



# PARENTING SPECIAL IN CHILDREN

## Evaluation Report

Sep 2017 – Aug 2018

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‘Invaluable specialist services, parenting programmes and support provided through insight and understanding and with compassion! Thank you!’



# Introduction


**This report covers activities during the academic year 2017 – 2018.**

Parenting Special Children (PSC) is a Berkshire based charity aiming to improve the wellbeing of children/young people with a whole range of special needs and disabilities. We have been working towards this over the last twelve years by providing specialist support to their families through a range of services including:

1. A helpline, over phone, email and social media
2. Specialist parenting workshops and courses
3. Specialist service for families of Looked After and Adopted Children (LAAC)
4. Sleep courses and clinics
5. Annual conferences
6. Family Fun events
7. Training opportunities for professionals working with disabled children and their families.

PSC services continued to be well respected and regularly used by families across Berkshire West and East during this year. We continued to enjoy strong partnerships with local authorities, schools, health and education professionals and voluntary services in the area.

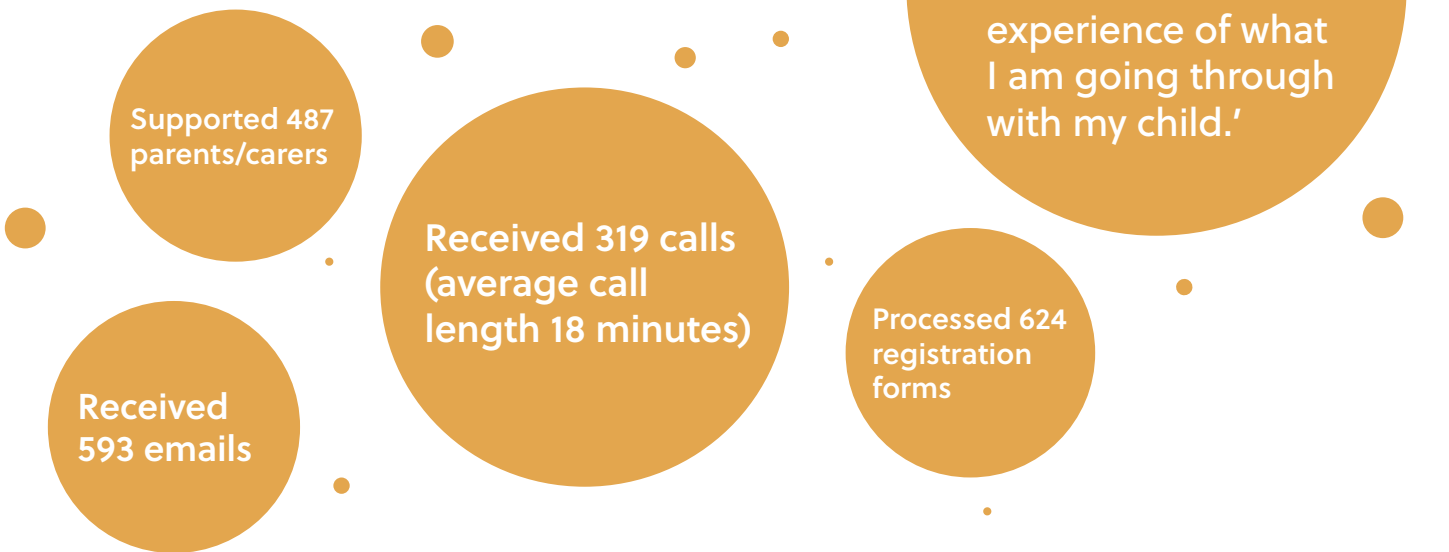
Over the year, the charity supported **1600 families at least once, while over 75% accessed more than one service.**



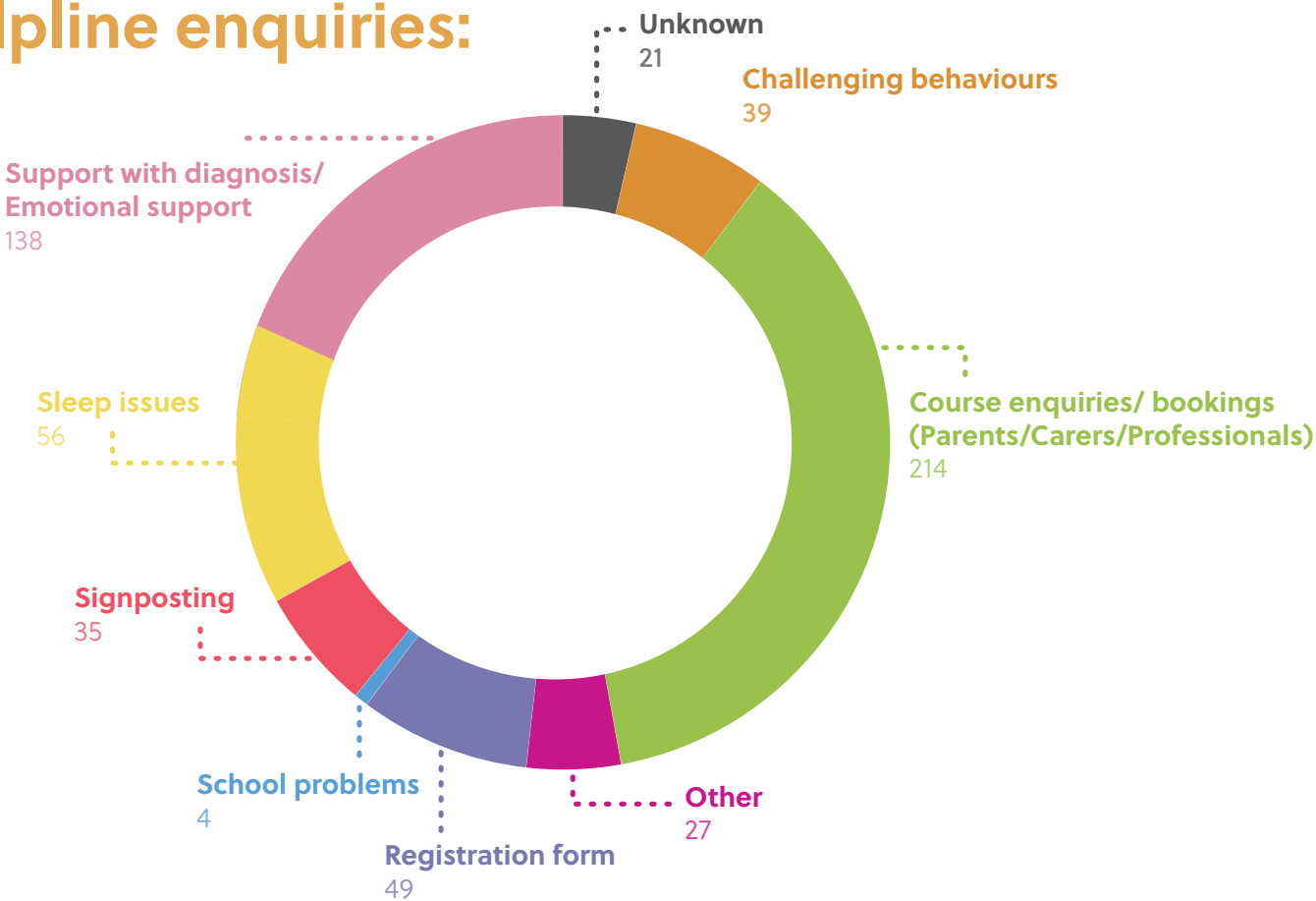
**'You have changed our lives and the support has been out of this world!'**

# Helpline

During the year, our helpline:



## Helpline enquiries:



# Parenting courses and workshops:

## Autistic Girls Service

The Autistic Girls Service delivered 10 topic based monthly workshops during the year with a **total parent/carer attendance of 145.**

**100% of attendees** said they would recommend the workshops to other parents/carers

'Very valuable session - feeling more empowered about supporting my daughter at home.'

'I love the PSC sessions - I feel supported! Thank you.'

'A great session which has helped me to look at how to support my daughter in a different and better way.'

'Very useful. Provided a whole new way of looking at friendships. Thank you.'

'First time attendee - absolutely excellent, so helpful and we learnt so much and met some great people.'

'I've really appreciated the chance to chat to other parents in the framework of the sessions on anxiety and friendship. I feel clearer about where I'm heading and calmer. Thanks.'

# Pre and Post Assessment workshops, Autism and ADHD:

**79 workshops delivered**, attended by approximately 350 parents/ carers – each parent attended an average of 2 workshops

Parents indicated an average 4 point increase (on a scale of 1-10) when comparing their knowledge on the link between ADHD and Anxiety before and after the workshops. Feedback also showed that parents/carers had more strategies to help their child's anxiety.

Parents indicated an average 3 point increase (on a scale of 1-10) when comparing their understanding of autism, how it affects their child's behaviour, strategies to deal with child's anxiety and awareness of local and national services to support the family before and after the workshops.

'The workshops were massively helpful and helped me to cope. I can't sing your praises enough. It set us on the right path to help our son.'

'The workshops were full of light bulb moments.'

'Our family situation is so different now. I look at where we were before and I can't believe it is the same child. It is so positive, a complete turnaround!'

'It made a dramatic difference to the way we approach his outbursts.'

'We understand our son better and we feel this has helped bring us all closer together and relate more to one another, making us a happier family.'

'I am able to understand my child more and have a better understanding of ADHD. I am more confident.'

## Sensory processing workshops:

**5 workshops delivered**, attended by 117 parents/carers

99% of attendees said they would recommend the workshops to other parents/carers

'Very informative session, useful tips to take home & try.'

'People may not know they need this course until they have been - it is excellent.'

## Courses:

**9 different courses (5-7 weeks each) were delivered across Berkshire attended by 65 parents/carers.**

**This included:**

- Time Out for Special Needs
- Time Out for ADHD
- Time Out for Autism
- Autism and Anxiety

All courses showed a marked improvement in the parent's understanding of their child's condition, the impact it has on their development, the number of strategies they have to manage the associated behaviors and their general confidence in parenting.

**As an example, when comparing evaluation forms filled in before and after the ADHD course, parents reported a:**

- 42% increase in their understanding of ADHD
- 54% increase in their understanding of the impact of ADHD on their child's development
- 90% increase in the strategies they have to manage ADHD behaviour
- 77% increase in their confidence around parenting their ADHD child/ren

'I am able to understand my child more & have a better understanding of ADHD.'

'I am already seeing improvements in the way I handle things.'

'This course has given me so many strategies and made me more confident as a parent.'

# Service for families of Looked After and Adopted Children (LAAC)

The service supported 170 parents/carers during the year through a number of activities, representing a mix of adopters, foster carers and kinship carers of children and young people no longer living with their birth parents. Approximately half of them attended more than one activity. The service also supported 107 professionals working with LAAC and their families.

'Fantastic support as always – delivered well and good group – felt listened and heard.'

## Overall, the service delivered:

- 18 parent/carer workshops on a variety of topics – total attendance 201
- 4 seven week courses on Trauma and Attachment
- One to One support to 37 parents/carers
- 3 sleep courses
- 1 Focus group
- 1 online survey
- 1 Family Fun event – attended by 86 people
- 1 seminar
- 5 professional training events
- Recruited 5 volunteer peer supporters
- Set up 10 parent/carer support groups including a Male Carers group and Kinship Carer group



## Families:

- 100% of parents/carers said they would recommend our workshops and courses to other families
- 100% of parents/carers attending courses said they were better able to interact with their adopted/ looked after children and felt more confident to support them
- 98% of parents/carers attending workshops and conferences reported increased knowledge and understanding of issues affecting their adopted/ looked after child/young person and gaining new information on how to meet their needs.

'Thank you both so much for delivering the course. I really enjoyed it. The content was wholly relevant and you did a fantastic job of delivering it - professionally and warmly.'

'Keep up this fantastic and invaluable work - you are doing such a worthwhile job and you are doing it so well.'

'I would definitely recommend this course to others. A very interesting course, expanding on numerous issues involved in childcare for looked after children. The two instructors were excellent, knew their subject matter well and put it across in an interesting and friendly manner.'

## Professionals:


- 96% of professionals said they recommend our workshop to other colleagues
- 94% reported gaining new knowledge and information about how to meet the needs of the children that they work with.

'Excellent presentation skills. Both presenters were skilled and had excellent knowledge and expertise. The course was very professionally presented.'

'The course has enlightened me and improved my ability to give my grandson the empathetic care he needs. The course was led by two exceptional ladies and I wish it could be offered to all parents.'

'Workshop was brilliant. Lots of practical advice strategies. Excellent delivery.'

'Fantastic support as always – delivered well and good group – felt listened and heard.'



**'I really enjoyed the anxiety training - it was brilliant. What a great service you offer to LAA children and young people.'**

## **Thoughts from parents and carers**

**'I went out from the course with a different attitude. I felt very empowered. We have had very calm days as I can see the children smiling again. '**

**'You provide a very special service and I am so happy and relieved that I found PSC.'**

**'Thank you for all your hard work during the year putting these courses together for us. They have been brilliant.'**

**'Thank you for everything that you have done to help me in this complex journey – our whole family has really appreciated it.'**

# Sleep courses and clinics

## Over the year, the sleep service:

- Received over 100 calls and emails
- Delivered 6 courses for parents (62 families reached)
- Delivered 11 in depth sleep clinics with parents
- Delivered 1 course for professionals Feb '18 (14 professionals reached)
- Saw a two year 'Global Make Some Noise' project start in April 2018

When asked 'How well do you understand the cause of your child's sleep difficulties' on a scale of 1 to 10 from 'Not good at all' to 'Very good', on average parents reported that after the course their understanding had increased by 5 points.

When asked 'How confident do you feel in managing your child's sleep difficulties' on the same scale, on average parents reported a 5 point increase.

'It helped me understand the sleep difficulties and correct strategies to put in place for a good sleep practice.'

'It has given us the knowledge and tools to help our children with their sleep difficulties, thank you!'

'I feel armed with new strategies to try and help my son sleep.'

'This course has been very good. Lots of things to look into changing for the whole family to get some sleep.'

'We made a chart, stuck to the same routine (given by PSC), rewards etc. After a year of him being in our bed, we're on night 17 of him staying in his own bed.'

# Family Fun Events

- **5 events delivered** this year including Pottery Party and Yoga experience for autistic girls, Easter and Summer Family Fun Days and a special event for families of LAAC.
- **195 children attended** the above events along with their families.
- **100% of families said** that these events give them an opportunity to be together, in a safe place, with fun activities and a place to meet other families.
- **75% of families said** that they thought that these events would improve their family relationships.
- **90% of families said** that the events would help to reduce isolation and help with their mental health

# Annual Conference

PSC has been running an annual conference for a few years now. This year, it was on 'Violence and Challenging Behaviour'. It was very well **attended by 73 parents/carers and 54 professionals**.

**87% of attendees said** that the organisation was either 'excellent' or 'very good'.

'I really enjoyed it, brilliant venue, both speakers were amazing. I feel I learnt loads.'

'Excellent, thank you. It has given an opportunity to reflect on my practice, my cases and my approach when working with young people & their families.'

'Thank you for taking a lead on VCB, it is the first course that has helped and been supportive.'

'Fantastic event, thanks for tackling this subject. Excellent speakers, incredibly useful information which I'll put into practice.'

'I think any professional who deals with families with Autistic children should attend a conference like this so that they would understand what the families go through daily.'

# Training workshops for professionals:

PSC regularly delivers training workshops for professionals working with children and young people with special needs. This year, 126 professionals attended such training events with the charity:

Service	Number of workshops	Number of professionals
LAAC Service	5	81
Sleep Service	1	14
ADHD Service	1	9
Across Services	1	22
Total		126

'I found today's group workshop extremely knowledgeable and interesting. It was well presented, and this is something I will take back to work and present to my colleagues.'

'A professional and well-delivered training. The trainer was very knowledgeable and well-informed, and sensitive to teachers' comments/responses.'

'Fantastic. Really enjoyed the course. Have taken so much away to think about.'

'The course was really well-structured and the leader was extremely knowledgeable. Her personal experience helped develop my understanding.'

# Team PSC

PSC is a beneficiary led charity with a strong team of staff and volunteers. At the time of writing this report, the team consists of 21 staff members (all part-time or sessional bar the CEO) and 18 volunteers (including 5 trustees). Nearly 90% of team members are parents/carers of children and young people with special needs along with having professional backgrounds and experiences.

**Our volunteers gave the charity a massive 1500 plus hours last year** – that is equivalent to having at least one full time post! A few of them moved on to paid employment at PSC or elsewhere.

## A recent staff and volunteer survey revealed very encouraging findings:



# Funders

We would like to express our appreciation to our funders for the important financial support that they provide, which enables us to deliver majority of our services FREE to families and at a subsidised cost to professionals.

## A big thank you to:



We would also like to thank our local fundraising platforms for their dedicated support:



We are grateful to all of the above, as well as our individual donors and sponsors for the fantastic support that they provide, without which we cannot continue.





# Looking ahead

After a very successful year, PSC is looking forward to not only continuing the existing services but also delivering some new and exciting developments like:

## Expanding work with Children and Young people

PSC will be expanding its work with children and young people as it merges with 'Auticulate', a local charity helping autistic children and young people develop their social, communication and independence skills.

As part of our new sleep project, **PSC delivered sleep workshops to 200 young people** in a secondary school in Wokingham in Sep 2018. We will be going into more schools, mainstream and specialist, and will also be working one to one with children who have sleep difficulties.

## New Parent/Carer information and support groups

PSC is already delivering three information and support groups, mentioned in the text above. We have received funding to expand this work and set up five further local groups across Berkshire – so watch this space!

## New topics on popular demand:

During Autumn 2018, PSC has already delivered 2 new workshops on 'Pathological Demand Avoidance' (PDA). The demand has been overwhelming, so much so that our next annual conference in March 2019 will be on PDA.

We also delivered a new course for families affected by 'Child to Parent violence' called 'Who's In charge' as well as a workshop on 'Dual Diagnosis (Autism and ADHD).' Look out for more topics and events!

## New and improved training opportunities

The charity is looking at new models of delivery to expand our training on a variety of topics to families as well as professionals working with them. We are currently looking at

- Working with the local business community to deliver lunch time workshops for staff
- Going into schools to deliver training to teaching staff after school and on inset days
- Developing a series of webinars and training videos to expand our reach

## Building reserves and the importance of fundraising

The majority of our services continue to be free for families and at subsidised rates to professionals. The need for PSC services is more than ever with local authorities facing ever increasing funding cuts and yet, we get very limited funding from the statutory sector.

As a small charity with very limited core funding, we are constantly looking for income through community fundraising events, regular donations and funding applications. Going forward, we are planning a number of steps to increase our income, in particular our unrestricted reserves to strengthen our core structure and maintain sustainability.

PSC would like to raise this awareness amongst families who have benefited from the charity so that they can 'give something back' to other families, who are new to special needs and desperately need our support.

### There will be a range of ways to give:

- Text Giving 70070 CHLD33
- Regular Giving through [www.localgiving.com](http://www.localgiving.com)
- Match funding [www.thegoodexchange.com](http://www.thegoodexchange.com)
- Donations via PSC booking system Eventbrite
- Cash donations at workshops and courses
- Volunteering with the charity

A decorative graphic featuring a semi-circle of colorful dots in shades of orange, yellow, green, and blue. Scattered around this semi-circle are various other colored dots of different sizes, including red, purple, and pink, creating a vibrant, abstract background.

# Safe+ Sound. Governance by RVA

## Safe and Sound

Parenting Special Children has been awarded our 'Safe and Sound' governance certification by Reading Voluntary Action, ensuring that our governance, policies and procedures are in place to assist the implementation of our work.

# Case studies

Real stories from our families.

## Helpline

Mary\* contacted the helpline after finding us online. She was very upset and wanted some advice and support with issues with her 4 children, one of whom has a development delay and is on the CAMHS pathway for Autism.

The helpline advisor found out more about their challenges with sleep, school and family life. She offered suggestions, techniques and signposted to people who could help with support at school. She followed up everything by email.

She called Mary a week later as agreed and was happy to hear that they had put the suggested strategies in place and things seemed more positive, children had a better routine and were sleeping better. She signposted Mary to some more organisations and followed this up via email.

Mary contacted the helpline again after two months, very upset saying she had no one else to talk to that 'got it!' She had experienced a very traumatic event with her eldest child and was finding it really difficult. It felt she needed to sound off how she was feeling without being judged. The helpline advisor gave some ideas appropriate for the situation, helped her to work out what she could do next and in what order and comforted her.

She called Mary again next day to check on her and found her feeling much more positive. Her child had not self-harmed for 5 days and she was very relieved about this. They talked about what could be done to make things more manageable. Mary expressed how grateful she was and how our support had made her feel able to cope better at the time and given her the confidence to carry on.

*Names have been changed  
for confidentiality purposes(\*)*

## Family Fun Events

From a parent - My daughter is 10 and diagnosed autistic, has dyspraxia and hypermobility and suspected PDA (Pathological Demand Avoidance). Since year 5 of school she has struggled more and more with anxiety and social situations. She has a few friends at school but finds it hard to attend regularly. Social interaction leaves her utterly exhausted and sometimes ill. She tries so hard to fit in in a mainstream environment but the expectations around naturally knowing what to say and how to act are really very difficult for her.

My daughter has attended the pottery session and the trampolining session. She loves attending PSC events because there are no expectations put on her. The other girls are autistic so she doesn't feel alone. If she wants to stop at any point, she can without any pressure. She was happy to meet other girls that are like her and to see that they are all so different but with similar quirks. We just wish that the events were more often!

The events have been great for her mental health, she said that she has finally found somewhere where she feels she belongs and I think that is absolutely vital in life!

The events are brilliant for our family, they make my daughter happier and more confident in the weeks after the events. It helps us as a family to not be isolated and stuck in the house which has a positive effect on us all.

## Sleep Service

The service supported parents of a 3 year old boy with Autism. Mother has mental health issues and is heavily pregnant.

The boy was taking a very long time to settle at bedtime then took 90 minutes to get to sleep but only if driven around in a car – every night. Once asleep, he woke up between 3 and 4 times per night.

Following suggestions by our sleep practitioner, the daily car journeys stopped. Mum was having badly needed naps in the day and her son was only taking 10 – 20 minutes to get to sleep! Night time awakenings also improved, now waking up 0-2 times per night.

## LAAC Service

1. Karen\* is a foster carer, currently fostering 7 year old girl Emma\*. Emma is one of 6 siblings and has been with Karen's family under short term placement. She is doing very well in Karen's care. The LA is keen for Emma to be adopted and has asked Karen if she would like to do so. Karen is worried that if she adopts Emma, support from LA will cease and she will lose all her legal rights as a Looked After child. The LA have indicated that they will need to end the placement if Karen refuses to adopt and will move Emma elsewhere. Karen does not want this to happen either given that Emma is so well settled in the family.

Karen attended all sessions of the 7 week attachment focused course with PSC. She also attended a sleep course over 2 sessions.

She needed a lot of support outside these sessions primarily to work out the pros and cons of adopting. The LAAC practitioners spent time with her and helped her make her case. She emailed:

I barely have the words to thank you so much... I am astounded at the way you have so taken on my situation with E, and I'm so thankful to have you for such a time as this. Your notes have been invaluable and they enabled me to feel more confident in my own thoughts and equipped me with information which I probably wouldn't otherwise have had. Your involvement has been such a blessing to me. To know that someone was able to comment with such knowledge and kindness too was enough to empower me in the meetings that I've had recently.

No one else was able to offer anything close, and whichever way this case goes, I will feel that everything that could have been done has been done, and that can only be good for the little soul in our care. Parenting Special Children's involvement through you, I'm sure, will have challenged the system positively, thank you so much!

**'You are so kind, you and your team are doing a wonderful job!' - Karen**

2. Jane\* is an adoptive mother of two primary aged girls. She has attended a number of workshops and other activities, including one seven week course. She sent this feedback:

I'm writing this email to thank you for the excellent support and service I have experienced since attending your workshops for parents of LAAC children.

I have gained a valuable deeper understanding of issues that are specific to children who have experienced developmental trauma and that are separated from their birth parents - as well as a tool box of strategies to help me

and my children cope with the many layers of behavioural challenges that result from insecure attachment.

Before I came across PSC, I felt isolated and misunderstood - especially by the school system and to some extent other "regular" parents too. I had read many books on lots of subjects relating to adoption and had completed the adoption training at our adoption agency twice, as we adopted two girls at different times. However, book knowledge and general introductions to adopted kids does not reach the vital real life difficulties that as adopters we face on a day to day basis.

I first came to the seven week parenting course and was able to express my frustrations in a supportive and confidential setting, and feeling I wasn't being judged on my parenting ability. It was both a sense of relief and extremely empowering to have validation and understanding from both course leaders, and the other adoptive parents.

I have used many of the strategies taught in the workshops and now talk confidently with the staff at school. We especially enjoyed the sensory workshop suggestions with slime, modelling clay and chewable jewellery - and settle my glitter is a regular favourite at bedtime after a busy day. I am calmer as a parent too, and have noticed a great improvement in my children as I am able to help them through their emotions without becoming as fraught as before.

Seeing PSC as an ongoing support and service, I am confident that I will be able to maintain my current level of calm moving forward into the tricky teenage years where identity and peer pressures bring along different challenges to family life and belonging in the adopted child. I found the recent talk on Facebook and social media very helpful, an eye opener to how instant and disruptive unsupervised birth family contact can be. This type of innovative training is essential in my eyes, especially when the figures of disruption within adopted families are explored.

I would like to say a big thank you also for the excellent family day you organised for both parents and our children recently allowing both parents and our adopted children to connect with others in the same boat. It has been helpful in building friendships that we will continue outside to cultivate outside of PSC.

**'A big thank you from me to you and your extended team, who put so much of themselves into this project to make it the success it is today.' - Jane**

A massive thank you to The University of Reading  
• Typography Department for their support with this report

'As an organisation, you have exceeded my hopes and expectations and continue to evolve by listening to the needs and suggestions of those you reach out to. As such you remain current, relevant and vital as a service that brings enrichment and insight to the children and families you support. A big thank you!'  
– Parent accessing our services

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