

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

Issue No. 2 - autumn 2009

In this issue we are focusing on Transition. We hope you will find this useful and we welcome your suggestions for future topics. We will be covering Education in the spring 2010 issue.

Post-16 Transition – are you ready for it?

In this issue we focus on post-16 transition, the move from child to adulthood. Young people with disabilities and/or special needs from 14 to 25 years old are deemed to be 'in transition'.

Chapter 9 of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, which can be viewed on the internet, deals specifically with the Year 9 annual review which is critical to the whole process. This review must involve the Connexions Service and in the case of a 'child in need' (disabled child), social services should attend. At the core of the process is the drawing up of a Transition Plan which incorporates information from all parties, including the child and parent. It should cover all aspects of a young person's life: education, health, housing, welfare benefits, life skills, social opportunities, etc. It is the responsibility of the Connexions personal adviser, who should also be able to give advice on forward options, to ensure that this Plan is used as a working document to ensure optimum life chances for the young person.

Statements of special educational needs only apply to young people over the age of 16 in school settings, such as at one of the special schools (St Ann's and Cricket Green) or one of the Academies or Catholic Sixth Forms. There is a different system once the young person leaves school. Colleges of further education will determine their own additional learning support.

Post-16 transition has recently attracted increased attention from both central and local government. It is in society's interest to keep a check on public spending and reduce the numbers of NEETs (those not in education, employment or training). At the local level this may mean better provision to avoid costly out-of-borough residential placements or travel training to encourage independence.

Merton now has a Transition Partnership Board which looks at the issues surrounding 14-25 year olds with disabilities or special needs. There are representatives from schools, Merton College, Children's and Adult Services, Connexions, Health, local support organisations and parents (including three Kids First parent representatives), which meets every two months; also Val Prior has recently been appointed Manager of a dedicated transition team so that all services are integrated, and Merton has recently appointed two Transition Social Workers. Merton College and Merton Adult Education have improved their provision for these young people and a group called Your Shout has been set up in the borough to give a social outlet and voice for these 14-25 year olds.

In 2010, all state secondary schools in Merton will have access to sixth forms which will allow more choices for our children. Additionally, Merton produces a Transition Pack with useful guides to all aspects of the process.

Transition Packs are available from Merton school SENCO's or via email from Val.Prior@merton.gov.uk. It should be good Year 9 Annual Review Practice to ensure that parents have these transition packs and they will be available at the **Transition Fair, Friday 6 November** from 10 am to 4pm at the Chaucer Centre on Canterbury Road, Morden, aimed at parents and young persons.

Cricket Green School is having their **Careers Evening on Tuesday 24 November** from 6 pm at

the school. Celia Dawson, the Head Teacher, is keen to attract the wider SEN community, not just Cricket Green families. For more information contact her on 020 8640 1170 or email head@cricketgreen.merton.sch.uk.

As part of our focus on post-16 transition, Kids First has arranged a **Disability Access Advice session at Merton College on Thursday 22 October** from 11am to 1pm and a **Meeting with Val Prior, Manager of the Dedicated Transition Team on Tuesday 10 November** from 11am to 1pm at the Lavender Children's Centre at Steers Mead, Mitcham. We are also holding a **Workshop on Transition Issues** in January 2010 covering benefits, independent living, work and education.

Connexions has arranged an evening event at their offices in Wimbledon Broadway on **Tuesday, 17 November** to ask further questions of Connexions representatives subsequent to the Transition Fair.

The following websites also provide some very useful information www.after16.org.uk and www.skill.org.uk.

A Personal view of post-16 transition

I have a 19-year-old son with Asperger's, speech and language difficulties and a history of M.E.. In the past year, a diagnosis of dyslexia has been added.

When I reflect upon post-16 transition, I have a number of observations. Too often it is left to parents to find out information for themselves, rather than being fed the information. My son attended a base attached to a mainstream school, which was in its infancy. I would like to think that the experiences of former pupils and their families are fed back into the system so that improvements can be made.

When your child has a Statement of Special Educational Needs there are certain entitlements and an annual review. Once out of the school system, the security of a Statement disappears (for instance, my son lost access to speech therapy); also free access to three years further education starts ticking away. For these reasons, I welcome Merton's decision to expand sixth form provision to all their schools.

I cannot stress enough the importance of travel training. What may seem a small step to a non-disabled person can be a huge achievement to a disabled person? My son first managed independent bus travel during his third week at college; now he copes with unaccompanied trips around south west London.

We are constantly trying to push out the boundaries and I am very thankful for mobile telephones which keep us in contact with one another.

College years have been reasonably successful, but he has experienced anxiety. The quality of the relationship between teacher and student is key. College brings a host of new experiences: own registration and self-declaration (or more usually non-declaration) of special needs or disabilities; sparse home-college communication; assignments that are difficult to understand; a growing expectation of the student to seek help rather than be given help automatically, etc. Once the annual reviews disappeared with the Statement, so too the input of Connexions. With parents' evenings non-existent and the young person struggling with communication, it can be very baffling and lonely.

Outside college the young person may want to find a part-time job but lacks the skills to seek employment, write a CV or put himself across properly at an interview. Fortunately, my son's social circles have grown since school but we have had problems. When his friends were not old enough to accompany him to a pub they would drink in parks at night and that would worry me.

In recent months we have been grappling with the university application system, which is not particularly user-friendly as there is this expectation that a young person with a normal IQ can master deadlines, forms, emails, telephone calls and appointments. The personal statement proved a stumbling block and the delay in writing probably affected his offers. Not only was it difficult to write but he was short on evidence of prior achievements and work experience having had a far from average life so far.

The biggest lesson I have learnt about the university application system is the need for up-to-date assessments and documentation, which would have been par for the course if his Statement and annual reviews had continued. Student Finance England deals with Disabled Student Allowance (DSA); they would not accept assessments carried out just prior to my son leaving school three years before, even though he has long-standing and lifelong conditions. Consequently I tried to obtain assessments through local health and education services, but to no avail. Fortunately, my son's college offered him an assessment with a dyslexia specialist as a special favour. Hence he now has a diagnosis of dyslexia, which is fortunate as Asperger's and Autistic Spectrum Disorder do not feature in the DSA booklet, just dyslexia and dyspraxia, so having the 'right label' appears to be important.

Once Student Finance England accepted my son would require support, we were then able to arrange a needs assessment at Roehampton University, which was promptly arranged. They in turn submitted a report to Student Finance and my son's university. We are now awaiting the go-ahead to purchase the recommended equipment and software, and to action the necessary training. I first approached Student Finance England in early February and university starts in two weeks and we still have much to sort out – you can never begin early enough.

Information about Kids First

Kids First is Merton's Forum for Parents of Children and Young People with Disabilities or Special Needs. We are funded by the London Borough of Merton's Children and Young People's Partnership, by Government through the Aiming High Initiative and through other funding raised by Merton Mencap. In January of this year Kids First celebrated its 5th Birthday. Membership is growing all the time and we currently have over 200 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

Keeping in Touch

Do you have an e-mail address? Kids First would like to keep you up to date on workshops, news and events by email. Using e-mail will mean we are able to keep you up to date on a more regular basis. If you are happy to be contacted in this way, please send an e-mail to tracy.blackwell@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk. If you do not have e-mail, we will continue to send flyers to you by post as we have previously.

Your e-mail address is solely for use by Kids First and will not be passed to third parties. We are currently working on streamlining our e-mail contacts so that you only receive the absolute minimum number per term.

Steering Group

The Kids First Steering Group consists of 8 volunteer parents and we aim for the group to reflect the 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. We make sure that parents are consulted on all services affecting members' children. New volunteers would be welcome - see below.

Steering Group Members

Astrid Spencer (Merton Mencap Trustee), Sheena Crankson, Paula Jewes, Rosemary Lever, Sharon Lisk, Yogesh Mehta, Kevin O'Byrne and Melanie Pheasant.

Merton Mencap

Merton Mencap appointed a new Chief Executive, Andrew Whittington, earlier this year. Andrew has experience of managing in the public and private health and social care sectors and is currently looking at developing the charity's services and activities. Andrew said, 'It is a time of change and opportunity for Merton Mencap. We want to introduce new activities where there is unmet need and continue to work to improve services for people with a learning disability and their family carers, throughout the borough'.

Merton Mencap's summer activities have been very popular again this year. The **Summer Playscheme** provides an opportunity for children with a learning disability or special need between 5-13 to enjoy exciting leisure activities. The **Buddies** scheme supports young people with a learning disability between 14-25 to enjoy community activities and leisure opportunities. Demand for both services has been very high and the programme of activities this year included a tour of Wembley Stadium, a visit to Kew Gardens, drama and music workshops and trips to adventure theme parks. The **Transition Club**, for young people with a learning disability between 14-25, now has regular, specialist football coaching sessions and a football team is currently being set up.

The emphasis of the club, which runs on Saturday afternoons, is on health and wellbeing, while helping young people to improve their confidence in accessing mainstream services. Merton Mencap's Chief Executive, Andrew

Whittington, feels this is an important element to services. 'The benefits of the services and activities we provide to people with a learning disability are more than enjoyment on the day: our aim is to help people improve their confidence, self-esteem and independence, while providing the opportunity for people to enjoy things that others take for granted'.

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

Representative roles

Kids First Volunteers Wanted!

We were delighted to have two members volunteer for representative roles as a result of reading the first Newsletter. As our membership grows we are always looking for volunteers to join various joint working groups and our own Steering Group (which we are hoping to extend to include an Issues group).

Laura Thorn's personal account of being a new rep

I volunteered as a Play Rep for Kids first ten months ago now, helping one of the Kids First Steering Group members in her role as a Kids First parent representative. It has been an exciting time, especially as the London Borough of Merton have recently secured £2.5 million to develop 14 play areas by March 2010, as well as a further 14 and an Adventure Playground by March 2011.

It has been really interesting to attend meetings and to see how decisions are made and to have been able to have given input on behalf of Kids First and its members. The Borough has decided on the year 1 sites and is now considering the year 2 sites - hopefully, with our input, they will be accessible to all of our children!

Can I be a Kids First Parent Representative?

- Do I have a few hours available during the day once a month (when my children are at school, nursery or college)? 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. However, you will need to have 3 or 4 hours free **either** during the school day or during the evening, once or twice a term.

Worried about being out of pocket? Did you know that parent reps 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 if you are interested or would like to chat further with a member of the Steering Group

Children with Disabilities Partnership Board

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 and a number of other service managers. Kids First provides six parent representatives.

We discuss services affecting disabled children including special educational needs, short breaks provision, after school clubs, and plans for integrating services. Our current parent representatives are Astrid Spencer, Sharon Lisk, Yogesh Mehta, Sanela Cox, and Paula Jewes. There is 1 vacancy. Unfortunately, the Borough has cancelled the last two meetings.

At the previous meeting, Paul Ballatt (Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance for Children, Schools and Families) explained that the contract for running Merton's leisure centres is under renegotiation. Kids First presented a list of current problems from the point of view of disabled people and Merton Mencap contributed a suggested list of questions for potential providers.

We discussed funding for independent travel training and informal exclusions from school.

Kaye Beeson (Head of SEN) explained that official exclusions of SEN children were rare. Kids First reps explained that parents are sometimes asked to take their children home for part of the day by their class teacher if they misbehave, which is an informal exclusion. There is also a lack of concern

by the Authority when SEN children are kept at home because schooling has broken down. Everyone agreed that these were major problems and Kids First will monitor parents' experiences and report back to the Board.

We are keen to hear from any parent who has been asked to take their child home, keep them at home, find an alternative school, or whose child has been at home for a long period with little communication from the Local Authority.

NOTE: Any information we receive from individual parents about their experiences are kept completely confidential within Merton Mencap.

The Play Partnership

There is funding from Government for 26 playground developments and an adventure playground in Merton. Kids First reps sit on the play partnership steering group in order to ensure that the new playgrounds cater for SEN and disabled children. Any information you can provide us about your good and bad playground experiences would be very helpful. Please ring Tracy Blackwell, 020 8687 4644 or email tracy.blackwell@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk if you have a comment or contribution to make.

Funding news

Kids First have received phase 2 funding of £10,000 from the Government for Parent Participation work under the Aiming High for Disabled Children Programme.

We will be running workshops and events focussing on post 16 transition. We will also be running another family event at Ravensbury Park next spring. We are hoping to start a log of parent's issues to feed into our representative work. With this funding, we are also updating our website, continuing with this newsletter twice per year and distributing our leaflets more widely, including at doctor's surgeries. This money has also enabled us to produce the new information leaflet for parents called "A to Z of Special Educational Needs (SEN)".

Integration Project

Kids First involvement in this has now finished as the project will be implemented very shortly. Merton are currently recruiting an interim Integrated Services Manager who will combine

together: Portage (under 5s); Early Support (key worker service for under 5s); the Children with Disabilities Team (Social services for families with disabled children); the new Short Breaks Service; other seconded part-time staff such as a school nurse, dedicated health visitor and speech and language services. Some parents should begin to experience a smoother service from early in 2010.

Short breaks Project

Mandy Lawson (previously deputy manager at the Brightwell Respite Centre), has been recruited as Merton's Short Breaks Manager. This year Brightwell will expand to accommodate more children and cater for medical needs and complex needs children, including children with moving and handling needs. An additional play scheme will be run during this October half term. Crossroads has started a new club for children with challenging behaviour and autistic spectrum disorders.

Cricket Green School has expanded their after school clubs and also some Cricket Green children are being supported to use child care provision at local mainstream schools.

Next year the plan is to develop overnight provision for complex needs children under 11 in a home-based setting. There will be further play schemes for complex needs children during school holidays. Young disabled people will be able to go with their siblings and friends to the youth club at Phipps Bridge for dedicated sessions. An inclusion worker has been recruited to enable more of our disabled children and young people to access mainstream services and community activities. Money will be spent on staff training across the borough. We believe this programme will significantly improve access to short breaks.

We will keep you informed about developments in this newsletter, including any schemes which can accept referrals directly from parents. For more information, please ring Tracy Blackwell, 020 8687 4644 or email tracy.blackwell@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk.

Lamb Inquiry into Special Educational Needs

The Government has set up a team of experts to look at SEN inspection and accountability, assessment of children's needs, parent partnership services, and how communication between parents and schools/local authorities could be improved. They have identified some

major problems with the current system which are consistent with our own experiences as Kids First parents. Some improvements suggested by the inquiry so far are:

1. Instructing Ofsted to monitor school's SEN policies more closely and looking more closely at outcomes for SEN children. Schools who do not meet the needs of their SEN pupils would not be able to achieve an 'excellent' or 'very good' rating overall. Inspectors should receive training in SEN and disability and specific experts recruited for inspection teams.
2. To provide a right of appeal for parent if a local authority decided not to amend a statement after an annual review.
3. Tightening professional standards for educational psychologists, speech therapists and possibly others involved in assessing SEN children. These opinions should be completely objective and fully quantified, where necessary.
4. There should be improvements in the quality of statements and guidance and training for staff who draw up statements. Training should also put into practice the principle of partnership.

There will be a full report from the Inquiry in October and we will summarise this in the spring newsletter.

Special Educational Needs Update

Kids First held its second meeting with Kaye Beeson, SEN and Inclusion Manager, and Jan Martin, Head of Education in Merton, last term.

At the meeting Kaye Beeson and Jan Martin agreed to help distribute our new leaflet called "An A-Z of Special Educational Needs" which has now been finalized and will be sent to all Kids First members.

Although Merton doesn't currently subscribe to a mediation provider it should be provided on request by parents. Kids First feel parents are not aware of this and Astrid Spencer has written more about mediation below.

Steering Group members were asked for their views on new Statement paperwork.

After hearing a number of concerns from Kids First parents regarding a letter they received from the Local Authority about the provision of

transport, we have asked for clarification and for parents to be written to again before half-term with more information.

We will be holding meetings such as this one every term. Please feel free to suggest agenda items.

Information and Tips

We hope you will find the following information and tips helpful. Neither Merton Mencap nor Kids First endorses any of the information given; it has been gathered from Kids First members who have made these recommendations. If you would like to recommend or submit something for a future issue, please email Tracy Blackwell at Kids First.

Green Valley Railway

I live in Westway, off Grand Drive in Raynes Park, which is a well-used cut-through to the Tesco superstore and the local schools along the A3. Little do most passers-by realise that behind the facade of an ordinary looking terraced house lies the Green Valley Railway.

My neighbour Paul first started to construct the garden model railway in 1987. It now boasts almost 500 foot of track, a working miniature canal and a full-size signal box brought up from Eastleigh in Hampshire.

With the help of his parents Edna and Roy and some like-minded railway enthusiast friends, Paul opens the railway to the public for one weekend each spring, autumn and Christmas. The proceeds of the day, raised through donations and sale of home-made refreshments (highly recommended), are divided between The Children's Society and Holy Cross, Motspur Park. To date, the railway has raised about £5,000 for charity.

The Green Valley Railway is a delight for young and old alike with its trains running to a schedule. Children get very excited at the sight of Thomas, Percy and the Troublesome Trucks from *Thomas the Tank Engine* trundling by. At Christmas, it is even more magical as trucks bear special Christmas cargoes.

Over the years, a number of Kids First families have enjoyed visits to the Green Valley Railway, where they have been made to feel very welcome. Open days are held throughout the year. The 'Christmas Special' will be held on **Saturday 5 December, 1-4.30 pm**. For further information and to check access, please ring 020 8542 5811.

Scampps

Scampps in Surrey supports children with complex and special needs living in Surrey and the neighbouring London boroughs of Merton, Croydon, Kingston upon Thames and Sutton. It is a registered charity run by a group of parents who themselves have young children with special needs.

The families they support have a wide range of disabilities including genetic conditions such as Downs syndrome, Prader Willi and other rare disorders, Cerebral Palsy, Autistic Spectrum Disorders, Global Developmental Delay, Learning disabilities; or medical conditions such as Spina Bifida and Cystic Fibrosis.

Scampps offer financial support to their local paediatric therapy team for equipment and toys. They also provide funding for individual bids for specialist equipment, sensory toys and software. In addition to organising networking events for the whole family, such as swimming parties, they run adult social events (not subsidised) for parents and carers to support each other. For further membership information and further details take a look at their website www.scampps.org.uk

Mediation (also known as dispute resolution services)

What is mediation?

The aim of mediation is to help parents/carers, schools, and local authorities reach an agreement which is in the best interest of the child; in other words, help to resolve disagreements. It is a helpful tool when the people involved are finding it difficult to communicate about an issue.

Mediation is an informal, voluntary process which involves an independent person (mediator) helping those in dispute to agree solutions that are acceptable to all parties. The mediator is impartial and therefore will not take sides or put forward suggestions. They will provide a controlled, structured, neutral environment in which you and the other party can work towards an agreement.

If you do reach an agreement, the mediator will prepare an agreement document which everybody will have a chance to check and comment on before signing. However, there is no obligation to agree anything at a mediation

transport, we session if you do not feel there is any common ground.

When should I use mediation?

If you feel that your concerns have not been adequately addressed through the local channels offered to you then mediation may be a good step. It works best when the parties involved have a real desire to come to an agreement, and are willing to negotiate.

How would I find mediation?

If you feel that mediation would be a helpful tool, either contact the Local Authority or the Chris Wilson the Parent Partnership Officer. Chris can be contacted by email chris.wilson@merton.gov.uk or by telephone on 020 8543 8671. Merton no longer have a contract with a mediation service; however, it is your right to request and receive mediation, and we have been assured by Merton that they will provide the service when requested. The Parent Partnership Officer will provide you with help and advice – he will not provide mediation.

Will it affect my right of appeal?

Going to mediation does not affect your right to continue with an appeals process, for example, tribunal; however, you must bear in mind that appeals are subject to time limits and ensure that you do not overlook these if you are going to mediation.

Feedback

We would be very interested to hear about your experiences if you have requested or used a mediation service.

Giving Blood

Have you ever thought about giving blood? There is a permanent centre at St George's Hospital, Tooting plus a travelling service that visits Wimbledon, Morden, Mitcham and Raynes Park regularly. More details are available www.blood.co.uk or by telephoning 020 8258 8300.

Merton's Active Plus Courses

In the summer and Easter holidays, Merton runs courses for children in the Borough. You can book these on the internet where you describe your child's extra needs in a box provided. Most activities charge a reasonable fee. The courses will not guarantee additional members of staff, but they will do everything they can to accommodate all children who wish to attend. Some activities

are in very small groups and so are more suitable for special needs children.

Two Kids First parents described their children's experiences at Deen City Farm during the summer: "They mucked out the pigs, made smoothies to sell in the cafe (after washing their hands, of course), they made a film about a ghost, and played with the guinea pigs. The staff were very caring and kept in touch with us. The other children were friendly and kind to each other."

We recommend that Kids First families try these courses. Call the Family Information Service if you would like advice on which activities would most suit your child. We would be very grateful for feedback from anyone who does give it a go at Easter, just email or call Tracy. For more information www.merton.gov.uk/activeplus.

Swing harness

The safety harness for the swing at Ravensbury Park is available for loan from Kids First. Please contact Tracy Blackwell if you would like to borrow it.

Sure Start Children's Centres in Merton

Sure Start is the Government's programme to support young children and families through early education for all, more and better childcare and reshaping early years provision through the establishment of multi-agency Sure Start Children's Centres, bringing together early learning, health and family support. It is reshaping early education, childcare and family services, while actively supporting parents as parents and in their aspirations towards employment, education and training.

Merton have developed 11 children's centre services to provide borough-wide coverage for all families with children under 5. All centres are fully accessible and provide a range of multi-agency services that meet the Sure Start vision for children's centres.

What will I find at the children's centres?

- Child and family health services including health promotion, antenatal and breastfeeding support
- Access to good quality childcare including links with childminders
- Family support services including helping with the challenges of being a parent

- Help and support to access training and employment
- Advice to help families make the most out of their income.

Children's centres are joining up with schools, local organisations, groups, NHS services, Job centre Plus and local service providers to create an invaluable service for families with young children in Merton.

Contact a Family and the Family Information Service will be holding coffee mornings for parents who have children with additional needs. The coffee mornings will be held on the second Wednesday of each month between 10 am to 12 midday. These will be held at Newminster Childrens Centre, Newminster Road (off Bishopsford or Malmesbury Road), Morden, SM4 6HG. For more information call 020 8545 3800 or 020 8640 5525.

Facebook

Contact a Family have launched a group on Facebook. CAF Facebook has about 600 members and those signed up are using it to keep in touch with parents/carers caring for children with similar conditions. There are podcasts to download; parent blogs to read and it is a great way for parents to share tips and views on caring for a child with a disability. You can find out more on www.facebook.com/pages/Contact-a-Family/25040545213

Disability Challengers

For those of you who haven't heard about Disability Challengers, they run Saturday Play Schemes and Holiday Schemes for children with disabilities. Your child has to be 4 or above and you need to register and have an initial assessment. After that you can book sessions when you like.

A half-day costs £7 and a full day (9.30 am – 4pm) costs £14. Children can attend regardless of how profound or able they are with their disability. Some venues will accept mainstream siblings too. They also run other events which don't need to be pre-booked, such as their Family Days and Fun Swims.

Unfortunately, the nearest scheme to Merton is West Ewell and the Fun Days and swimming take place at Guildford. For more information call 01483 579 390.

Carers Support Merton

Carers Support Merton invite you and your children to a free play session to celebrate the launch of their family support services for children with disabilities.

The play session will be held at Eddie Catz, Wimbledon, 42 Station Road, SW19 2LP (opposite Abbey Mills & Sainsburys) on Friday 23 October. There are two sessions being held 10-12 and 4-6 pm. To book your place call Shelley or Opal on 0208 646 7515 or email: opalind-say@carerssupportmerton.org.uk.

Kids First Autism DVD

“Something’s Not Right...The clues that might mean autism” - This Kids First DVD is available free from Tracy Blackwell or can be downloaded from our website, www.kids-first.org.uk

Martial Arts

I wanted to find a mainstream activity for my autistic son which preferably involved some level of physical activity. After some research I settled on Karate and it has proved to be a real success. I am writing this article with experience of an autistic child; however, I see no reason why it should not be relevant to other learning disabilities or special needs.

Whilst researching, I found a lot of anecdotal evidence that Martial Arts have a positive effect on children and adults with autism and other special needs.

Martial Arts trains students in motor co-ordination and body movements, and improves the range of motion and flexibility whilst strengthening the body.

One of the advantages that I see is the level of discipline required for Karate. The rules and etiquette are clear and simple and are taught from the beginning, which provides clear boundaries and removes grey areas and social ambiguities that my son finds hard. It also teaches respect; all students are taught to respect one another which leads to a tolerant and inclusive environment. It is repetitive and so the moves become instinctive rather than having to be thought about, and it is about individual rather than team success and so each individual can progress at a rate which is suitable for them rather than the whole class.

My son has graded a number of times now and with each grading has received a new coloured belt and a certificate. As his parent it is wonderful to see him succeed within a mainstream environment and to witness the positive effect this has had on his self confidence and self esteem.

Most martial arts are suitable for 5 years old and above.

Tube – access all areas?

Do you need information about where you can get on a tube train without using steps, or where you can find toilet facilities on the underground.

If so, you'll be pleased to know that Transport for London has produced two new products to help you. The Tube toilet map shows which stations have toilet facilities – including accessible toilets – and the Step free Tube guide which uses a traffic light colour scheme and an ABC letter system to show the step and gap between the platform and the train at stations you can use to make step free journeys.

TFL have also launched a campaign to raise awareness of their accessibility information and information in alternative formats so that customers will find it easier to plan accessible journeys. These products include large print tube maps and information about their Assisted Transport Services.

For more information about the range of products visit tfl.gov.uk/accessguides or call 020 7222 1234.

Fulham Football Club Disability Courses – Positive Minds Project

Fulham FC Community Sports Trust is working in Partnership with the local community to provide multi-sport activities for young people aged 16-19 years with a disability.

These sessions are held at Cannon's Leisure Centre, Madeira Road, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 4HD on a Wednesday between 7.30 – 8.30 pm and cost £1.00. For more information or to book contact Susi Williams on 0870 442 5432 or email swilliams@fulhamfc.com

Family Learning Festival

Merton Adult Education will be holding a series of events during their Family Learning Festival. This will take place between 10-31 October 2009. All Family Learning Festival events are offered to adult members of the family and their children.

The adult member could be a parent, carer, grandparent, aunt, uncle or an adult brother or sister. All activities are free! To join in the fun and for more information log on to www.merton.gov.uk/adulteducation.

Zumba comes to Morden

ZUMBA!!! Soon to be the biggest fitness craze to hit the UK. The best fun you will ever have to lose weight, get in shape and get totally addicted. Experience the magic of ZUMBA! Dance and exercise to hypnotic Latin American & Worldwide rhythms. It is a great way to de-stress and forget your worries for an hour! For more information and details of classes in Morden and the surrounding areas log on to www.zumbaparty

M-Card

The Family Information Service has been developing the M-Card throughout Merton.

The M-Card is a free credit card size ID that shows a child or young person has a disability or special need. It can be used at many attractions in Merton (and beyond) to get assistance, to fast track through queues or to get discount entry prices. The card is easily recognizable and helps identify that the holder has a special need or disability without having to go into details. Organisations that accept the M-card should display the 'M' symbol so that you know that you can use your card there. The Family Information Service will also send you a list of organizations with your M-Card.

To get an M-card you need to register with Merton's Disability Database. This is a voluntary register of children and young people with a disability or special need in Merton. It is held within the Family Information Service, a confidential and impartial service. For further information and to register go to www.merton.gov.uk/mcard.

Radar Key

The national key scheme (NKS) offer independent access to disabled people to around 7,000 locked public toilets around the country. RADAR would like all providers of accessible toilets to keep their toilets unlocked if at all possible.

The NKS is suggested for use only if the provider concerned has to keep the toilets locked to stop vandalism and misuse.

However, from personal experience a high number of disabled toilets are kept locked. An easy way to obtain a RADAR key is to purchase one from the Shopmobility Scheme in the St Nicholas Centre in Sutton. The keys cost £3.50 and the blue badge will be needed as proof of disability. Keys are available by other means but Kids First members have found this the easiest way to obtain one.

Kylie Sheets

Kids First have been contacted by a number of parents as there has been a change to the provision of incontinence sheets for children with disabilities. When children were out of nappies they used to be provided with two 'Kylie' sheets per year but this service has now been stopped.

If you have been affected by this or feel you may be in the future please contact Michael Foot, Complaints Manager at St Hellier Hospital, Wrythe Lane, Carshalton, SM5 1AA or ring Tracy Blackwell, 020 8687 4644 or email tracy.blackwell@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk.

Headway

Headway – the brain injury association which helps those who have suffered brain injuries – has also set up a new group to help the carers, family and friends of victims. The newly launched group provides a two hour slot during the week when carers can focus on themselves and their own needs. Headway is hoping the group will help reduce social isolation which can result from caring for someone, and enable families and friends to build new support networks with others who understand the issues involved. To find out more contact Headway on headwayswLondon@gmail.com or 07722 861642.

Odeon Cinema Screenings

With slightly lower volume and brighter lighting, special screenings will soon be organised by the Odeon in Wimbledon to take place every Saturday morning at 11 am. These screenings aim to be totally child (and parent) friendly - no adverts or trailers to sit through. Bring all the family and pay on admission. We will let our members know when these sessions begin.

We wish to make it clear that this is an Odeon service and not the responsibility of Kids First. We would still appreciate your feedback on these sessions so that we can inform the Odeon if there are problems e.g. with the sound or lighting levels, accessibility etc.

Newsletter Feedback

We were delighted with the feedback we received after the first Newsletter.

"I would like to commend you and the team on such a well informed and well put together Kids First Newsletter. I have thoroughly enjoyed the material and found the entire Newsletter very interesting"

"I received my copy of the Newsletter today and found it a very interesting read"

"Congratulations on the Kids First Newsletter which looks very professional and will be an excellent publicity tool"

"Brilliant Newsletter, best I've seen"

Do you like our second Newsletter? We would like to hear your views and include your contributions. Please email tracy.blackwell@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk

Recent events - a summary of Kids First meetings since our spring newsletter

Inclusion workshop – we heard how a number of sports organisations are trying to adapt to meet the needs of disabled people and children, especially those with physical disabilities.

First Aid Course – presented by a colourful personality, as always with Actual First Aid. Parents learned skills to help them deal safely with accidents, minor and severe.

Nutrition – parents tested the Eye-Q oil supplement which is recommended for all children. Multi vitamins are also recommended, even for children with a fairly balanced diet.

For children who will not eat fruit or vegetables, try frozen fruit mixed with juice and blended into a slush puppy.

We learned that we eat too much grain (cereals, breads, pastas) which are often difficult for us to digest. Our carbohydrates should come mainly from fruit and vegetables, rather than from starchy foods.

Feedback from parents included "I was given lots of ideas and it was good to meet other parents",

"I was able to discuss my child's health problems with the facilitator and other parents."

SEN Law – we held 2 workshops on this topic. The new tribunal system (SEND) appears to be operating in much the same way as before (SENDIST). Parents are expected to present independent evidence at tribunal, so it is still a two tier system based on who is rich enough to pay for experts, although some parents qualify for legal aid.

Feedback from parents included "The workshop was excellent – thank you for arranging", "I benefited enormously from attending this workshop", "Very beneficial although some of it was distressing – how awful the process and how unhelpful the LEA's can be".

Deen City Farm – the children enjoyed the magic show again but we will change this event next year so watch this space!

Police lunch – 3 community police officers talked to us about how they use their "stop and search" powers. We discussed why it might be helpful if the police could recognise certain disabilities. We have agreed to follow this up with the local force and arrange some initial training for them.

St Georges Hospital Psychology lunch – doctors and psychologists working in the Health Service seem to be aware that parents often have to fight for appropriate services and will support parents wherever they can.

Free events for your diary

Moving to Adulthood – Val Prior
Tuesday 10 November, 11am – 1pm

By the Manager of the new Dedicated Transition Team.

Hear about School, college and work options for disabled young people, 14-25 years.

Lavender Children's Centre, Steers Mead, Mitcham CR4 3HL

Inclusion and Equality Training for Parents*
Thursday 26 November, 9.30am to 2.30pm

By National Mencap.

Find out what support you should expect when your child attends out of school and leisure activities.

Aragon Children's Centre, Aragon Primary School, Aragon Road, Morden SM4 4QU

Kids First Christmas Social & Karaoke
Wednesday 2 December, 8pm to 11pm

Free buffet & refreshments

The William Morris Function Room, 20 Watermill Way, Abbey Mills, SW19 2RD

Transition to Adulthood: Workshop*
Monday & Tuesday 18 & 19 January, 9.30 am to 2.30 pm

By Skill: The National Bureau for Students with Disabilities.
Workshop on adult benefits, education, work and housing
Morden Cottage, Morden Hall Park, SM4 5JD

Consultant Nurse Jim Blair, St Georges
Tuesday 2 February, 11am to 1pm

Hear about specialist nursing services for adults and children with learning disabilities
Morden Cottage, Morden Hall Park, SM4 5JD

Sexual Development and Growing up*
Thursday 25 February, 9.30am to 2.30pm

By Timian Training & Development
A workshop about how to handle the special problems we face when our disabled or SEN child goes through puberty and faces "grown up" problems.
Lavender Children's Centre, Steers Mead, Mitcham CR4 3HL

Carers Support Merton, Parent Carers Groups

Wednesday 10 March, 11am to 1pm
Meet the new parent advocate and parent groups co-ordinator and find out how they can help Merton parents.
Morden Cottage, Morden Hall Park, SM4 5JD

Brain Gym Workshop

Tuesday 23 March, 10am to 2.30m
Exercises to help your child with co-ordination, behaviour, concentration and general development.
Venue to be arranged

** means need to book a place*

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!

Contact Details

For further information or to register with us

ring: Tracy Blackwell on 020 8687 4644

or

email: tracy.blackwell@swlondonmencap.nhs.uk

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

Merton Mencap. Registered Office Address: The Wilson Hospital, Cranmer Road, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 4TP. Company Limited by Guarantee Registered Charity Number 1113444. Company Registration Number 5692213 (England)

