



National Network of Parent Carer Forums

'Our Strength Is Our Shared Experience'

Why the recent Media scrutiny on SEND means we have to stay focused on the Culture and other changes needed to improve the lives of Children and Young People with SEND and their families

As a membership organisation the Steering Group of the National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) are responding to the developments in social media and the news over the last week that have brought into sharp focus the importance of the cultural change underpinning the introduction of the Children and Families Act 2014.

Our members have raised concerns that recent Twitter comments were disrespectful towards Parent Carers and children and young people with SEND. Parent Carer Forums across England are working hard with their Local Authorities and Education, Health and Social Care employees, many of whom, like us are striving to effectively embrace and are working towards the real change the new law sought to provide in their local areas; to bring about the culture change necessary to deliver the better lives and outcomes promised by the Children and Families Act and develop a less adversarial system for families. That requires strong leadership and commitment at all levels, national, regional and local.

We believe like others, that these situations give us an opportunity to reflect on why we are here, what that culture change means, and the challenges to it.

Section 19 of the Children and Families Act

Section 19 of the Children and Families Act is a legal duty, embedded in the Act itself that puts taking account of the wishes and aspirations of children, young people and their families at the heart of the new changes. That it is required in all of these changes to take account of:

- (a) The views, wishes and feelings of the child and his or her parent, or the young person;
- (b) The importance of the child and his or her parent, or the young person, participating as fully as possible in decisions relating to the exercise of the function concerned;
- (c) The importance of the child and his or her parent, or the young person, being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions;
- (d) The need to support the child and his or her parent, or the young person, in order to facilitate the development of the child or young person and to help him or her achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes.

This is about more than person centred planning. It is about empowerment, equality, participation and enablement. It is about listening and making a journey together - at an individual, operational and strategic planning level. When times are tight, this may seem difficult or not essential. That is not the case – participation and coproduction is the most



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important element and the necessary transformational changes for children and young people with SEND cannot happen without it.

Working in coproduction with families also does not mean spending more – it means spending what you have wisely so that it meets actual needs.

New Vision

When we read about the SEND reforms we often see references to “choice and control”, “the local offer”, “0-25”, “EHCs”, “SEN Support”, “integrated working” and so on. What does it all really mean? It is not a new bureaucracy. It means a new vision for all children and young people with SEND and their families. These are all part of the tool kit to deliver on that; they are not ends in themselves.

When the Children and Families Act passed into law in September 2014, the changes to SEND reflected many years of work with many people, in particular Parent Carers and families of children with SEND and Parent Carer Forums. Many of the responses to earlier consultation documents about the nature of the changes came from Parent Carers. Their broad view was that the system was very adversarial and did not meet the needs of children and young people or their families well - especially those with more complex needs who need better coordination across education, health and social care - and outcomes for too many were very poor.

Therefore some of the main reasons for the changes were:

- Parents struggle to find the services that should be helping them, have to battle to get the help their children need, and have to tell their stories time and again.
- Moving from children's to adults' services (known as “transition”) can be very difficult.
- English LAs spend over £5 billion a year on SEND provision, and yet those with special needs are far more likely to achieve poorly at GCSE, Not be in Education, Employment or Training, or be unemployed. They are also likely to suffer poorer health. This is in addition to the £2.5 billion spent through the pupil premium.
- These issues affect a lot of people: 1 in 5 children are currently identified as having some form of SEND, with 2.8% having a more complex need.

A New Culture

The legal changes are designed to deliver much more than simply a change of name from Statements to Education Health and Care (EHC) Plans or School Action and Action Plus to SEND Support – they are about transforming the whole culture of SEND so that the experiences and outcomes for children, young people and families are much improved. There is the whole new requirement to put children, young people, their families and their aspirations at the heart of all that is being done. It is a requirement to treat children and young people with SEND the same as all other children and young people.



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This explains the emphasis on person centred planning, involving children, young people and Parent Carers in the whole new planning at all stages, including the EHC process, and a greater focus on outcomes across education, health and care.

A New Ethos

The ethos of the reforms is probably best described in a presentation by the Department for Education at one of the NNPCF/Contact a Family Annual Parent Participation Conferences:

"We want all children and young people to achieve well in their early years, at school and in college; find employment; lead happy and fulfilled lives; and have choice and control over their support.

The SEND reforms will implement a new approach which seeks to join up help across education, health and care, from birth to 25.

Help will be offered at the earliest possible point, with children and young people with SEND and their parents and carers fully involved in decisions about their support and what they want to achieve. This will help lead to better outcomes and more efficient ways of working."

In order to achieve better outcomes, there is rightly a new focus on effective early intervention (across all services), improved joint working and joint commissioning. Services need to better fit the needs of children, young people and families so that they do not have to join it all up themselves. These wider cultural changes will take time but it is vital they are understood and bought into by all at the outset so that they can be achieved and children, young people and families have better experiences and outcomes.

The NNPCF

As the NNPCF Steering Group we promote the importance of the principles and cultural change of the Children and Families Act 2014 and how this requires a person centred and family centred approach, this in turn should create a much less adversarial system for families. The recent developments mentioned above have served as a timely reminder of the challenges still in the system for families.

Children and Families Minister Edward Timpson has previously made a commitment to strategic and individual participation to not only the NNPCF, and local Parent Carer Forums, but also to the wider parental SEND community.

As the NNPCF Steering Group we are raising it with the Department for Education, the Minister, and other relevant organisations that have supported the development and implementation of the SEND reforms to ensure that this issue is recognised as a significant



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concern to our Parent Carer community. The requirements of section 19 must be made clear to all Local Authorities and others in Local Areas.

We will also restate the importance of addressing the issues that are set out in the [National Priorities for Parent Carer Forums](#) which include the need for strong leadership and an ongoing commitment to make participation and coproduction with Parent Carers, Parent Carer Forums a reality and to achieve what the Children and Families Act promised us all.

We know too that there are new challenges ahead in the form of, for example the Educational Excellence Everywhere White Paper and schools and high needs funding reform proposals, and we need to know that these will not throw the Children and Families Act ambition and ethos and vision off course.

We will be working with all others involved to ensure this is not the case and to achieve the right future for Children and Young People with SEND and for Parent Carers.

The NNPCF Steering Group
17 June 2016

About the NNPCF

The National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) was launched in 2011, and is funded by central government. We became a formally constituted Group in November 2013. The NNPCF membership is made up of Parent Carer Forums of which there is one in almost every local authority area in England. Each Parent Carer Forum in receipt of the Department of Education participation grant is a member of the NNPCF.

The function of the NNPCF is to develop cohesive good practice and effective participation and a solution focused approach at all levels, locally, regionally and nationally. The aims of the NNPCF are to:

- Ensure that good practice, knowledge and shared expertise about Parent Participation continues to grow and strengthen.
- Develop a cohesive and coherent structure to sustain and develop the effectiveness of Parent Carer Forums across England.
- Strengthen the pan disability, Parent/Carer led model of local forums and boost our collective voice.

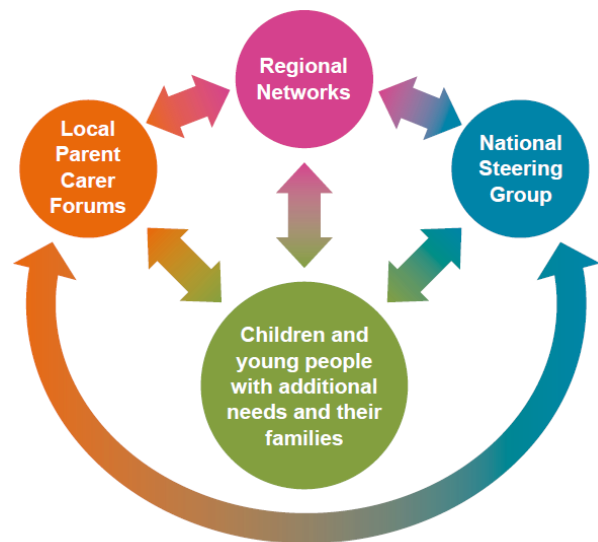


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The structure of the NNPCF is shown below:

Each Parent Carer Forum includes Parent Carers with a full range of experiences in Health, Education and Social Care as their children have a wide range of conditions. Parents in the network total over 70,000



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