

Family Fun Sessions

-Holidays sessions for families of children and young people with SEND

4th April 2024

10-11.30 & 12.30-2

The King's Church

Budget: £700

Spend Breakdown: £50 BH Youth to provide a craft
£140 Disco Dome hire
£290 Circus Skills equipment
£45 advertisement banner

Broken down to:

£300 from Budding Foundation

£400 from BHTC

Spent: £525, plus:

-Seed planting equipment, and paintable bird houses were gifted by The Budding Foundation

-Venue hire, volunteers and additional activities were provided free of charge by The Kings Church (TKC)

Aim: The Family Fun Sessions were open to families of children and young people with SEND, and were free to attend. The aim was to provide a safe and fun event for children and young people with SEND, whilst providing support and information to parents and carers, as well as offering activities to siblings.

Number of bookable tickets: 60 families via Ticketsource

Number of attendees: 38 families (60 booked with a waiting list operating)

Publicity:

The event was advertised in many places and the poster had a QR code that linked to the webpage:

- Several posts on the Town Council Facebook and Twitter
- The King's Church shared the event with congregation, contacts and on their social media
- Poster in the Help Point Window
- Easter activity flyer
- Press release in advance
- Shared, via email, with all local schools
- All noticeboards in the town
- Sent to all supporting organisations and activity providers
- Sent, via email, to all the Young Carers database
- Shared with a support group I am part of personally
- A banner at the McDonalds roundabout
- Printed in RH Uncovered

Event breakdown:

Local organisations who support families were invited to attend and have an information table at the event. Eight organisations attended offering support; these were;

- Carers Support
- WSCC Early Help
- Kangaroos
- Makaton Jenny
- WS Libraries
- TKC Money Advice
- SENDias
- West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service -first session only

Other groups that were invited but unable to attend included (but were not limited to) West Sussex Young Carers, Holiday Activity Fun (HAF), West Sussex Parent Carers Forum, Reaching Families and Family Information Service. Many were unable to attend due to the fact that they only run term time and so do not have staffing capacity in the holidays. West Sussex Young Carers are planning to attend the session later in the year.

The King's Church ran a number of activities with volunteers from the church, and the budget was used to book other activities. The activities were all free to do and on offer there was:

- Inflatable disco dome with music
- Circus equipment
- Sand art
- Lego table
- Fire Engine -first session only
- Seed planting and pot decorating
- Painting
- Paper flower making
- Colouring

Author Julie Alison Macdonald also provided a book reading of her story, alongside Jenny Fisher who did Makaton signs. Julie then offered a book signing to anyone who purchased a copy of one of her books. This was the only paid part of the event and books were reasonably priced at £7.99.

Feedback:

We created a QR code which is available at the events to scan as well as in notice boards afterwards. The code is linked to a Google form which we can keep adding events to without changing the code itself. The form simply asks what event you have attended, 'what went well' and 'it would be even better if...'
Here are some of the responses received for this event:

What went well?

- We loved them lots for a mix of ages.
- Lots of space, not too busy, Friendly staff on the whole, good range of activities.
- The selection of activities available for the children, the calming venue and ambience. And also, the different organisations available to speak to for advice, services, connections, etc which was invaluable for me.
- My daughter particularly enjoyed taking part in circus skills, I found it useful seeing what support is available for us as a family.
- My son loved the sand art table (very sensory) and decorated a plant pot.
- Activities were excellent.
- All the events are good and my kids enjoyed them.
- Everything - excellent organisation, great activities that kept children occupied, provided lots of enjoyment and fun. Very safe space. Good to network.
- Accessible activities for the children.
- The entire session was great.

It would be even better if...

- Maybe another craft for older children 10 plus.
- Circus man was more friendly.
- It just wasn't long enough for us, we only got round half of the activities. Another suggestion would be for representatives from local support groups to be there such as Umbrellas and HEARD as it would be great to know where to meet other parents/adults with late diagnosis.
- My daughter struggled with the noise of the event.
- By the time we got to the table to paint bird boxes there were none left.
- Perhaps if the volunteers were briefed on SEN beforehand. I'm not sure they all understood it.
- Dance for kids.
- Can't think of anything.
- If activities could change like adding different things.
- More accessible activities for those with low mobility or unable to walk.
- If there were more information stands.

Evaluation:

The event was well attended, although not everyone who booked a ticket came. This is a shame as we did have people on the waiting list but is to be expected with this cohort, as needs change regularly. Tickets were booked up fairly quickly which does show the need in the community, and those who attending reported having a lovely time.

In future on the booking system I will include,

1. Are you a Burgess Hill resident and if not, where are you coming from
2. Number of children attending (not just an overall number per ticket)
3. Age brackets for children

This will help with data analysis, such as are we meeting the needs of the local community or are people attending from further away. It would also help The King's Church to plan suitable activities for the age groups attending and ensure there is enough crafts for all children. Although we are conscious that age and capabilities are not always completely relative with the groups attending.

I am really keen to keep activities free, as this section of society offer incur additional constraints to their household costs. Having a book sale, which is optional to partake in, allows attendees to not be tied into any financial commitment, however, we are aware that when it is free to register people are more likely to be no shows in comparison to events where people are required to purchase a ticket, even if the fee is small. I will assess the amount of non-attendance in August, alongside the result for April but hope that we can keep it as a free to attend event.

As an alternative we could look to charge a small fee in return for something, so this could be a goodie bag with fidgets, or if we have an author the ticket price covers the cost of the book and they then receive a free copy. This would not be ideal but we need to ensure spaces are not going to waste by people who book but don't cancel their tickets or turn up.

The only issue was with cones being moved in the car park, which had been set up for the fire engine, but all was resolved. The fire engine was a good addition, which attendees like and it would be nice to explore other services attending in the future such ambulance, police or national highways. However, I am aware that it does take up a number of spaces in the car park that could be used by attendees. Car park full signage would help but this would need resourcing.

We already have activities booked for the August sessions, which include the disco dome, Trainmaster providing their giant Thomas train tracks, and Julie will also be returning with her new book that will be published in the coming months.

Looking at feedback (included below), and considering the August sessions are already planned, I would like to look at for 2025:

1. Making the sessions slightly longer, to 2 hours, but this would require additional commitment from TKC volunteers, as well as the space to be available for the extra time
2. Swapping up some of the activities, although we are conscious that many children with SEND like familiarity. I would like to investigate booking:
 - Silent disco
 - Sensory space
 - An entertainer, such as a magician
 - Drawing workshop

It would be great if we could have some of the other organisations attend, such as West Sussex Parent Carers Forum and Reaching Families, but as they run term time only the possibly of them attending is very low.

The report was shared with The King's Church and Angie supplied the follow comments:

- **Sign-ups** -We do need to look at attendance and sign up. The second session was especially quiet. I wonder if we could have an optional contribution of £1 or £2 per person, at the point of sign up? This could encourage commitment to their spaces, and it could also be an opportunity to then donate that money to a nominated child/youth SEND-related charity?
- **Stall-holder feedback** -Did you manage to get any feedback from stall-holders as to how easy it was for them to engage with families? I was wondering whether we need to rethink the layout so that they are more easily accessible ...maybe a block of outward facing stalls in the middle of the room, with crafts etc. around the edge? It may be easier for their networking by doing this. There was one parent who didn't get to connect with them because her child was wanting to be in one space and the stall she wanted to look at was just too far out of reach.
An alternative thought is that we encourage stall holders to mingle and to go to families, rather than to only expect families to get to them? They would need to wear their ID lanyards (which we encourage anyway), so that people know who they are talking to and who they represent.
- **Contributors** -I'm interested to find out about Umbrella and HEARD. The more variety we can have in the way of support for families, the better.
- **Understanding of children with SEND** -I think we could add a bit more in the preliminary gathering, before the sessions start. This could be an opportunity to reiterate who the event is for and the kinds of needs we are expecting to facilitate, maybe with some examples of ways we are looking to do this and how everyone can help. Most of the team and participants have had experience and even training in working with children who have SEND but it would be good to make sure we are all of the same understanding.
- **Accessibility for activities** -In addition to gaining an understanding of the ages of children/youth who are coming, I wonder if we do need to ask an optional question on the booking form, as to whether they prefer to access activities at floor level, low table level or medium table level. We have tried to cover all bases, but we could be even more specific, through having an idea of this, along with their ages.
- **Length of sessions** -I would be reluctant to make each session longer than 1.5 hours. I was aware that some people started drifting away before the end, even though some others were keen to stay on. I did speak to a few of the parents of the handful who were keen to stay. A couple said that their children, due to their SEND, do find it difficult to come away from anything they are enjoying.
From a volunteer/stall holder perspective the full thing is already a 6-hour day (starting 9am or earlier and ending pack-down at 3pm). It's already a great event and I would rather we focus on keeping it as sustainable as possible.

Kayleigh Elliott-Davidson
Events, Communication and Administration Officer
18/4/2024

