

The Virtual Autism Hub Newsletter

October 2024

PAACT: New courses for Parents/Carers and autistic teenagers in Lincolnshire

From their headquarters at Hillcroft House, Whisby Road in Lincoln, PAACT have been extra busy this year. With funding from LPFT, Gordon Forsyth, Chair of PAACT and the rest of the team have created two new free courses. One for parents and carers of autistic children and another for autistic teenagers.

On top of this, their annual conference is about to take place on Tuesday 12th November.

For those unfamiliar with PAACT, they are a parent-led volunteer group – *Parents and Autistic Children Together* – formed in 1998. They have tirelessly supported families with autistic children across the county with training programmes, conferences, workshops, activities and support group meetings.

Titled, *Navigating the Path Ahead: Helping Your Autistic Child Thrive*, the 4-week parent/carer course aims to build parent confidence in supporting their child to make a lasting, positive impact on the child's future.

Seeing a gap in provision for autistic

teenagers, *Your Autism SuperPowers* is a 6-week term-time course running on Wednesdays. PAACT are offering a full day of fun activities and projects to help 11-16 year-olds discover their unique strengths and talents and find new friends.

Both courses are hosted at Hillcroft House with the first groups already underway. The next cohorts begin in November with further groups running in January and March of 2025.

Find out more about the courses or register for a place by emailing paactsupport@hotmail.co.uk

The Showroom on Tritton Road in

Lincoln is the venue for PAACT's 26th Annual Autism Conference.

Hosted by Andrew Whitehouse, a SEND practitioner and coach, the conference focuses on 'Behaviour' this year and has guest speakers from occupational therapists, behaviour therapists and representatives from the Working Together Team, as well as PAACT Committee parents.

The conference is a full day and is aimed at parents, carers and professionals with ticket prices for PAACT members and non-members.

To book tickets:

<https://ticketsource.co.uk/paact>

Or go to PAACT's website to find out more:

[Parents and Autistic Children Together – PAACT \(paactsupport.com\)](https://www.paact.org.uk)



NAVIGATING THE PATH AHEAD: HELPING YOUR AUTISTIC CHILD THRIVE

Join Our FREE 4-Week Workshop Series!

Funded by LPFT grant funding project.

Are you ready to empower your child and unlock their full potential?





A note from Manager, Neil Wells

I would like to thank all the team for what's been an amazing start to the Virtual Autism Hub. Behind the scenes, the team have been working tirelessly for the benefit of all those that reach out for our help and support, whether it be help with PIP form completion, to applying for grants from our grant-making scheme.

We are starting to see an increasing demand for our navigators to help with queries and also great feedback from WAVE 1 grantees with their initial projects that we have been able to fund.

As a service we aim to be innovative and creative in order to meet the demands of the community.

Look out for new support groups springing up across the county. Our successful WAVE 2 applicants will be announced shortly.

Pop-Up Autism Hubs in the Community

Although virtual in name, getting into communities and meeting people is a top priority with the team.

Pop-Up Autism Hubs are now regularly taking place in libraries across the county.

These are informal and friendly. You don't need to book an appointment and you don't need a diagnosis to talk to us about yourself, or your child if you are a parent or carer.

Navigators on issues like:

- Education
- Employment
- PIP/DLA help
- Sensory advice
- Mental health
- National and local support networks and groups
- Getting a diagnosis
- Pre- and post- diagnostic courses



Set up and ready to go, every second Friday of the month at Lincoln Library.

Come and tell us about your experience of autism and your ideas about what could make life easier.

You can come for information and advice on anything affecting you from one of our knowledgeable

If you would like a Pop-Up Hub visit your local library, let the team know lpft.virtualautismhublincs@nhs.net

Contact us



lpft.virtualautismhublincs@nhs.net



01522 458588



www.lpft.nhs.uk/virtual-autism-hub

Pop-Up Autism Hubs in the Library!

- **Louth Library** every 1st Wednesday of the month
- **Lincoln Central Library** every 2nd Friday of the month, 2-4.30 pm
- **Grantham Library** every 2nd Tuesday of the month 2-4.30 pm
- **Sleaford Library** every 3rd Wednesday of the month, 2-4.30 pm
- **Skegness Library** every 4th Tuesday of the month, 10-12.30 am

Come and see us!



Supporting people to live well in their communities

Back to School

It has been an exciting time for children who have started school this September, going into their first year at primary or secondary. Hopefully, the first term nerves are easing and students are starting to feel settled into school life and their new surroundings.

But if your autistic child is struggling with their learning or you have concerns about their social skills or mental health, what can you do?

SENDCos

Make an appointment to speak to your child's Special Educational Needs and Disability Co-ordinator (SENDCo) at school. This is a member of staff specially qualified in SEND who also holds a teaching qualification.

Their job is to identify needs and ensure provisions are made to help children succeed in education. SENDCos do not need a formal diagnosis of autism to put strategies in place.

Every school must have a SEND information report either on its website or available as a hard copy. It will explain how it manages SEND; how it implements the graduated approach, how you can raise concerns, support the school can provide and which support organisations the school can ask for help.

What is the graduated approach?

The graduated approach follows a four-stage cycle: assess, plan, do and review. The school will assess your child and discuss with you strategies they think will help.

They then write a support plan including the outcomes they are hoping to achieve.

Make sure you receive a copy of the plan.

Class teachers and Learning Support Assistants will then use the agreed interventions.

A review and discuss with parents/carers then takes place and the cycle continues. For further details [Identifying and supporting SEND – The Graduated Approach - Lincolnshire County Council](#)

EHC Needs Assessment

The graduated approach often meets the needs of the child, but if more input is needed, like 1-2-1 help, you may decide to apply for an Education and Health Care Needs Assessment.

Again, you do not need a medical diagnosis to apply.

With the school's input, and possibly evidence from your GP and outside agencies, you complete an online referral document.

A multi-agency panel will consider the request and decide if an assessment is necessary within six weeks.

Emotional support

It's now compulsory for all schools to teach pupils about mental health

and wellbeing as part of their health and relationships education.

However, there can be times when young people need some extra support.

Many schools have a dedicated mental health lead and mental health and wellbeing offer. If your child is struggling with their mental health, talk to the school.

You can approach their form tutor/class teacher, Head of Year or SENDCo who can access help from the Healthy Minds Lincolnshire team.

The LIAISE service

Liaise are Lincolnshire County Council's experts in SEND law.

Their role is to help parents and carers and schools work together should there be a breakdown in communication.

You can ring them or fill in their online form to get specialist SEND advice.

If you are looking for more information on SEND in schools or would like more advice on where you can get help, contact the Virtual Autism Hub.

www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/liase
0800 195 1635
liase@lincolnshire.gov.uk

Liase

SEND Information Advice and Support Service in Lincolnshire

A free, impartial and confidential service that provides information, advice and support to parents, carers, and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Lincolnshire.

Liase
SEND Information Advice and Support Service in Lincolnshire



Community Heroes

Rainbow Stars – shining brightly for 10 years!

Co-founders Jane Peck and Hannah Owen are celebrating the 10th anniversary of Rainbow Stars on the 1st of November.

Now a much-loved Sleaford charity with a multi-sensory room, events for the whole family and an allotment, things have come a long way.

How did Rainbow Stars begin?

My son is now 14. When he was little he met all the milestones until he stopped talking at 18 months. It was really hard to find a course for parents and carers that would help us. The nearest one was an Early Birds course in Boston. I fought for it to come to Sleaford and it ran with six families. Hannah [Owen] was one of the parents and we set up Rainbow Stars together. We wanted somewhere where parents and carers could talk openly about the things they were experiencing.

At first it was our little support group



on Facebook. But then we organised monthly play meetings at our local play area and breakfast at local restaurants. It just grew from there.

We started off wanting fifty people to feel less lonely. Now it's snowballed into this massive charity with three thousand people in the Facebook group. Behind each one of those three thousand people is a family.

It's been a mad journey!

Six years ago, the Mayor of Sleaford asked us to become a charity. We were worried about becoming a charity. It was important to us to stay totally voluntary and self-funded. But we did it.

We were offered a building on Kesteven Street before later moving to Masons' premises on Watergate. The Masons have been really good for us. They've raised funds which helps us stay affordable for families.

What's the best thing about Rainbow Stars?

We're open every day and every evening except Thursdays. We offer something for everyone; Siblings Sessions, Curry & Beer nights, Pamper Evenings. The family unit is really important and you often find siblings and parents are on the autistic spectrum too. Some people pop in for coffee and to chat and off-load.

We keep charges right down. For £3 you get fed too using food that was probably grown on our own allotment.

All of this happens with the help of 15 incredible volunteers. Each volunteer has autistic children or grandchildren and/or special needs.

Sleaford have been amazing. A lot of local businesses have supported us. Local restaurants have shut so a big crowd of us can go in and not worry about the noise we're making or behaviour that some people might



not understand.

They now know how difficult it is to go out when you have children with additional needs.

Moy Park, another incredibly supportive local business, gave us £25,000 for our new multi-sensory room.

I feel like Sleaford's eyes have been opened.

Do you have any advice for parents and carers with SEND children?

Yes – find your crew! It's a lonely, dark place when you get that diagnosis, until you meet like-minded people that 'get it'.

Find that community. It makes the world a better place.

Rainbow Stars

Additional Needs Hub
for adults and children

17 Watergate, Sleaford, NG34 7PG

Open daily and most evenings
9.30-2.30 except Thursdays

Evening sessions:

Mondays: Gaming and craft 6-7.30 pm

Tuesday: Siblings Sessions from 6pm

Wednesday: Gaming and craft 6-7.30pm

Friday: Sensory Stars

Saturday: Dungeons and Dragons (once a month)

rainbowstarslincs@hotmail.co.uk

Or find out more information on
Facebook