

The logo consists of a teal-colored oval with the text "Reading Families' Forum" centered inside in white, bold, sans-serif font.

**Reading  
Families'  
Forum**

*A voice for families of children and young people with  
special educational needs and/or disabilities*

# **Reading Families' Forum CIO**

## **Annual Report and Accounts**

**2021 / 2022**



with a speaker (one each term), an annual Information Day, and a public conference. RFF members represent parents on a variety of committees and working groups within the local authority, and work regularly with key service providers in the Local Authority, NHS and voluntary sector.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Reading Families' Forum has been a charity since April 2016, building on our work to promote co-production between families of children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) and service providers for the last 16 years. (Co-production means developing services together.)

In the last year, we have increased our membership from 226 to 304 parent carers and 742 people follow us on social media now compared with 639 people in 2021!

## **MANAGEMENT**

At the last AGM in September 2021 the following trustees were voted in:

- Lynsey McDonald – secretary
- Alice Carter – treasurer
- Pauline Hamilton & Alison Ries – trustees and our longest serving forum members
- Karen O'Leary and Ellie Hunt – new trustees
- Ramona Bridgman, Chair.

Sadly, Ellie had to step down soon after, due to other commitments.

We also have a number of parent carers who provide invaluable support over the past year, including Claire Harrison, Ruth Pearce, Beryl Thompson, Sarah Snow and Liang-I Yang.

All our staff and Trustees have faced huge pressures over the past year, and the Chair really values their commitment to continuing to do what they can for other SEND families.

### **We have 2 employees and 1 paid contractor:**

Our Parent Participation Co-ordinator, Fran Morgan, organises our events brilliantly, minutes our meetings and is a point of contact for families and service providers alike. She also arranges speakers for groups of parent carers at schools and children's centres.

Lisa Harry is our Youth Forum administrator and does a great job of organising events for Special United.

Tara Robb is an excellent self-employed administrator and does all our bookkeeping.

## **REVIEW OF OUR WORK OCT 2021 – SEPT 2022**

**We have held 7 online Coffee Sessions** attended by about an average of 4 parent carers per session on a variety of topics

1. Deb Hunter, Mental Health Lead.
2. Nikki Stevens, SEND team manager (Now Maggie Buckley)
3. Nina Crispin, RBC on rewrite of the Autism Strategy
4. Fiona Hostler, Children Missing Education Officer
5. Nina Crispin and Amanda Nyeke, RBC reviewing the draft new Autism Strategy
6. Children with Disability Team on updates to the service
7. The new Designated Children's Officer, Miranda Walcott.

We also held a session for parents on the process of applying for an Education, Health and Care Plan and Tribunals in December 2021 and an Information and Fun Day in June that 100 people attended.

**Co-Producing Improvements for children/young adults with SEND** The Forum continue to sit on the SEND strategy group and 5 work strands that are part of the board's work: communication, early intervention through to specialist provision, consistent approaches to emotional well-being, preparing for adulthood and short breaks. We also attend the Autism Board, the SEND Joint Implementation Group and the Carers' Steering Group.

We meet regularly with the Local Offer team to review the information and how it is presented and have met with MPs and health professionals to try and sort out provision for hydrotherapy.

We have been involved in the set up of the new Keyworker scheme for children and young people at risk of admission to a mental health bed or residential setting, and have helped interview new Keyworker staff.

**Getting our young people's views heard** The Special United Youth Forum has met online 5 times and once face to face since the last AGM.

1. Deb Hunter regarding mental health
2. Heidi Francis – Keyworker scheme above
3. CAMHS
4. Royal Berks Hospital and draft Autism Strategy
5. Children's Director
6. New SEND Team Manager, Maggie Buckley

Young people who take part receive a £10 voucher.

Special United has made a training video for schools that has been very well received; a piece was written about this in the national publication CYP Now. They have also visited the Royal Berks to advise on accessibility and fed back their views on the Easy Read Transition to Adulthood Guide and the Local Offer refresh.

**Other pieces of work that RFF has been involved with since the last AGM**

1. Guide to using a Direct Payment to employ a Personal Assistant for your child has been completed as well as a Guide to Accessing Children's Social Care.
2. An easy read guide to transitions to adulthood.
3. The Local Offer refresh
4. The draft Autism Strategy

We are also in the process of updating our website to make it easier and quicker to add new information and events.

We have held a parent carer survey to gain feedback from families. Parent carers and young people with additional needs have raised a number of issues regarding local services, including:

- Current short breaks are very good but there are not enough sessions or long enough to give parents enough of a break and some children the level of stimulation they need. There also needs to be some more sessions for those who don't like performing or sport. The Lego Club is a good start with this. RFF has made The Children's Disability Service aware.
- Long waits for autism and ADHD assessments – additional funding has been made available but there continues to be long waits.
- There has been a significant increase in SEND children missing education due to anxiety, with huge impacts for the children and their families. The school improvement team are training school staff, using the video made by young people themselves, but there is a way to go in some schools.
- There is a lack of hydrotherapy for physically disabled children and adults, long waits for wheelchair equipment and repairs and long waits for OT assessments in the home. This all has significant impacts on children's physical health and that of their carers. RFF have raised this at the JIG several times.
- Families have raised concerns about how the LA legal team respond when a parent appeals to Tribunals. We are seeking legal advice in this regard and have discussed with the LA.

- Access to mental health support is very challenging with long waits and different referral criteria. This has meant that some children with SEND fall through the gaps. A Learning Disability CAMHS will be set up in the next year and RFF are working with other providers to ensure a joined up service.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Become a member if you are not already, the more members we have the more influence we have with local services. All parents or other family carers of children and Young People up to age 25 living in the Reading Borough Council area are eligible to join and membership is free. Members elect our trustees and choose the chair, secretary and treasurer.
- Become part of the steering group. We will support you to become involved in the meetings with service providers to let them know what families need. Service managers like to hear from different parent carers rather than just the same old faces!!
- Become a Trustee and be part of planning our work. We are a friendly, supportive team and make sure we all only do what we are able to do at the time. As our children get older, we are looking for parent carers of younger children as well as more experienced parents.

## FINANCIAL REVIEW

### Reserves policy


Reading Families' Forum has very little unrestricted income because its work is funded by short term grants from the charity Contact and other organisations. These grants cannot be held as reserves. We have now managed to build up a small reserve and are getting close to our aim to be able to hold in reserve 3 months' expenditure to allow work to continue while awaiting grant funding.

### Accounts and Treasurer's Report


The accounts for the financial year 2021 / 2022 are attached to this report.

Reading Families Forum receives an annual grant from the charity Contact to support parent carer participation in the Reading Borough Council area, and from time to time we also apply for grants from other organisations to fund specific projects. In 2021-22 our work was heavily impacted by the continuing pandemic and we held all our events online. This meant that we were able to spend some of the money we would have otherwise spent on events on infrastructure and equipment and on a parent carer survey which will inform our work in future years. We were also able to continue to run the Youth Forum Special United while waiting for renewed funding from Brighter Futures for Children, which we received in autumn 2021 to run the Youth Forum until March 2023. We have also been able to build up our unrestricted funds to help with running costs while grant applications are pending and to cover the increasing costs of running the Forum and employing staff.

Signed on behalf of the Trustees:



Ramona Bridgman, Chair  
5/10/2022



Alice Carter, Treasurer  
5/10/2022

<b>Receipts and Payments Accounts 2021-22</b>	<b>Unrestricted funds</b>	<b>Restricted fund (BFfC 2019)</b>	<b>Restricted fund (BFfC 2021)</b>	<b>Restricted fund (Contact)</b>	<b>Total 2021-22</b>	<b>Total 2020- 21</b>
	£	£	£	£	£	£
<b>Receipts</b>						
Contact grant	0	0	0	14,181	14,181	13,415
Brighter Futures contract	500	0	10,000	0	10,500	0
Other	13	0	0	0	13	0
<b>Total receipts</b>	513	0	10,000	14,181	24,694	13,415
<b>Payments</b>						
Public Events	0	0	0	1,466	1,466	140
Steering group / parent carer costs	0	0	0	10	10	283
Staffing and administration costs	0	0	0	10,206	10,206	7,436
Resources (including website)	0	0	0	3,727	3,727	0
School Groups Project	0	0	0	0	0	0
Youth Forum	0	1,029	3,958	0	4,988	4,570
<b>Total payments</b>	0	1,029	3,958	15,409	20,397	12,430
<b>Surplus (Deficit)</b>	513	(1,029)	6,042	(1,228)	4,298	985
<b>Net movement in funds</b>	513	(1,029)	6,042	(1,228)	4,298	985
Brought forward at 1/4/2021	2,932	1,029	0	3,319	7,280	6,295
Transfer between funds	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Carried forward at 31/3/2022</b>	3,444	0	6,042	2,091	11,577	7,280

**Statement of Assets and Liabilities**

	Unrestricted funds	Restricted fund (RBC 2019)	Restricted fund (RBC 2019)	Restricted fund (Contact)	Total 2021-22	Total 2020-21
Cash at bank and in hand	3,444	0	6,042	2,091	11,577	7,280
Assets retained for charity's use	0	0	0	0	0	0
Liabilities	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total assets less liabilities</b>	<b>3,444</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6,042</b>	<b>2,091</b>	<b>11,577</b>	<b>7,280</b>

**Treasurer's Report 2021-22**

Reading Families Forum receives an annual grant from Contact to facilitate parent carer participation in the Reading Borough Council area, and supplements this income by applying for grants from other bodies for specific projects. In 2021-22 our work was heavily impacted by the continuing pandemic and we held all our events online. This meant that we were able to spend some of the resources we would have otherwise spent on events on infrastructure and on a parent carer survey which will inform our work in future years. We were also able to continue to run the Youth Forum Special United while waiting for renewed funding from Brighter Futures for Children, which we received in autumn 2021 to run the Youth Forum until March 2023. We have also been able to build up our unrestricted funds a little to help with running costs while grant applications are pending and to cover the increasing costs of running the Forum and employing staff.