



Shaping SEND Services with Bury Families.

What is BURY2GETHER?

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BURY2GETHER is Bury's forum, for parents/carers who have a child/young person with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, SEND (aged 0-25) and who live in, and/or access services and schools in Bury.

What is a Parent/Carer Forum?

A parent/carer forum works with Education, Social Care, Health and other services to ensure parent and carer voices are represented when designing and improving services for our children/young people and their families.

In England, there are parent/carer forums in almost all local authority areas.

Forums have a Steering Group of parents who lead this work and listen to the views of other parents in the local area. The Steering Group gathers the most prevalent themes from parents/carers via surveys, consultations and informal conversations such as Question and Answer sessions or Coffee Mornings. Parent/carer representatives then use this information to work with strategic partners to propose changes. We do this through our elected parent/carer Steering Group, who are invited to various groups and boards, to present the collective voice of forum members.

BURY2GETHER is a group of SEND parents/carers that have chosen to help to create change through working together. We choose to work with Services and Commissioners to influence change by working collaboratively with them. We use data collated from Bury parent/carers to present our case. Our parent/carer representatives deliver this by building relationships with partners.

BURY2GETHER has approximately 900 members and a social media reach of over 1,500. We have an open Facebook information page that parent/carers and professionals are able to view and we have a closed Facebook 'Group Chat' facility, encouraging peer-peer support for parent/carer members. It is not a requirement to have a Group Chat facility for the forum, however, this can be a beneficial tool for engaging with parent/carers quickly.

BURY2GETHER is 5 years old and we are one of the newest forums in Greater Manchester. Statistically, this is how we compare (approximate figures):

Rochdale forum - 18 years old - Facebook Group 781 parent/carers (** Rochdale is Bury's statistically comparable neighbour in terms of size and demographics*).

Stockport forum - 13 years old - Facebook Group 1800 parent/carers

Trafford forum - 8 years old - Facebook Group 1000 parent/carers

Forums have similarities to the organisation Healthwatch, who like forums, don't advocate for individual families, but instead represent a collective voice. Healthwatch advocates for their members on issues regarding health and social care services. It has a place to represent collective voice at the Health and Wellbeing Board, within Bury Council, which is a statutory board.

Similarly, BURY2GETHER feeds into various boards and groups. The governance group for SEND in Bury is called the SEND Assurance Board, and this feeds into the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Healthwatch is funded by the Department of Health and Social Care, and receives approximately



Shaping SEND Services with Bury Families.

£122,000 a year (based on 19/20 figures).

As BURY2GETHER is the DfE approved forum, it receives an approximate yearly grant of £15,000, from the charity Contact. The role of Contact is to administer grants, monitor and support forums. BURY2GETHER is therefore a voluntary led, constituted group. All of our parent/carer Steering Group have a voluntary role, in which they are aided by our paid administration support. Our Steering Group members support the forum because they are passionate about evoking change.

BURY2GETHER receives no funding for their forum work from the CCG or the Local Authority. However, other forums in other Local Authority areas in Greater Manchester do choose to be funded by their partners.

What about the other work BURY2GETHER does?

Running the forum is BURY2GETHER's primary aim.

But being parent/carers ourselves, we can't resist applying for grants/bids for projects that will help support our community. These form part of our secondary aims. These have included delivering £4,500 worth of sensory equipment to families during Covid, clubs and activities run from our centre by our volunteers, and funded day trips out for SEND families over the holidays. This year, we also stepped in at the last minute, with a bid for part of the additional funding that the DfE provided Bury with, for children with SEND.

What types of SEND do we represent?

All types of Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities, regardless of diagnosis.

Statistically, autistic children/young people form the largest category nationally within SEND. This amounts to approximately 70% of SEND. Therefore, this is represented similarly within our membership. Despite this, we try to be as inclusive as possible. For example, our current Steering Group have children with the following conditions: Autism, ADHD, SWAN Syndrome, Liver Disease, Rare Chromosome Disorder, Irlen Syndrome, EDS, Osteogenesis Imperfecta and Epilepsy to name a few. And previous Steering Group members have had children who have required complex care, have Down's Syndrome and have been wheelchair users.

What is a parent/carer forum responsible for?

The forum is **not** responsible for ensuring that the Local Authority (LA) or Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) implement the voices of our parent/carers. Our responsibility is to pass on the collective voice of our parent/carers.

The LA, CCG and political leadership are responsible for working with us as equal partners and bringing about change. The willingness of our partners to work in coproduction with us and implement the voice of parent/carers will be judged by the CQC and Ofsted inspectors during the SEND inspection process.

Are we independent?

Yes, we are. And our elected Steering Group members ensure that we stay independent. I'm sure our parent/carer representatives wouldn't have given up the last 5 years of their lives voluntarily, if they thought otherwise.

Are we censored in any way?



Shaping SEND Services with Bury Families.

Absolutely not. Feel free to ask the LA or CCG directly. They will definitely agree that the forum always represents the voice of parent/carers the best we can, presenting measured and balanced conversations, whilst provisioning challenge and scrutiny.

Why do we choose to be the Department for Education (DfE) approved parent/carer forum?

The parent/carer forum is recognised within the SEND Code of practice. There are special privileges that the DfE approved forum holds, such as representations as equal strategic partners at board level, across the CCG and Local Authority. This is a unique opportunity available only to forums. Other parent/carer groups, such as campaigning and lobby groups, do not have this privilege.

We choose to be the DfE approved forum because this allows us to work with the charity Contact, who provide us with invaluable support, such as:

- A regional advisor
- Training
- Peer-to-peer support from other Forums across the Region and Nationally
- Access to regular regional meetings
- Access to the annual National Network of Parent/Carer Forums conference
- Access to additionally support services, such as legal advice and counselling for our volunteers

By choosing to be the DfE approved forum, this gives us the platform to work as strategic partners with the Local Authority and CCG. Partners will therefore be assured to work with us, because of the following:

- Due diligence around this arrangement means that Contact (the DfE delivery partner), monitor our performance and conduct as a Forum.
- The Local Authority and the Forum are required to agree to a Memorandum of Understanding each year, set out by the DfE and Contact.

What are the terms of our DfE grant?

For the grant to be approved, the Local Authority must be in support of the forum and demonstrate working partnership. They must agree to a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to work in co-production, as follows: -

- The Local Authority commits to uphold the principles of the SEND Code of Practice and to work in partnership with the DfE approved local parent/carer forum to improve local services for children and young people with SEND.
- The Local Authority must recognise the independence of the DfE approved parent//carer forum.
- The Local Authority must value the role of the DfE funded parent/carer forum in representing the needs, experiences and views of parent//carers of children and young people with SEND including their role in raising issues, providing constructive feedback through open dialogue and challenging partners when necessary.
- The Local Authority agrees to work together with respect and as equal partners.

Below is the agreement that the forum adheres to:

The forum agrees to the same principles and also signs up to work in partnership.



Shaping SEND Services with Bury Families.

- We commit to uphold the principles of the SEND Code of Practice and to work in partnership with the local authority/health organisations to improve local services for children and young people with SEND.
- We recognise the local authority and health organisations as our strategic local partners.
- We value the role of the local authority and health organisations in carrying out their statutory duties and will raise issues from parent/carers providing constructive feedback through open dialogue, and challenging partners when necessary.
- We agree to work together with respect and as equal partners. I confirm we will abide by the principles of co-production above.

The forum confirms that agreeing to the MOU does not supersede any local partnership agreements or arrangements.

Do any other forums across Greater Manchester choose to be the DfE approved forum?

Yes, there are 10 forums across each of Greater Manchester's 10 Local Authority areas that choose to be the DfE approved forum.

We are linked in with all our Greater Manchester and regional forums and have weekly meetings available to ourselves. We also have a very active WhatsApp group that helps us to compare and share good practice.

Do we belong to any networks?

We choose to be part of the National Network of parent/carer Forums - NNPCF.

The NNPCF represents over 93,000 parent/carer members. BURY2GETHER works closely with our North West Regional NNPCF representative and has the ability to communicate on a weekly basis. The role of the NNPCF is to liaise on a national level with leaders such as Ministers, NHS England, The DfE, etc. They do this in a similar way to forums, by parent/carer representatives joining national strategic meetings.

How is a parent/carer forum part of the process of change for SEND services?

There are many different mechanisms for leading change for SEND services. The forum (BURY2GETHER) is just one part of the process. Other avenues for change are as follows:

- Coproduction for Individuals: The individual circumstances of a family such as EHCPs, compliments and complaints that influence strategic local change for SEND.
- Coproduction for All: The views of parent/carers when consulted with by services that lead to strategic local change for SEND.
- **Strategic Coproduction: The collective voice of parent/carers, represented by the forum (BURY2GETHER) at Strategic Level, in partnership with the LA, CCG and other bodies. This is achieved by parent/carer representatives being included at Strategic Board level to present the voice of parent/carers. Collective voice is then fed into the forum's national channels through Contact and the NNPCF.**
- Healthwatch: Advocate for their members on issues regarding health and social care services. They have a place to represent collective voice at the Health and Wellbeing Board within Bury Council.



Shaping SEND Services with Bury Families.

- IASS - Independent Advice and Support Service: Provides free, impartial information, advice and support to disabled children and young people aged 0-25, and those with SEN, through their parents and carers. Young people aged 16+ can have support in their own right. IASS has its own Steering Group of parent/carers that are able to influence the service.
- Lobby Groups: A body formed to influence legislation on a particular issue.
- Pressure Groups: The group will use demonstrations, petitions, and publicity to influence change locally and nationally.
- Legal action: Individual or group action taken against the Local Authority or CCG that evokes change locally or nationally.
- Local Councillors: Constituents can approach Local Councillors to influence individual or community wide (local level) concerns regarding the local council.
- Members of Parliament (MPs): Constituents can approach one of Bury's 2 MPs, whose primary focus is on evoking national (government level) change.
- Third sector organisations such as charities: Some organisations who have had first hand experience of SEND will collate information/themes and present them to mechanisms for change, such as any government inquiries.
- Schools (such as SEND parents groups and governors): Schools have the ability to evoke change by welcoming internal SEND parent groups to shape the school offer. They also have a governing body, which includes a SEND Governor, that should champion and influence the SEND agenda internally.

Is a parent/carer forum for everyone?

In principle, yes! All parent/carers in Bury are welcome to sign up as a member. All members are welcome to contribute their experiences through our consultations, meeting with services or commissioners, etc, at any time.

Not everyone, at all the time, will feel that being a member of the forum is right for them. The forum has to work **with** the Local Authority and CCG to get things right. We do this by positive engagement. We present the voice of parent/carers and we do this by being present in meetings and building positive relationships, whilst presenting challenge and scrutiny.

Strategic change can be slow paced. This is a frustration for everyone involved.

As a result, parents who are in a particularly difficult part of their SEND journey may not feel the forum is the right place for them at that time.

Although we welcome everyone at every part of their journey, we understand that parents who are (rightly) angry with their family's circumstance, may not resonate with the forum's 'working together' sentiment at a particular time in their own journey. We completely understand that. And there are times when members of our own Steering Group need to take a step back to pursue their own direct action with services and may feel their 'working together' approach may be compromised.

But the forum is fluid. And 5 years down the line, we continue to challenge and scrutinise by working together. We grow and evolve every day. Together, we believe we are stronger.

If anyone does want to become more involved with BURY2GETHER, please send us an email or fill in an expression of interest form on our website.



Shaping SEND Services with Bury Families.

What is our stance on pressure groups and lobby groups?

Good luck to them. We welcome them. There is a place for everyone.

We are all here for the same purpose, which is to bring about positive change for SEND.

They have a different role than ourselves. And we serve different purposes.

The forum still wants to hear the views of parents that are part of these groups.

All that we ask is that we treat each other with mutual respect. We are all in this together.

Some of our members may support the aims and objectives of pressure groups or lobby groups, however BURY2GETHER as an organisation is not in a position to share details of these groups with our members.

Our agreement with the DfE is to work **with** partners at the CCG and LA, so we can't, as an organisation, endorse publicly pressuring them.

Summary:

The forum is privileged to hold a very unique position. We have the ability to influence at a strategic level using collective voice. We are a voluntary led group, run by parent/carers that have a child/young person with SEND. We are doing our best to do the right thing.

We continue to want to hear your voices. Thank you for all your contributions over the last 5 years and thank you for supporting us.

Our voices are louder together.