

# SWINDON SEND FAMILIES VOICE Newsletter



'Our voices are better together'

SPRING 2022



**LOCAL SEND CHAMPIONS**

*Dressability*



**MORE OPTIONS  
FOR SEND  
SHARING SERVICE**



**BRANCHES  
SUPPORT  
GROUP**

## SEND Information Packs!

**Do you have a child  
with any kind of SEND  
that is starting primary  
school this September?**

**THANK YOU  
TO SWINDON  
STORIES FOR  
DONATING ALL  
THE CHILDREN'S  
BOOKS!**



**Whether your child has a diagnosis,  
EHCP or not, we will have a SEND  
Information Pack for you!**

We have invited every single preschool and nursery setting in the Swindon area to order packs for your family. Please note that if your child doesn't attend any preschool or nursery, we will still have a pack for you that we will deliver to your home! More information will follow after the Easter Holidays so watch this space!

*\*Please note pack contents may vary to the photograph*



## JOIN OUR MAILING LIST

[swindonsendfamiliesvoice.org.uk/mailling-list-sign-up](http://swindonsendfamiliesvoice.org.uk/mailling-list-sign-up)

Make sure you have your say on current surveys, consultations and focus groups and for information about our events and workshops.



'Our voices are better together'



Call us on **07486 873405** or email [swindonsendfamiliesvoice@outlook.com](mailto:swindonsendfamiliesvoice@outlook.com)

[www.swindonsendfamiliesvoice.org.uk](http://www.swindonsendfamiliesvoice.org.uk)



SwindonSEDFamiliesVoice

# Local SEND Champions

In each newsletter we speak to local people and businesses who are making a difference in the SEND community. This time we spoke to Sharon Tombs the Manager of Dressability.



## *Dressability*

Dressability is a friendly independent local charity which supports the clothing needs of individuals with disabilities and those with limited dexterity. There is only one other company in the UK that offers this kind of service, so we are really lucky in Swindon to have such an amazing organisation to support our families!

They provide a personal, tailored and bespoke service developing practical solutions to everyday problems. The service is open to everyone who needs them.

**“BY ADAPTING PEOPLE’S CLOTHING AND NOT THEIR STYLE, WE ENABLE OUR CLIENTS TO MAINTAIN THEIR INDEPENDENCE, AND ENJOY A SENSE OF WELLBEING BASED ON THEIR OWN PERSONAL CHOICE.”**

### **Where did it all begin, where did the idea come from?**

Sharon told us, “We’ve been going since 1998 and the idea and creation came from Sian Barrie who was a carer. She had a lottery grant to start the organisation. She saw the need was there from her home life after realising that it wasn’t just her, but lots of other carers, elderly and disabled people who were struggling to get dressed and undressed. The fastenings on the clothes are often difficult to use and she wanted to create ones that were easier to use as some even cause pain. We’re trying to give people independence.”

*“The aim of the organisation is to ensure anyone with a physical disability or learning difficulties are afforded privacy and dignity with dressing and toileting.”*

### **Who are Dressability, and where are you based?**

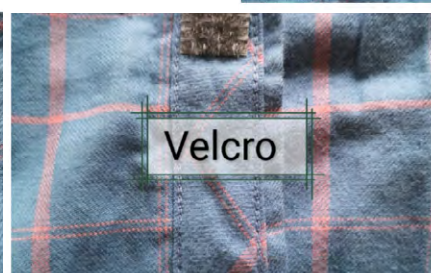
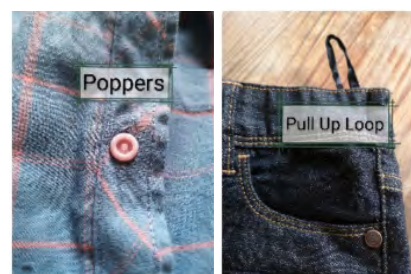
“We are based in Westmead in Swindon, above the MS Therapy centre. We have disability access including a lift. We are a team of 1 Manager, 7 staff members, 7 trustees and around 22 volunteers.”

### **Who can you help?**

Sharon told us “Our core business is anyone with a disability and anyone over the age of 65. We can make adaptations for clothes from baby clothes upwards. In fact a while ago a young lady had a stroke and wanted to dress her own baby but couldn’t do the poppers on the Babygro. So we adapted them so they had Velcro instead, and so it made it possible for her to dress and undress her own baby independently!”

### **What kinds of things can you do?**

One thing that has surprised us is how much of a variety Dressability are able to adapt! Sharon agreed, “We do so much stuff; replace zips with Velcro, bibs for children, a strap handle to the back of a coat to stop a child who won’t wear reins from running into the road, a massive variety of things! We adapt lots of school uniform, for example we can put magnets into school shirts under the buttons so they look like a normal shirt on the outside, but you don’t have any fiddly buttons to do up and it can be easily closed with the



magnets. That way the child doesn't need to ask for help after PE! It's a bespoke service. Whilst we can give you lots of examples, everyone has very different needs and we are here to address the individual needs so if it's not on our website, still ask us and we can usually find a solution!"

### How are you funded?

"It costs £113,000 a year to keep us going. We are a charity, and we make a small charge for our service and the rest (85% of the cost) is subsidised. So, with no statutory funding given to us we rely on the small charge and the generosity of others. We also have a fee-waive service, so we wouldn't charge people who are struggling financially. We provide free consultations, so if you weren't sure what the solution is or if we can help you, you can call us for free advice."

### How do people access the service?

To access the service you just need to contact them and make an appointment. They open between the hours of 9-3 Monday to Friday. They want to make sure we have the right member of staff on hand to discuss your needs, so it is advisable to call and make the appointment rather than just visiting directly. They have a 2 week turnaround on average for items and they get very busy in the lead up to the September school year. They make lots of school uniform adaptations.



*Dressing up clothes they adapted for Brimble Hill school*

**"ALONGSIDE THE CORE SERVICE, WE HAVE A TEAM OF PEOPLE THAT WORK ON COMMUNITY PROJECTS SUCH AS MAKING REUSABLE SANITARY TOWELS FOR WOMEN IN GHANA AND ALSO APRONS FOR THE OLIVE TREE CAFÉ. WE DID DRESSING UP CLOTHES FOR BRIMBLE HILL SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE PREDOMINANTLY IN WHEELCHAIRS."**

### How can you help Dressability?

To raise money you could do a fundraiser, join the Swindon Community Lottery, or use Amazon Smile.

You can find out more about Dressability by viewing their pamphlet [here](#) or visiting their website:

[www.dressability.org.uk](http://www.dressability.org.uk)

Find them on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/DressabilityUK](https://www.facebook.com/DressabilityUK)

## Preparing for Adulthood

# Transitions Roadshow 2022

For parents, carers and professionals to hear about and discuss the work done to support young people age 14+ with additional needs

**Wednesday 15th June**

**10am to 4pm - Swindon Town Football Club**

**Save the date**

Employment,  
volunteering  
& training

Independent  
Living

Friends,  
Relationships  
& Community  
Involvement

Good  
Health

# Spotlight on our Parent Carer Reps

Every newsletter we introduce you to one of our parent carer representatives. This month we are introducing...

## Katy Anderson



I'm mum to two boys, aged 6 and 4. My eldest has autism (with a demand avoidant presentation), associated sensory difficulties, severe anxiety, hypermobility and significant fine motor skills difficulties. He's also under assessment for ADHD. My 4 year old is also under assessment on the NDC Pathway, as he has significant social communication difficulties, as well as some speech difficulties. Before becoming a Mum, I've spent many years working with children with SEND in a variety of roles and settings.

### What do you enjoy about being a parent rep?

I love being part of a team of people who not only "get it" but are committed to getting parents' voices heard. On a personal level, I lost a lot of my identity when I had to give up my career to stay home to meet my children's needs and being part of Swindon SEND Families Voice has given me some of that professionalism

back, whilst being able to work flexibly around my children. I like being able to respectfully challenge organisations to hear the lived experiences of families, and to improve their services so that children and their families have better experiences.

### What has been your proudest moment?

This is tricky, but I'm proud to be representing parents in the Dingley's Promise Early Years Inclusion Project, which is offering free training to all "birth to five" practitioners to improve inclusion. I'm also very proud that the Swindon SEND Families Voice team have trusted me to lead the Swindon SEND Sharing Service - I'm hoping we can grow this service so that it is a vital resource for parents to use.

### If you could change one thing about SEND?

There are many things I would want to change, but if I had to pick just one it would be the fact that parents' knowledge



of their own child is not considered equal to other professionals who might see that child, particularly during the EHCP process. These other professionals, whilst expert in their field, only see a child for an hour or two before making recommendations about a particular bit of the child, but parents live with that child 24/7 and have a really holistic view of what's going on, and this needs to be respected and valued. I also know first-hand how damaging it can be not to be listened to, and not to be taken seriously when raising concerns about your child and wish to prevent other parents experiencing the same.

### What do you do when you are not a parent rep?

When I'm not a parent rep, I am busy being Mum to my two boys, who like to keep me on my toes! We love to take trips out to the woods, the beach, the countryside, or find somewhere new to explore. I also work as a PA/Direct Payments worker. My New Year's Resolution this year was to make some time to focus on an activity just for me, and I'm looking forward to starting a yoga class soon.

## What a year it's been so far!



**Branches Support Group is our monthly, term time support group. We asked team member Nausheen, who organises it all, to update you on past sessions and what's coming up!**



I've been eager to get back to meeting face to face with our lovely parents and carers, and the feeling has been mutual. Due to various reasons, we've had to do a mixture of in person and online sessions. But we will always do in person where we can! In September we started the school year with the Mental Health Trailblazer Outreach team with Amy Smith, who is the Project Lead at the Clinical Commissioning Group. It was well attended and we hope those that came got something useful out of it! They are due to come back again before the summer, to help provide some strategies for those with children who find change and transitions difficult.

Teresa Jones, the Team Manager for the Disabled Children's Team paid us a visit

and the following month we had Kirk Anderson, who is from LD CAMHS, come along to give us a talk on sleep (we all love our sleep and wish we had more of it!) which was so well received by everyone and parents walked away with lots of advice and tips. Thank you Kirk!

**"EVERY MONTH NOW WE ALSO BRING ALONG THE SEND SHARING SERVICE, SO YOU CAN COLLECT OR DROP OFF YOUR ITEMS."**

So far in 2022 we have had sessions with the Local Authority SEND Team, Early Help Hub and Steve Lacey who is an ADHD Nurse, and in March we had a great presentation on Dyspraxia (DCD) by Patsy, who is an Occupational Therapist, and Penny a Speech and

Language Therapist. Both were able to answer questions and give advice to the attendees on the night.

We still have only a few more Branches Group sessions until the end of the year and we have some fantastic speakers coming up including Dr Teresa Carter, Nigel Pickering about Exclusions, and Hannah Freeland about Social Care.

Now my aim is to arrange for Branches to be in different areas of Swindon, which we hope will enable some parent carers who haven't come along yet the opportunity to join us more easily. So keep an eye out for information coming soon on who's coming when and where!

Can you believe I've already started booking up Branches from September onwards and I can't wait. I love doing what I do!

**Branches is free to attend, you don't have to book a place, and you can bring your children to the daytime session! The sessions take place on the second Thursday of the month during term-time, and will be either a 10am-12 session or a 7-9pm session. Join our mailing list, look on our website or Facebook page, or drop us an email/phone call to find out more!**

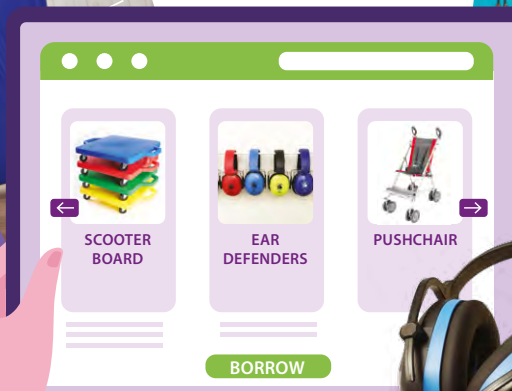


*Our Parent Rep Katy had a little helper at this month's session!*



**SEND**  
**Sharing**  
**Service**

**ONLY £3**  
membership per  
year, per family  
No borrowing  
costs



[swindonsendsharingservice.lend-engine.com](http://swindonsendsharingservice.lend-engine.com)

## More options to collect or drop off and browse the SEND Sharing Service!

**We now open every Monday during termtime from 10am-12noon so you can access more of our lending library!**

Based at our office in Sanford House, you are welcome to come along and take your time choosing, dropping off or collecting your items. Just give us a quick call on 07486 873405 when you are in the building reception and we will come and collect you. You can also still drop off/collect items at our Branches Support Group and Stay and Play Coffee mornings!

A reminder that the SEND Sharing Service costs only £3 per year, and there are no additional costs involved with hiring the items, with the exception of some large items that require a refundable deposit paid.

**Our library is not just for books!**

**Some of the items we have in our library include:**

- Disability pushchairs
- A dark den pop up tent with sensory lights
- iPad Mini
- Fidget toy packs
- Communication Flash Cards
- Adaptive cutlery
- Ear defenders
- Weighted lap blankets



## Feedback

*"What a brilliant service. I was delighted to have the opportunity to borrow a Yoto Player, as it's something I've been interested in using. The sharing service provided the chance to try it out and fully understand how the player works. The whole experience was excellent. From my first encounter with the team, to the emails during the loan period, and the final return of the item, everything was both professional and friendly. Professional in that I never had any doubts about where to go and when, and what the conditions of the loan were. Friendly in every sense, whether face to face or via email. I was made to feel welcome, at ease, and valued as an individual, and as a parent. Thank you."*

Feedback from a parent about the  
SEND Sharing Service



**You told us you wanted it to be easier to drop off and collect your items from our lending library.** We have introduced a dedicated Monday morning session at our office in Sanford House! See the SEND Sharing Service feature in this newsletter for more information.



## Letter from the Chair

**If the past 2 years have shown us anything, it's that life can be unpredictable, and events can bring change at a moment's notice.**

With that in mind, Swindon SEND Families Voice has gone through a number of changes. This includes 3 members of our committee stepping away from the forum, over the last few months, to focus on other things. I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to them all for all their hard work and dedication to the team over the past few years and wish them well in their future endeavours.

Looking forward, the new financial year means that we have some exciting plans in the works, including the SEND Information Packs, increasing our Lending Library, continuing with our popular Branches Support Group sessions, and Reshaping Conversations Part 2!

Watch this space for more info, and until next time, 'Thank You' for following and supporting Swindon SEND Families Voice, without it, we wouldn't be the team we are today!

Best wishes

Michelle

FACT



**807 PARENTS**

have provided feedback so far this year via surveys and focus groups

FACT



**200**

is the number of parent carers we have spoken to at events this year

FACT



We have now been running for over

**4 YEARS**