



FAMILIES INFOCUS (ESSEX) E-BULLETIN

SPRING
2019 ISSUE

Welcome to the Spring Issue of

the Families InFocus Newsletter. With the weather turning warmer, the clocks going forward, and extra-long bank holiday weekends to enjoy, our thoughts are naturally turning to getting out and about, exploring new places and trying new activities. Having a physical or a hidden disability can sometimes make this more challenging. Luckily there are lots of online resources and information packs to help make your experiences more enjoyable. Whether you're looking to visit an accessible park in Essex or going further afield; travelling by car, plane, rail or tube, the following websites offer advice and information to help plan your journey/trip:

- [Accessible Countryside for Everyone \(ACE\)](#) – a very useful online guide detailing options by county
- [Access Able](#) – Accessibility Guides that tell you about a venue's access, using accessibility symbols that give you a quick overview of what is available, you can also use these to filter your search.
- [Changing Places](#) – details of accessible toilets around the country.
- [National Rail enquiries](#) – details of accessible train stations, booking passenger assistance, policies on mobility scooters.
- [Transport of London](#) – have produced various guides detailing accessible stations. The Tube map shows which Underground, Overground and DLR stations are step-free.
- [Scope](#) – have produced a comprehensive online guide, by members of their online community.
- [Motability](#) – an online directory of useful specialist organisations and independent companies that provide advice, assistance and services to help disabled people get out and about in Britain.
- [Rough Guide to Accessible Britain](#) – produced in conjunction with the National Autistic Society. The Guide provides advice for physical disabilities and people with cognitive and mental health conditions, providing you with the detail needed to plan and enjoy great a day out

*We hope you enjoy reading our newsletter.
Have a lovely Easter break
All the best from The Families InFocus Team*

If you would like to unsubscribe from our newsletter at any time, please contact helpline@familiesinfocussessex.org.uk

Want to influence the way we are run?



The Board of Trustees, which is made up of volunteers, is responsible for overall management and running of Families InFocus (Essex) working closely with Rachel Ellis, CEO.

We always welcome new Trustees, especially parents whose families use the services of the charity. If you are interested, and would like to know more, please contact Rachel on 01245 353575 or Email: rachel@familiesinfocussessex.org.uk



We need your help!

Please could you spare a moment of your time to help Families InFocus?

Have we recently provided you with advice and/or support?

If so, please could we ask you to complete a client feedback questionnaire?

Your participation in our survey will be vital in helping us to secure future funding and will also provide important evidence to existing funders in highlighting the important work we do with Essex families.

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/HB5X3G2>

We have now made it even easier to leave feedback by producing a QR code which will enable you to complete the questionnaire via any smart phone.



As an independent charity, Families InFocus (Essex) is funded almost entirely on donations and funding applications.

The survey should take no longer than 5 minutes to complete and please be assured that we will not share any personal or sensitive information to third parties.

Thank you for your support!



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Information....

Families InFocus (Essex)

Supporting Essex Families for over 22 Years

Who are we?

We provide a free INDEPENDENT SEND Information, Advice and Support Service to any Essex family of a child/young person (0 to 25) with any special educational need or disability.

Our Family support Advisers provide support via telephone/email helpline, face to face, drop-ins, advice surgeries, and outreach through home visits/meetings (*Subject to availability*).

Help with Educational Issues includes:

- Information, advice and support with Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment and EHC plan and One Planning.
- Information, advice and support with all other SEN support
- Talking through the issues, helping complete forms/letters
- Offering advice on the processes involved.
- Being available to accompany you to meetings, reviews etc. (*subject to us receiving enough notice*).

Help with disability related benefits for the child/young person and family support including:

- Disability Living Allowance (child/young person)
- Personal Independence Payment (young person 16+)
- Family Fund and Carer's Allowance
- Other financial support including tax credits and Employment Support Allowance.

Preparing for and attending appeals and tribunals (both education and benefits related).

Other sources of help and support available:

- National Helpline from Contact (formally Contact a Family): Tel: 0808 808 3555 contact.org.uk
- SENDIASS Essex: Tel: 0333 013 8913 or visit send.iass@essex.gov.uk
- Essex Local Offer: essexlocaloffer.org.uk/content/send-information-advice-and-support-service

Our services are seen as essential, invaluable and our holistic approach means we can tailor our support to the individual families we help – *Families InFocus 2018*

We are delighted to announce our one year anniversary for obtaining our PQASSO Quality mark! PQASSO is a 'quality assurance' system that involves working through 12 areas of running an organisation - such as governance, user involvement, finance, volunteering - and deciding how well you meet various criteria. PQASSO gives our users the assurance that we are running the charity under strict governance rules. Well done us!



Essex County Council (ECC) SEND STRATEGY IN ESSEX 2019-2024

Essex County Council has embarked upon a programme of change for provision and services with the ambition to improve the outcomes and life experience of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

They want to ensure that the voice of the children, young people and their families are at the heart of the services they deliver and are seeking to engage as many parents, carers, families and children and young people as possible. They will be doing this via a period of public engagement in the form of an online survey and discussion workshops delivered by The Essex Family Forum – (the parent carer network in Essex. The Essex Family Forum are an independent group who gather the voice of families).

For 10 weeks until 31st May 2019 a survey will be available for you to give your views on the current services; what's working what's not and to have your say on how you would like their services to be in the future. A survey is available through Essex County Council, for you to give your views.

The survey can be accessed via the link:

<https://consultations.essex.gov.uk/send-strategy-and-innovation/send-public-engagement/consultation/intro/>

This is an important opportunity to get your voice heard and to help shape future SEN (Special Educational Needs) services of Essex County Council.

NEW BENEFIT RATES: APRIL 2019

A list of the new DLA benefit April 2019

Weekly Rate	Lower	Middle	Higher
Care component	£23.20	£58.70	£87.65
Mobility component	£23.20		£61.20

New Carer's Allowance from April 2019

Carer's Allowance for 2019-20 is £66.15 a week, with a £10 Christmas bonus in December.

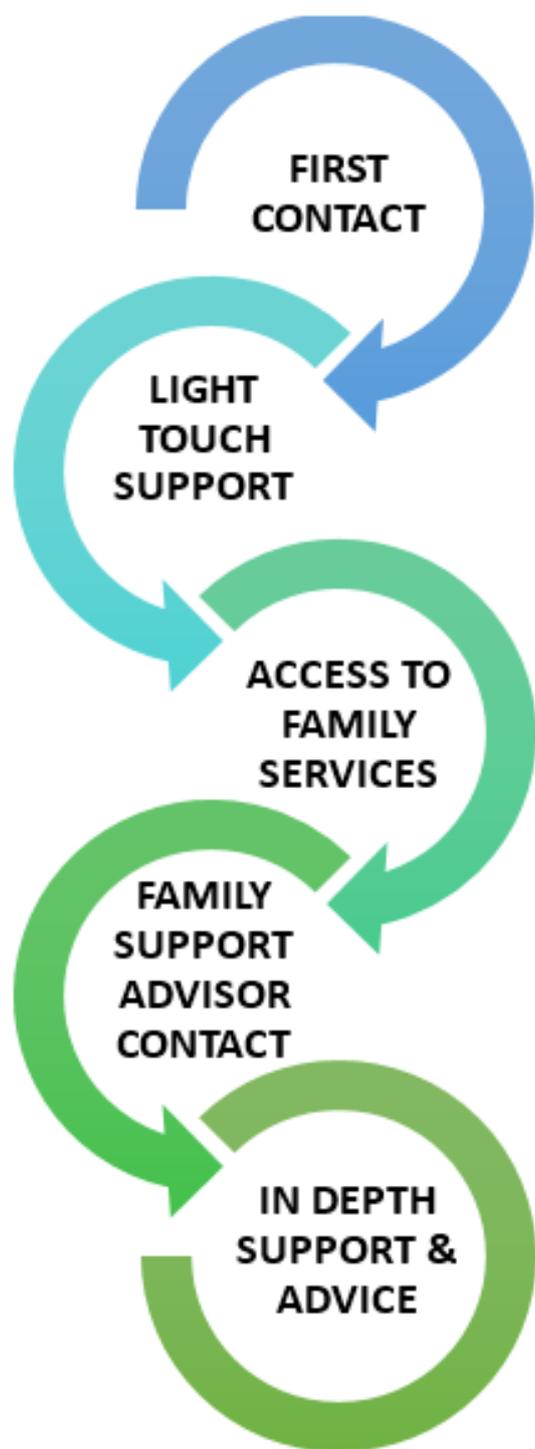
You will be eligible for Carer's Allowance if you meet certain conditions.

You must:

- spend at least 35 hours a week caring for someone who is receiving a qualifying disability benefit (see below), but you don't have to live with them or be related to them
- be 16 years old or over, live in England, Scotland or Wales
- not be in full-time education
- earn £123 or less, per week, after tax. This £123 is 'earned' income only. It doesn't take into account benefits such as Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments.



FAMILIES INFOCUS (Essex) offer a one stop information and advice service which can be accessed free and without a GP referral.



CONTACT US

Via Phone, Facebook message or by filling out a Referral Form on our website.

INITIAL ADVICE VIA OUR HELPLINE STAFF

Signposting to other sources of help
Practical advice and guidance by our trained helpline staff given to parent carers

ACCESS TO SERVICES FOR ALL THE FAMILY

Outreach clinics
Saturday Activity Club
Kidzspace
Parent drop-ins
Indulgence days

A DEDICATED FAMILY SUPPORT WORKER

If further support is required you will be assigned your own Family Support Advisor who will give you independent and trusted support every step of the way.

IN DEPTH SUPPORT

Support can be given via 1:1 parent meetings; professional and school meetings. Also offer help with form filling (Benefits and Education), Mediation and Tribunal Support.



Website: familiesinfocusessex.org.uk



facebook.com/FamiliesInFocusEssex



Helpline: 01245 353 575



helpline@familiesinfocusessex.org.uk



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What's On.....

SATURDAY ACTIVITY CLUB

Play activities for children with a disability or special needs and siblings, accompanied by their parent/carers



Every Saturday 3.30pm – 5.30pm*

(* unless otherwise stated. Up to date closures announced on Facebook) Chelmsford Sport & Athletics Centre, Salerno Way, Chelmsford, CM1 2EH

Suggested donation: £2.00 per child

*Closures:

Saturday 11 May

Saturday 22 June

Saturday 6 July

Saturday 29 June- Summer Party

****Closed to non-registered members of the Activity Club for the Summer Party**

All new members will be required to fill out registration forms.

It is essential you fill out a form before coming to the club.

Please telephone the office to sign up

CALL 01245 353 575 or email the helpline

helpline@familiesinfocussessex.org.uk

FAMILY INFOCUS

BRAINTREE DROP-IN SESSIONS

Come and join us and meet other parents, for a coffee, cake and chat.

DATES: 8 May, 12 June, 10 July.

TIME: 10 am – 12pm

VENUE: Alec Hunter Academy, Learning Village, Stubbs Lane, Braintree. CM7 3NR

A trained therapist will be available offering a free treatment and a trained Family Support Adviser will be on hand to discuss any queries you may have.

Pre-school children welcome



ADVANCE NOTICE:
ACTIVITY CLUB SUMMER PARTY
DATE: 29 JUNE 2019
TIME: 3:00PM – 5:00PM

We are moving the traditional April Spring party to a summer party on 29 June. We will have an entertainer, raffle/tombola, name the teddy and light refreshments will be served.

To book please email
helpline@familiesinfocussessex.org.uk



Kidzspace Events

Activities for siblings aged 8+ living with a child who has a disability or a special need

Hi Kids!

A big welcome to all our new members this year. As usual we have had lots of fun at Kidzspace. In January we started the year off with Rollerskating and a meal at Madison Heights and this Easter we have been to the Equestrian Centre to take part in horse riding. Everyone enjoyed painting pottery at Ceramics on the Hop, Writtle and bowling and Jump Street have been some of the chosen places to go. Here are some future events, so if you are interested in coming along please book early.

Date: Saturday 18 May

Event: Production of Oliver

Where: Chelmsford Theatre

Time: 2.15pm – 5.00pm

Cost: £8.50

Date: Saturday 22 June

Event: Pirates Bay Mini Golf/Food

Where: Maldon Promenade

Time: 11.30pm – 1.00pm

Cost: £7.00

To Book: helpline@familiesinfocussessex.org.uk





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What's On Cont.

Interact are an Essex based charity dedicated to improving the emotional well-being and opportunities of young people and young adults with disabilities. They run various programmes throughout the year for children aged 12+. Amongst their popular programme of events is their popular Circles of Support. Please refer to the flyer and to find out more information and visit the website Interact.org.uk



*Have you heard about
Circles of Support?*

Enabling young people to socialise, learn from each other and appreciate each other's skills and abilities...



Circles of Support increases opportunities for friendship and helps a young person (aged 12-18) with additional needs, learning disabilities/difficulties enjoy activities in the community.

Each Circle of Support is made up of 2-5 peer volunteers. Volunteers support/spend time with the young person helping them to access activities, develop friendships, contribute to new experiences, create social opportunities, increase independence skills and have fun - just like any other teenager!

Circles activities take place outside school/college hours and can include cafe catch ups, meals out, cinema trips, bowling, badminton, football, or trampolining. Activities enable young people to socialise, learn from and appreciate each other whilst also promoting social inclusion within communities.

Get in touch to find out more:

01245 608206

youngpeopleteam@interact.org.uk



Royal Association for Deaf people
Together with Deaf people, creating a better, more accessible future



Streetlife

SLYDE
Streetlife young driver education

12th May 2019* Was ~~£40~~ Now **£15**
*(includes presentation)

2nd June 2019
7th July 2019



SPECIAL OFFER!
Book all three lessons for only: **£35**

Driving related workshops /
Driving Lesson / Practice
Skills / Building confidence /
Road safety

0-5 6-8 9-11 12-18 * Deal Parent Siblings CODA
London Essex Thurrock Southend Romford

*This event is open to the ages of 14 upwards.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: 078 078 12690 www.royaldeaf.org.uk
0300 688 2525 0300 688 2527 cft@royaldeaf.org.uk
[@royaldeaf](https://twitter.com/royaldeaf) [RADRoyalAssociationforDeafpeople](https://www.facebook.com/RADRoyalAssociationforDeafpeople) [/RoyalDeaf](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCR0yDeaf) [/royal-association-for-deaf-people](https://www.linkedin.com/company/royal-association-for-deaf-people) [royal_deaf](https://www.instagram.com/royal_deaf)

Patron: Her Majesty The Queen | Founded 1841 | Registered Charity No. 1081949 | Company registered in England No. 3973353

Are you deaf and aged 12-18? The Royal Association for Deaf People are running driving skills sessions with Street Life Young Drivers Education at Colchester United Stadium. Book all three sessions now and save! To book email: cft@royaldeaf.org.uk

Grapevine Essex



Grapevine Essex was established in 2012 to provide supported recreational and educational activities for adults with learning disabilities living in Essex. In March 2013 we achieved charitable status and were entered onto the Charity Register with the Registered Charity Number 1151261.

Anyone aged 18 or over with a learning disability can apply for membership. Members are invited to attend a diverse programme of fully-supported and affordable activities and events that are held all year round. Please visit their website for further details <http://www.grapevinessex.org.uk/index.html>

TRANSITION COFFEE MORNING

SATURDAY 27TH APRIL

This is for all students in their last year of school. Come along, have a coffee and speak to us about what we have to offer. From 11am to 1pm we will be providing refreshments in a relaxed friendly environment where you can learn all about Hawk Farm and the fantastic service we provide to all of our students.

Hawk Farm is a new activity farm based in Weeley, Essex. We offer a wide range of activities and workshops for young adults with learning disabilities, families, schools and so much more.

Some students are ready for a different approach to learning and we believe that individuals can achieve and progress by becoming more active on the farm, engaging more with nature and wildlife and start to improve personal health and wellbeing.



Hawk Farm,
Hawk Lane, Weeley,
Essex, CO16 9AF
07814 266 673
info@thebigxperience.co.uk
[facebook.com/hawkfarmic](https://www.facebook.com/hawkfarmic)

HAWK FARM – Is a new activity farm in Weeley, Essex. Visit their facebook page [@thebigxperience.co.uk](https://www.facebook.com/hawkfarmic) for further information.



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Spotlight on.....



THE ESSEX FAMILY FORUM

The Essex Family Forum is the Parent Carer Forum of families that include children and young people (0-25) with disabilities and/or additional needs, living in Essex, working in partnerships with the Local Authority, Organisations and health commissioners aiming for quality outcomes that meet the needs of their families.

We would like to introduce Karen Holmes, a volunteer at the Essex Family Forum and our Family Champion who would like to connect with as many families as possible to ensure your lived experiences inform services and opportunities for children and young people with SEND.

Karen has been volunteering for Families InFocus for several years now. In her role as a Family Champion at the Essex Family forum, her role is to represent the families served by Families InFocus and share the main issues and challenges you face as well as instances where services are working well.

For further information about Karen and the Essex Family Forum and how to contact her, please see her Bio below.

Introducing Karen Holmes, Family Forum Champion

Hello!

My name is Karen Holmes. I am the parent of a child with special educational needs and I am a volunteer with Families in Focus. This year, I have also started working as a volunteer with Essex Family Forum. Essex Family Forum is a voluntary organisation which has been asked to contribute to a large number of consultations, surveys and grant bids, as well as attend meetings within Essex around SEND, reforms, workshops and specific strategic meetings around education, health and social care.

In order to do this effectively, we need to connect to as many families as possible to ensure their lived experiences informs services and opportunities for children and young people with additional needs and/or disabilities. As a Family Champion, my role is to represent the families served by Families in Focus and share the main issues and challenges faced as well as instances where services are working well.

At present, I am involved with several working groups as a parent representative working with health, education and social care, looking at specific All age Autism Priorities, including improving accessibility of services for people with mental health difficulties and developing an early intervention approach for people before they reach a crisis situation.

As a forum, we have also been involved in liaising with Essex County Council and the education and transport service and can support families and carers in accessing the Essex Local Offer, Essex Short Breaks Service and other providers.

If you would like to know more or have any questions, please contact me via the Families in Focus helpline, or check out Essex Family Forum

www.essexfamilyforum.org or their page on Facebook. I will keep you up to date with what has been going on and hopefully I can find out more about your views too. I am also planning to attend the Saturday Activity Club so I can meet some families in person and answer any questions or queries.

I'm here to support you and ensure your views are heard, so please get in touch

Best Wishes,

Karen Holmes.





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Seeking your views on Essex County Council's vision and future strategy for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Services in ESSEX.

...We believe all families need to be listened to, respected and acknowledged.

Dear parents, carers, children and young people of Essex,

Essex Family Forum would like to invite you to take part and have your voice heard!

As the independent Parent Carer Forum for Essex, we are a well-informed, connected and empowered community of families that includes children and young people up to the age of 25 with special educational needs and/or disabilities. We work in partnership with organisations, our local authority and health commissioners aiming for quality outcomes that meet the needs of all our families. Find us here at www.essexfamilyforum.org

Developing a strategy for SEND in Essex

Family participation is very important to the development of Essex services. For 10 weeks until 31st May 2019 a period of public engagement will run and during this time a [survey](#) is available through Essex County Council, for you to give your views.

In addition, Essex Family Forum will be hosting Vision for SEND in ESSEX - Parent/carer Engagement Workshops. These are free to attend and will be held at various locations across Essex. We will be running 12 daytime sessions 10.30 am – 12.30 pm and 4 evening sessions 7 pm – 8.30pm. For full details of dates/locations and how to book your place at one of the sessions please visit www.eventbrite.co.uk (search *Vision for SEND in Essex* or *Essex Family Forum*) or contact us at hello@essexfamilyforum.org

At these workshops we will be asking you to tell us what's happening now, what's working, and what's not. We would love to hear what you have to say! This will be followed by the opportunity to draw a line in the sand, take stock and think about how you would like to see SEND services develop moving forward. We would like you to share your vision for SEND under two main headings; *Developing School led SEND & Growing the Specialist SEND Provision in Essex.* (Full details of what these headings mean, can be found in the document [Developing a strategy for SEND in Essex](#).)

From small changes and bright ideas to big innovations, we want to hear them all! As parents/carers you have knowledge and insight that makes you experts because of your lived experiences. Your input at these events will be anonymous and fed back forming part of the public engagement that will influence the strategy for SEND in Essex. Take this opportunity to get involved, have your say and together we will make a difference...we look forward to seeing you there!

Yours faithfully,

Essex Family Forum – the parent carer forum for Essex.

For more information please see the links provided: The Full document [Developing a strategy for SEND in Essex](#) was published by ECC in March 2019. The [SEND Strategy in Essex](#) and more information on how to get involved is on the [Local Offer](#). you are also invited to take part in an [Online survey](#).



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Supporting a good cause

THE ESSEX LOTTERY

Supporting
Families InFocus (ESSEX)

How will you care for your community this year?

Your support goes direct to local causes in YOUR community

- Support our cause and we keep 50p from every £1 ticket
- You choose who you support – you know where your support is going
- Sign-up for just £1 a week
- There's also a chance to win a £25,000 Jackpot every week
- Start the new year knowing you are supporting your local heroes

To start supporting, visit:
www.essexlottery.co.uk

and search for: **Families InFocus**

Supporters must be 16 years of age or older
See website for terms and conditions

Volunteering Opportunities

You can also support us by volunteering. We have various opportunities, from volunteering at our Saturday Activity Club, to helping at Kidzspace to being a helpline/office support volunteer. Please email Melanie James at melanie@familiesinfocusessex.org.uk for further details.

Raise funds for Families InFocus (Essex) every time you shop online

Find us on easyfundraising to start:
<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/familiesinfocus/>

Shop with over 3,300 online stores

amazon.co.uk **John Lewis** **ebay** **M&S**
Argos **Booking.com** **Boden** **next**
DEBENHAMS **GAP** **Viking** **Sainsbury's**
SCREWFIX **JUST EAT** **moonpig** **OSOS**
discover fashion online

If you are taking part in any fundraising events, please do consider supporting Families InFocus (Essex). It is easy to make your own free online fundraising page via <https://www.justgiving.com/FamiliesInFocusEssex>

Family and friends can donate securely via justgiving.com, Facebook or text message.

Families InFocus (Essex) Helpline: 01245 353 575 Open Monday to Friday 10am – 4pm
Email: helpline@familiesinfocusessex.org.uk
Website: www.familiesinfocusessex.org.uk