

MARCH 2022

**PARENTS
OPENING
DOORS**
PARENT CARER FORUM



**PODS
BEFRIENDING
SCHEME**

PODS

SPRING 2022

Newsletter



What's included

Foreword by Elaine Pearce, Project Manager

Strategic Update from Jayne Stevens

PODS Christmas Party 2021

PODS Family Groups

Befriending Scheme Update

PODS Fundraising & Events

Pears Sessions

Max Cards

Ironbridge Passes

PODS Sensory Sessions

Picnic in the Park 2021

Christmas Party 2021

Queens Jubilee

PODS Family Quiz

**GET
INVOLVED**

with the PODS Easter
Egg Hunt throughout the
Newsletter! Let us know how
many eggs you spot!

Company/Charity number: 1150871

Members of
COMMUNITY FUND
N N P C F
National Network of Parent Carer Forums
1000 Strong in and Beyond Birmingham
www.nnpfc.org.uk

Foreword from Elaine Pearce, Project Manager

Welcome to this year's newsletter, I'm writing this with the optimism that we are finally seeing the end to Covid and its restrictions. The whole team hope that you have been keeping safe and well over the last year and have not been too adversely affected by the continuation of the pandemic.

As an organisation over the last 12 months, we have faced many challenges, but with such a dedicated and passionate team, driven by the will to support our members, we have found a way to overcome and carry on. Being forced to relocate our offices during Covid was never on our agenda and was certainly one of the biggest challenges we faced. However, we feel it has resulted in a positive outcome, we now have more space and a central location with improved accessibility.

Events during Covid have been a difficult one to negotiate, we were faced with the inability to carry out any Easter activities last year due to another 'lockdown'. The team however, literally jumped into action as Bunny Rabbits delivering Easter Eggs all over Telford, did you spot any?

With the desire to continue helping further parents/carers knowledge and understanding, workshops and events were moved online with some great speakers such as Dean Beadle. These have been very successful and well received, we are now starting to gradually return to in person events, starting off small and hopefully increasing in size as things improve.

As with many other Charities we have continued to see our database grow at a larger rate than normal, this highlights to us the huge impact that Covid has had on many families, especially those with children/young people who have an additional/disability. As always, we are here for every family and are committed to supporting our members regardless of the size of our database.

The Forum has been as active as ever, with the feedback from families being fed into more strategic meetings than ever before, ensuring effective change is brought about, improving services for our members and their families. Our in-person Parent Rep meetings have restarted, and we have welcomed some new members to the team. Our Befriender team has gone from strength to strength, with new volunteers being trained up and brought on board to meet with increasing demand. The introduction of a specific monthly Befriender family group to enable parents/carers to access non-judgemental peer support has been successful. The general family groups have continued at various locations across Telford to make them as accessible to as many families as possible. Some of the sessions take on themes such as crafts, mindfulness, etc. Due to popular demand, we have continued with the outdoor meet ups at Blists Hill that started during lockdown, I secretly think they are only coming for the amazing chips! Lego Therapy and Coding club continue to be as popular as ever, with the hope that these will soon move away from online sessions and return to the community. We have also been involved in delivering



sessions specifically for certain areas of the community, these have taken on a wide variety of styles from tennis to Karate and Mindfulness to name a few.

We were fortunate enough to receive funding from the 'Pears Foundation' this has allowed us to run weekly activity sessions for the whole family, resulting in a reduction in isolation and improved the confidence amongst the attendees whilst helping them to form friendships with their peers. This has also led to the introduction of new Sensory Sessions for preschool children.

Fundraising has been tricky; however, we have persevered and thanks to our social media raffle page we have been able to raise some funds, alongside our other incomes such as Twincl and donations.

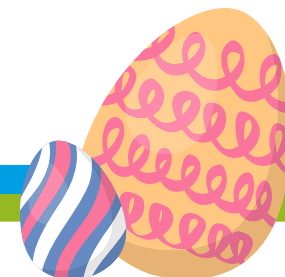
Where we have been able, we have continued with our annual day trips and events, we even took a whopping 4 coaches to Rhyl, a day I think none of the staff will ever forget! We were pleased to be able to host a Christmas event and welcome so many families to join us in the festivities after so much isolation from the world.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank every single person that has supported us over the last 12 months, be that as Parent Rep, Befriender, Volunteer, donator etc, without you we would not be able to help and support as many families as we do, so thank you very much for all you have done, no matter how big or small, you have truly made a difference.

Please enjoy reading the rest of the newsletter to find out what we have been up to and the plans for the coming months.

We hope to see you all very soon,

Elaine Pearce
Project Manager



Have you ever heard of Twincl?

Telford's own lottery, would you like to be in with a chance to win some money whilst supporting us at the same time? If the answer is yes, please scan the QR code below to find out more.

As always, all money raised from events and fundraising will be used to help with further events, trips, activities, and support for our PODS families. Thank you to all that have supported us and took part. There will be further fundraising events throughout 2022 so please keep a look out.



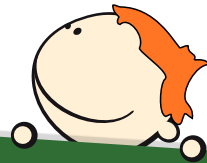
Hello from Jayne Stevens, Strategic Co-ordinator

I'd like to start my update with a massive thank you to our parent carer community who continue to get involved, having a say, and helping to 'Make A Difference' in the community of Telford and Wrekin. We have continued to work throughout COVID, and you have continued to engage with us and this has helped us to shape services - some of it locally, links also made to regional and national work. Also a special thanks to our Parent Reps who have continued to engage with the core team, in different ways, but still as we move out of 'lockdown' and away from so many restrictions, we remain a strong team and by the time of this newsletter hitting your doormats at Easter, we'll have regrouped and held an in-person meeting. I'm going to tell you the difference your voices have made over these past twelve months, some of the developments we are working on and some ways that you can get further involved. We gather your parent carer voice through all the work we do as a forum and with our wider Charity areas covered in this newsletter - the work of befriending team, family groups, fundraising, events and trips, phone calls, emails, social media and everything inbetween.

There has been progress made with developing a pathway to support Down's Syndrome - working with CDC, Early Years specialist teachers and Portage teams. We'd love to hear from you to hear how this is working? Wider pathway development work is under discussion and we welcome feedback from Early Years families.

I hope you enjoy reading the updates and if you have any questions at all, don't hesitate to let me know and get in touch.

Jayne Stevens
Strategic Co-ordinator



What does a Parent Carer Forum (PCF) do?

The official parent carer forum for Telford & Wrekin - Parents Opening Doors (PODS) is grant funded by Department for Education (managed by Contact) to be the strategic partner in Telford & Wrekin and is completely independent.

Parent carer forums are local groups run by parent carers of disabled children and their aim is to make sure that services in their area meet the needs of disabled children and their families.

The grant is used to strengthen parent carer forums, so that parent carers can participate in the strategic planning and decision-making around services for children and young people with SEND in their area including Local Authority and Health services, as well as community partners.

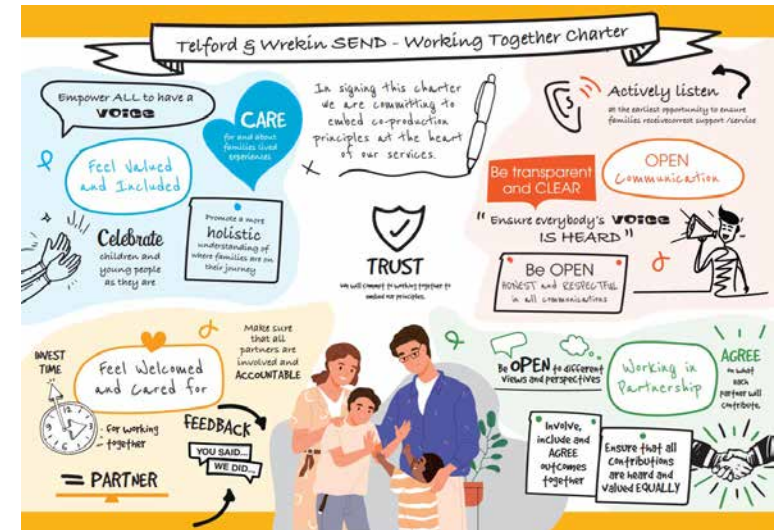
"Parent Carer Participation is when parents and professionals work together, recognising each other's knowledge, to make informed decisions about services that make the best use of resources" *extract Contact Charity*

VOICES Working Together Charter

This charter demonstrates a commitment to embed co-production principles at the heart of any services developed for our families with SEND in Telford & Wrekin.

The last newsletter gave news that we were going to be setting up group sessions and we are really pleased that these did indeed go ahead - we had hoped for in-person but we managed to do it all online, so thank you again for everyone taking part in this.

All the information has been collated, and currently in draft version (at time of writing)!



The four cornerstones that we have shared already have been strengthened with the following key messages:

Feel valued and included

Open communication

Feel welcomed and cared for

Working in partnership



Short Breaks Review

We've been talking about Short Breaks as long as I have been in post, and it was actually the basis of the beginning of parent carer forums 14 years ago . . . We've seen lots of changes over the years, and continuous feedback but last year gave an opportunity for an overall review of the Short Breaks Statement and re-establish eligibility and charging policies. This was done through a widespread consultation exercise, led by Telford & Wrekin Council. There were open sessions, sessions with young people, focus groups and presentations that covered the following:

- Update the Short Breaks Statement
- Re-establish the Eligibility Criteria
- Charging Policy
- Commissioning Targeted Short Breaks Activities
- Information on current provision and ideas for new targeted activities and building on mainstream providers to support with existing community provision.

The recommendations and findings from this consultation exercise are currently with Senior Leaders for discussion before sharing more widely (at time of writing article mid-February).

Respite Provision

We know of the challenges for families who have not been able to access respite provision at Acorn Way in particular, and the lack of overnight respite due to demand and availability. Work and discussions continue to take place and commissioners and operational teams are working with local providers (including some adult providers) and outside agencies, to look how this important service can be provided. Work to support families with PA recruitment and employment is also being discussed.



Support Sessions with Educational Psychologist

A main issue discussed in our COVID survey and wider feedback from families in general, was for parental support and the report highlighted the need for this to be particularly from families with children and young people with Autism or waiting for an assessment. The experiences were shared and discussed at Aiming High for SEND Board, further discussions with Education and Skills and Health teams, led to some funding jointly from council and CCG (NHS) to support this cohort of families to pay for Educational Psychologist time. PODS hosted these sessions as part of their core offer, and it was important that this project was and continues to be peer led.

We started hosting on-line support sessions with an Educational Psychologist team - four times a month - daytime and evenings - from March last year, general sessions and more focussed sessions covering anxiety, communication tools, screen time, links with schools (involvement of IASS). The focus of the sessions has been home-life and support for parent carers. The model of support has been a 'solution circle of support' which involves curious questioning and exploring issues in more depth and then discussions around ideas to try. Whilst this was a new way of working for our families, the overall feedback has been really positive.

Session Feedback

Over the past twelve months and this is some of the feedback we've received.

"I found it really useful to discuss the issues with my son and ideas to help him further at home. It isn't always easy to know how to complement what is going on at school and often the issue is parents don't really know what happens on a day-to-day basis in schools. I felt like I left with lots to think about and some new ideas to try so I thought it very worthwhile"

"Knowing that I am with people who understand just how hard it is to get others professionals to listen and actually hear your concerns, to actually have access to advice from M, hearing what helps or different things to try"

"It empowered me greatly and I left feeling so thankful and supported with the confidence to parent my child"

1:1 Offer and Feedback

Over the year, based on further feedback and discussions, we identified a need for 1:1 sessions. Discussions were held, funding sourced and we are now able to offer 1:1 sessions where families meet with a lead Educational Psychologist twice to discuss their concerns and develop an action plan. These have been running since September '21.

"I've just had my first 1:1 with Educational Psychologist and I cant thank you enough for making this possible. Informative, helpful ,but more than this as a parent I felt not only listened to but heard. Thank you so much I didn't know where to turn and now feel so much more positive and stronger with PODS help and support"

If you are interested in attending a daytime or evening group session or accessing the 1:1 support offer (2 sessions approx. one month apart) please get in touch with us. Families can self refer to PODS directly and all we ask is that you are members.

COVID Experience Report

Thank you to all our families who have expressed their views and shared their experiences in our second COVID survey. Here is an extract from our 2021 COVID Experience and Impact Report:

"We have helped to reduce isolation and to promote inclusion wherever possible through offering opportunity to participate in activities to improve their health and wellbeing. A poignant reminder of finding the right place to be for our families, from a new family:

"Thank you pods I've felt lonely the past 2 years trying to fight for my son and it's only been the last 2 months that I felt welcome and not alone talking to people on here [private group] (2020)"

Parent Carer Experiences

**Worse here are:
Emotional Health, Stress, Loneliness**

**Less worries for:
Physical Health, Anxiety about leaving house**

Child/Young Person Experiences (reported by Parent Carer)

**Worse here are:
Maintaining Friendship, Stress, Emotional Health**

**Less worries for:
Physical Health, Feeling happy**

Some extracts from our Survey demonstrates the complexities of needs of our families – whether they are early years, in mainstream or specialist settings, or moving into adulthood: **"I would have ticked 'okay' for quite a number of them, if that had been an option. And it has also been variable. For examples, my x has at times been very anxious, but overall is doing okay. I have ticked good rather than poor, when I have wanted to say 'okay' because it's not that bad. But not always that good either!"**

Early Years

- ☹️ Covid has effected my x confidence and have further delayed x and I think x picked up on my anxiety
- ☺️ It has been 12 months now so myself and husband keep our x happy and secure with routine.

Primary

- ☹️ I feel extremely isolated and unsupported. Absolute nightmare - no sleep, or routine - hard to keep sane!
- ☺️ I'm a lone parent, work full time and have three children and my youngest has Downs Syndrome. Their schools have been extremely supportive and helpful to me.

Secondary

- ☹️ The stress and worry of covid on my x have made his anxiety worse and the lockdown has been far too hard causing a huge increase in very violent and destructive behaviours.
- ☺️ Opting to home educate during covid period and school not forcing zoom or team meeting instead the same teacher linked to us and visiting the home briefly once a week has helped and shown our x potential. As it turns out x is a whiz at algebra....who knew.

College

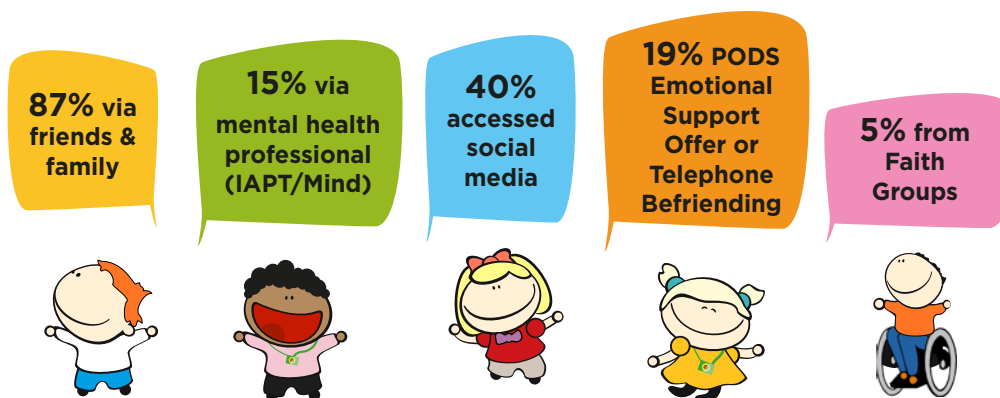
- ☹️ So tired and stressful. Coming through transition to adult services at the same time.
- ☺️ Everything seems exaggerated in behaviours, but college has continued due to EHCP

Adults

- ☹️ Has only left the house in the past year for medical appointments
- ☺️ Our x volunteers twice a week...this gets x.out of the house and exercising which has helped keep things on an even keel.

All of the hundreds of comments, challenges, issues and questions which were raised in our report were collated and discussed at the 'comms' meeting we have with Health teams and Telford & Wrekin Council – social care, education and skills, community teams as well as wider voluntary sector partners and were included in relevant action plans for ongoing discussions and form part of the 'You Said/We Did' Feedback on the Local Offer.

Families have told us they have received some support, from various sources:



We are thankful, that as an independent body and a registered charity we have been able to make decisions that mean we can offer levels of support to our families. Resilience of parent carers alongside parent emotional and mental health is a huge factor and we know that regular support networks have broken down and that families feel forgotten. PODS Charity offer of Support during COVID included the following and you'll read more about this throughout the newsletter (some of which we covered in the 2021 newsletter).

Out and About Cards, Communication and Wellbeing Calls, Helpline, Wellbeing Packs/Sensory Packs, Character Visits at Easter and Christmas, Cookbook, Outdoor Family Groups & Fundraising.

Autism Pathway/Emotional Wellbeing Panel

Emotional Wellbeing Panel

The challenges of our families have been well recorded over this past year and reported upon and this has led to an in-depth report of the Emotional Wellbeing Panel – the route for requesting Autism assessments. Thanks to our parent carers who attended a review session for this in December 21 and shared their thoughts and experiences through conversations with PODS and through a local survey. The report with its recommendations – some short, medium, and longer term, is currently sitting with Directors for action on decisions. We hope that by the time this newsletter reaches you, that you will have been invited to an event to explain these in more detail and to share the next steps.

Autism Training Offer

In February '21 an Autism Pathway training and development offer was starting to be produced and this has formed part of the discussions of the wider Autism Pathway meeting that we sit on. The training offer includes things like what is available at Strengthening Families Team, the wider BeeU offer from Kooth and BEAM, Mental health in schools, Community Learning, Early Bird/Plus, and wider offers.

More Work to do . . .

The work of PODS will not stop here though, and we continue to sit on the Autism Pathway as it is developed, to incorporate support for pre-diagnosis, wider offers, considerations for co-conditions and other neuro-development pathways, those for anxiety, and wider mental health – still a lot of work to be done and we're behind you all the way!

School VOICES

We have been able to support some schools with online parent groups – working with specialist and mainstream settings on an ad-hoc basis, ensuring that families have received support around diagnosis and mental health, including those who are particularly vulnerable.



Children's Autism Hub

The Children's Autism Hub has been commissioned to support families with an autism diagnosis. The feedback to develop this offer has been via parent carer voices and thank you to everyone who has input into this. The offer is a collaboration between T&W CVS and Autism West Midlands, builds on the Adult Autism Hub and offers a range of opportunities which you can read more about via their website:

<https://www.telfordautismhub.org.uk/childrens-autism-hub>

Julie Collins, the new manager of the hub has this to say:

"We are very excited to announce the opening in January 22 of The Telford Children's Autism Hub, for children/young people with a diagnosis of autism 0-18 years. You and your child may access a range of support including access to peer support, family activity sessions, advice sessions and training workshops delivered by a specialist advisor from Autism West Midlands. Our small staff team are welcoming parents into our weekly Coffee and Chat sessions. This is an opportunity to share with other parents and also for us to listen to your views, which will enable the hub to provide the right support for families at the right time. Please have a look at our website which provides lots of useful resources and information. You can also find out about future events we have planned".

We look forward to hearing from you; Julie Collins – Children's Service Manager – Telford Children's Autism Hub

Autism in Schools Project

This project covers a range of areas in the North Midlands Region (Telford & Wrekin, Shropshire, Staffordshire and Stoke). Two schools have been chosen for our local area - Dothill Primary and Charlton Secondary.

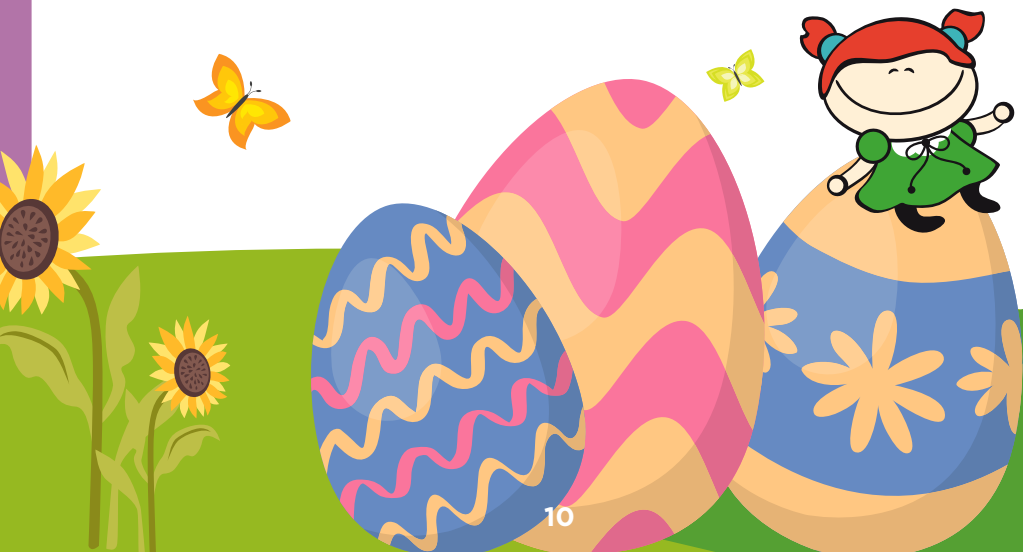
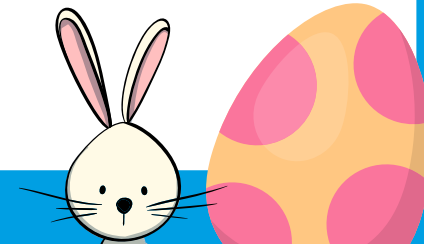
The objective of this pilot project is to promote whole school cultural change, led by Senior team/ Heads of your school and working closely with parent carers via PODS Parent Carer Forum, represented by Jayne Stevens, Strategic Co-ordinator and Uma Bhatia.

Pilot Aim: "This is a cross system project to improve experience and outcomes for Autistic students in mainstream schools. This will include the development of school workforce and leadership to ensure that mainstream schools offer capable environments in which autistic students can thrive, in particular, supporting good mental health and promoting inclusion for this group of young people. There will be a focus on ensuring that key transition points for autistic students are supported effectively, ensuring a positive experience in terms of change, and moving forward"

We have collected a wide range of views already from both schools and are working with parent carers via 'coffee morning/afternoon' at each school (meet in school reception) to share the results and work together on the above aims.

Dothill dates: Monday 9th May, 13th June, 11th July @1.30pm

Charlton dates: Wednesday 25th May, 29th June @9.15am



Speech & Language Therapy

We've held some workshops with families and members of the Shropshire Community Health Trust teams through an identified need to redesign the Speech and Language and Communication Needs pathway. Parent carers expressed their preferences for more services to support their children as early as possible, with timely assessments and advice and more services, alongside more information to support them at home. This has meant that parents, early years, schools, and practitioners all working together. Families gave positive ideas and provided feedback about the advice line and website, which have been improved. Please take a look...

Speech, language, communication needs



[Speech, language, communication needs](#)

Eating, drinking, and swallowing needs



[Eating, drinking and swallowing needs](#)

Advice line number:
01743 450800 (option 4)

<https://www.shropscommunityhealth.nhs.uk/>

Another strand to this work, and as part of this review: the team are working with early years and education providers to deliver interventions from Stoke Speaks Out and Talk Boost to support more children as early as possible.



<https://www.stokespeaks.org/>



<https://ican.org.uk/talk-boost>

Town Park and Playground Communication Boards



Discussions with Yas, have given us an opportunity to raise this as an idea with Telford Town Park and we are in talks to have one designed specifically for our own Town Park, so we are working with Sensory team, Telford Town Park, and design teams. Watch this Space and we hope to have something in place in time for Summer!

A brilliant local parent (Yas and her son Ethan) has been fundraising to have some of these communication boards delivered to local schools which is absolutely amazing. So far, they've gone to Hollinswood Primary, Haughton Special School, Severndale Academy, Priorslee Primary Academy, Newport Infants, and one due for Halesfield Day Nursery.



Equality and Diversity Workshop

Following on from the above conversations, we were informed that Telford & Wrekin Council are in the process of updating their Equality Strategy and we were invited to set up an engagement session with their consultant. We did this mid-February - a very quick turnaround, but we brought a range of families to the table to discuss our family needs, the needs within the community and share our personal experiences as service users and as representatives of the wider parent carer network.

This feedback will be used as valuable input into the strategy development, and we look forward to reviewing it in coming months.

Inclusion? Acceptance? Accessibility? What does it mean to you?

We asked this question to families as part of a project we were invited to work on with Telford College Media Students - they wanted to produce a video for us to support our charity and we suggested something around 'inclusion'. We put out some questions to families and here are just some of the responses:

"Being able to take my child out in the community without fear of reprisals"

"We aren't left out and we can join in"

"Not been judged"

"It means everything to us, it means us being able to be part of the community without judgment. It means being able to take part in activities or just accessing the community without the stares if our child displays a different behaviour to theirs. To not feel an outside in an already isolating world"

"For us, it means that we are accepted for all the quirks that a young man with autism brings, and that we are given a chance to show the good stuff, spending time and getting to know us"

"Accepting my child as he is and not judging him or our family"

"A huge relief, no stigma or prejudice, a fair level"

This feedback has been used in the video and has been shared as part of our Disability Awareness Training.

Community Sharing and Learning

We had a great opportunity to also ask wider members of the public and professionals and community partners at a 'Safer Neighbourhood' event we attended at the end of last year. Some of the responses are shown here in this picture.

We asked the same questions around what inclusivity and acceptance meant to them - some very interesting conversations were struck up and one that sticks with me around why a person with a disability should have to make special arrangements to access something in the community - surely it should be provided automatically . . .

A question to provoke some thoughts??



Highlights from SEND Local Offer

SEND Strategy

The current SEND Strategy will be extended until this year. A new strategy will be developed going forward and will also need to incorporate wider work based on the National SEND Strategy, OFSTED frameworks, and various other SEND work areas. We look forward to involving you in this later this year.

Transition for SEND pupils from Primary School to Secondary School

Transition for SEND pupils from Primary School to Secondary School – Must, Should Could

- **Must** - As a minimum, all schools **must** ensure the following happens for pupils with SEND during transition.
- **Should** - School **should** be trying to ensure the following during transition.
- **Could** - Schools **could** implement the following during transition

We are sharing again as we know it's important discussion from families. We have also worked with IASS on a Transition session for families – an Early Years one and also a primary to secondary. Look for these coming up again in the future.

Local Offer Link and Newsletters

Check out more information on the Local Offer here: www.telfordsend.org.uk/

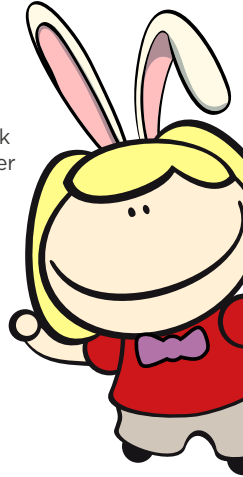
Welcome to Telford & Wrekin's Local Offer

The Local Offer aims to bring together useful information across education, health and social care within one website. You can find information, advice and guidance and a range of local service providers who support children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Simply click on the age range that applies to you, or your child if you are a parent or carer.

SEND Newsletters

To sign up for regular updates and SEND News direct from Telford & Wrekin Council – use this link: https://www.telfordsend.org.uk/info/1/home/109/send_news



Training Offer

2021 has been a positive year for the Charity and we have started to deliver many differing services. They have been specifically designed to help support our members, reduce isolation, and bring more disability awareness to the wider community whilst helping us work towards financial sustainability. One of the services brought on board was the introduction of Disability Awareness training, to assist organisations have a better understanding of how they can both support and engage with people who have a disability or additional need.

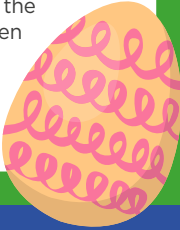
The training has been a remarkable success and has been conducted at a wide variety of organisations, from Local Authorities, Voluntary groups and even the armed forces. The organisations report that they feel better informed, more confident when meeting disabled members of the public, have improved understanding of hidden disabilities and better knowledge of basic reasonable adjustments they can make to achieve greater accessibility for all. The training can be delivered both online or in person and will be tailored to the individual organisation's needs. To find out more please email elaine@podstelford.org



Transport Assistance

We know from families the issues and frustrations around School Transport and the challenges this causes. A new Transport Manager is in post, and we have had two meetings with the team now to address the key issues, putting in place requests for more information to be shared and in a more timely manner. We have been told that a new system is being put in place that will be consistent and easier to identify and manage children's and young people transport requirements.

We are hopeful that this will resolve issues and also the sharing of information of how the system works – things like when risk assessments will be carried out and how, and when drivers will visit families' homes – when they will be available to do so (an example of this that had not been shared previously was that historically, many drivers and PA's don't work in the summer holidays so are unable to visit families until beginning of September).



We are part of PODS – what does it mean?

As a Charity, it's important to us that families feel welcomed, they feel part of a community and as part of the 'video' project, we asked what it means to be part of PODS – here are some examples of what people said to us:

"Empowered me to be stronger and more resilient"

"That I'm not alone"

"It has made knowledge available to me for local help, education guidance and it feels nice to be in a like-minded community"

"PODS has helped so much over the years, I now refer as many people as I can to them, who ask me for help or who I know are struggling with their child/young person/family"

"PODS makes you feel that you are not alone, and you are part of a group which has a voice that is listened to by the local authority to support the needs of families who have a member with additional needs"

"It has had a huge impact on me, it makes me feel like I am doing a really worthwhile job, to help others in a similar situation. On a personal level, PODS were there for me when my child was first diagnosed, they welcomed me and my family with open arms, they included us and made us feel part of something, easing the loneliness, pain and heartbreak that we were feeling initially"

"Very timely emotional help for myself and correct guidance/workshops to know more about the different strategies I can use to help my child"

"Impact of PODS on me has been massive, I've been able to find help and support, learn from other parent carers and share my experiences, whilst having fun".

"Feel like we have support, we've made friends and enjoy activities with other families with disabled children"

“Together We Can Make a Difference”

Why not get involved?



Parent Carer Participation is when parents and professionals work together, recognising each other's knowledge, to make informed decisions about services that make the best use of resources.

We work across the whole range of services including health, education, social care, and alongside our voluntary sector partners – at a local, regional and national level. We are also members of the National Network of Parent Carer Forum.

As the Strategic Co-ordinator my role is to involve and support parent carers and families who have a child and young person aged 0-25 years to have their voice heard in service development. PODS is a representative body that attends strategic meetings, meetings with commissioners, operational leads, Directors and service leads, providers of services etc.

I am supported in this work with a team of parent reps who each have an area of work they are interested in and support me with, albeit this is not exclusive, and anyone can feed into any area of work at any time.

Deb Sheppard has volunteered with us for many years, in various roles, as a befriender and supporter and as a champion of all things Mental Health. Deb has also supported us with mental health led family groups.

Karen Hale-Jones has been a key parent rep in the work around adults and her experiences of working with young people at college has been very valuable. Karen also has a lot of experience around housing and specialist placements.

Keiron Warr has been with us for many years and is Chair of Carers Partnership Board. Keiron brings a wealth of experience from his working life and special schools and supports with the Joint Commissioning meetings.

Liz Bickford-Smith has been involved with transition to adulthood and employment and is very passionate about community inclusion. Liz is also a co-founder of the Newport Hub Café and Funky Friday Disco's.

Simon Buckley-Robins has always had an interest in the work around Short Breaks and supports me with this, and transition/adult world and specialist college placements, moving into adulthood, with knowledge and experiences shared around social care.

Tina Lowe focus when working with me has been around Early Years, working with Child Development Centre, and more recently the Speech and Language Therapy pathway. Tina also runs the Shining Stars 0-5 playgroup and links into the hospital communication meetings.

Sara Lyon has worked with us for many years, focussed on her experiences and links to nursery provision, as a champion of the forum and getting involved with direct family support at groups and meetups.

Sarah Richards has worked with us on the Local Offer development and also a dedicated piece of work around transition between primary and secondary schools, sharing her direct experience of this work.

We are very fortunate to be welcoming two new Parent Reps to our forum:

Cas Lake is one of very newest recruited Reps and her area will focus on Short Breaks for children, picking up the key work for 0-18 years, and she will work with Tina on this going forward.

Kerry McLafferty is another one of our newest recruited reps, and focus will be on education matters, EHCP Quality assurance and involvement in development of the SEND Strategy.

Our own staff team also play a role in supporting me as Parent Reps (voluntary hours) and their links into key areas are detailed below. You can read more about their key roles in the centre pages of our newsletter, but these are some of the areas they also get involved in:

Elaine Pearce supports me with autism pathway and comms meetings, also works with Strengthening Families.

Joanne Smith supports with complex health needs and the needs of young people into adulthood and relevant support.

Kerrie Seagrave supports with Strengthening Families, early years work and the Child Development Centre.

Uma Bhatia supports with early years work and autism projects.

Jeannie Munford-Lear, supports with early years feedback and from her experience in working in primary settings

GET INVOLVED, BE OUR VOICE

Do you have something to say about local services?

Are you passionate about ensuring parent carers are heard and believe in PODS Vision?

Then why not Become a Rep?

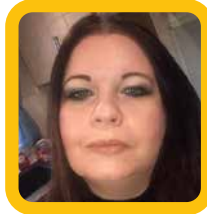
To get involved and help share parent carer voices, please contact Jayne (Strategic Co-ordinator) for a chat and a cuppa on: 0777 534 2092 or email jayne@podstelford.org

Meet the PODS Team

Elaine Pearce

Project Manager

I joined PODS in early 2017 after attending an event, I felt inspired by the work and support they offered, this encouraged me to become more involved. Initially enrolling on the Parent Rep training as a volunteer, this involved attending meetings and workshops to represent the voices of our members and their families. This developed into me taking the role of Project Manager through opportunities that came along based on my previous working experience. My role oversees the day to day running of the charity, part of which is ensuring we have suitable funding in place, along with supporting staff and volunteers. Me and my husband have 4 children, Kimberley who is 18, Twins Ryan and Luke who are 11 and 9 year old Ben. Ryan has many additional needs including Autism, Epilepsy, Sensory Processing Disorder, OCD, ODD, Dyslexia and Hypermobility to name but a few. From my own battles and experiences, I have a good understanding of the difficulties faced by families surrounding both diagnosis and support. My drive and passion is to help, support and make a difference to as many families as possible.



Jayne Stevens Ba(Hons)

Strategic Co-ordinator

I am a co-founder of Parents Opening Doors, which started its life as Parent Carer Forum 14 years ago. I got involved in Participation work after attending a parent support group and realising and benefitting from the power of the parent carer voice, having received support to share my experience and felt listened to. This led to the evolution of the Parent Carer Forum: PODS - Parents "Opening" Doors. Over the years I have seen the Charity side of things grow, but my heart and expertise has remained in Parent Participation where I sit in my role as Strategic Co-ordinator. Participation means that parent carers and professionals work together, recognising each other's expert knowledge, to design, develop and improve services across health, education, social care and with community partners. As the Charity has expanded, parent carer voices come from all the other areas and are collated into the 'forum'. My professional and personal foundation are based on strong relationships and an open communication at all levels - I'd much rather meet with someone face to face, or pick up the phone, and look forward to closer working, especially with the families we represent. Sharing my personal experiences - I married Lee not long after arriving in Telford, heading towards 28 years, we have a son Matt with Autism, ADHD and associated co-conditions who is now 21 and is adjusting to life outside of specialist education; and a daughter Jess who is 18, and working full time, before heading to university this year. You will no doubt have seen Jess at some of our community events. I enjoy live music and dancing, cooking with my family, and has a passion for reading. My motto is 'Always ask a Busy Person!'



Kerrie Seagrave

Member Support Co-ordinator

I have been part of the PODS Team since June 2017, where I started as PODS Administration Co-ordinator. In May 2021, I took on the role of PODS Member Support Co-ordinator and I now look after the Befriending Scheme and a lovely team of Befrienders as well as looking after the members database, producing the newsletters and weekly E bulletins amongst other tasks. Being part of the PODS team is extremely important to me, as I know from personal experience just how much being a member of PODS and accessing the Befriending Scheme can help a parent. I became a member of PODS in January 2014, the first time I attended a PODS Family Group, I felt very alone and isolated, as myself and my family had recently moved to Telford and didn't have any family or friends in the area. This soon changed and I felt very supported by PODS. My Husband and I are parents to Jack who is 17 and is currently doing an IT Apprenticeship and Lilly who is 10 and attends The Bridge School. Lilly has Autism, a Learning Disability, and many other additional needs. When I have some spare time, I enjoy going to the gym, running, and spending time with my family.



Joanne Smith

Events and Fundraising Lead

Joanne has worked with PODS since October 2019. She joined the team shortly after attending her first trip to Rhyl beach as a new member in August 2019, she was impressed with the work and support offered to her and the other members attending the trip that day by the staff. Joanne felt that she could offer a sympathetic understanding of a variety of disabilities, from her own life experience and knowledge around physical disabilities and mental health and understanding the stresses this could bring on a whole family unit. She has previously worked in a special needs school, and as part of a community support team in Lichfield. Joanne moved to Telford from Lichfield in Staffordshire in February 2019 with her family. She has 3 sons, a 25-year-old with mental health issues of ASA, ADHD, and BPD, a 22-year-old son with severe physical disabilities as Cerebral Palsy, Epilepsy, Scoliosis, tube fed, to mention just a few. And a pleasant and helpful 10-year-old. In her spare time Joanne enjoys crafts and gardening.



Uma Bhatia

Lego & Family Group Lead

Hello, I am Uma. I joined the PODS team in October 2019. I have 2 children Vani, 19 and Om, 10 years old. I became a PODS member in early 2015 shortly after my son's diagnosis of ASD. I found the much-needed support network in PODS. The Family Groups and workshops run by PODS were very useful and I regularly attended these sessions. I also developed a peer network of friends at the PODS sessions - we all have children with additional needs and could relate with each other's experiences and challenges. I have been through some very challenging times bringing up my son with additional needs. I also realised that sharing of my experiences and learnings could help other parents / carers in similar situations. I am motivated to work for the betterment of the special-needs community in general. In PODS, I found an avenue to express myself and work with a group of likeminded people determined to make a positive difference in the lives of families with kids with additional needs. I have undertaken the Parent Rep training and am also a trained Befriender. I was involved in the successful pilot run of the Lego Therapy Club. I now work as the Lego and Family Group Lead for PODS. I love interacting with children and parents/carers and find the engagement at Family Groups and Lego Club very rewarding. In my spare time, I enjoy doing Sudoku, singing, and watching movies with my family.



Jeannie Lear

SEND Engagement Lead

Hi, I'm Jeannie Lear and I have been PODS SEND Engagement Lead since February 2021. I first got involved with PODS at the start of 2020 volunteering at Uma's Lego Sessions. Since then, I have been running Pear's sessions, which started off as craft and sensory activities over Zoom. Thanks to funding from the Pears Foundation, I am providing a variety of sessions across Telford with support from the brilliant PODS team. My role has progressed to also providing sensory sessions, which supports young children and parents/carers. I have been fortunate to meet many PODS members and gain a better understanding of what families need in Telford. Before joining PODS, I studied Childhood Studies at college and university alongside working as a teaching assistant in Early Years and at Haughton School. My previous experience has always gravitated towards support children with SEND, something I credit to my late sister who had SEND. From a young age I knew that supporting children, young people and families with SEND was something I wanted to do, and I feel very lucky to be working with PODS today.



Holiday Scheme

A further area of work we have branched into over the last 12 months, is supporting with the running and implementation of school holiday playschemes.

We were delighted to be involved in the planning and conducting of the pilot SEN summer play scheme, that the Local Authority ran during the school holidays and took place at the Ice ring and Exotic Zoo. The families that attended were grateful for the opportunity to have an accessible weekly activity for the children, in a supported environment. For us it was a fantastic way to engage and meet with more families and ensure they were accessing all the help and support they were entitled too and introduce them to the wider PODS offer.

During the summer, October, and Christmas school holidays we also partnered with other providers, such as Meeting Point House and Creation Station to assist in their delivery of playscheme programs. We conducted a wide variety of activities, such as chocolate making, cake decorating, pizza making, coding, Lego, science experiments, craft, and sports sessions. These were delivered to a mixed age range and abilities that included Sen and non-Sen children, we feel this is a fantastic way to unite children from differing backgrounds and encourage them to be accepting of people's differences.

We look forward to working alongside providers again over the coming year, enabling us to continue supporting inclusion in the wider community and further our sustainability. If you are interested in us partnering with your organisation, please email elaine@podstelford.org



Sleep Workshops

In 2021 we were funded by Health to undergo specialised sleep training to enable us to deliver Sleep Tight workshops to parent and carers to assist them in formulating bedtime strategies, to better improve sleep quality for the whole family. Many families have resorted to Melatonin to aid their children get too sleep, as they feel they have tried everything else, however this only helps get the child to sleep it does not assist them in staying there, in some circumstances it may fail to work at all.

The strategies and methods taught within the workshops are designed to both facilitate your child falling asleep and remaining asleep. They are derived from tried and tested methods that take into account children's individualities and help you plan a routine that works for you and your family. The course is 5 sessions long spread over 5 weeks, it is essential that all 5 sessions are attended, each one covers a different topic/aspect which will slowly allow you to build a plan that works for you. If you are interested in finding out more or booking on, please email elaine@podstelford.org



PBS Training Positive Behaviour Support



In January 2021, PODS were given funding for 3 staff members or parent reps to undertake PBS training from the BiLD Project by the LA and CCG teams to become Peer Educators. The BiLD Project focusses on families with children who have a Learning Disability.

Positive Behaviour Support (PBS), is about understanding behaviour, meeting needs, and knowing that behaviour is a form of communication, and that all behaviour happens for a reason. It is important to understand the cause of the behaviour to find a way (or ways) so that the behaviour of concern does not reoccur or the frequency of reoccurrence decreases.

To understand the cause, PBS gathers information from everyone supporting, family, support workers, speech and language etc, by using DASH:

- D** - Define the behaviour in an observable and measurable way
- A** - Ask everyone involved with the person about the behaviour
- S** - See the behaviour by observing the person
- H** - Hypothesize where, why, and when the behaviour occurs

ABC charts (Antecedents, Behaviour and Consequences) are used to record the behaviour. With everyone working together the best possible strategies can be worked out for the individual. Peer Educators can provide support for families of people with learning disabilities who may have distressed behaviours and who want or need support.

If you would like to know more about Positive Behaviour Support, please contact us via email: support@podstelford.org



Befriending Scheme Update

from Kerrie Seagrave,
Member Support Co-ordinator



The Befriending Scheme has seen quite a few changes over the last year, with Lin moving on and myself being appointed Member Support Co-ordinator, looking after both our Member Database and the Befriending Scheme. On a personal note, I'd like to share that the Befriending Scheme means a lot to me as I accessed the scheme early on in our daughter's diagnosis process, so I know just how much it can help and support a family when they need it most.

We have a growing, active team of wonderful Befrienders, all of which are parent carers themselves, so they have lived experience and know what it's like to go through the diagnosis process and the challenges families can face. Befrienders support parents at time of diagnosis or during challenging times relating to their child or young person's diagnosis.

We recently amended our referral process, we now have a new Referral Form, designed by Elaine, that professionals are welcomed to complete. This helps to make the referral process easier, the form gives more detailed information on how we can help and support families.

Throughout the pandemic, we have and continue to provide our Befriending support by telephone rather than in person, but this has meant we are still able to provide support to families that need us.

We have recently started our new monthly Befriending Scheme Family Group, where you can meet our Befrienders who are ready to listen, in a friendly, welcoming, and non-judgemental environment. Details of the family groups are shared on our weekly Ebulletin and on PODS open Facebook page, we also have a closed Facebook group where families can ask questions, ask for advice or share tips and experiences.

If you would like to know more about accessing the Befriending Scheme or would like to become a Befriender, we would love to hear from you. You can email: kerrie@podstelford.org or call 07309 753044.

We're always here for you, whether that's through weekly calls, a one-off call when you need someone to talk to, or a chat at our family groups, we are here and ready to listen.

Kerrie & the Befriending Team xxx

THESE ARE JUST A FEW QUOTES FROM OUR BEFRIENDERS ON WHAT BEING A BEFRIENDER MEANS TO THEM...

Being a Befriender helps me give back to a group that helped me

Not feeling judged by what you feel are failings

I have always been a good listener, and care how people are feeling, I have been supported in the past, I wish to be of any help whatsoever to a person, a chat, any info I can pass through knowledge, the person knows I'm there for them.

Being able to give back and help others, knowing how much talking to someone can help.

PODS Events

At PODS we support families with a wide array of differing disabilities and needs, this is at the forefront of our minds when planning any event or activity. We always try to cater for as many of our family's as we can at each event or look to put on alternative activity where possible. Over the last 12 months we have had some wonderful events/activities with many more to come. Here is a little reminder of what has taken place since March 2021.

In the Summer holidays we teamed up with 'Contact' who provided funding to cover cost of entrance fees for our members to visit Conkers. We covered the cost of transport and took one coach full of our families on a wonderful adventurous day out at Conkers discovery centre. The children and young adults enjoyed bush crafts, built a campfire to melt marshmallows, took a ride on the mini train, played in the parks, enjoyed the sensory garden, and watched a 4D short cinema show. All in all, a great time was had by all, and I think the adults were as worn out as the children!



Prior to Covid our annual coach trips went to many a varying location, one which has always been a great hit was a trip to the seaside. With Covid having got in the way and prevented trips in 2020 our members were overjoyed at their return in 2021. So much so that demand for our trip to Rhyl was unprecedented, we resorted to increasing our coaches from 2 to 4! This was a major undertaking, however the team did good and pulled it off. There were goodie bags provided for the children and young Adults to keep them entertained on the coach, with a fun bingo game to spot certain objects and vehicles, which I think the parent/carers enjoyed more! Each coach took part in their own raffle with the opportunity to win some seaside goodies whilst helping us to raise vital funds. Although the weather was windy this did not discourage our families from enjoying the beach, the children built sandcastles, dug holes, buried their feet in the sand and collected seashells. The arcades and funfair were also a great hit, it's safe to say the journey back home was a lot quieter on the coaches with lots of snoozing and worn-out children, parents, and carers, with lots of fun family memories made in an inclusive, supportive environment.



Whilst on the Rhyl trip many families mentioned the Blackpool Illuminations and enquired to whether we would run a trip. Following on from this feedback we investigated the opportunity and decided to put on a Blackpool trip during October half term. This consisted of two coaches (we learnt our lesson with 4) the trip enabled families to see the lights, without the hassle and complications of having to arrange and drive such a long journey on their own. The weather that was forecast was not very good, but someone smiled on us that day and whilst it was cold, it certainly was a lot drier than expected. Families again were provided with goodie bags to keep the children and young Adults occupied on the coach, whilst at Blackpool our families enjoyed a walk along the promenade viewing the spectacular lights and enjoying the beach views, arcades, and eateries. On the journey back they enjoyed their own lights show on the coaches using the glow sticks provided by PODS.

At the end of October, we held a spooktacular pumpkin carving session to celebrate Halloween. Families thoroughly enjoyed participating and creating some amazing carved pumpkins and wonderful decorations, it was lovely to see families enjoying a fun time together and making special memories. Please keep a look out for this year's upcoming events and activities.



Fundraising

Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank every single person for their continued support over the last year, again it has been a tough one for all and your loyalty and support has not gone unnoticed.

I think the biggest recognition though needs to go to our wonderful team of Volunteers, in which we have seen a massive increase in numbers, so thank you to them for their continued dedication and passion, please remember without you none of this would be possible. Also, a huge thank you to our fabulous donors throughout 2021 and into 2022 such as, Asda Donnington Wood, Morrisons Lawley, County Fundraisers Dawley, Rotary Club Wellington, Capgemini, Magna, Arnold Clarke, Energize and the funds raised through our Fun Run and other small donors.

Without the crucial income via grants, donations and fundraising and the support offered by our volunteers the charity simply could not continue to fulfil the purpose it was intended and reach out and support every one of you reading this newsletter. We are proud of all the events and activities we manage to successfully host, however there is a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes that you never get to see or hear about. There is an army of dedicated volunteers and staff who work tirelessly, spending numerous hours filling in forms, attending meetings with potential funders, researching venues and events, networking and organising our activities and liaising with our dedicated supporters who are very generous with their donations. If you would like to get involved and help out, please email joanne@podstelford.org

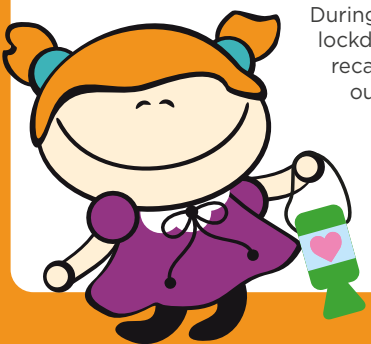
During the first lockdown you may recall we created our Facebook 'PODS Fundraising Group' that runs regular raffles with



some wonderful prizes, such as chocolate hampers, games bundles, sports equipment and even Kindles. Please remember to join the group to be in with a chance to win a fabulous prize.

Where possible and restrictions have allowed, we have held a couple of fundraising raffle stalls at events such as the Oakengates carnival and Telford Balloon Festival, in which we also had our sensory tents to enable families to take a break and access some calming activities. Our latest fundraising activity was the Weston Park 5k & 10k Run organised by Kickass Endurance, in which we had some wonderful people including some PODS staff participating in order to raise funds. In the coming year we are looking to take part in further Fun Runs etc, so if running is your thing and you would like to support us, please get in touch. We are also part of Amazon Smile, this works by people signing up to become our supporters, every time that person shops, Amazon will donate an amount to us at no cost to the individual. Please look out for us on Amazon smile next time you are shopping.

If you have any ideas for fundraising, activities, events or would like to get involved please get in touch: joanne@podstelford.org



PODS Family Groups



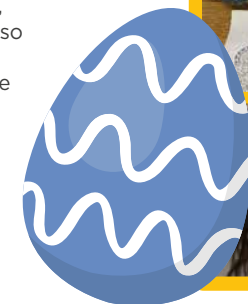
Another year and the pandemic still disrupting our everyday routines. We continued the Family Groups online and meeting up outside, whenever possible, thus ensuring we remained connected overcoming to some extent the isolation that the pandemic has brought up on all of us. The good weather and the onset of spring also helped to make our outside family groups pleasant and enjoyable.

When meeting online, we did some craft activities, with the materials home delivered to the members who had booked. Along with the usual catch up we enjoyed getting creative and building the crafts. The family groups provide a platform for the parent/carer community to be amidst peers who understand them and share tips and tricks with them. The parent/carers have enjoyed joining in at the family groups - the Family Group at Blists Hill has particularly been very well attended where we enjoy the walk and catch up over coffee at the café while the children have fun at the newly opened Play area.

We held Family Group sessions at the Jackfield Tile Museum where the parent/carers got the opportunity to express their creative selves while painting tiles. Tile painting was much appreciated by all who attended - it was also a good calming experience for the attendees.

Recently we held a session on Mindfulness which was well appreciated by those who joined in. The session was led by a Mindfulness Practitioner who demonstrated and trained us to be in the present moment and be aware of our feelings and thoughts, moment to moment. The session also covered mindful eating and doing creative work in form of making The Glitter Jars and Rock Painting.

PODS family groups continue to provide support and advice to the members in a non-judgemental friendly environment.



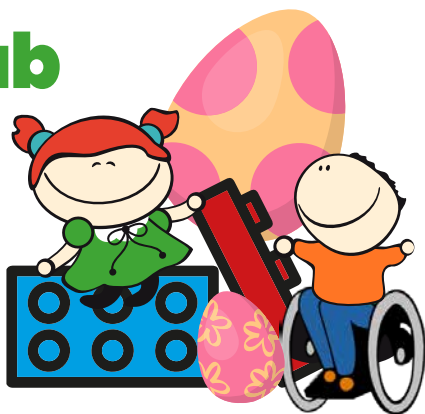
PODS Lego Club

The Lego Club continues to keep the young children creatively engaged as well as socially connected. We are hosting the Lego Club sessions online with help of Zoom, the tech savvy kids have taken quite well to the online interactions. The kids have even helped me discover a few cool features of the zoom platform.

The Lego Bingo games within the Lego Club are a big hit with the children. We have had a few nail-biting finishes raising excitement levels during these sessions. The children are encouraged to share their Lego builds and any other achievements.

While sharing their builds, the children are encouraged to share their thoughts and experiences with all thereby helping them develop their language skills, good listening skills and learning to be patient while waiting for their turn. With life returning to normal, we are hopeful that the Lego Club can be hosted in person like earlier.

The passion of the children towards Lego is the main driver to keep running the Lego Club sessions during these trying times. The Lego Club continues to provide a platform where children can increase their social and communication skills in a safe and non-judgemental environment. In case your child is interested to join the Lego Club please email Uma at uma@podstelford.org

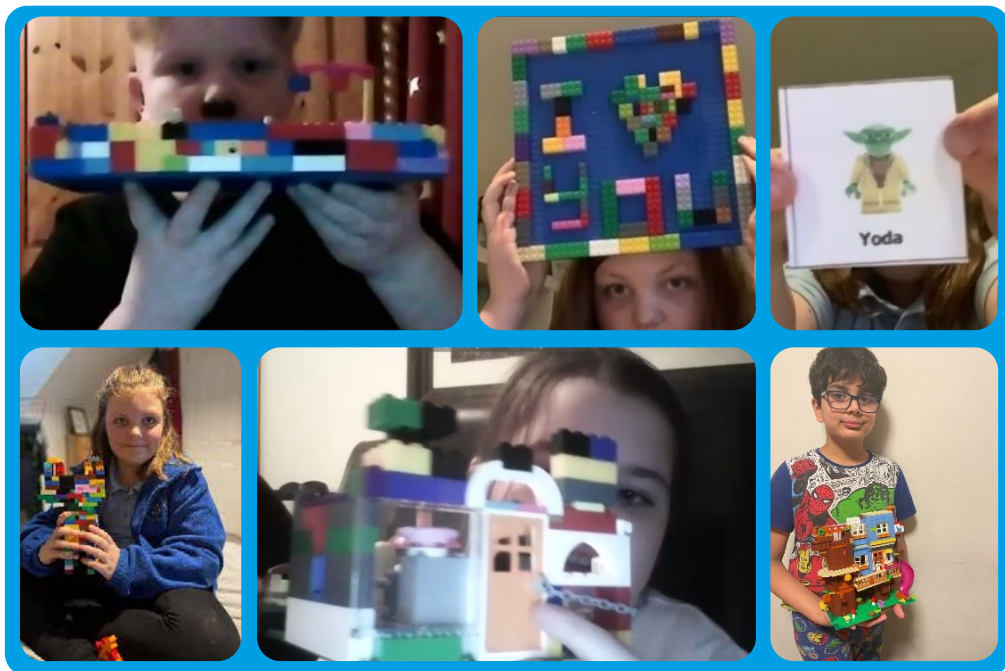


PODS Code Club

With the uncertainty of the pandemic continuing and the children being on and off school, the boredom was setting in with both the children and the parents. The question on our minds was "How to keep our children engaged?". We all know how clever our children are with technology, so with this in mind we thought to setup Code Club to teach them how to code and explore their creativity further.

The programming language we all learnt in Code Club was **Scratch** – a visual block programming language, where the children could program and share interactive media such as stories, games, and animation. During the sessions, the children not only honed their programming skills, but also learnt to think creatively, reason systematically and work collaboratively. We all know how important these skills are for our children. We had such fun in the sessions learning **Scratch** and programming our sprites (animated characters in Scratch) to do different activities all by experimenting. The children participated in the Coolest Projects 2021 in which they submitted their own mini projects and earned accolades.

Now we are aiming to restart the Code Club in -person and learn Python language.



PODS Donnington Sessions

PODS received funding in October 2021 to work with families in Donnington and Muxton areas to help them overcome isolation and become more active. We organised Tennis sessions for children at the Telford Tennis Centre. These sessions led by a coach helped the children to explore a new sport and learn some new skills. The feedback was very encouraging, we hope to schedule more sessions in future for children of PODS members.

We arranged Mindfulness Practice sessions for parents/carers over a period of 4 weeks. The sessions included practising Body scan, mindful eating and mindful object meditation and

creating a mindful jar. Mindfulness assists with stress reduction, greater resilience, increase in confidence and self-esteem and improved health and wellbeing.

Recently, we held a Karate trial session for children to introduce them to martial arts. The team from GKR Karate introduced different techniques to children and explained the levels they could achieve during training. The children enjoyed learning and practising karate moves.

In the coming weeks, we are planning to hold further sessions at the Tennis centre for children and a walking group for parents/carers.



Pears Sessions

Last year, we were awarded a grant from The Pears Foundation. This funding has enabled us to create Pears Sessions, a programme that offers a variety of activities held in Telford for children with SEND and their siblings. The programme has proven to be popular, highlighting the need for inclusive activities. Sessions aim to promote confidence, build social skills, and reduce isolation. As a result of the Pears Sessions, parents have told us that their children have gained confidence, friendships and felt a part of a team!

The programme is divided into two age groups; primary and aged 11 and beyond. Some of the activities that have been enjoyed by our families are Inflata Nation, Wizard School, Woodland Sessions by Small Woods and tubing at Madeley Ski Slope. We are pleased to announce that due to available funding, Pears Session will be continuing until Summer 2022.

Sessions take place on Thursdays and Saturdays during term time and are free to attend.



Sensory Sessions

Last year we were fortunate enough to be awarded funding from Energize to purchase some sensory equipment. This has been put to good use enabling us to make events more accessible to those that struggle in busy, loud, and over stimulating environments. The equipment has proved to be very popular and has led on to the idea of delivering specific sensory sessions.

In November 2021, we began providing weekly sensory session for children aged four and under. Sessions were set up with the aim of providing children with opportunities to engage their senses and develop areas such as social, cognitive, and fine motor skills. Through feedback, we have recognised the importance of offering opportunities for children and parents/carers to meet and socialise, especially post-lockdown.

Sensory play can allow children to develop their understanding of their emotions and the world around them and reduce anxieties. With their parent/carer, children are able to explore and play with a variety of sensory toys and resources with other families. From February, we have included sensory activities to each session, such as tuff tray activities using paint and shaving foam. Sessions take place every Monday morning from 10am to 11.30am at the PODS office and tickets cost £3 per child.



Easter 2021

We are very aware of how our members both old and new look forward to our events and activities during school holidays. However, at Easter due to Covid we were faced with many restrictions, meaning we could not have a family face to face event. As always, we did not want the children and young people to miss out completely, so we come up with a different way in which we could deliver an Easter event. We joined forces with Asda in Donnington wood, who gave us a fantastic opportunity by offering to have a trolley at the front of the store to collect Easter Eggs. We were overwhelmed at the generosity of their customers who far exceeded our expectations, to the point we asked Asda to redistribute some of the eggs. As our staff are such great sports and up for anything they agreed to dress up as Easter bunnies and hopped along to visit many of our families with a basket full of treats. All of the children including their siblings received a chocolate egg or soft toy depending on what was most appropriate. This brought a lot of smiles and joy to some very excited children, who were delighted that the Easter Bunny had dropped by. Please keep a look out for this year's Easter Bunny who will be hopping by to spread some Easter joy at our upcoming events.



Queens Platinum Jubilee

We are very excited to announce that we will be celebrating our Beautiful Queens platinum Jubilee, 70 years on the throne! Our event will be held on Thursday 2nd June 2022 (Bank holiday) at 'The Engine shop building' at Enginuity.

We will be celebrating with a traditional sit-down English afternoon Tea, themed around Kings, Queens, princesses and Princes, so please feel free to dress up in your regal clothes and join us in celebrating. We will have stylish decorations and an abundance of Union Jack flags for you to wave, rumour has it that the Queen will be there too, although she maybe a little flat and made of cardboard. We have commissioned a local budding artist who is creating a one-off piece of artwork to commemorate the Jubilee, which will be unveiled on the day. There will be light entertainment alongside gentle background music, families will also have access to the Enginuity museum through-out the event. There will be a small charge to attend the event, however, parking will be free on the day thanks to Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, this will be supplied via a code that you will receive on arrival. In the lead up to the main event we will be hosting a series of free craft sessions for families to come along and help make crowns and decorations for use on the day. A special thanks to those that attended our Jubilee planning workshops and came up with these fantastic ideas on how to celebrate. Please look out for the information and links to book on to the Afternoon Tea and craft sessions, they will be advertised in the Ebulletin and on social media.



Picnic in the Park 2021

Last year although we managed to put on a different version of our annual event, many families missed our usual Picnic in the Park offerings. This year we were over the moon that the event was able to proceed as normal, with some Covid safe precautions in place.

It was jam packed with more than ever before amazing fun activities such as go karts, video gaming van, wizard school, Telford Chin Woo Martial arts demo, bouncy castles, inflatable assault cause, rodeo bull, archery, messy science workshop, wet sponge throwing, face painting, glitter tattoos, sports equipment, many stalls and not forgetting our super value packed lunches, ice creams and PODS refillable drinks bottles.



We were relieved that the weather was kind, bright and dry all day, enabling the event to be enjoyed by nearly 500 individuals. This year we choose once again to open the event up to both our members and the general public, as part of our strategy to promote inclusion, acceptance and understanding of the needs that our families have.

To ensure the event was as accessible to as many families as possible we again hired a MOBILOO which is a mobile changing places unit, many thanks to the Local Authority for supporting us with this decision and providing the funding.



We were delighted to welcome The Mayer Cllr Amrik Jhawar, Cllrs Shirly and Stephen Reynolds, Cllr Raj Mehta who came along to meet and talk with the team and the families on the day.



Most importantly we would like to thank the army of volunteers we had on the day, some were PODS members and their families, others were on loan to us from Capgemini, from the bottom of our hearts we could not thank you more, we could never of pulled off such an amazing event without your help! Please tell me you are all available for this year?????



Feedback on the day was fantastic, we have included some below:

All the children were happy and so many smiling faces, picnic in the park was very well organised.

Having the Mobiloo on site enabled my young adult son to be able to stay all day and enjoy the fun activities and atmosphere without having to leave the event to meet his personal care needs.

My children were not judged on their behaviour and could join in with other children that have similar needs.

We loved the variety of things to do.... Especially archery and bouncy castle!

Christmas 2021

Who doesn't love some festive fun and cheer at Christmas, here at PODS we certainly do! We were delighted that it was possible to host our annual Christmas events this year, although it did look dubious at one point with Covid still lingering and the threat of more lockdowns. As in previous years we held two separate events, this allows us to cater for the differing needs of our families.



Our first festive event was a 'quiet Santa experience' this was held at the Exotic Zoo in their brand new purpose built location in the heart of the Town Park. This is a firm favourite with those families whose children struggle to cope with the sensory overload that goes with a big party. Children and young adults were able to attend along with their siblings and parent/carers, each family was allocated an individual time slot with Santa to prevent queuing. Through working with the venue, we ensured there were no flashing lights or music, and that the environment was appropriate. Santa of course was amazing and handled all of the youngsters needs fabulously, whilst gifting them a lovely present each. Following their Santa visit the families were able to continue their festive magical experience with a quiet trip around the Zoo before it was opened up to the general public.



The second event was our PODS annual big Christmas party, this has become a firm favourite with families over the past few years and was sorely missed last Christmas. This year we decided to try a new venue that offered more space, flexibility, and the ability to do our catering in house around the needs of Covid safety. We were amazed at the generosity of a local business who supplied us with a snow machine, which we placed at the entrance to greet families on their arrival. The party included a disco, party games, candy floss machine, buffet, and a quiet sensory area. Of course, no Christmas party would be complete without a special visit from Santa himself, who had his own purpose built grotto and a gift for every child/young person. It was simply a Magical event for the whole family, and a delight to see so many Elves helping Santa.



Massive thanks to our amazing volunteers who dressed in either elf t-shirts or elf costumes to add to the atmosphere, without your hard work the party could not have been the success it was. We were also very lucky to receive a donation from county fundraisers in Dawley to help make this party as magical as it was, so a huge thank you to them for all the support they have given us.



Other highlights from the year:



Dean Beadle Workshop (Autistic Speaker)

At the request of families, we brought back Dean to talk to us – all online and COVID-safe. But great attendance as ever and very enlightening.

New Office launch

In between COVID restrictions we were able to host a mini launch of our new office at Hazeldine House. Welcoming parent carers and professionals. It's an ideal space for our workshops and training, and also our Monday sensory groups are held here.

Mental Health Group

As part of our commitment to support parent carer mental health we were able to hold an event at the office. Very valuable information shared to us by one of our mental health trained Parent Reps.

Makaton

We were delighted when Debbie, a Makaton user herself approached us and offered to run some Makaton workshops for our members. The workshops were snapped up in record time and greatly received by all who attended them. Debbie did an amazing job and worked her way through the signs at an appropriate pace for everyone. All the attendees got to take their workbooks home to continue their practice and even a certificate. Thanks for the fabulous session's Debbie.



Wills and Trusts

Through our networking we established links with Carina, who is a solicitor specialising in Wills and Trusts. She very kindly offered to run a couple of workshops for our families to give them the opportunity to find out about the choices and routes available to them. She gave some fantastic information and advice, she also provided us with some leaflets that can be accessed on our website. If any of you would like any further information, she is happy to chat with you, she can be contacted on 01743 284143.

Food Parcels

Covid brought many a challenge to families, no more so than those families with children and young people who have disabilities/additional needs. Within this community there is a group of families referred to as JAM families (Just About Managing), they are often forgotten about and tend to go unnoticed, they usually don't qualify for free school meals or food parcels, so when covid hit, it was easy for them to slip below that very thin managing line they were walking. We wanted to help, so we teamed up with June from Asda and together we put together food parcels for these very families. They were filled with long life items such as tins and pasta along with a few treats. They were distributed to those families who were not able to access food parcels elsewhere in order to relieve some of the financial strain and ensure they had food on the table.



Shining Stars

Special needs group for 0-5s

Led by friendly, experienced parents

NEW VENUE

The Linden Centre,
Oak Rd, Overdale,
TF3 5BT

Between
Ketley and
Newdale.
No 13 & 16
buses go
nearby

NEW DAY

Tuesday
10-11.30am

Come along and join us while your child plays

Email shiningstars2017@hotmail.com

A group with a range of play activities for children who have an additional need. Eligible for families prior, during or after diagnosis. Children must be supervised. Two children per adult. Siblings without an additional need are also welcome to attend.

Shining Stars



Ironbridge Gorge Museum Passes

Now restrictions have eased, and the museums are open as usual, why not loan some of our passes to allow you access to all the museums listed below. PODS members are entitled to this amazing offer thanks to the collaboration with the Ironbridge Gorge Museum trust. So why not try out the new outdoor play area at Blists Hill or the new interactive features at Enginuity!

The offer entitles the member and up to 5 other people of their choice free access to the Ironbridge Gorge Museums for a whole week, subject to a small deposit.

The pass allows you to visit:

- Blists Hill Victorian Museum
- Enginuity
- Coalbrookdale Museum of iron
- Darby Houses
- Jackfield Tile Museum
- Coalport China
- Museum of the Gorge/Tollhouse
- Tar Tunnel
- Broseley Pipeworks

You will require 1 pass for each person (including children) with a maximum of 6 available at any one time, each pass will be valid for 1 week and you can visit any of the participating museums any number of times.

Passes are allocated on a first come first served basis, if you would like to use the passes, please contact Elaine either by email elaine@podstelford.org or through our Facebook Page. All passes must be collected in person, there will be a **£5 deposit per pass** that will be refunded when the pass is returned by the agreed date.



Max Card

We are proud to be an ongoing distributor for the Max Card scheme. Not heard of Max Cards before? Not sure what they are?

The Max Card is designed to make days out more financially accessible for families of children with additional needs/disabilities and/or Foster Families, by helping families save money on great days out both locally and throughout the UK, they can even save you money on UK holidays.

Take a look at the Max card website www.mymaxcard.co.uk to see which venues are available in your chosen area, it can be used at locations such as castles, zoos, bowling alleys and even discounts on holidays. When you see a venue listed which you wish to visit, depending on the requirements for the venue, you can either book online or simply show the Max Card upon arrival, this will allow you free or discounted admission. They are available at a cost of only £3 from PODS family groups/events or via contacting Elaine via email elaine@podstelford.org. Only one card is required per family, each card lasts at least 18 months.

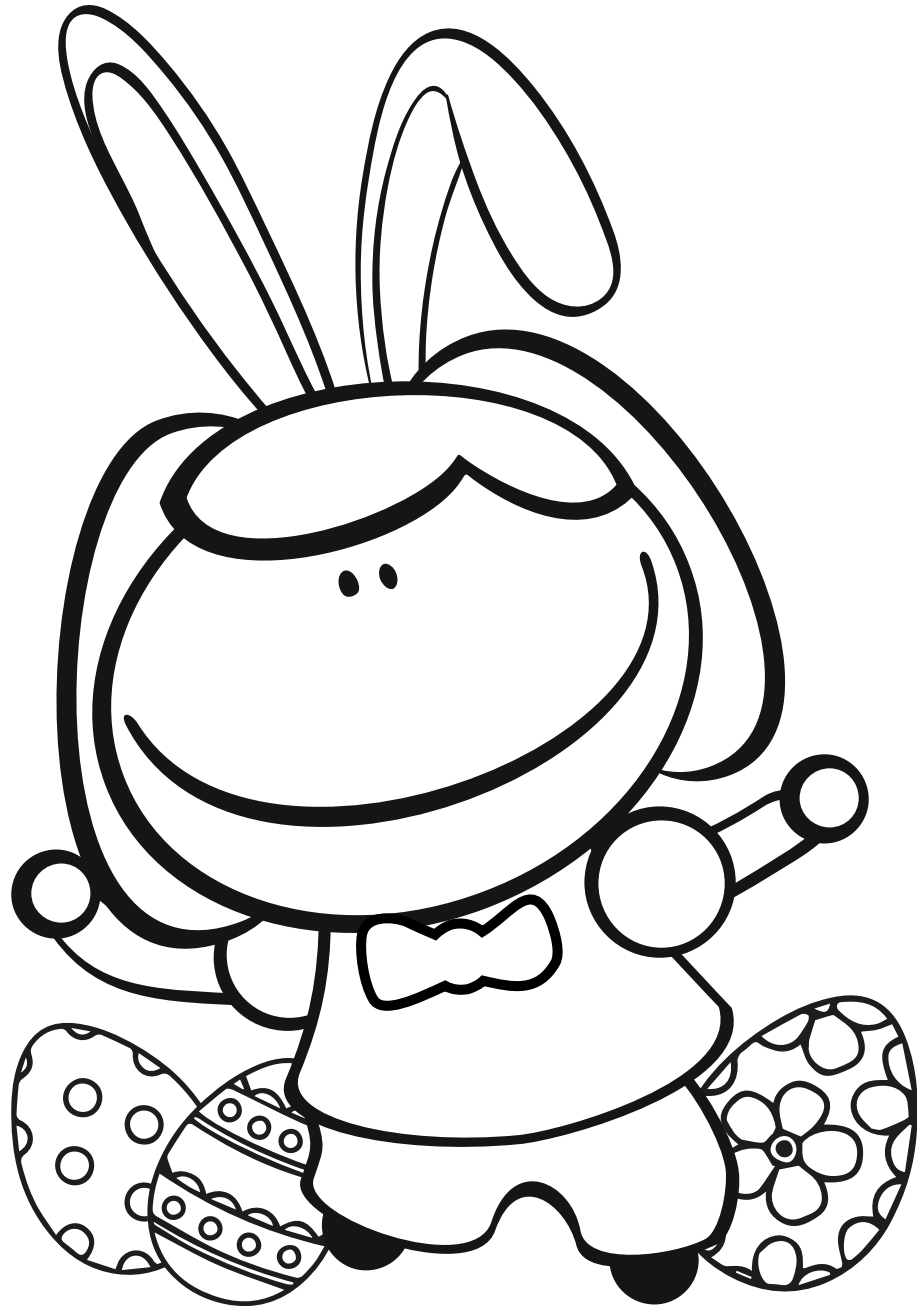


PODS Family Quiz – Questions

1. What do you call a baby cow?
2. What is the capital of England?
3. How many planets are there?
4. What do you put in the toaster?
5. What is the name of Peppa Pig's younger brother?
6. What is Dr Who's time machine called?
7. What is the name of the Snowman in the film "Frozen"?
8. What sweet food is made by bees using nectar from flowers?
9. What is the yellow of an egg called?
10. What colour is the M in the McDonalds Symbol?
11. What school did Harry Potter attend?
12. Which ancient people built pyramid?
13. What do caterpillars turn into?
14. What type of bun do we traditionally eat during Easter?
15. What is the name of the game where you go searching for Easter eggs and collect them in a basket?



Colouring Fun!



PODS Annual Survey

Your responses to our previous Annual Survey have been very important in how services across health, education and social care have been developed and how PODS can continue to involve and support you.

Please complete our survey, to be in with a chance of winning a

£50 VOUCHER

in our prize draw.

LINK: <https://forms.office.com/r/p2EUfS4hEm>

PLEASE SCAN HERE:



PODS Family Quiz - Answers

- | | |
|-----------|---------------------|
| 1. Calf | 9. The Yolk |
| 2. London | 10. Yellow |
| 3. Eight | 11. Hogwarts |
| 4. Bread | 12. The Egyptians |
| 5. George | 13. Butterflies |
| 6. Tardis | 14. Hot Cross Bun |
| 7. Olaf | 15. Easter Egg Hunt |
| 8. Bees | |

(Did you spot all the Easter Eggs in the newsletter? There are 43 in total!)





SAVE THE DATE

PODS PICNIC IN THE PARK

MONDAY 1ST AUGUST 2022
10AM-4PM AT ADMASTON HOUSE, ADMASTON, TF5 0BN

Come along and join in the fun, we have lots of activities and workshops available on the day.

For more information please contact *Joanne Smith*
by email joanne@podstelford.org or call 07816 643747

Registered Charity Number 1150871

PODS HELPLINE

(Supporting families with disabled/Additional need children aged 0-25 years)

Are you in need of some guidance or information? Would you like to access our Befriending service or maybe receive a call from one of our staff?

Then please give us a call or email us!

Hello it's PODS,
how can we help?



01952 458047

support@podstelford.org

Calls will be answered between 10am-4pm Monday-Friday, outside these hours please leave a message.





Please CHECK OUR WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA FOR UPCOMING FAMILY GROUPS & EVENTS



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PODSForumTelford
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