in a whatever way works for them, they are not the problem, the wrong expectations and blinkered attitudes are.