



The Independent Helpline for Special Educational Needs

Annual Report for the period 1 October 2007 to 30 September 2008

Introduction

SOS! Special Educational Needs (SOS!SEN), continues to expand its profile and deepen its involvement in Greater London, as well as extending into the Home Counties and other Authorities throughout England, reaching as far as Cornwall and County Durham.

The SOS!SEN Helpline continues to operate from its offices at 35 Staines Road in Twickenham, and also from the homes of some of its advocates who live a distance from the Charity's base. In those latter cases, calls are automatically diverted to the Advocate's home telephone.

Objectives

The objects of SOS!SEN are the support of carers and parents with children who have special educational needs within the London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames and the South of England, but not excluding other areas in England and Wales where the needs arises, by the provision of information, practical assistance and advice and such other exercises as the trustees shall deem necessary with a view to meeting the educational needs of their children and improving their conditions of life.

Advisers to SOS!SEN

Bankers: NatWest, Teddington
Solicitors: SEN Legal Ltd; Fisher Meredith LLP

Links with other Charities and Organisations

The Charity's initial historical links still exist with VIPs in SEN and MAPS in Kingston. Links with Network 81 and IPSEA exist with their advocates, even though there are minor differences in the manner in which support to parents is provided: the aims, though, are identical.

Increasingly, links are being formed with small, local, groups whose focus is on specific conditions such as asperger's or Down Syndrome. These links are particularly useful to all organisations because each can benefit from the research the other carries out and from the expertise each gains.

35 Staines Road Twickenham TW2 5BG
Helpline: 020 8538 3731 Fax: 020 8255 7657
SOS! Special Educational Needs Charity Number: 1112475



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Summary of main activities and achievements

Whilst the SOS!SEN telephone Helpline continues to be the main source of enquiries from parents, SOS!SEN is becoming increasingly well known through the Workshops and Seminars it holds, and through parents who have benefited from the help they have received. Schools, too, who have heard of the support SOS!SEN provides, often refer parents to the Helpline.

email enquiries tend to be discouraged because they often lack the necessary detail to enable an advocate to establish the key details; such enquirers are encouraged to call the Helpline number for advice, guidance and support.

Of the 5,000 calls fielded during the year, about 30% are new referrals. Whilst some queries can be dealt with at source, many require further investigation. Other, more serious cases require more dedicated resource from a SOS!SEN advocate, sometimes requiring them to represent parents at a SENDIST Hearing. In all, during the year, 32 families have been supported in this way, 16 of which have resulted in a victory for parents at a Hearing. A further 10 resulted in the Local Authority withdrawing from Appeal and agreeing to the parents' requests, with the remaining 6 being successful, having been taken on by Special Needs lawyers.

Meetings

Workshops continue to be held on a range of topics of interest to parents of children with special educational needs, as well as those professionals who are involved in the world of SEN. Smaller forums have been convened that address more specific issues, local or national, to a more discrete audience.

New Tribunal Regulations came into effect on 3rd November 2008. As a result, SOS!SEN has liaised closely with Special Needs lawyers and is planning a series of Workshops to advise parents and all those involved with SENDIS Tribunal work, the effect the new Regulations will have on the previous process.

Fund Raising

The absence of corporate funding and Grants continues to pose a major challenge in providing financial support to SOS!SEN. As a consequence, SOS!SEN has held a number of fund raising events and Workshops, and has been fortunate in obtaining a small degree of local sponsorship: together, this has produced almost all of the charity's income, out of which support to parents has been provided. Donations from parents and supporters remains a vital part of SOS!SEN's income and are so gratefully received.

A Children's Charity Shop, All4Kids, was established in 2007 and is already managing to fund the majority of the annual rental of the SOS!SEN offices in Twickenham. This means that nearly all income generated from donations can be used directly to help the very parents the Charity was established to support.

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Conclusion

SOS!SEN remains committed to helping parents and carers to get the right support and the best educational setting for their children. Running the Helpline Office, building and maintaining the infrastructure, absorbs about 25% of the charity's income. As a result, 75% of its expenditure was able to be spent providing direct support to those families who sought the charity's help during the year. As always, the amount able to be allocated in this way is directly proportionate to the funds raised: the more that is raised or donated, the more children will benefit.

Martin Dean
19 January 2009