

# Grapevine

The paper for parents and carers of children with additional needs in Southwark

## Spring 2010

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## 2010: the year of empowerment



The future can be uncertain for us all. How might a new government affect our benefits or our children's schooling? How do we manage as our children get older, as services change or even are withdrawn?

This year, Contact a Family in Southwark are focusing on ways in which we can help families to help themselves. "Skilling yourself up" and creating strong networks are both vital to being more independent as a family and supporting your children towards independence.

We are planning a series of Family Learning events, including Makaton training and story-telling, and workshops on housing and behaviour. We will also be holding events to introduce parents to local activities and facilities, and on the last Friday of every month we are offering group sessions for people filling in repeat applications for Disability Living Allowance.

See our self help and activities pages (9-11) for details of some of these events, and to find out more about how the new Message in a Bottle initiative can help you begin to build networks of support for your family and your child.

Empowerment and "skilling yourself up" will be the focus of our annual conference on 13 May. Your personal invitation will be coming shortly.

### Coming soon!

#### Grapevine letters page:

send us all your news, ideas and feedback—what can we do to make your life easier?

# Contact a Family news

## Yvonne



“Hi, I am Yvonne Lubwama, the new admin and events worker.

“As a parent of Contact a Family I have over the years been able to access the services and have appreciated the support offered.

“When I had the chance to volunteer I was keen to join up and was hopeful that I was giving something back. It was also a chance for me on a personal level to learn and build up my knowledge and support others.

“When a position came up I applied for it. I am pleased to be working for an organisation close to my heart. While I am comfortable working in the admin role this role presents a challenge for me that I am willing to embrace.

“I look forward to meeting you all over the next few months.”  
*Yvonne*

## Prithvi

“Hello, my name is Prithvi Perepa, and I have just joined Contact a Family Southwark as the Older Children’s Services Development



Officer. This is a six-month project focusing on transition of young people with disabilities into adult life.

“I will be meeting people to find out about the needs of families during this transitional process and the support they require. This will help us come up with a future plan about the way we can support families.

“Before joining Contact a Family I worked mainly with children and young people on the autism spectrum. I worked in Southwark previously and am looking forward to working in the borough again and hopefully meeting some familiar faces.”  
*Prithvi*

## Martha is back



“Hi all.

“It’s lovely to be back, after several months with my family and friends in my home country Colombia. My colleagues and you are making me feel at home. Many thanks

for this. I had a wonderful time there, I was able to spend time with my mother and have a lot of cuddles and my mum’s food, although I missed all of you. I had some exciting experiences, meeting professionals, exchanging information and helping families who have children with disabilities.

“But the most exciting news I want to share with all of you is that I am pregnant with twins! They are a boy and a girl, and we are over the moon as we see this as double blessing. It means that I am going to be away again for long period, but in the meantime I am here at Contact a Family, working with all the families and professionals.”  
*Martha*

**New family worker, Carys, will be starting in April. Meet her in the next Grapevine!**



## 30 not out

As many of you will know, Contact a Family has been celebrating 30 years of strengthening families with disabled children from April 2009, and the events and projects are now drawing to a close.

Our anniversary year began in May 2009 with a research report *What makes my family stronger*, which found negative attitudes towards disability coupled with a lack of services to be the main barriers preventing families with disabled children from leading ordinary lives. Findings were used to lobby all political parties during party conference season, and had prominent press coverage.

In August we held the Contact a Family Big Day Out, encouraging and helping families with disabled children to get out and about together. We held celebratory events around the UK, including a picnic party in Hyde Park, attended by many families from Southwark.

Contact a Family's last report *Our family, our future*, published in November, highlighted how many families with disabled children are missing out on family life due to the red tape and prejudice they face. The stories featured in the report, written in the parents' own words, are a unique insight into the lives of families with disabled children, celebrating family life, acknowledging challenges, and talking about hopes, dreams and fears for the future. The report, and an accompanying exhibition of family photographs, were launched at an event at the House of Lords on 4 November, hosted by Baroness Jill Pitkeathley and attended by Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families Ed Balls. Ed Balls said: "Contact a Family has a fantastic history of supporting families with disabled children and providing them with good quality information at the right time."

The report and exhibition then toured the UK as Contact a Family hosted further events in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, bringing families together with politicians to talk about some of the issues that they face and play a role in getting families with disabled children moved up the political agenda.

Srabani Sen, Chief Executive of Contact a Family, said: "We would like to say a huge thank you to all families for helping to make our 30th anniversary celebrations so special. It really has been a marvellous year in which we've embraced the opportunity to celebrate Contact a Family's achievements over the last three decades and raise awareness of some of the many issues for families with disabled children."

## Counting the Costs how are your finances now?

In 2008 Contact a Family asked families about their finances and the results were shocking, with one in six families reporting that they were going without food and heating.

Now, two years on, we would like to ask families about their finances again so that we are able to demonstrate if and how things have changed. There is a lot of talk that the economy has turned a corner and things are beginning to improve. But we would like to know what your experience is.

Counting the Costs 2010 will help us to raise awareness of the money worries specific to the families we support and to campaign for change.

Please take the time to fill out our short online survey, which you can find at:  
<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/T2S2ZZF>

# inside Southwark: other agencies

## Community Action Southwark news

Community Action Southwark (CAS) has launched Southwark Forum which is a new way for all voluntary and community groups to get together and share concerns, news and views.

There are five subgroups, each supporting organisations providing services linked to children, adults, legal advice, skills (employment and skills training), or space (environment, regeneration, housing and safety).

Representatives from each subgroup will link with Council representatives from the corresponding department at joint meetings of the Council and CAS. This will give our sector the chance to influence policy at the highest level.

In order that everyone can keep up to date, CAS has started to use Basecamp which is a shared area on the internet. Anyone in the group can share documents and news and make comments and suggestions without having to go to a meeting.

## multi-agency work

### Together Understanding Autism in the Early Years conference report

Parents and practitioners came together on 12 February to develop a shared vision of how young children with autism and related conditions should be included within our community. It was a lively and positive day rounded off by a visioning session when

everyone was asked to imagine, and then describe, the future.

Naomi Gilbert, Manager of Contact a Family, said: "I imagined a feeling of relief that people with autism were accepted. Many people had very similar visions, and some themes, such as acceptance and being as one, came up repeatedly."

The result of all this imagining was captured in a colourful and easy to understand drawing. For a full review of the conference and a photo of the drawing, see the spring issue of Parent Carers' Council newsletter, *Parents' Voices* (see page 7).

## help needed

The Family Information Service (FIS) is keen to hear from families about services they should include in the information they give out to enquirers. Have you used a service and want to let other families know about it? The FIS also want your views on services they already advertise. This will help them give the most useful information to other families and the professionals who support them. (FIS contact details are on page 9.)

The multi-agency Autism Strategy Group wants to hear about services useful to families with a child on the autistic spectrum. This could be training or a play group or a helpful book, film or website and may not be autism-specific. Don't keep it to yourself, email [naomi.gilbert@cafamily.org.uk](mailto:naomi.gilbert@cafamily.org.uk) and she will pass it on.

Contact a Family is gathering information about services helpful to families with a teenager. What supports your young person in their journey to independence and adulthood, or supports you in letting go? Contact Prithvi on **020 7277 4436**.

# inside Southwark: local authority

## transition

Young people who have a Statement of Educational Need have a review of their potential future need for services and their plans for education and/or employment at age 14. This is called the Year 9 Review.

Children's and adult services have devised a protocol or pathway to make sure that a plan is in place for all young people who will receive a service as an adult.

New toolkits have been devised to support families with transition and these will be printed soon. Parents and professionals have been involved in the development of the guides which will be suitable for parents and young people.

Contact a Family is mapping existing services which support families and young people approaching adulthood, particularly those who would not be eligible for adult services. Prithvi Perepa has joined us (see page 2) to help families identify the services which help them to support their young person to independence and adult life and what they feel is missing.

## filling the gaps for two-year-olds by Family Worker, Abi Melotte

I found out during our practitioners' meeting in Nunhead and Peckham locality that there is an early years pilot scheme providing free nursery places for two year olds. So when I saw one of our parents at our drop-in at Rye Oak Children's Centre I asked if she would like to apply for her son. We filled out the form and I sent it off the same day. I got a reply within a week and the placement started the following week.

The scheme is aimed at children who would benefit from additional support around their early development before the age of three. The criteria which allowed our family to access this scheme was very straight forward; all he needed was to be assessed as needing additional support.

As our family's child had autism this was taken into consideration when finding a placement for him and the nursery were happy to offer him a place.

At the time of writing, he has been attending the nursery for a week and has settled in really well. The placement will be funded until he is offered a free place at a nursery when he turns three years old.

The scheme is open to families of a child with additional needs, aged two, who get one of the qualifying benefits, including Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, or tax credit. For full details or a referral, get in touch with one of the family workers at Contact a Family:

**020 7277 4436**

## Credit Crunch at the council

It's not just families that have been feeling the pinch over the last two years. Local authorities all over the country have been facing the same tightened budgets, in addition to hiring freezes and the impossible task of balancing all of these difficulties against the increasing needs of their service users.

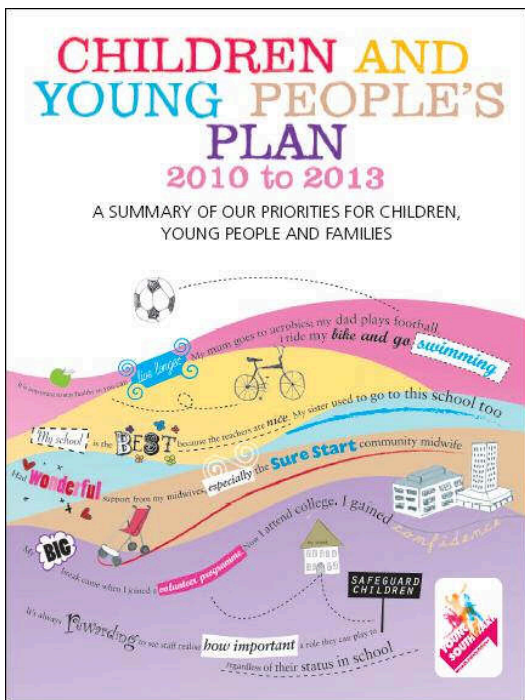
Southwark is no exception, and with the election looming, carrying with it doubts over public spending and central government priorities, plus recent reports of 150 council jobs to be axed, things may yet get tougher.

# inside Southwark: local policy

## Young Southwark: Children and Young People's Plan

Last year, over 1000 young people, parents, carers and professionals gave their views to Young Southwark on how services work for young people and their families. You may have attended one of their Tell Us Your Story sessions in libraries and schools.

From that consultation, Young Southwark have put together the Children and Young People's Plan in draft form for 2010-2013, stating how they plan to improve services over the next three years.



Consultation has now finished, but you can get copies of the draft plan and summary online at:

<http://www.southwark.gov.uk/YourServices/childrenandfamilies/YoungSouthwarkPartnership/cyppconsultation.html>

## Aiming High for Disabled Children

### short breaks

Funding through Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC) for short breaks has provided a number of exciting new activities for children and young people in the borough. Keep up to date with what is available now and what is planned for next year at: <http://www.southwark.gov.uk/YourServices/childrenandfamilies/ChildrenandFamilyCare/aiminghigh.html>

Small grant funding is also available to support voluntary and independent groups working in the borough. Grants may be up to £500 for activities and up to £1000 for equipment or refurbishment costs. For details please contact Mary Braid at Community Action Southwark on **020 7703 2368** or email [admin@casouthwark.org.uk](mailto:admin@casouthwark.org.uk)

### parent participation

A recent survey sent to parent forums shows that since the start of the AHDC programme more areas are now producing newsletters for families of disabled children, involving parents in consultations and providing structured support for parent forums.

Grant levels for parent participation have been confirmed for 2010-11, and £10,000 is once again available to a parent group in each area working to improve local services. Southwark Parent Carer Council will be applying for the Southwark grant this April.

You can read more about activities taking place across England on the Together for Disabled Children website:

<http://www.togetherfdc.org/topics/>

# inside Southwark: local policy

## “The social and economic value of short breaks”

Action for Children and the Every Disabled Child Matters campaign have commissioned a report into the importance of short breaks in terms of savings to the public purse.

The report found that, as well as being a profoundly important source of support for families, short breaks can save the state a minimum of £174 million each year, by:

- reducing the number of referrals of disabled children to long-term residential care
- making families less stressed
- reducing the need for emotional or behavioural provision for siblings.

The report concluded that it is crucial that funding for these programmes is guaranteed beyond 2011, to “sustain and embed” the positive differences that can be made financially and in terms of the wellbeing of our families.

You can get a full copy of the report at:  
<http://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/valueofshortbreaks>

## Worried about what the election will bring for you and your child?

Every Disabled Child Matters is asking parents to get their local candidates to sign up to a Constituency Pledge, stating how they will represent the interests of disabled children and their families:

[http://www.ncb.org.uk/edcm/Constituency\\_Pledge.pdf](http://www.ncb.org.uk/edcm/Constituency_Pledge.pdf)

See the full ECDM election toolkit here:

[http://www.ncb.org.uk/edcm/constituency\\_pledge/election\\_toolkit.aspx](http://www.ncb.org.uk/edcm/constituency_pledge/election_toolkit.aspx)

## Southwark Parent Carers' Council

Southwark Parent Carers' Council (PCC) has had an extraordinary year of growth and consolidation. The PCC currently represents a forum of 214 local parent carers, meeting regularly to address service issues and strengthen its involvement in local policy-making and delivery.

The PCC has representation on a number of key decision-making boards within Southwark and is actively looking to expand this, particularly in the areas of education and health. It is also a focus for consultation with parent carers of children with additional needs.

The PCC will be applying for the local Aiming High parent participation grant in April to continue its work, but with government funding insecure beyond spring 2011, key among its priorities is long-term sustainability. The PCC intends to address not just the specific consultation requirements of the local authority, but also, through long-term stability, to impose its own agenda and get the services our families need and have a right to.

If you are interested in finding out more about the Southwark Parent Carers' Council, how you can influence local services for your children, or simply what sort of activities are on offer for you and your family in Southwark, get in touch.

Log on and find our website and eforum at  
<http://www.southwarkpcc.org.uk>

Or contact us by phone or email:  
**020 7277 4436**  
[info@southwarkpcc.org.uk](mailto:info@southwarkpcc.org.uk)

  
**southwarkparentcarers council**

## Cold Weather Payments



Winter is finally coming to an end, and it's been a doozy. The UK has been in the grip of some of the severest winter weather for decades, and while it's meant days off school and snowball fights for some, for people on restricted budgets it's meant a struggle to keep warm and arrange last-minute childcare.

Between November 2009 and the end of March 2010, the Government has been releasing cold weather payments to help with these additional costs to people on a low income, including any families receiving a disabled child premium. Each £25 payment is triggered when a local weather station records temperatures below freezing for seven days in a row. By January 2010, payments had been triggered by nearly three-quarters of the weather stations, although there has been confusion about who is eligible and when.

If you were due to receive a payment, it should have been paid directly into your bank account by the Department of Work and Pensions. You can check whether one was triggered in your postal area at:

<http://pensions.direct.gov.uk/en/cold-weather-payment/home.asp>

Did you receive a Cold Weather Payment this year? Did it help? Call us or email: [southwark.office@cafamily.org.uk](mailto:southwark.office@cafamily.org.uk)

## Cash Counts

Contact a Family has launched Cash Counts, a new online service dedicated to ensuring families with disabled children are getting every penny they are entitled to. Cash Counts includes:

- an online benefits calculator
- a top tips guide on the benefits available to families with disabled children
- a frequently asked questions page to help families navigate the benefits system.

Families with disabled children face huge financial challenges. They incur additional costs caring for their child – childcare, heating, transport, home adaptations and equipment. Despite this, many families are not claiming the benefits they are entitled to.

Srabani Sen, Chief Executive of Contact a Family, says: "We would urge families with a disabled child to use Cash Counts or telephone our helpline to make sure they are getting every penny they are entitled to."

<http://www.cafamily.org.uk/cashcounts>  
helpline: 0808 808 3555

## need advice?

**Blackfriars Advice Centre** is offering a new housebound service to at-risk groups, including families of very young children. They can offer help on a range of topics, such as debt, housing and benefits.

If you need to access this service, speak to one of the Family Workers at Contact a Family, who can make a referral for you.

**020 7277 4436**

## DLA workshops

Contact a Family Southwark are holding group sessions on the last Friday of every month for parents completing a repeat application for Disability Living Allowance.

It's a chance to chat to other parents, thrash out typical issues with the application, and to take control and get confident with the process of applying.

Sessions are 10am-12pm at **Contact a Family**  
54 Camberwell Road, SE5 0EN

**Friday 26 March**

**Friday 30 April**

**Friday 28 May**

To book a place, contact Alice:

**020 7277 4436**

## Family Information Service

Southwark FIS is here to help families with children aged 0-19 find the information they need. They can provide impartial information on a range of issues including:

**childminders:** including childcare during unsociable hours

**day nurseries:** nursery schools and classes

**tax credits:** and help with childcare costs

**nursery education:** getting a free place for your child

**pre-schools**

**out of school childcare and play:**

activities for 5-12 year olds in your area

**extended school services:** services before and after school hours

**parent and toddler groups**

**schooling:** local primary and secondary schools, plus educating at home and independent schools

**leisure:** swimming classes, soft play, dance, music, sport, library story-time, martial arts, tumble-tots etc.

**special needs:** support groups and services, for children and young people aged up to 21

**support groups for parents and carers recruitment information:** for people who wish to make childcare their career

Contact the telephone helpline:

**0800 013 0639**

Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.00pm

or email:

**family.info@southwark.gov.uk**

**www.southwark.gov.uk/familyinfo**

## Message in a Bottle

Message in a Bottle is a simple idea originally designed to encourage vulnerable people, living on their own, to keep basic personal and medical details on a standard form and in a common location where they can be easily found in an emergency. But it has a usefulness far beyond this.

In partnership with other local voluntary agencies and the emergency services, Contact a Family is planning a new pilot scheme, bringing Message in a Bottle to families with disabled children and others with vulnerable people depending on them.

It's a quick and easy way to find out vital information about someone in an emergency, and will save valuable time. A longer-term benefit is that it encourages people to plan for emergencies by building relationships and increasing circles of support, which can, in turn, lead to stronger and safer communities.

Watch this space for more information, for how to access the scheme, and how to get the most out of it for your family.

## Contact a Family Events

Join Contact a Family and receive our events programme. To receive regular email updates on all our events and activities, we need a valid current email address.

And remember, if you want to book an event, a phone call is not enough

**RETURN YOUR BOOKING FORM!**

Contact Becky Jones:  
**rebecca.jones@cafamily.org uk**  
**020 7277 4436**

## new disability sports clubs

There are three new disability sports clubs in Southwark for 2010. The clubs are free and are for both girls and boys. These are:

### boccia and new-age kurling

ages 8+  
Tuesdays, 4.30-6pm  
City of London Academy, SE1 5LA

### disability cricket

ages 8+  
Thursdays, 4.30-6pm  
City of London Academy, SE1 5LA

### youth disability football

ages 10-14  
Tuesdays, 5-6.30pm  
Brimmington Park Astro turf,  
Clifton Crescent, Peckham SE15

For information about these clubs, or other disability sports clubs in Southwark, visit **www.southwark.gov.uk/sport** or contact Glyn Newberry, Community Sports Officer (disabilities) on 020 7525 1105 or **glyn.newberry@southwark.gov.uk**.

## cinema card

The Cinema Exhibitors Association Card entitles you to one free ticket when you accompany someone with a disability to the cinema.

To qualify for the card, you or your child will need to be:

receiving Disability Living Allowance OR registered blind

It costs £5.50 to apply, and the card is valid for one year.

You can find out more information on the cinemas that use this scheme, and download an application form, at the CEA website:

**<http://www.ceacard.co.uk/>**

or we have a stock of application forms at the Contact a Family offices:

**020 7277 4436**

Information about subtitled or audio-described film showings can be found here:

**<http://www.yourlocalcinema.com/>**

## Access 4 All

Community Action Southwark are holding drop-in play sessions for children with autism and related conditions and their families.

The free sessions take place at the Ellen Brown Play Centre in Spa Gardens, and it's your chance to have exclusive access to indoor and outdoor facilities and snacks.

Your child can take part in fun and exciting play activities that help social, physical, intellectual and emotional development.

To find out more, contact  
Mary: **020 7358 4834**  
or Peter: **020 7525 1102**

# drop-ins and support

## Down's syndrome play group

A new monthly drop-in and play group, held in Lambeth, but open to parents of children with Down's syndrome in other boroughs.

The sessions run from **10am to 12pm**, and activities will be provided for all ages.

The next sessions are:

**10 April**

**1 May**

**12 June**

at: **Chandlers Hall**

15 Lambeth Walk, SE11 6DU

## NAS support groups

A new support group for parents of children of all ages with autistic spectrum conditions replaces the Roebuck pub group.

The group will be meeting **10am-12pm** at:

**Alfred Salter Primary School**

Quebec Way, Rotherhithe, SE16

**Friday 19 March**

**Friday 23 April**

**Friday 21 May**

**Friday 25 June**

A second support group takes place **7.30-9.30pm** on the last Wednesday of each month at:

**the Magnolia pub (the Mag)**

211 Lordship Lane, East Dulwich SE22

**Wednesday 31 March**

**Wednesday 28 April**

**Wednesday 26 May**

**Wednesday 30 June**

Both groups are run by volunteer parents of children with ASC, and all are warmly welcomed.

## Being Dad

Barnardo's have received money from the Parenting Fund to run a series of activities aimed at fathers from the African Caribbean community. The first of these is a six-week parenting programme for fathers and male carers who may need additional support. It takes place at Peckham Library, beginning on 31 March, and is free.

Referrals can come from dads themselves or from agencies and professionals as part of the Common Assessment.

For more information or to make a self-referral, contact Roksana Akhtar:

**020 8498 7148** or

**roksana.akhtar@barnardos.org.uk**

## out of work and blue?

The Southwark Psychological Therapies Service offers free talking therapy to adults in Southwark suffering from depression, anxiety, stress or low mood.

A new service is now available for parents experiencing anxiety and depression related to worklessness.

A vocational team can address practical issues such as benefits and job search, and therapy is offered in non-intensive courses of 6 weeks, and intensive courses of 20 weeks.

Note: there is a waiting list for intensive therapy.

You can refer yourself for this service, and crèche facilities are provided at some venues.

Contact SPTS on: **020 3228 2194**

or email: **sptsadmin@slam.nhs.uk**

# what we've been up to

## ice skating



During half term we took a trip to Streatham Ice Arena – everyone seemed to take a tumble, but by the end all the children had got the hang of it (mums, dads and staff didn't do so well!). If your family would like to have a go on the ice you can get the 133 from Elephant and Castle straight to the Ice Rink with prices starting at £5 per person (please call 020 8769 7771 for further details).

## MBG Funhouse



On the 30 January we took around ten families to MBG Funhouse, an excellent activity centre which runs gardening, arts and crafts, hair and beauty and sports activities among many others. If you are interested in popping along to check it out with us on Saturday 24 April, please fill out the enclosed booking form. Alternatively you can go along any Saturday to 1 Kenbury Street (just off Coldharbour Lane).

## half term at the Tate



The Tate Modern arranged a special one-off event for families to find out more about some of the works in the gallery and create some masterpieces of their own!

## swim and story



After working up an appetite at one of the disability swims at Peckham

Pulse, we had some lunch and an afternoon of storytelling in the Children's Pod at Peckham Library. Peckham Pulse are running disability family swimming sessions in the Hydro Pool on Saturdays, 8-9am, and Sundays, 11am-12pm.

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