

Sunderland parent carers experiences of life during the Covid-19 pandemic

Thank you to all the Parent Carers who managed to complete or recent survey, to capture the experiences of SEND families in Sunderland, during the Covid-19 crisis. We wanted to get a snapshot of the issues and problems families were facing during lockdown, and any challenges ahead. The results are being used to talk with local partners on possible solutions and support might be available.

The survey ran for 7 days, 03/05/20 to 10/05/20, this is brief summary of the final report, the full report can be found on the forum's Facebook Group and webpage.

Key Findings

- **General Wellbeing/Mental Health** - Some families have adapted really well to the change in routine and home schooling, others initially coped well, but as the lockdown continues, are now starting to struggle. Lack of sleep, frustration at being home constantly and stress levels are increasing. Some CYP behaviour is worsening (as indicated in the respondents comments), and parents are seeing some increase in the child hitting out at others. Parent Carers are now having to deal with being a teacher on top of their everyday caring and parenting responsibilities, without having access to respite, PA's, therapies, etc. Families are anxious and worried going forward, the risks of contracting the virus and financial pressures are now adding to the stress and worries.
- **Shopping/Finances** – From the start of lockdown, families have found it extremely difficult to get an online delivery slot, as their families are not considered vulnerable according to government guidance during the Covid-19 pandemic. Increased queuing times can make supermarket visits extremely stressful for single parent families who have no choice but to the children with them. Item limits have sometimes meant larger families have had to make increased visits to supermarkets. Many own brand items have disappeared (not just out of stock)

Our recommendations

Overall communication to parents about how the changes to normal life directly affects them and their children and young people seems poor and not person centred. Those families who have a social worker were better served but even then parents felt left alone to cope and this produced feelings of anxiety and fear which we feel adds to the lack of desire to trust anyone to keep their children and young people safe other than themselves. This will have a direct effect on the education, health and mental wellbeing of these children and young people, and their families, for some time.

Schools know who is on the Disabled Children Register and who is receiving SEN support, who has been referred to services so these families are known to the LA and CCG as well as local voluntary sector partners. A simple postcard asking how they are and how they are coping, perhaps with contact details of where to find help and support, would have been welcomed by the families so that they do not feel alone and left behind. Some schools have been brilliant at keeping in touch, not just with homework but also with pastoral care, others have been less so. Welfare calls have been welcomed and as we move to the next phase the need to contain information about how children are to be returned to education and these need to be personalised. There is no point in sending an EY child details of what is going to happen to exams and vice versa. So letters sent to families can be in broad themes but relevant to the age of the child.

Families need to be made aware that when a education setting is open it is because all pupils will be safe and secure in that setting so videos of new arrangements could be made by each setting and posted on their website so families can see what has been done to keep the pupils and staff safe.

A message from the Director of Education and the ADCS/ADAS thanking families for their forbearance during this time would also be welcome along with the reassuring message that settings will be safe but families will not be punished for continuing to keep their children at home (a cut off point to this arrangement will obviously have to be decided)