

**Merton's Forum for Parents of Children and Young People  
with Disabilities or Special Needs  
A project of Merton Mencap**

Tel: 020 8687 4644 email: [kids.first@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk](mailto:kids.first@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk)  
[www.mertonmencap.org.uk](http://www.mertonmencap.org.uk)

## Issue No. 3 - spring 2010

In this issue we are focusing on Education. We will be covering the Disability Discrimination Act in the autumn issue. We welcome your suggestions for future topics.

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### Help for parents of special needs pupils!

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A free new booklet called "**A-Z of Special Educational Needs (SEN)**" is now available in schools in Merton.

It explains all the confusing terms used by teachers and other professionals when they are talking about children with special needs.

As soon as a child is identified as needing extra help in school, parents are bombarded with terms like IEP (Individual Education Plan), SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) and EP (Educational Psychologist). Parents need to know what these and other terms mean in order to understand how to make sure that their child is receiving the correct help in school.

This booklet was written by parents for other parents so is easy to understand. The authors are all members of Kids First.

We have enclosed a copy with this Newsletter and you can obtain further copies from your school, your local library or Children's centre.

You can also obtain it directly from Kids First at: [kids.first@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk](mailto:kids.first@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk)

Telephone: 020 8687 4644

Website: [www.mertonmencap.org.uk](http://www.mertonmencap.org.uk)

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### What are exclusions?

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If your child is sent home from school at any time or asked not to attend for any length of time, this is an **exclusion**.

Every time this happens, the Head must write to you immediately giving the length and the reason for exclusion.

All exclusions must be reasonable and not be an alternative to supporting your child and meeting his or her special needs.

Any time your child is excluded, you have the right to make written representations which must be considered by school's governors.

If an exclusion is for more than one day, school must set and mark work for your child.

Parents please watch out for:

*"this is just an informal thing, not an exclusion"*

*"he just needs time at home to calm down"*

*"he is only leaving early, no need for any fuss"*

*"the Head does not have time to write a letter"*

These should NOT happen

For more detailed information please see [www.ipsea.org.uk/What-you-need-to-know/Exclusion](http://www.ipsea.org.uk/What-you-need-to-know/Exclusion)

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## SEN transport, the facts

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All parents, including those with SEN or disabled children, have an obligation to make sure their child is transported to school and attends school irrespective of their own logistical problems due to work or other commitments.

However, the LEA has a **duty to provide free transport** or to provide help with transport in the following situations:

1. The closest school which can meet your child's special educational needs is more than "statutory walking distance" from home. This is 2 miles for pupils under 8 and 3 miles for pupils 8 and over.
2. The school is within statutory walking distance but the nature of your child's disability means they cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school.
3. The journey to school is unsafe.
4. Certain other cases involving children from low income families (normally qualifying for free school meals), children educated further than 2 miles for faith reasons, and children not educated at school.

If you fall into these categories, the LEA must provide transport if you request it and should not ask you to give any additional reasons why you cannot transport your own child.

In all other situations, provision of transport is discretionary. The LEA needs to make arrangements for transport if it considers it necessary for the child to attend school. This decision should be made by the LEA based on evidence and following an individual assessment of need.

Other key duties of the LEA are:

- Families must be able to appeal against any transport decisions made
- Transport must be non-stressful
- All transport staff (such as drivers and escorts) should have passed an enhanced criminal records bureau (CRB) check
- Journey times should be no more than 45 minutes for a primary school pupil and 75 minutes for a secondary school pupil

For more details, see Merton's Home to School Transport Policy at [www.merton.gov.uk/learning/edinclusion/edspcialneeds.htm#transport](http://www.merton.gov.uk/learning/edinclusion/edspcialneeds.htm#transport) or [www.IPSEA.org.uk](http://www.IPSEA.org.uk)

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## A personal experience of education

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*A Kids First* parent has a boy with Down's syndrome who attends his local Merton Primary School. The family is very keen for him to stay in mainstream school for social reasons.

Some of the incidents that this Mum experienced at school were quite stressful:

1. On a number of occasions, Mum was rung during the school day and asked to collect her son from school. She was told he had misbehaved, including pulling the glasses off a dinner lady. She was told that he could come back the next day.
2. At every annual review, the school brought up the subject of a special school and suggested that he should go there part time at first.

How did Mum respond?

We advised her that being asked to take your child out of school, even if just from 2pm until 3.30pm, is technically a temporary exclusion and should be followed by a letter from the Head Teacher explaining why this has happened and explaining what appeal process the parent has available to them. The school should make every effort to avoid exclusions for statemented children and work with their support staff to identify problems before they resort to exclusion.

The next time this happened, Mum asked "is this a formal exclusion?", and then went into school to discuss how teachers were logging the events immediately prior to her son's behaviour incidents. She explained that being sent home is a treat for him and so would encourage the behaviour to continue. She also explained that he only does this at school so there must be a specific trigger and that the school had a responsibility to try and work out what it was.

What happened?

*School did not exclude him again and seemed to manage his behaviour much better.*

We advised the Mum that parents have a strong legal right to have their children educated in mainstream school (if the cost of any support is extremely high, the Local Authority have to prove that it is unreasonable). Mum needed to focus the annual review on how everyone can make his life at primary school successful and happy. Mum asked Chris Wilson (Parent Partnership Officer) to come to the next annual review with her and she stood her ground.

Recently, the school called Mum in to discuss a residential school trip for her son's class. She was worried that they were going to say he couldn't go. In the event, the school was very helpful and already had a plan of their own; there was no suggestion that he couldn't go.

*This school appears to have learned that their job is to improve life for the child.*

All the information which this parent used to confidently stand her ground is available in our leaflet "A-Z of Special Educational Needs (SEN)".

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## Free expert education advice

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**IPSEA** is a national charity providing free legally based advice to families who have children with special educational needs. Their website includes useful model letters as well as helpful advice.  
[www.ipsea.org.uk](http://www.ipsea.org.uk)

**The Advisory Centre for Education (ACE)** is a national charity that provides advice and information to parents/carers on a wide range of school based issues including exclusion, admissions, special education needs, bullying and attendance  
[www.ace-ed.org.uk](http://www.ace-ed.org.uk)

**Carers Support Merton** can provide individuals with support to write letters, attend meetings, fill in forms etc.  
Tel: Opal Lynch 020 8646 7515

**Network 81** is a national network of parents working towards properly resourced inclusive education for children with special educational needs  
[www.network81.org.uk](http://www.network81.org.uk)  
Helpline: 0845 0774055.

**East London Education Legal Advice Service** ELELAS is part of Tower Hamlets Law Centre and provides FREE independent and confidential, special education legal advice. The service is based in East London, but not restricted to advising in this area – they cover all areas of London. You do have to make an appointment.  
Tel: 020 7247 8998  
email: [info@thlc.co.uk](mailto:info@thlc.co.uk).

**The Children's Legal Centre** offers free legal advice on school admissions as well as other areas of law and policy affecting children.  
[www.childrenslegalcentre.com](http://www.childrenslegalcentre.com)  
Tel: 0845 345 4345

**Phil McLeish**, Young People's Lawyer at the Springfield Law Centre, Springfield University Hospital, 61 Glenburnie Road, SW17 7DJ. He also provides education law advice:  
Tel direct line: 020 8682 6115  
Tel switchboard: 020 8767 6884  
Fax: 020 8767 6990  
Mobile: 07528 272 208

**Merton's Parent Partnership Officer** provides impartial confidential support, advice and training to parents of children with special educational needs and those at risk of exclusion.  
Tel: 020 8543 8671  
Hillcross Primary School, Ashridge Way, Morden, Surrey, SM4 4EE

Kids First will be holding an evening session with Chris Wilson, **Merton's Parent Partnership Officer**, on Monday 24 May, 8pm to 10pm, Chris will explain how to obtain advice on schools and education. It will be at the William Morris Pub, 20 Watermill Way, Abbey Mills, Merton, SW19 2RD.

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## Information about Kids First

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Kids First is Merton's Forum for Parents and Carers of Children and Young People with Disabilities or Special Needs. We are funded by the London Borough of Merton's Childrens Trust, by Government through the Aiming High Initiative, and through other funding raised by Merton Mencap. In January of this year Kids First celebrated its 5<sup>th</sup> Birthday. Membership is growing all the time and we currently have over 230 members.

### Kids First's strengths are

- we are a local group, dealing with issues specific to Merton
- we welcome all family members
- we support all disabilities and special needs including mild to severe learning disability, autistic spectrum disorder, physical and sensory impairment and complex medical needs

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### Steering Group

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The Kids First Steering Group consists of 10 volunteer parents and we aim to reflect a cross section of Kids First members.

The Steering Group meets twice a term and drives forward the business and planning of Kids First.

We also ensure the voice of parents is heard at local policy-making level.

New volunteers are welcome – why not try it out?

#### Current Steering Group members:

Astrid Spencer (Merton Mencap Trustee), Gunny Lenz-Mulligan, Paula Jewes, Valerie Shannon, Rosemary Lever, Sharon Lisk, Yogesh Mehta, Kevin O'Byrne, Sanela Cox and Melanie Pheasant.

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### Keeping in Touch

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Do you have an e-mail address? Kids First would like to keep you up to date on workshops, news and events by email. If you

are happy to be contacted in this way, please send an e-mail to

[tracy.blackwell@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk](mailto:tracy.blackwell@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk).

If you do not have e-mail, we will continue to send flyers to you by post.

Your e-mail address is solely for use by Kids First and will not be passed to third parties.

We have recently streamlined our e-mail contacts so that you only receive the absolute minimum number per term and it is clear what each is about before you open it.

## Representative roles

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### Kids First Volunteers Wanted!

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As our membership grows, we are always looking for volunteers to join various joint working groups and our own Steering Group.

#### Can I be a Kids First Parent Representative?

- Do I have a few hours available during the day (when my children are at school perhaps)? OR
- Do I have time to attend evening meetings twice a term (7pm – 10pm)?
- Would I like to know more about the workings of the Local Authority and PCT (Health)?
- Can I speak to other parents of disabled/SEN children and explain their views and experiences to other people?
- Do I want the Kids First parent forum to continue and grow?
- Do I want Kids First to reach and support more parents?

If you volunteer to be a parent rep, we will provide full training and support.

#### Worried about being out of pocket?

Parent representatives can claim expenses for travel, parking and other reasonable costs upon presentation of a receipt.

Please ring Tracy Blackwell, 020 8687 4644 or email

[tracy.blackwell@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk](mailto:tracy.blackwell@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk) if you are interested or would like to chat with a member of the Steering Group.

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## Children with Disabilities Partnership Board

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This board meets on a Friday morning approximately every 8 weeks. Members include the Head of Special Educational Needs, the Manager of Children with Disabilities Team (Social Services), the Children's Trust Commissioning Manager, representatives from the PCT (Health) and a number of other service managers.

Kids First provides up to six parent representatives. We discuss services affecting disabled children including special educational needs, short breaks provision, after school clubs, and other services.

Our parent representatives are currently Astrid Spencer, Sharon Lisk, Yogesh Mehta, Sanela Cox, and Paula Jewes.

The Children with Disabilities Partnership Board and Transition Partnership Board will be merging shortly and we are awaiting details of the new structure.

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## Transition Partnership Board

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The Transition Partnership Board meeting in January was chaired by young members of the 'Your Shout' group, who announced that they will shortly be making a DVD with Cricket Green and St Ann's Schools using money from the Aiming High for Disabled Children Programme.

Merton's Transition Team is currently updating the Transition Packs and other documentation.

The Jigsaw4U project continues to work with families 'in transition' who require assistance beyond that normally given by statutory services. Their caseload is diverse.

Other items discussed include: sixth form provision and further education funding; Merton Mencap's travel training scheme; and services at the new Mitcham Polyclinic.

Yet again there was no representation from Connexions (who are supposed to be pivotal to the transition process), mainstream secondary schools, or housing, who have yet

to report back on plans for future provision for the disabled.

As the Transition Partnership Board is now merging with the Children with Disabilities Partnership Board, we will be keeping a check on continuity of issues, membership and attendance.

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## The Play Partnership

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26 of Merton's playgrounds are being upgraded. You must ask soon if you want a special piece of equipment or landscaping to help your child to enjoy outdoor play.

New equipment will include sand, logs, rocks, boulders and ropes. We are hoping that all of the upgraded playgrounds will include flat swings as well as traditional ones, equipment with back and side supports, and tactile equipment which can help our children to use their imagination and develop strong play skills.

Please let our new co-ordinator, Sue Henning, know if you have any suggestions: email: [kf@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk](mailto:kf@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk)

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## NEW Kids First Issues Log

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Kids First is aiming to build up a confidential log of issues affecting Kids First Members.

Please tell us about any minor or major issues and this will enable us to build up a general picture of problems and good practice in the Borough.

Send your issues to Sue Henning, email [kf@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk](mailto:kf@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk) or feel free to speak to a Kids First representative at any of our events.

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## Short breaks Project

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You can now contact the Short Breaks Team directly on 020 8545 3090 to find out about positive activities for your child which can also provide a break for you.

Merton's Family Information Service also gives advice on short breaks, childcare and mainstream activities. Call 020 8545 3800 or access their website on [www.merton.gov.uk/community/familyinfo.htm](http://www.merton.gov.uk/community/familyinfo.htm)

Merton's new short breaks include after school clubs at Cricket Green and also soon St Ann's School. There are specialist play schemes available in most school holidays, and residential developments are taking place for complex needs children including those with moving, handling and medical needs. A part time inclusion worker, Hannah Clarke, will be looking at supported mainstream services for disabled children.

### **Eligibility – what is available to you?**

Not all short breaks depend on your family being referred by social services. Just attending a special school in Merton can qualify you for some schemes. Parents can also contact the following clubs directly

- Merton Crossroads Afterschool club at Cricket Green school (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday)
- Merton Crossroads Saturday Friends Club at the Polka Theatre, for children with autism, 5 to 13 year olds (every other Saturday)
- Merton Crossroads Alice Powell Club at Cricket Green school, for children with learning disabilities or special needs, 10 to 16 year olds (every other Saturday)
- Magic Club at Phipps Bridge Youth Centre, 9 - 25 year olds (Saturday)
- Squad Youth Club, 13 to 25 year olds (Thursday night)
- Merton Mencap TC club (Transition Club) at Wimbledon YMCA, 14 to 25 year olds (Saturday afternoons)

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## **Special Educational Needs Meetings Update**

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Kids First has regular meetings with Jan Martin (Head of Education) and Kaye Beeson (Head of SEN & Inclusion). For those members who receive home to school transport, the Kids First Steering Group has complained about way in which the review was handled last summer and is continuing to take advice and follow up our

complaint. Please feel free to suggest other agenda items for these regular SEN Meetings.

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## **The Lamb Inquiry: What will change for parents?**

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The Government has accepted the following recommendations which will be in place in due course:

- Ofsted must report on SEN provision in all schools they inspect
- Parents can appeal if their child's statement is not updated
- There will be a national, independent SEN helpline for parents
- More emphasis will be placed on making sure that reports from people such as Educational Psychologists and Speech Therapists reflect children's needs and not available resources
- The Local Government Ombudsman can now receive complaints from parents and can investigate individual schools
- Guidance will be strengthened on exclusions for SEN pupils (see exclusions section above)
- Legal aid for tribunals may become available
- All SEN officers will be expected to have training specifically on writing good statements and communicating with parents
- SENCOS now have to be qualified teachers as well as undertaking special training

Overall, non-compliance with statutory duties is recognised as being a problem and Ed Balls, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, says he is committed to turning this around after the election!

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## **Merton Mencap**

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### **Merton Mencap develops its services for children**

Merton Mencap has recently developed the scope of its services for children with a learning disability. Until recently, the charity could not provide services for children who also have medical needs, moving and

handling needs or other complex needs, but this has now changed. Merton Mencap's Chief Executive, Andrew Whittington, says the charity has been working towards this for some time: 'After reviewing our services for children, we felt we needed to make changes in order to include those with additional needs. We therefore altered our insurance arrangements, wrote new policies and procedures, and recruited and trained staff to enable us to welcome children who have a range of other needs, in addition to their learning disability.' Merton Mencap run playschemes for children with a learning disability during the school holidays and, over the last year, the charity has more than doubled provision. Their playschemes ran during the October half term, Christmas holidays, February half term, with extra provision provided for children with profound and multiple learning disabilities, and they are currently organising playschemes for Easter. Andrew feels there is a clear need for such services: 'The idea is to take children out for the day to do activities which non-disabled children take for granted, while also providing a break for family carers.' Merton Mencap receives referrals for their playschemes through social services at present, so they advise families who are interested in this service to discuss this with their social worker.

## **Merton Mencap launches new web site**

Merton Mencap has launched their first website – [www.mertonmencap.org.uk](http://www.mertonmencap.org.uk) The site includes details of their services for children, young people and adults with a learning disability and their family carers. The site also has details of their latest staff and volunteering vacancies. Merton Mencap's Chief Executive, Andrew Whittington: 'We are very excited about launching our first web site and providing information to local people in this way. We consulted various parties when designing the site, which has also been reviewed by the *Speak Out* group, a forum for people with learning disabilities in Merton'

Please telephone Merton Mencap's Young People's Projects Co-ordinator on 020 8254 8389 for further information.

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## **Useful tips**

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**We hope you will find the following information and tips helpful. Neither Merton Mencap nor Kids First endorses the information. Kids First members have made these recommendations. If you would like to submit something for a future issue, please email Sue Henning at [kf@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk](mailto:kf@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk)**

### **Spectrum at St Georges**

Spectrum is based at St Georges, Tooting, and is an organisation run by trainee doctors for children with a range of disabilities.

A Kids First parent wrote "Our son attended a party, disco and games sessions last October which he enjoyed immensely. Spectrum organise various outings and events. I can recommend them highly."

Spectrum also offers a befriending service whereby a young trainee will take your child out to the park or play with them at home.

There is currently a waiting list but you can contact Spectrum on [sgulspectrum@googlemail.com](mailto:sgulspectrum@googlemail.com) or 07896 816890.

### **Information Centre at St Helier Hospital**

A brand new patient information centre, designed and built to offer patients a wide range of information about different aspects of their healthcare was opened in November.

The centre at St Helier Hospital contains a wealth of easy-to-understand information about a wide range of medical conditions, as well as local support groups and the services that the Trust has to offer.

It also offers patients free internet access, so that they can look at official healthcare websites. You can also find information leaflets such as Kids First and Merton Mencap!

## **Books for families of children with special needs**

How many families in Merton realise the wealth of reference material that is available in our local libraries about children's special needs? They hold an extensive range of books covering a wide range of disabilities and special needs, and may also be able to order a specific title if they do not have it available.

## **How I helped my son beat ADHD**

Sharon Fuccillo has written a handbook for other parents whose children are struggling with ADHD. It is very reader friendly and is full of helpful tips and advice.

For more advice on ADHD, visit [www.addiss.co.uk](http://www.addiss.co.uk) or if you would like a free copy of the handbook, "Better Days: A Family Handbook for ADHD", please email [info@betterfutures.co.uk](mailto:info@betterfutures.co.uk)

## **Afasic – unlocking speech and language**

Across the UK, the lives of over 1 million children and young adults are affected by the hidden disability of speech, language and communication impairments.

A number of Kids First Members have recommended Afasic, the UK charity for speech, language and communication impairments.

They have a great website and you can subscribe to their news snippets at [www.afasic.org.uk](http://www.afasic.org.uk).

## **Lady Allen Adventure Playground**

This playground provides adventurous, imaginative, and exciting play opportunities for disabled children and their siblings between the ages of 5-14. The playground also has indoor facilities including play areas, soft play, arts and crafts area and a video games room.

Opening times:

Term time: Tues 10am-5pm (under 8s),

Weds-Fri 3.30-5 pm, Sat 10am-4pm.

Holidays: Mon-Fri 10am-4pm.

After school club: Tues-Fri: 3.30 pm-6pm.

Sat Club: 10am-4pm.

For further information and charges

telephone: 020 722 80278

## **Daisy Garland**

The Daisy Garland is a family-run, national, registered children's charity based in West Wimbledon to support families with children with epilepsy

They aim

- to raise the much needed awareness about childhood epilepsy
- to fund specially trained ketogenic dietitians to work within the NHS country-wide, allowing other children like Daisy to benefit from this drug-free treatment. The ketogenic diet can dramatically reduce the severity of all types of seizures. However, due to lack of NHS funding, this diet is not widely available in the UK.
- to provide active support for parents/carers of children diagnosed with epilepsy

Family Funday Picnic and Balloon Race – Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> July, Holland Gardens, Cambridge Road, West Wimbledon 1-5pm. Free admission – bring a picnic!  
[www.thedaisygarland@btinternet.com](mailto:www.thedaisygarland@btinternet.com)

## **Scope – New Cerebral Palsy resource pack**

A new free guide for parents of children with cerebral palsy containing a wealth of practical information and advice as well as details on where to find support has recently been launched by disability charity, Scope.

The compact guide offers comprehensive advice on supporting a child with cerebral palsy, from everyday activities, such as the best techniques to use for brushing teeth, to long term issues like providing for a child's special educational needs.

Parents who would like a copy should contact Scope Response. The service can be contacted on 0808 800 3333, by email [response@scope.org.uk](mailto:response@scope.org.uk)

## **3H Fund**

3H Fund specialises in organising holidays for physically disabled people and respite for their carers.

Care is provided by volunteer helpers and two experienced leaders. Each holiday has a nurse and/or access to local medical facilities.

New for 2010 they are organising activity holidays for 13-17 year olds at the Keppleway

Centre in the Lake District. Places will be limited.

For more information and costs contact 01892 860207 or email [kim@3hfund.org.uk](mailto:kim@3hfund.org.uk).

### **Green Valley Railway**

This working model railway is called "The Garden Line".

173 Westway, Raynes Park SW20.

2010 Open Days in aid of the Children's Society and Holy Cross Church are:

#### **SPRING OPENING**

Sat 17th and Sun 18th April

1-5pm both days

#### **SUMMER OPENING**

Sat 17th and Sun 18th July

1-5pm both days

#### **AUTUMN OPENING**

Sat 2nd and Sun 3rd October

1-5pm both days

For confirmation of opening times, access and other enquiries tel: 020 8542 5811

### **New Wimbledon Theatre Open Day**

As part of its centenary celebrations, New Wimbledon Theatre is holding an Open Day on Wednesday 14th April from 11.00am to 7.00 pm: tours, displays and activities, lots of interesting things for all the family to see and do. [www.ambassadortickets.com/New-Wimbledon-Theatre](http://www.ambassadortickets.com/New-Wimbledon-Theatre) for further details..

### **Multi sensory room – Lavender Children's Centre**

Did you know that there is a multi sensory room at Lavender Children's Centre, which opened last September?

The sensory room is open to individuals, small groups and professionals and can be booked for 1 hour slots in blocks of 4 weeks. An induction will be given, which will last approximately 10 minutes to show you how to make the best use of the room and how to use it safely. For more information contact Wendy Maxey, Tel: 020 8646 7345.

Lavender Children' Centre  
Tamworth Park Recreation Ground,  
London Road  
Mitcham  
CR4 3LA

### **Drusillas Park – East Sussex**

If you are looking for a fun day out in the Easter or summer holidays, Drusillas Park is a great place to visit. With hundreds of fascinating and entertaining creatures and fantastic attractions for children (including Thomas the Tank engine) it is a great day out. Drusillas Park is accessible to all, with wheelchair routes and low level viewing and a sensory trail with booklet. For more information see [www.drusillas.co.uk](http://www.drusillas.co.uk).

### **Special needs website**

[www.special-needs-kids.co.uk](http://www.special-needs-kids.co.uk) – this site is an information directory and shopping site to help parents and carers of children with special needs. It gives a number of links to organisations which support children with special needs e.g. sport and play, holidays, outdoor and indoor toys.

### **Calvert Trust**

Enabling people with disabilities, together with their families and friends, to achieve their potential through outdoor adventure activities in the countryside. Its three centres welcome over 11,000 visitors each year, helping them challenge disability through outdoor adventure and providing more opportunities to find out that "its what you CAN do that counts!" For details of their centres and to download brochures see [www.calvert-trust.org.uk](http://www.calvert-trust.org.uk).

### **Cricket – boring?**

I always used to think of cricket as rather boring – my brothers didn't play the game and my father would fall asleep in front of the Sunday afternoon televised matches (but then he had worked a 6 ½ day week and eaten a big roast lunch). Nowadays, I have much more time for cricket, so much so that I help with local youth cricket. Cricket has given my eldest son useful work experience as a coach and team manager; for my youngest son, who has Asperger's, cricket gave him a social and sporting outlet at a time when he was struggling elsewhere.

The game has rules and etiquette, ideal for someone who likes structure and predictability. It is a fairly accommodating sport – a slow runner or overweight fielder may be able to hit a '6' with ease or have

good hand-eye co-ordination for catching or bowling; very few players are all-rounders.

Cricket can improve social skills – shaking hands with opponents at the end of a match, sharing a cricket tea or passing time when a rain shower interrupts play. It is a sport for girls and boys that seems to attract people of all ages, colours and creeds and helps them to mix easily together.

In our cricket club we have children with Asperger's and other language and communication difficulties; also one or two with hearing impairments. It is an inclusive, mainstream club.

In Wallington, there is a club specifically for children with disabilities and special needs. Cricket has made an effort to cater for all comers, for instance the blind and partially sighted use a white 'rattle' cricket ball, and coaches are encouraged to undertake disability and equity training modules to help them adjust to difference. Just as girls' cricket has seen a recent revival, there is now increased interest in cricket for those with disabilities and special needs.

There is increasing evidence that children with conditions such as Asperger's can benefit from undertaking the kind of skills associated with cricket, not only in the physical co-ordination and sequencing sense, but also in learning to follow instructions and work alongside others. If you have a young child aged 6 to 10 then they can join kwik cricket sessions, progressing to hard ball cricket if they are capable. Schools have shown a renewed interest in cricket for all the above reasons plus its contribution to team working, improved behaviour and better mathematical skills.

For further information about cricketing opportunities in South London and Surrey go to:

[www.britoval.com/content/surrey-cricket/development/disability-cricket](http://www.britoval.com/content/surrey-cricket/development/disability-cricket)

## Kids First Information

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### Newsletter Feedback

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Do you like our third Newsletter? We would like to hear your views and include your contributions. Please email [tracy.blackwell@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk](mailto:tracy.blackwell@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk)

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### Recent Kids First meetings

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#### Wills and Trusts – Mencap

Everyone needs a will, however simple, otherwise the distribution of your estate will take much longer and money may not go to the people you expect.

A discretionary trust is the best way to protect your child's state benefits and to prevent challenges to your will from the Local Authority and others.

As protection for your disabled child, it is a good idea to name a solicitor as one of the trustees in your trust. You could also use a charity such as Mencap to set up and manage a trust for your disabled child.

#### Behaviour Management & Breakaway Skills – Andy Whysall

Challenging behaviour is unlikely to be cured, but we can learn to recognise small changes in eye contact, body language, tone of voice etc which precede challenging behaviour.

We learnt strategies for lowering the arousal level of both ourselves and our child to keep the situation under control.

#### Merton College – Disability Access Advice

The college tries to assess all young people within six weeks of arrival to make sure they are receiving appropriate support, including one to one support if necessary. However, if students cannot cope with the level of work, they will be asked to find another placement.

Some young people refuse to have any support, which is their right once they reach 16.

Much of the College's support and assessment has historically focused on dyslexia but this is changing.

## **Merton's Dedicated Transition Team – Val Prior**

The team offers support and signposting for families of disabled and SEN children from 14 to 25.

Val has 2 social workers attached to her team who can answer questions regarding college, school, housing, benefits, work and assessments for adult social services.

They will try to help every young person to move forward even they do not qualify for adult social services after the age of 19. It is a new service so still in development.

## **Inclusion & Equality Training – Mencap**

Parents were shown how to adapt a game to make it more inclusive. We discussed activities in school playgrounds, sports and also classroom attitudes.

Parents were interested in inclusion accreditation which involves an annual audit of service providers within the Local Authority by a group of disabled and non disabled young people.

## **Transition to Adulthood – SKILL: National Bureau for Disabled Students**

The speaker, Andrea Lewis, updated parents on the 139a assessment; an analysis of need and description of support your child will require once they leave school. The Connexions service should carry out this 139a assessment for all children with a statement, and also for some on school action plus, in the year before they leave full time school.

We learnt about ESA (Employment Support Allowance) which has replaced Incapacity Benefit. Your child is eligible from the age of 16 but will have to have an interview called a Work Capability Assessment and possibly also a medical assessment. The benefit goes up to a maximum £95.15 per week but child benefit will cease once ESA is claimed.

## **St Georges Consultant Learning Disability Nurse - Jim Blair**

Parents can contact Jim prior to their child or young person going to St Georges Hospital, whether as an in-patient or out-patient, and Jim will make sure everything is organised to support you. He will also pass on your comments and ideas to practitioners. He

holds a senior post and can really change things.

We discussed the possibility of a special adolescent ward, options around how blood is taken, disabled parking, waiting times, and food for parents on the wards.

Please contact Jim if you have a child with a severe learning disability; just let him know how he can make your life easier. His email is [Jim.Blair@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:Jim.Blair@stgeorges.nhs.uk) and his phone number is 020 8725 2217.

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## **Free events for your diary**

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### **Merton Mencap Services for children, young people and adults**

Thursday 29 April, 11am to 1pm

Andy Whittington, Chief Executive  
*Chaucer Centre, Canterbury Road,  
Morden, SM4 6PX*

### **How to Manage Education, Work, Benefits, Housing\* Advice for parents of young people aged 13 -25 years**

Friday 14 May, 9.30am to 2.30pm

Jane Alltimes, Mencap  
*Morden Cottage, Morden Hall Park,  
Morden Hall Road, SM4 5JD*

### **Merton's Parent Partnership Service**

#### **How to obtain advice on schools and education**

Monday 24 May, 8pm to 10pm

Chris Wilson, Parent Partnership Officer  
*William Morris Pub, Function Room,  
20 Watermill Way, Abbey Mills,  
Merton, SW19 2RD*

### **What is Music Therapy?\*** **How can music help our children & what can we do at home?**

Tuesday 8 June, 9.30am to 2pm

Belinda Soper, Music Therapist

Chaucer Centre, Canterbury Road,  
Morden, SM4 6PX

**Techniques for Playing  
Creatively with your Children\***  
**Play provides therapy,  
education and builds positive  
relationships!**

Friday 18 June, 10am to 2.30pm

Diana Seach, Education and Family  
Consultant

Chaucer Centre, Canterbury Road,  
Morden, SM4 6PX

**Solve Your Child's Sleep  
Problems!\***

**Discuss your sleep or bedtime  
issues and find practical  
solutions**

Friday 25 June, 10am to 2.30pm

Patricia Everitt, Sleep Nurse, Cerebra  
Chaucer Centre, Canterbury Road,  
Morden, SM4 6PX

**Positive Activities for your  
Children and Young People**  
**What can your child do after  
school and in school  
holidays?**

Thursday 1 July, 11am to 1pm

Mandy Lawson & Hannah Clarke,  
Short Breaks Team & Mark Clark,  
Merton Youth Service

Chaucer Centre, Canterbury Road,  
Morden, SM4 6PX

*\* means need to book a place*

**Feedback from parents**

At all Kids First events, we ask  
parents to fill out a simple evaluation  
form. Here are some of the comments  
received recently.

*"It helps to know how Merton works. The  
meeting was informative and helpful."*

*"It was useful to know how to complain."*

*"Extremely helpful to meet other parents who  
are at a stage ahead and can talk of what they  
have learnt."*

*"Gives me a chance to open up about my  
stressful life and the people here understand."*

*"Great, new tips and ideas to trial."*

*"Every participant is made to feel relaxed,  
welcome and part of the group."*

*"The venue was noisy at times and the toilets  
were not easy to find."*

**First time with Kids First?**

**Worried about not knowing  
anyone?**

If you want to come to one of our events but  
are worried about finding the building or not  
knowing anyone else...

just ring or email and we will arrange a friendly  
member to meet you before the event and stay  
with you so you are not alone!

**Our contact details**

**For further information or to register**

Ring Tracy Blackwell on 020 8687 4644  
or email

[tracy.blackwell@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk](mailto:tracy.blackwell@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk)

**Important note:**

***Whenever we refer to "parents" in our  
newsletters, flyers and emails, we mean  
ALL carers of children and young people.***

**Disclaimer:**

***Any views expressed in this newsletter do  
not necessarily represent the views of  
Merton Mencap.***

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