



**Reaching  
Families**

# Impact Report

2023/24

*Empowering families of  
children and young people  
with special educational needs  
and disabilities in West Sussex*



# Executive Summary

## Times have never been tougher for families of children and young people with SEND

With no end in sight to the austerity that has depleted public services, created endless waiting lists and all but left families to their own devices, parent-carers are being forced to find alternative solutions to the struggles they face.

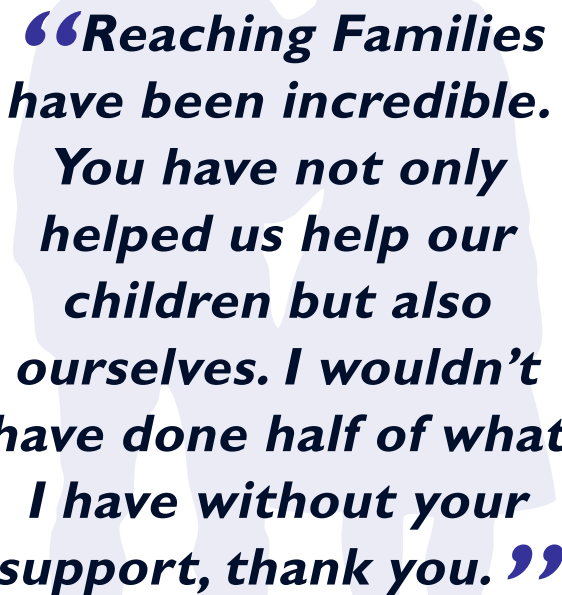
Reaching Families exists to help parents find those solutions. Our mission of empowering parent-carers has never been more needed. For almost all the families we support, self-reliance is the only option they have left.

Our information, training and peer support helps parents become experts through experience. Whether it's fighting for their child at tribunals, home educating children who are unable to attend school or learning how best to support their mental health, wellbeing

and development, parents are pulling together and doing this for themselves – and for each other.

Our training provision best illustrates this new reality. In the year before the covid pandemic Reaching Families delivered 33 workshops to 426 parents-carers. In 2023/24 we delivered 84 workshops and courses to 1,305 parents. Such is the demand for knowledge and skills, if time and funding allowed, we could easily double our provision.

We have always known that families of children with SEND face multiple challenges, hence our long-term plan to create a one stop shop of services that enables parent-carers to access support across many issues under one roof. Parents are used to being passed from pillar to post. Our job is to minimise that experience.



***“Reaching Families have been incredible. You have not only helped us help our children but also ourselves. I wouldn't have done half of what I have without your support, thank you.”***

# Our Year in Numbers

## Our Delivery



2,000+

copies of *Making Sense of It All* distributed



10,000+

copies of our fact sheets downloaded from our website



1,305

parents attended one of our training workshops or courses



215

families received advice on claims for Carers Allowance, DLA & PIP



81

parents participated in our befriending service



266

parents attended one of our Umbrellas support groups



117

parents supported by the NDP navigation service (January to March 2024)



1,261

new Facebook Group members

## Our Impact



89%

of parent-carers said they had **improved knowledge** of how and where to access support for their child



84%

said they had **improved skills and self confidence** in supporting their child's health, wellbeing and development



£2.1m

raised in **successful claims** for Carers Allowance, DLA and PIP



71%

reported **improved wellbeing and resilience**



80%

said they felt **better connected** to other parent-carers

# Information

## In an era of scarcity knowledge is power

Navigating the labyrinth of information needed to support a child with SEND has never been easy for parent-carers but never been more important than in this era of scarce support.

A survey of parent-carers we carried out in early 2024 shows that our parent-carer guide, *Making Sense of It All* remains essential reading for parent-carers in West Sussex whilst our newly updated factsheet series continue to be downloaded from our website in the thousands.

We also published a new animation for younger children to help them understand the assessment process for Autism. In 2024/25 we will be publishing a companion animation for older children.


***“The book was a godsend, laid out so clearly, helping me to understand what support was out there and what I could chase down. We’re a year on now, and with the transition to college, I’ve found myself dipping into the book again to understand how to navigate this next chapter. A huge thank you for putting together and publishing this valuable resource.”***



**2,000+** copies of *Making Sense of It All* distributed



**10,000+** copies of our fact sheets downloaded from our website



***“Reaching Families are brilliant. These courses are so, so important at a time when local services are so stretched and unable to help us.”***

# Training

## Waiting times for local services leads to huge demand for training

Where we once used to talk of our workshops selling out in a matter of days, we now talk in minutes – three minutes being the record for one of our newer workshops we delivered this year on Autism in Girls.

Whilst it is heartening to know our workshops are so relevant to the needs of SEND families we take no satisfaction at all that in 2023 the waiting lists to attend our training workshops were almost twice as high as those who attended. A major priority in 2024 will be securing funding to increase the capacity of our training delivery and ensure we can optimise the number of parents who can access our workshops and courses.



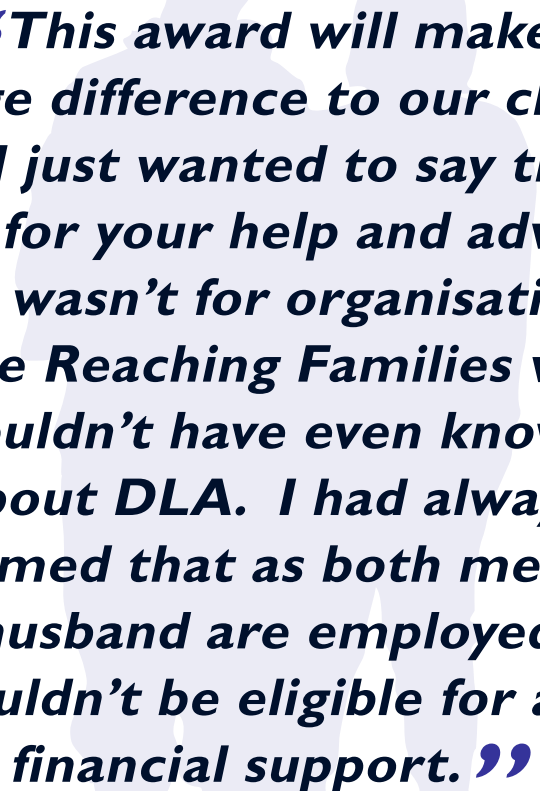
**1,305** parents  
attended one of our training  
workshops or courses

# Benefits Advice Service

## The cost of living crisis increases demand for our benefits advice service

With the cost of living crisis continuing to bite deep and more families being forced to seek private provision for their child, demand for our Benefits Advice Service showed no sign of abating in 2023. There was particular demand from vulnerable families who need additional support in making claims and/or appeals to tribunals.

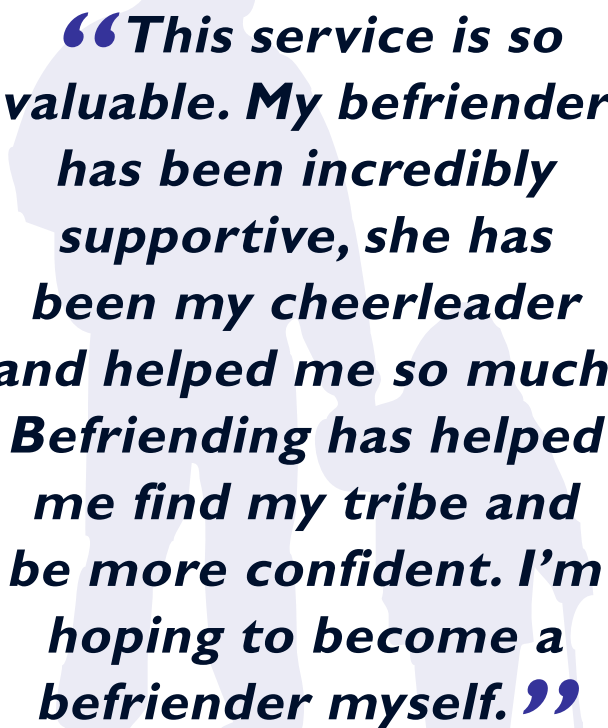
We ended the year with confirmation of almost £90,000 over three years from the National Lottery Community Fund to continue the development of the service. This much needed funding will allow us to make permanent the post of Benefits Support Worker who helps parents in checking claims and create a new post of team administrator. Above all it helps ensure the longer-term sustainability of the service.



***“This award will make a huge difference to our child and I just wanted to say thank you for your help and advice. If it wasn’t for organisations like Reaching Families we wouldn’t have even known about DLA. I had always assumed that as both me and my husband are employed, we wouldn’t be eligible for any financial support.”***



**215** families received advice on claims for Carers Allowance, DLA & PIP



***“This service is so valuable. My befriender has been incredibly supportive, she has been my cheerleader and helped me so much. Befriending has helped me find my tribe and be more confident. I’m hoping to become a befriender myself.”***



**81** parents participated  
in our befriending service

# Face-2-Face Befriending

## Supporting more new parent-carers than ever

There is no support for a new parent-carer quite like the empathy and wisdom of another parent who’s lived through the same experience.

Our parent-carer befrienders provide an invaluable source of support to parents of children waiting on, undergoing or recently assessed for SEND – helping with information, signposting, empathy and sharing their own personal experiences. Demand for the service has risen every year since we started the project in 2018 and now, with the largest team of befrienders we have ever had (30 in total), supporting more new parent-carers than ever. We are immensely grateful to our befrienders for their simply invaluable support.


# Umbrellas

## New groups help more parents develop their own networks of support

We've long known the best support parent-carers receive is from other parents with a similar life experience. That is why expanding the reach of our Umbrellas support groups has been so vital to helping parents develop their own networks of support.

With the development of four new Umbrellas support groups in Burgess Hill, Chichester, Horsham and Shoreham-by-Sea our community outreach now covers almost all the major urban areas of West Sussex (including Littlehampton and Worthing) and surrounding areas.

In this post covid era of remote delivery our groups are a vital means of parents accessing in person peer support, seeking information and signposting from our outreach team and generally being around other people who understand the challenges they face.



***“It’s made my life so much better having this amazing support network”***



**266** parents attended one of our Umbrellas parent support groups



# NDP Navigation Service

Supporting parent-carers waiting for their child to be assessed for ADHD, Autism and other neurodiverse conditions

Waiting on assessment for ADHD, Autism and other neurodiverse conditions can be interminably long for children and families in need of support. We were therefore thrilled to be asked by NHS Sussex to pilot a new navigation service for parents of children and young people at various points on the West Sussex Neurodevelopmental Pathway.

Launched in January 2024 our new service provides initial telephone support, information, advice, signposting and training to parent-carers. By the end of the financial year (March 2024) it was clear this could be our most in demand service to date.

***“ I was enormously grateful for the very knowledgeable and kind ear the NDP navigation service provided. In particular signposting, assisting with bookings on forthcoming webinars and the follow up with signposts to resources was also very helpful. The person I spoke to really understood and grasped my situation well. ”***



**117** parents supported  
(January to March 2024)

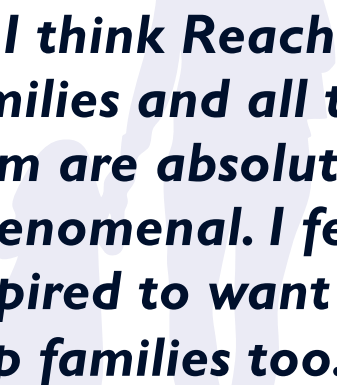
# Next Steps

1. Continue to pilot and develop the NDP Navigation Service

2. Publish a new edition of Making Sense of It All

3. Secure funding to increase our training capacity

4. Develop a new community fundraising strategy



***“ I think Reaching Families and all the team are absolutely phenomenal. I feel inspired to want to help families too. ”***

# With thanks to

## Amaze Sussex

Autism and Social Communication Team (WSCC)  
Awards for All (National Lottery Community Fund)  
Bascule Charitable Trust  
Carers Support West Sussex  
Child Development Services  
(Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust)  
Co-op Community Fund  
Early Help (WSCC)  
Edward Gostling Foundation  
Disability Register (WSCC)  
Garfield Weston Foundation  
Grocers Charity

## Impact Initiatives

Learning and Behaviour Advisory Team (WSCC)  
Legal & General Group  
Metal Recycling Scheme  
NHS Sussex  
SENse Learning  
Sussex Community Foundation  
True Colours Trust  
West Sussex Mind  
West Sussex County Council  
West Sussex Parent Carer Forum  
West Sussex Portage  
West Sussex SENDIAS

...and with special thanks to all of our amazing volunteers!

[www.reachingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.reachingfamilies.org.uk)