

“Let’s Talk About Leisure”

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Stadium Of Light, Sunderland.

Report

By
Paula Lockhart

The objective of this event was to share information about what is already available in the area for Special Educational Needs/Disabilities (SEN/D) children, what was missing/needed, and what can we do to help inform people of events, and influence providers.

The event was attended by 22 parent carers, 13 service providers including some from the private sector and 11 professionals and other organisations. 31 attendees filled in an evaluation sheet, 81% were very satisfied overall with the event, and 19% satisfied. From the evaluation sheets, people wanted more fun days, conferences and information days. Other comments from the evaluations were

- *“Could we use different colour name badges to identify who is a parent and who is a professional”*
- *“All info sharing is useful”*
- *“Providers should move between tables, perhaps like a ‘speed dating’ type event”*
- *“Family focus groups with other senior partners” - Unfortunately no contact details were left so we cannot clarify/follow up on this.*
- *“Well done to everyone who organised the day”*

The day was facilitated by our communications officer, Maureen Morris, with other SWCPCC members facilitating the table discussions. Maureen gave the following opening speech

“The title of today’s event is “Let’s talk about Leisure” We then added the phrase “the stuff you choose to do in your spare time” this was because you may not recognise what the term leisure meant, mind you we should probably also added a definition of “spare time”.

Leisure is a funny thing it means so many different things to different people, sitting down reading a good book, having a meal with friends and family, playing a sport, even if that sport involves being cold, wet and smelly, watching others play a sport, screaming yourself hoarse at a concert, yes I am looking at you Anita. Whatever floats your boat. But it all boils down to having a little break from life, a few seconds, hours or days when things are different, enjoyable, exciting or restful. Every one needs some leisure time.

But leisure time and leisure activities are the things that set us and our families apart. Every child has to go to school so there are different sorts of schools that can accommodate all their different needs. Most children go and see a doctor or go to hospital at some time in their childhood and their needs are catered by the universal health service. But Leisure activities are somehow different, for a start they are not all provided by a central body, you have the freedom to pick and choose what suits you, they are for the most part run on a commercial basis, they are for everyone to use but then along we come with our little square pegs who can’t fit in the round holes and it sometimes feels that it is our fault, we are asking too much, we are being unreasonable. Well we are not being unreasonable or asking too much and we certainly aren’t at fault - and neither are our children.

Providers, by law have to make reasonable adjustments to ensure that everyone has the chance to access their services. Within that statement there is a world of difference. By and large the leisure industry is a service industry and as you are aware good service can mean many different things. There are providers out there who go the extra mile for the family of a child with disabilities, there are providers who would like to but perhaps don’t know how to, and there are others who really couldn’t give a damn. So today we are going to look at what we want for our children, their siblings, their grandparents and ourselves all of whom have the right to leisure. What we want will be different for my family and for yours but maybe I have come across exactly what you are looking for and maybe you can tell me of just the place to go to get what I would like. When we have collated all these ideas together we will have to do something with them and at present our hope is to develop some sort of “trip advisor” resource that can give you ideas and a place where you can pass on knowledge - good and bad.

As I said before by and large the leisure industry is a service industry and it needs to give customers what they want, there are about 800 families in Sunderland who have children with disabilities and as Kathy always says

“where’s the noise” well 800 families can make a lot of noise when they find a good facility and a lot of noise when they find an unresponsive facility, so we have some economic muscle.

I am delighted to say that we have with us today a number of providers of leisure activities, some who have already gone the extra mile for children and families with disabilities and some who are keen to find out how they can improve their service to our families.”

The day then moved onto table discussions – each table had a mix of parent carers, service providers and other professionals. Various starting points were given to aid discussions. Comments/results are as follows.

Activities already in place/accessed

- Marley Potts have community allotments which groups can use as well as individuals
- East Durham & Houghall College used for small group trips
- Storybook, Boldon – SEN closed play session (Monday evenings) for siblings as well
- Useful Vision hold regular activities for the visually impaired. Advertised in the C.A.F. newsletters
- Kathleen Davis School of Dance teaches SEN/D alongside mainstream. Will also go out to schools
- Special Olympics Sunderland – regular activities held. Badminton/Judo/Swimming at the Raich Carter Centre (Hendon). 10 pin Bowling league, fortnightly at AMF Washington.
- Beamish Museum – Register a SEN/D child with them and up to 2 carers go free (Need to verify). Also very good at working with SEN/D group trips, very accommodating.
- Peterlee College – similar to Houghal but more horticultural, cookery, pottery. Contact Keith Cook
- Woodland Trust, Easington have many free activities. Contact Chris Aflek
- 11+; various clubs throughout the City – A690, Bluewatch, Pitstop etc, City Equeal, Youth Parliament. Contact Angie Mills at the Youth Development group
- Adapted biking at Hetton Lyons Park
- Orienteering through Roker Park. Maps available for a nominal fee from the Marine Activities Centre
- Temple Park do disability sessions
- Hendon Young Peoples Project – Saturday club for SEN/D ages 5 – 13. Transport may be available for those that don’t have access to a car.
- Learn To Swim Programme
- SEN/D trampoline club at Crowtree Leisure Centre, Monday 4pm-6pm
- Silksworth do holiday junior bootcamps.
- Blue Watch Youth Club – do many different activities including residential
- Marine Activities Centre do open sessions but they possibly may be unsuitable for some disabilities.
- Pool can be hired at Barbara Priestman and Portland schools
- Washington Wetlands Trust & Alnwick Gardens are very accommodating for SEN/D
- Down at The Farm – good with sensory, staff very good

Activities requested

- Group trips
- Parent only trips/activities
- Horse riding
- Family activities

Miscellaneous ideas

- Cinema card – issued for the child, enables a carer free entry
- Durham Area Disability Group have lots going on - check out their website
- Tyne & Wear Museums may offer transport

Other Comments

- Difficulty in finding information about activities - a central point is needed.
- Families Information Service (F.I.S.) new website is now live
- Kids want somewhere where they can be accepted, can relax and enjoy themselves
- Parents want opportunities for themselves as well
- Radar key – some people were unaware of this scheme, need info placed on website
- SEN friendly cinema screenings, but only some chains so could be difficult to access. Could we approach Cineworld/Empire Cinemas with this scheme, show them good practice?
- Aquatic Centre is not accommodating to SEN/D – will move them to enable the ‘proper’ swimmers to swim.
- Lack of opportunities for the under 8’s
- The City of Sunderland includes Washington and the Coalfields, yet most activities tend to be in Sunderland itself.
- Could there be a ‘trip advisor’ type of facility so parents can rate where they’ve been to enable other parents to make informed choices
- Each leisure centre produces a document of activities. Washington Leisure Staff ‘assess’ the child? For what reason (we are presuming Health & Safety), and what qualifies them to assess SEN/D?
- F.I.S. aim to signpost people
- Clubs need to be right for the child, staffed by people who understand SEN/D and are fully trained, especially around the ‘hidden’ disabilities.
- More consultation needed as to why the Silksworth closed sessions didn’t work
- Disabled doesn’t just mean wheelchair bound or physically disabled.
- Have disability session so providers and parents can get to know each and the child’s needs.
- Marine Centre is looking into providing more
- Kids need to try different things
- Bite size taster sessions (similar to those under Aiming High), across the city, closed sessions.
- Transport can often be a barrier to accessing activities
- There is often a waiting list for the clubs
- Lack of changing facilities for older children/teens
- (from a provider) not know what disabilities there are, where they are, and how many
- Hidden disabilities often mean less opportunities as mainstream activities are not always suitable
- Strand horse riding (Washington) is good but expensive, also has a long waiting list
- Lack of understanding about carers
- Cost of equipment/training to providers, could prevent them hosting activities.

Everyone thought the day was useful and went away with ideas and activities to try. Several parent carers have since been in touch and their child is now accessing a leisure opportunity, some for the first time.

Outcome

Information was shared on what opportunities were available, resulting in children accessing new activities. Providers were made more aware of what was wanted, and that there are many different types of disabilities. Some providers will be talking to parents about starting new activities.

Further Action

- Gather details of all current opportunities (date, time, contact, location), share with the F.I.S. and publish on our website, and also produce a paper copy for distribution.
- Share examples of current opportunities with providers of similar activities to encourage more opportunities
- Follow up with providers to see how else we can work together.

