



SEND NAVIGATOR REPORT

✿ 2023/2024 ✿

We are delighted to share the first annual report for our SEND Navigator project funded by the National Lottery.



SOMERSET PARENT CARER FORUM CIC

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Executive Summary

We are delighted to bring you this report for year one of the SEND Navigator project.

The following provides an overview of the work undertaken and the impact.



Overview

This year has been very busy with a lot of activity taking place across the project including various events. Through our SEND Navigators 1-1 support has been provided in response to 165 referrals.

Peer to peer support groups have provided an opportunity for parent carers to meet up and helped to reduce the isolation that can be felt by families. We have also run a range of family days and activities which provide support to do things which would otherwise be hard to impossible for families to access.

Good quality information has been central to the offer this year and ensuring that parents are empowered with the knowledge to support their children.

Learning and challenges we have had to overcome

This year has required significant time investment in setting up new systems and implementing changes to existing systems to ensure that these support our work. These can now be used to influence the design of the offer moving forward.

Staff retention and recruitment of volunteers has been the largest challenges which have impacted on delivery. We have also had to adapt our offer in response to changes within the system.

Background



Somerset Parent Carer Forum CIC is a Community Interest Company formed by parent carers in 2016. As one of the 153 parent carer forums in England we raise awareness of the experiences of families of children who have Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND).

As an organisation we have seen an increase in the number of parent carers trying to find help, while also seeing a reduction in support available. The support that is available is often confusing to navigate and many parents with caring responsibilities are unaware of what they can access.

Listening to the feedback from families as an organisation we have expanded our offer to help address these growing needs of our SEND community. We have been excited to explore new ways of working through our partnership with the National Lottery and are grateful to the players of the National Lottery who have enabled the grant funding to be made available to support our work.

The funding through the National Lottery this year has enabled us to run our Chill and Chat peer to peer support groups, put on family events and employee SEND Navigators to support our parent carers find their way through the SEND system.



This year at a glance

4254

Parent Carers

Parent Carers Forums members registered
on our CRM system.

165

Referrals

1-1 support requests from the SEND
navigators

94

Chill and Chat Sessions

Groups held in Wells, Yeovil, Shepton Mallett,
Henstridge, Langport, Taunton, Minehead,
Street/Glastonbury and Bridgwater

378

Attendance at Chill and Chat
groups

124 different parents

22

Drop ins

63 parents have received support via
our navigator drop in sessions

20

DLA/PIP forms

SEND navigators supported parent
carers to complete the forms to apply.

255

Fun day Attendance

122 Children/young people
133 Parent carers

199

Activity days attendance

73 parent carers
126 children/young people

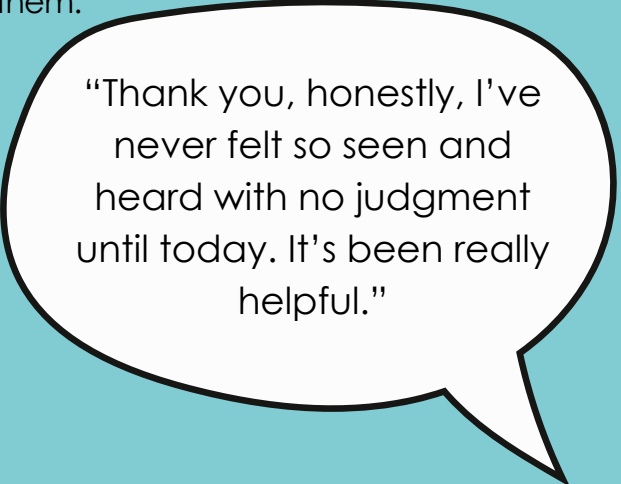
Chill and Chat peer support groups

Through the project we have run 94 Chill and Chat groups. This year we have run groups in Wells, Yeovil, Shepton Mallet, Henstridge, Langport, Taunton, Minehead, Street/Glastonbury and Bridgwater.

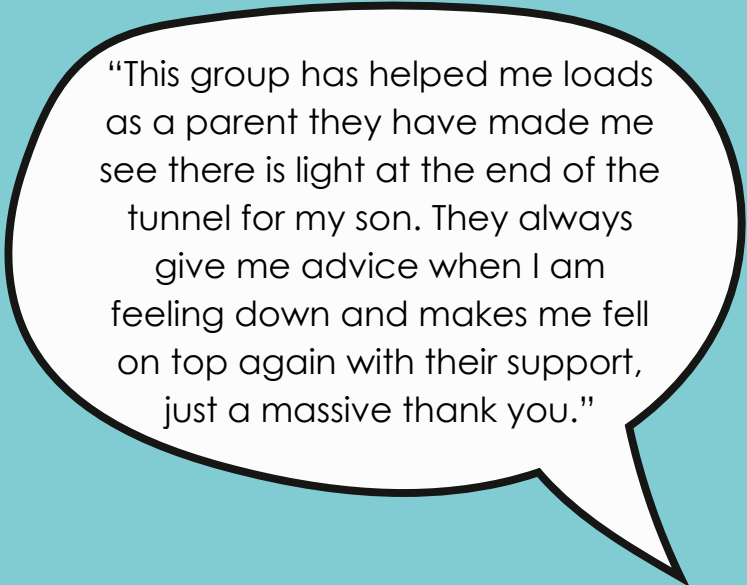
The groups provide an opportunity for parent carers to meet together and feel less isolated as they meet others in similar circumstances.

We have had an attendance of 378 parent carers attend our Chill and Chat coffee sessions over the year, with 124 different families accessing the groups. Our records show that parent carers are returning to the groups and are finding value in meeting up. It has been really nice to see parent carers forming networks of support.

It has been hard sometimes to get the balance between consistency of venues/time, so that people can learn about the groups, and suitability for parents. Although we have asked parents where they want the groups, some of our groups have taken time to grow and we have had challenges with some of the venues. We plan to review all of our groups on a six monthly basis and ensure the suitability of them.



"Thank you, honestly, I've never felt so seen and heard with no judgment until today. It's been really helpful."



"This group has helped me loads as a parent they have made me see there is light at the end of the tunnel for my son. They always give me advice when I am feeling down and makes me feel on top again with their support, just a massive thank you."

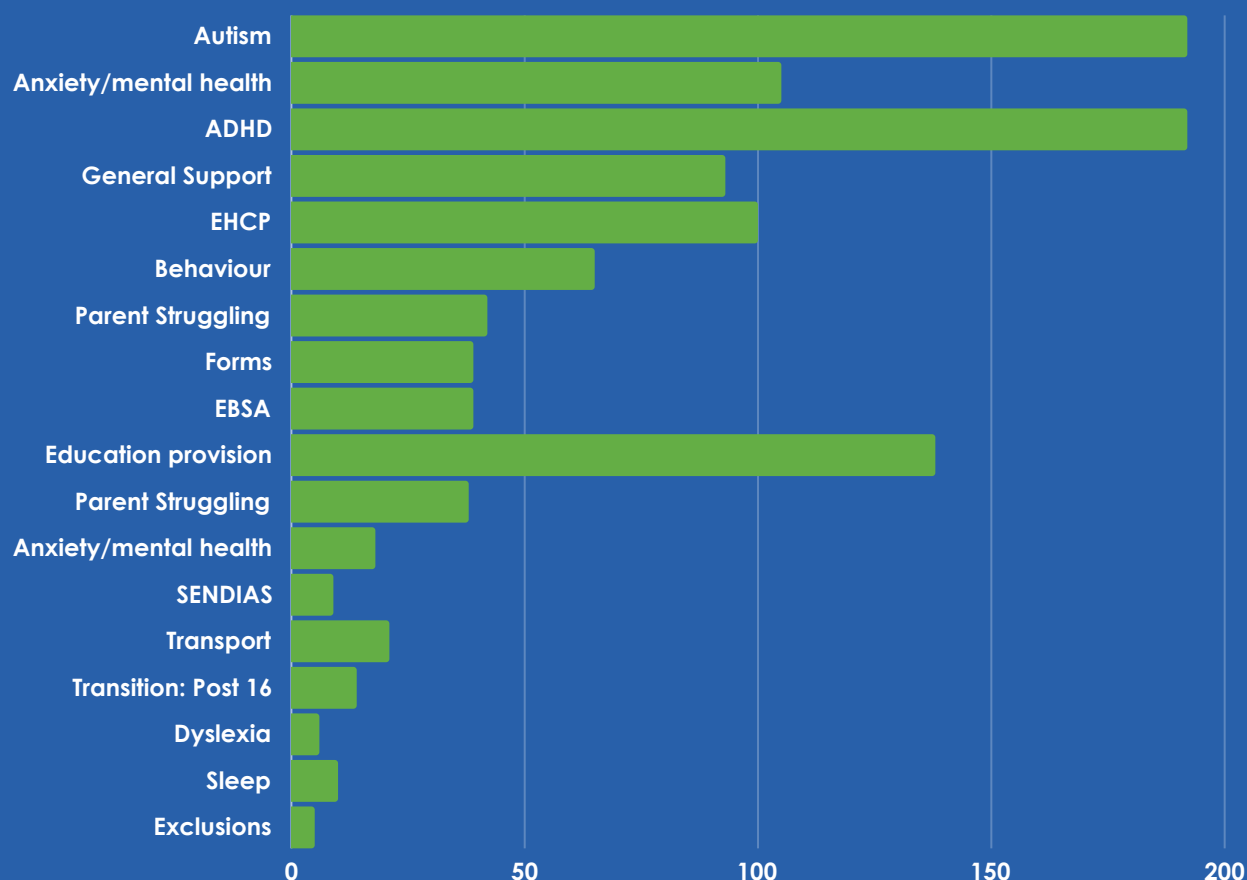
In addition to reducing isolation and building networks, these groups provide information and sign posting for those that attend.

Parents can find it overwhelming when starting their SEND journey or at different stages as their child's needs change and they need to access different support.



At our Chill and Chat groups parents discuss a wide range of subjects. While the content of these conversations remain confidential to the group, we collect the themes discussed, so that we can use this to influence the design of our offer. This also helps us to influence developments locally such as Somerset's SEND Local Offer and the Wise up Workshops.

Themes of conversations



Actions taken as a result of the Chill and Chat groups

The themes from the Chill and Chat groups help to influence the offer we run for parents via our Wise up Sessions which are funded through NHS Somerset funding.

For example, we now run sessions on Emotional School Based Avoidance as part of our Wise up Workshops for Parent Carers. These are jointly run with the Educational Psychology service and provided information and strategies for parent carers to support their child. These sessions also empower parents with knowledge about what support they can expect through school.

"I just wanted to say I think the services you provide for parents and the children are amazing."



As part of the referral process, children need to understand that they are being assessed for Autism or ADHD. Parents have expressed that they can find it hard to talk to their child about being neurodiverse, especially if they then do not get a diagnosis. In response to this we have worked with Somerset NHS Foundation Trust to run monthly drop-in sessions where parent can discuss this with the team who complete the assessments.

Parent Carers have raised concerns about the impact that having children not in school or on reduced timetables has on their ability to work and the financial impact on the household.

This has been fed back to Somerset Council and has partially influenced the new process to address hard to find placements for children with specific needs and the proposals for a new service offering to support families when children are not in school.



Parent Carer and family events

In July we hosted our joint Fun Day with the Community Inclusion and Activity Team at Somerset Council. The day provided a range of information stands for parent carers and activities for families to try.

Families enjoyed activities including painting, lego, bouncy castle, inflatable assault course, film making bubbles, scavenger hunt, tabletop games, archery, hoop throwing, cricket, football, drumming, laser tag, art and crafts, mocktail's and holding animals.

133 parent carers and 122 children attended the day, and the feedback was very positive. Plans are underway for the 2025 funday.



Ark = 23

Butlins = 82

Slip and Slide =57

Ham Hill Rangers =13

Funday = 255



"Everyone is so kind and friendly and it's been a lovely day"

"Lots of lovely things to do"

"Amazing no longer feel so alone"

"Great day, great use of resources and funds. Thank you!! Kids loved it"

SEND Navigators

In January 2024 our 4 SEND Navigators started, each working 10 hours a week and covering the Somerset area. During January the focus was training and this was through a mixture of the training we purchased via Ihasco, working with existing forum reps and meeting with the Somerset SEND Local Offer coordinator.

Our initial plan was to have 2 navigators but when we interviewed it became clear having 4 across the area would be a more effective use of resources and minimise time taken up traveling. We planned for navigators to work in a specific area of Somerset for 1 year supporting parents while building up a network.

The aim of this was to ensure the navigators did not get overwhelmed with a high caseload. When we started to raise awareness of the offer during November and December, various schools SENCOs raised concerns about the delays this would cause for some parents, reflecting one of our concerns with the design initially.

Early in the year we also became aware of a new pilot called Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in schools which we would be involved in. This would include establishing parent groups in the 40 schools which were taking part. We felt there would be potential duplication with the original navigator specification, so we decided to adapt the offer and trial focusing the navigators on 1-1 work and supplement this with drop-in clinics.

We were keen to make sure that the referral process was not a barrier to accessing support, so set up a simple application form on our website for both parents to self-refer and for practitioners to refer.

Between 1 February and 30 September, we received 165 for navigator support with the main sources of referrals being self-referral or SPCF team members identifying parents who would benefit. In addition, we have had some referrals via schools and social care.

Navigators have also completed 20 DLA/PIP applications with families. The forms can be very challenging and often leave parent carers feeling down as they focus on all of the child's difficulties and ignore their strengths.

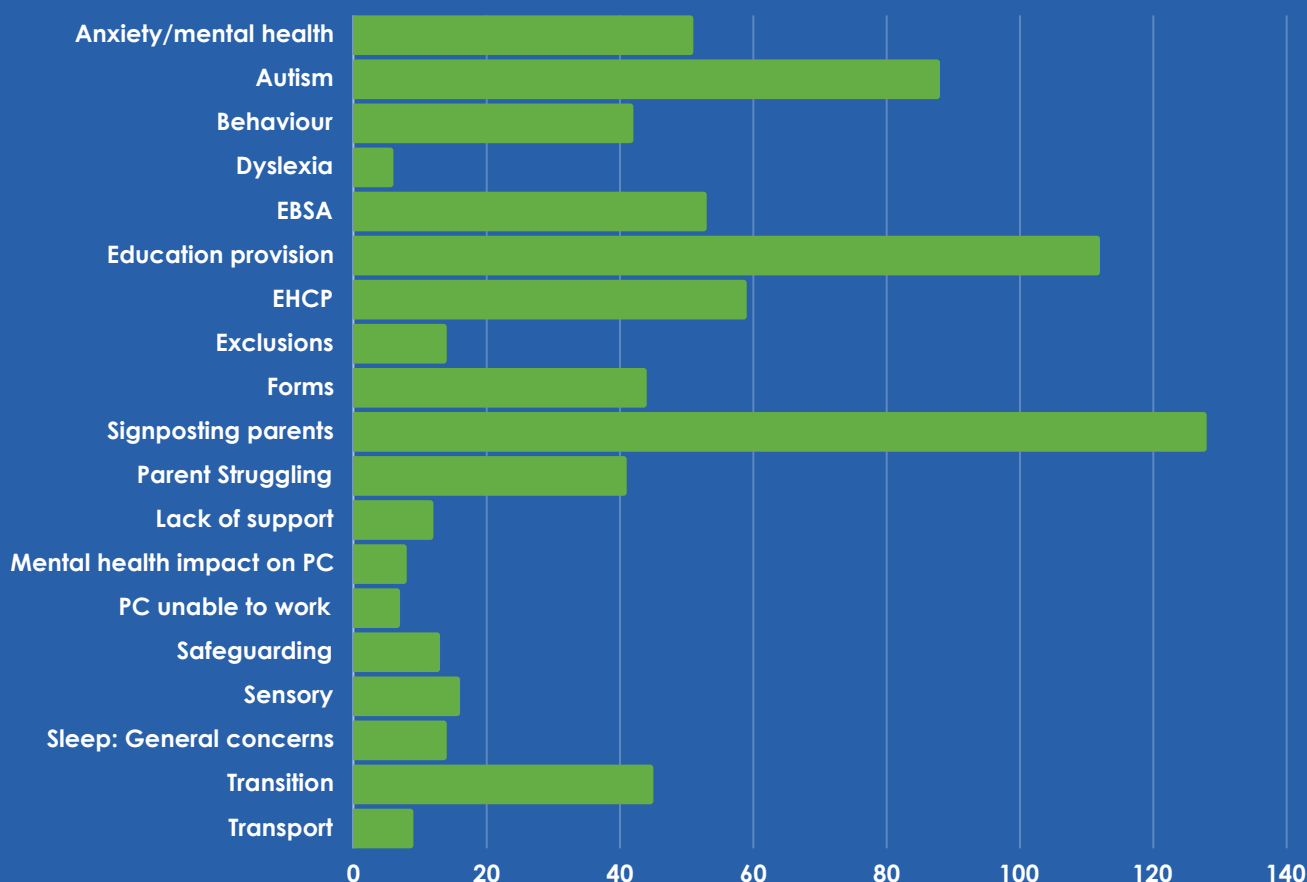




"You have been the single most supportive and helpful resource that I have encountered on this journey. I cannot believe that until this point, I have not been signposted to the resources and support you have guided me to, which ultimately has brought me some hope, relief and much needed focus when I was drowning in literature and unsure where to start or turn in a time of crisis".

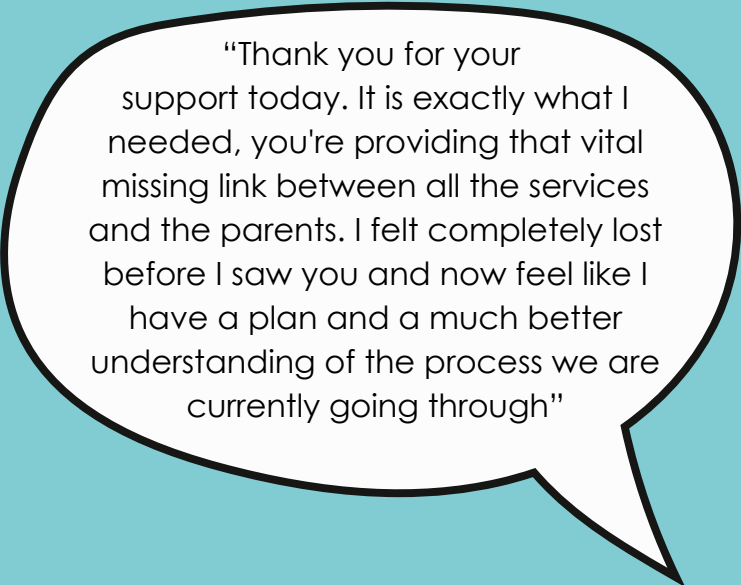
The range of topics relating to the reason for a referral varies with some needing generalised signposting to services, to more in-depth pieces of support often involving a range of needs.

Themes of referrals



To enable navigators to meet more parents we decided to try drop in sessions at 4 locations, Wiveliscombe, Cheddar, Frome and Wincanton. The sessions took a while to become established with Frome and Wincanton being more popular.

Feedback for the Cheddar drop-in has led us to team up with the Space as this is a more accessible venue. We are currently reviewing Wiveliscombe as despite this being a requested venue it has not been successful in parent carers attending.



"Thank you for your support today. It is exactly what I needed, you're providing that vital missing link between all the services and the parents. I felt completely lost before I saw you and now feel like I have a plan and a much better understanding of the process we are currently going through"

Navigators have also attended events such as the two 'Let's talk SEND and Inclusion' events, fun days and coffee mornings to raise awareness of what they do and support parent carers.

During the year two of our navigators have had to leave and this alongside a large increase in referrals, has impacted on our capacity to manage the volume of cases. We have increased the hours of one of the existing navigators and have employed a new navigator who will be starting 1-1 work with families in January.

We are now implementing a triage system which involves us ensuring that all referrals are reviewed within 3-5 days and then the most suitable support is recommended, this could be signposting, support via peer to peer Chill and Chat groups or 1-1 Navigator support.

We are also looking at the step-down process as we have closed 66 cases but the vast majority remain open due to needing check ins, we are exploring how this could be facilitated through groups or call backs from volunteers, so that navigators can continue to support the more complex cases.

We have also needed to develop the use of our CRM to manage the new type of work (1-1) so that we can effectively track cases. This has meant working with developers at Lamplight and reviewing internal processes.

Due to the level of concerns being raised by parents, we have had to implement a new safeguarding feature within our CRM, to ensure these can be effectively managed. Almost all the concerns have been connected to practice at a few schools and this has been raised with the appropriate bodies.



"Thank you so much for your advice and support. It feels like we might finally get a bit of help"

Case Study

A came to the forum for support when her child was struggling to understand his differences. At this time, he had not received a diagnosis, was struggling with school and the combination of this had impacted his mental health.

We support A and her son to complete the forms to be referred for an Autism assessment and A son was accepted onto the pathway.

Following an incident where A son had tried to act on his desire not to be here, we were able to contact the team at CAMHS who arranged for outreach support and the CYPNP team expedited the referral for an autism assessment.



Stock image



Stock image

A has received ongoing support and had a space to discuss her concerns and get information on how to help her son.

A's son has received professional support, and this has enabled him to sit his GCSE and complete work experience at a local primary school where he felt comfortable.

The navigator was able to support A to complete an application for PIP and to look at next steps for her son.

"If it wasn't for you and your team, I hate to think what it would be like now. I will forever be grateful for your support."

Raising awareness and networking

As part of the project, we employ a peer to peer support coordinator who manages all the Chill and Chat peer support groups. This year a lot of work has taken place to understand where parents want the groups located and finding suitable venues. Please see the section on Chill and Chat groups for more information.

The role has also allowed for awareness raising of the forum including our wider offer of support and influence.

Four times a year the coordinator also organises a support group forum event (2 online and 2 in person) which is open to all groups in Somerset. These allow groups to support each other, share the challenges that they are hearing from families and share recourses which have been useful. We often have guests from local service providers or decision makers so they can hear first-hand about what would be helpful.

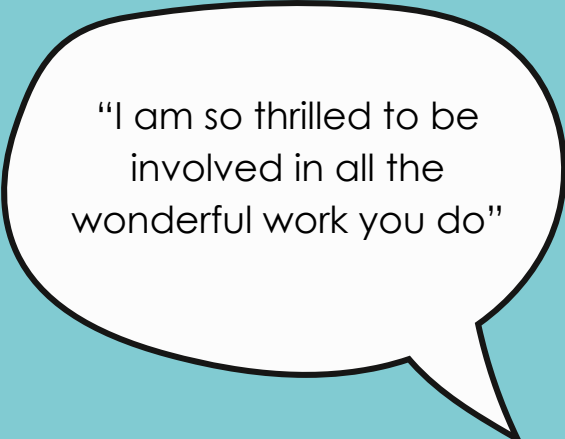
Next year the group will also provide training as part of the group, for example we have teamed up with Citizen's Advice and will be looking at how to use the benefits apps so groups will be able to provide support to parents on using this.

The peer-to-peer support coordinator has spent a significant amount of time building relationships and networking such as with the Connect Somerset champions.

This has proved to be helpful and enabled us to use these links to support the 1-1 work of the navigators. Lots of families need to be able to access support local to them and linking in with a range of different services has enabled us to better understand what is on offer in local areas, things that often only people in the area know about.

We have been working hard on ensuring all the structures are in place to support volunteers before growing this area of our work. It is essential to us that volunteers feel valued and are supported effectively so our peer to peer support coordinator is now attending the VCFSE volunteer network and is organising getting our volunteer opportunities on to the website and volunteer hub.

So far we have 8 volunteers who are helping at events, with a range of projects or with project oversight. Growing this team will be our focus area for growth next year.



"I am so thrilled to be involved in all the wonderful work you do"

SEND Journal

Due to challenges with staffing we have focused this year on 1-1 work and the development of the journal has not moved on as far as we would have liked.

We think that changes in the local services will impact on what is available in the way of support to families so we want to understand what the new landscape will look like before printing the journals.

To help us move this on we brought the team together for an away day where we reviewed the themes of what we had heard from families over the year.

Work will continue this year through focus groups with parent carers to develop this and look at some of the practical things which we need to decide regarding how it is structured.



Internalised presentations

**Emotional Based
School Avoidance**

Sleep

Toileting

Dysregulation

Self esteem

Demand avoidance

Sensory needs

Behaviour

Anxiety

Above are the key areas we have identified so far for the journal.

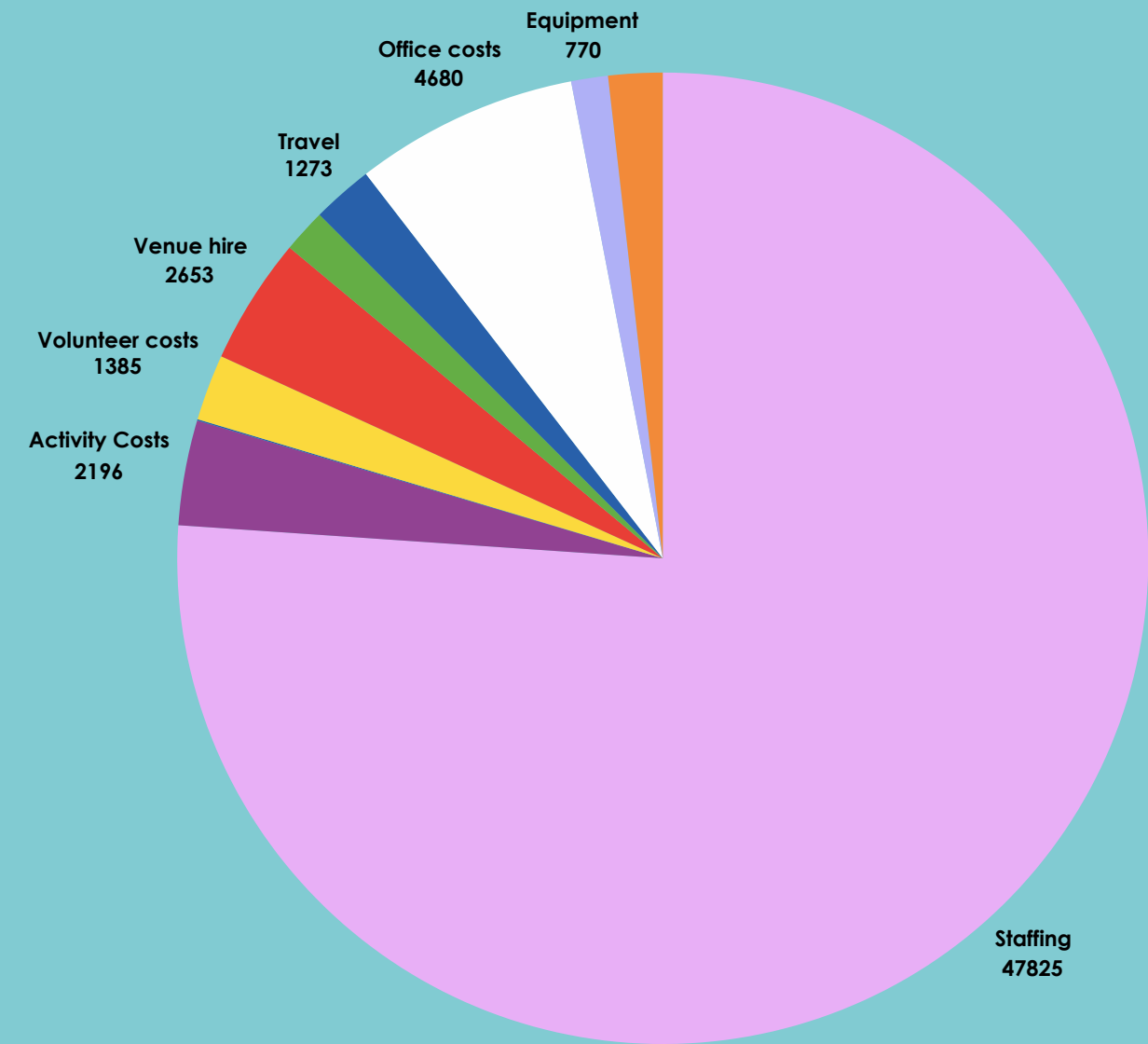
Finance

The following shows how the funding has been used during the first year of the project.

We have also matched funded some elements of the projects as indicated in the chart.

Due to recruitment issues we have an underspend this year of £10766.90.

Events	£1000
Training	£500
Office and Overheads	£17,320
Insurance	£1200



Next steps



We have a range of plans for this upcoming year. We have identified several organisations who we plan to work with over the coming year to help strengthen the local offer of support for families.

Planning has already started for the next family funday, and we are planning several events for parent carers to enhance the peer to peer support offer including parent carer breakfasts and family picnics.

Further development of our CRM system is planned this year with Lamplight being due to launch a new version of the system in January. Currently we are working to understand the impact this will have, any risks and opportunities that this will bring.

Our work is overseen by a steering group made up of parent carers of children with a range of needs. This oversight is invaluable and we appreciate the time they give.

We will be supporting this next year with focus groups on various elements of the support journal to ensure that the work reflects as wide a view as possible and therefore can be the most helpful.



✱ Thank you!



National Lottery players raise over £30 million a week for good causes across the UK.

Thanks to them, last year we were able to provide support for parent carers in Somerset and help to reduce isolation.

Contact Details

If you would like to know more about our work or would like to get involved please contact us using one of the methods below.



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