

Family Advice Service

Impact Report 2021-2022

produced by
absolutely
MARKETING

 **Beams**
Supporting disabled children & families

RCN: 1054129

We Are Beams



"I feel overwhelmed in dealing with both of my children with additional needs, as well as applying for an EHCP for my daughter, working a full-time stressful job, managing my own health needs, alongside Dealing with the COVID situation. If I did not receive support I do not think I would be able to cope"

Parent survey 2022

We support over 450 disabled children and their families at any one time through our menu of services. These are:

- **Family Advice Service**
- **Short Breaks Service**
- **Dragon's Retreat Respite Unit**
- **Direct Payment Service**
- **Brokerage Service**
- **Payroll Services for parents and small businesses**

The disabled children and young people who access our services will typically have one or more learning difficulties, complex health needs, physical or sensory impairment, challenging behaviour, Autism or severe ADHD.

Caring for a disabled child 24/7 can put extreme pressure on a family with strain on relationships, mental health and wellbeing as well as finances.

In areas such as Gravesham English is not the first language for the family and they struggle to get the help they need from the local authority such as basic equipment, filling in paperwork for

Additionally we are able to co-facilitate a range of training opportunities for professionals, all of which improve the family life.

We have a designated male carers support group, alongside general support groups and a siblings club. Our intention is to offer an holistic approach to the whole family.

The disabled child or young person aged between 4-18 years

benefits and securing a place in a suitable SEN school. Some of the parents may also be disabled, have learning difficulties and many are from single parent households.

All this extra stress can make a family feel very overwhelmed, isolated and unable to cope.

The Beams' Family Advice Team is usually the first point of contact into the charity for most parents. The first contact will be emotional, sometimes tearful when the parent of a disabled child is desperate, seeking help and advice and has no one else to turn to.

Parents and carers may be referred by the local school, GP, Healthcare Practitioner or they can self-refer, with or without a diagnosis for their child

The role of the Family advice team is to provide the right advice and support to parents so that they can make the best choices for their disabled child. The advice we give is for any financial matters, education, health, transport and mobility, emotional support for parents and offering parenting programmes so that the family can meet the disabled child's needs.

The Family Advice Service supports families in Dartford, Gravesham and Sevenoaks, although helpline calls are received from a wider area, particularly neighbouring Boroughs.

can then be referred to our Short Break Service to see if any activities planned are suitable for them or other Beams' services will be offered to the family.

Our collaboration partners typically include community paediatricians, speech and language therapists, specialist nurses, education professionals and local voluntary organisations such as the National Autistic Society, Homestart, SALUS Group and Kent PACT.

Our Experience and Child Protection

Our Experience

We at Beams has been in existence for 25 years. We are well established in the local community. Our Advisors have the following experience:

- Eight team members have substantial personal experience of living with a disabled child
- 20 years' experience of developing and managing an holistic service
- 20 years' experience working knowledge of special educational needs and disability law
- Extensive experience of multi-agency /partnership working
- Training and experience of key worker/ lead professional role
- Autism Spectrum Disorder trainer (Cygnet Parenting Programs)
- Substantial involvement in strategic planning for disability services in Kent.
- Degree, masters degree in law, and have completed legal training on the Children and Families Act 2014 with SOSSEN and the CDC (council for disabled children).
- ILM (institute of leadership and management) level 3 award
- PTTLS (Preparation to Teach in the Lifelong Sector) Teaching qualification to teach adults
- Licensed to deliver and train facilitators for Cygnet ASD parenting programme
- Trained to deliver Webster Stratton parenting programme
- Ipea SEND Law training level 1
- National Autistic Society CPD accredited course – Women and Girls on the Spectrum
- Emergency First Aid
- Foundation course on Makaton signing
- Introduction to counselling
- Child protection training
- Lone worker training
- Solihull approach foundation course
- MHFA England - Youth Mental Health Aware Training
- Zero Suicide Alliance - Suicide awareness training
- Zero Suicide Alliance - Step up module in suicide awareness training.
- Headstart - Resilience conversation training
- Future Learn - Psychological First Aid: Supporting Children and Young People training

Child Protection-Children in Need

This is a priority within the charity. Our Head of Charity is a Safeguarding lead and is a part of the Kent Board. Beams have safeguarding policies, training and procedures to ensure that every child, regardless of their age, gender, religion or ethnicity, can be protected from harm.

This means that we aim to;

- Protect children from abuse and maltreatment.
- Prevent harm to children's health or development.
- Ensure children grow up with the provision of safe and effective care.
- Take action to enable all children and young people to have the best outcomes.

An example of a referral made this year for safeguarding was on the basis of neglect and emotional abuse. This was not an intentional case of neglect. The family's circumstances which included mental health issues and domestic violence meant that the child was not accessing school and parents were also unable to get the child to routine medical appointments. The child was neglecting all self-care and isolating themselves in their bedroom. Parents did not have the necessary motivation, ability or

skills to change this, and this is a 2019 ongoing child protection case.

Most severe cases we have worked on recently;

- Child with significant, complex needs including ASD.
- Exclusion from school.
- Extreme violence towards mother, sibling and extended family.
- Manipulative and controlling behaviour.
- Several A&E admissions due to extreme episodes of behaviour.
- Engaging in highly dangerous, promiscuous behaviour.

SEN and Disability in Kent

When Ofsted and Care Quality Commission undertook their inspection of services in early 2019, they highlighted that too many children and young people with SEND do not get the support they need in Kent.

It is estimated that **24.4%** of people aged **16-64** considered themselves to be disabled

We have also seen an increase in the amount of young people identified with SEND, whilst over the same period there has been a decrease in the proportion of children receiving help. There has also been a significant increase in young people needing an EHCP (Education Health Care Plan), and they are less likely to be at a mainstream school which is behind the rest of the UK.

At least **41%** of these will have a diagnosis of **ASD** which is also above the national average of **30%**

There are still young people that have not returned to education since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020.

Beams has seen a significant increase in the amount of calls on education support and at least **80%** of calls to the service are on this topic.

- There just under 37,000 school-aged children and young people with SEND in Kent.
- Approximately 1 in 5 of primary and secondary pupils and 1 in 7 pupils in special school with SEN support have social, emotional and mental health as a primary need

In Kent we have seen an increase in the number of school-aged children and young people identified with SEND and there has been an increase in the proportion who have an Education Health and Care (EHC) Plan- Kent's Strategy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities 2021-2024

Source: Kent strategy for young people with SEND 2021-2024 published report.



Kent Needs Analysis Report 2022 recorded that;

- Dartford and Gravesham are the highest ranking districts for BAME population in Kent. They have the highest number of children with English as a second language.
- Dartford is ranked second in the county for children with a hearing impairment who have specific needs. It is also ranked third for the percentage of young people who are carers. The anecdotal stories of county lines activity demonstrates the need to protect all vulnerable young people in the area, especially those with ASD who are susceptible to grooming by organised crimes

- Gravesham recorded issues of concern such as the achievement gap for those in receipt of free school meals and accessing food banks. There is also a direct link to disability.
- West Kent has very high numbers of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) including moderate learning difficulties, physical disability, severe learning difficulties and social and emotional health difficulties (in total over 1,000 children in Maidstone) and is within the top three ranking in Kent, per need.
- Sevenoaks has the highest percentage of young people with Special Educational Needs with an Education and

Health Care Plan at 5%, and the highest number of children and young people with physical disability across Kent and Medway. There are several specialist schools in Sevenoaks and West Kent which may explain the higher numbers of resident young people with SEN and physical disability. Sevenoaks also have the highest proportion of children in low income families living with a lone parent. As SEN and disability can be the cause of a relationship break up and disability can put pressure on finances, this may be significant in relation to this theme. Swanley and St Mary's ward fall within the 10% most deprived in Kent.

Family Advice Outputs 2021-2022

In 2021-2022 Family Advice achieved the following outputs through a combination of telephone advice, one to one sessions, parent workshops drop in clinics, support at school and parent support groups.

- The team processed 2841 enquiries, which came in via the helpline, email, social media, events and drop in clinics
- Family advice facilitated 344 individual advice appointments.
- 59 parents accessed the Cygnet Parenting Programme
- 102 parents attended our parent support groups

Our proven outcomes are:

- Reduced social isolation for parent and child
- Improved health and well-being of family
- Better educational outcomes for the child
- Increased confidence in dealing with a disabled child
- New parenting skills and coping strategies
- Building strong relationships with other parents
- Prevent a family from falling into crisis

*"I have seen the positive and life changing impact that Beams has had on the parents of my SEND students" **Teacher 2022***



Impact of Family Advice Services

99% of respondents were very satisfied by the services received by Family Advice

98% felt that the Family Advice staff understood their concerns

100% would recommend the family Advice service to others

97% felt that the service had a positive impact on their health and wellbeing and their child

Prior to using Beams services **89%** of respondents felt some isolation, afterwards **80%** felt none or less isolation.



Parents were asked

Tell us a little of how you feel today. What would be the consequences of not receiving any support?

"Feel physically and mentally exhausted, trying to battle education, find ways to understand and support my two very different children at home and school. My son hates leaving the house so I feel stuck. Consequences could result in marriage break down, mental health break down, children out of school completely"

"If no support was provided then there would be no respite for us. The contribution to EHC plan from Beams is valuable as he has settled well in Beams. He enjoys play schemes and likes meeting staff at the premises. His independence skills have developed at Dragons Retreat"

"I am Exhausted, lockdown has taken its toll on us being at home with my daughter 24/7. I had no support is in place at all, it's made me anxious, tearful and very isolated having to deal with her all alone during lockdown, added to the fact that she now saying she does not want to go back to college as she prefers to be at home. Beams help came at just the right time for me and my daughter is now back at college. The future looks so much better"

What difference do we make?

"Beams helped me feel more positive about the future. I still feel overwhelmed at times but am more able to deal with things now. My daughter's behaviour was very challenging". The Family Advisor gave me coping strategies and I am able to tackle the cause of my daughter's bad

behaviour and prevent it, rather than not to just react to it"

"Beams have been vital for our family. We utilise many of the services. Help with school issues and EHCPs, Annual Reviews, support groups, play schemes for some holiday respite, family trips, family advice, many, many things! Our boys wouldn't be in the position without Beams"

"Without We Are Beams my daughter wouldn't have her EHCP, she wouldn't have such good support at school, they helped us with applying for the right benefits and even helped us with our council when no one else could"

"Having someone to talk things through is great. Because we access so many services via Beams they are like a family so it's like talking to another family member about your current issues. I feel ok"

Case Studies - Greg's Story

Greg is 16 and has been home educated since he was 4 years old by his father who was previously a head teacher of a primary school.

Greg has ASD and suffers high levels of anxiety and his family thought that the local school would not be able to meet his needs. His father focussed purely towards the academic side of education rather than his social and emotional wellbeing. He knows that this was a mistake as

Greg is now unable to socialise, can't manage risk, does not always behave in an appropriate manner and has no friends. Greg is now prone to violent outbursts and has attacked his parents leaving mum with significant injuries. The family were at crisis point before they called us and fear Greg will end up in secured accommodation without support.

Our Family Advisors have the wealth of knowledge and experience to signpost,

support and guide the whole family through their turmoil. We will ensure that all agencies work together, we will support the family to raise their concerns to the police, social services and educational psychologists. There is currently no provision in Kent that can support Greg's needs so we will continue to ensure that Greg is offered the best facility for his needs and that his family are kept safe.

Anna's Story

Anna's life has been turned around by the help she received from our Family Advice service. She was bullied at school for being different. She tried to mask her ASD and ADHD but the enormous pressures from social media, teenage girls' friendships and keeping up with the school curriculum were too much for her to cope with in lockdown so this led her to being sectioned last year under the Mental Health Act.

Anna's mother was then referred to our Family Advice Team.

After supporting mum by attending meetings with the local authority we managed to get Anna a place at an Independent College that offered courses in land-based studies for students who have additional educational needs in an informal rural environment.

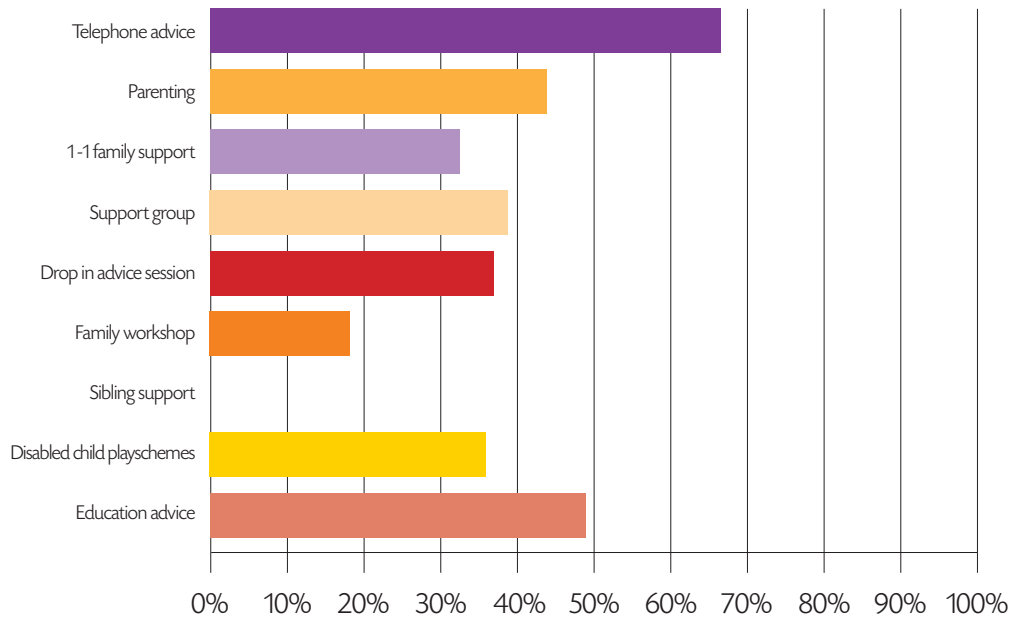
Anna is a very bright girl who is now thriving in an environment that suits her needs.

She loves biology, she has been predicted to do well with her A Levels and has plans to become a vet. She is now comfortable enough to communicate with our Beams family Advisor herself. Anna is no longer the person she was, she has the potential for a very successful life in the future.

Anna said " Beams made me see that I could have a future for the first time. I have made positive changes to my life with Beams at my side"

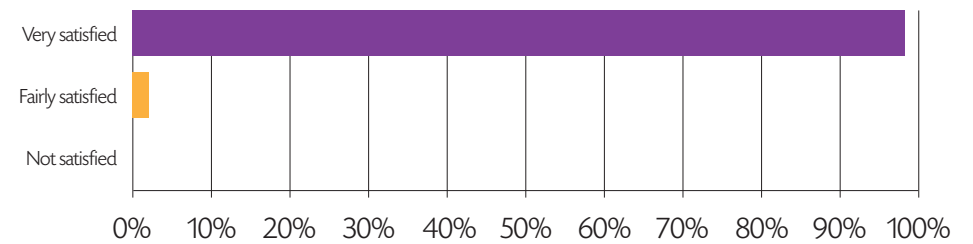
Family Advice Follow up Questionnaire 2021/2022

What services have you received from We Are Beams?



Answer choices	Responses
Telephone advice	66%
Parenting course	45%
1-1family suppon	33%
Support group	40%
Drop in advice session	38%
Family workshop	18%
Sibling support	0%
Disabled child play schemes	36%
Education advice	50%
Total Respondents: 61	

How would you describe your level of overall satisfaction with Family Advice services received?

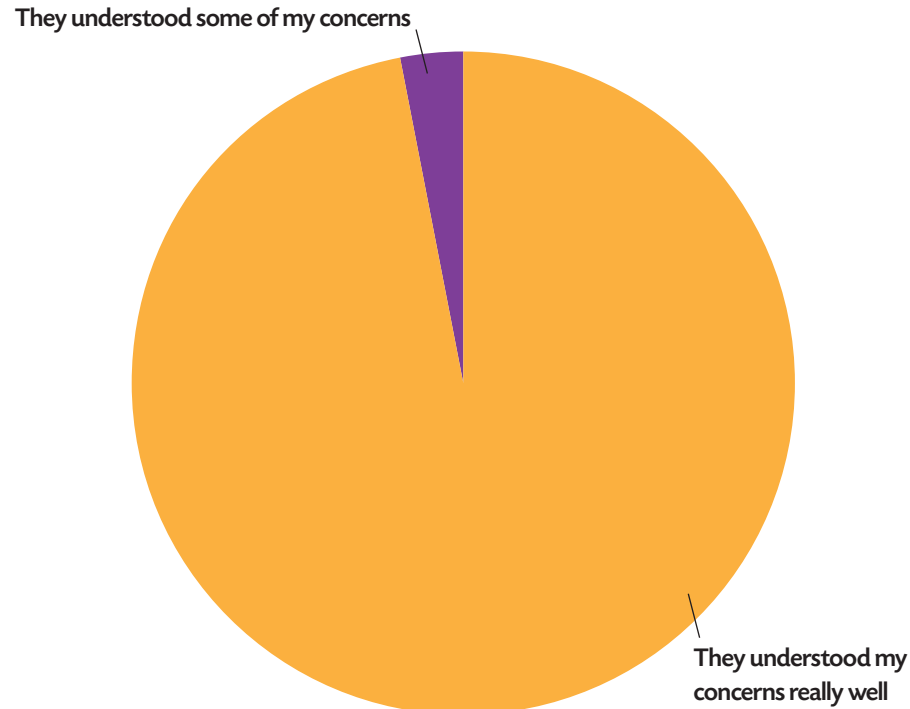


Answer choices	Responses
Very satisfied	99%
Fairly satisfied	2%
Not satisfied	0%
Total Respondents: 62	

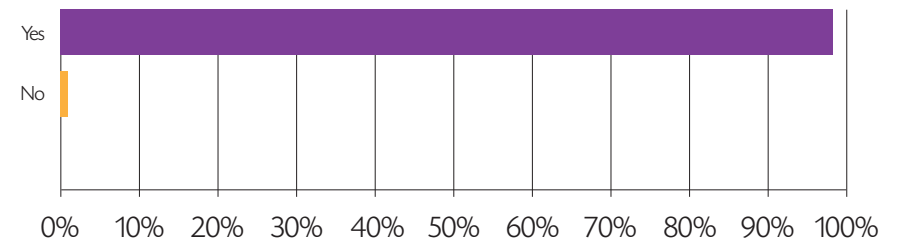


Family Advice Follow up Questionnaire 2021/2022

How well did you feel our staff member understood your concerns?

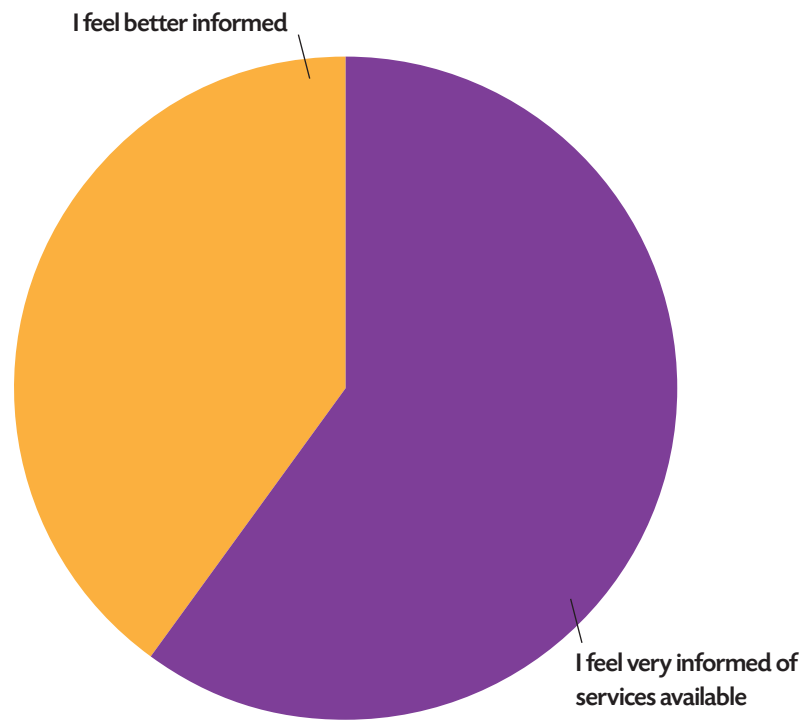


Do you feel We Are Beams has had a positive impact on your health and well-being of your child?



Family Advice Follow up Questionnaire 2021/2022

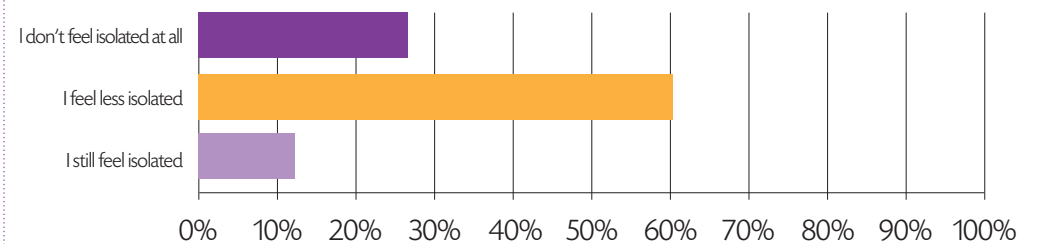
Having accessed the Family Advice, how informed do you now feel with regards to accessing the services available for parents and carers of a disabled child?



Answer choices	Responses
I feel very informed of services available	55%
I feel better informed	45%
I don't feel informed at all	0%

Total Respondents: 60

Having received help from the Family Advice Service, how isolated do you feel as a parent/carer of a disabled child/young person?



Answer choices	Responses
I don't feel isolated at all	28%
I feel less isolated	60%
I still feel isolated	13%

Total Respondents: 61

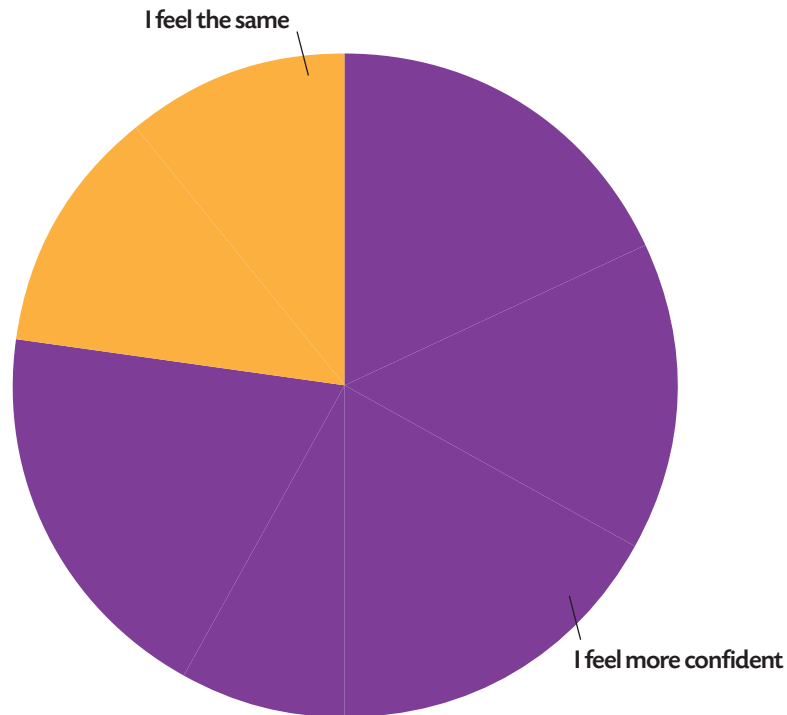
"Beams helped me feel more positive about the future. I still feel overwhelmed at times but am more able to deal with things now. My daughter's behaviour was very challenging".

"Having someone to talk things through is great. Because we access so many services via Beams they are like a family so it's like talking to another family member about your current issues. I feel ok"

"I have always found the support from We Are Beams invaluable. From Dez first helping with the EHCP process 5 years ago to helping me with post 16 transition to Sue and team running the parenting course - it has all been an amazing support for both myself and Tilly.."

Family Advice Follow up Questionnaire 2021/2022

Having received the services of Family Advice, how confident are you dealing with your child's disability?



Answer choices

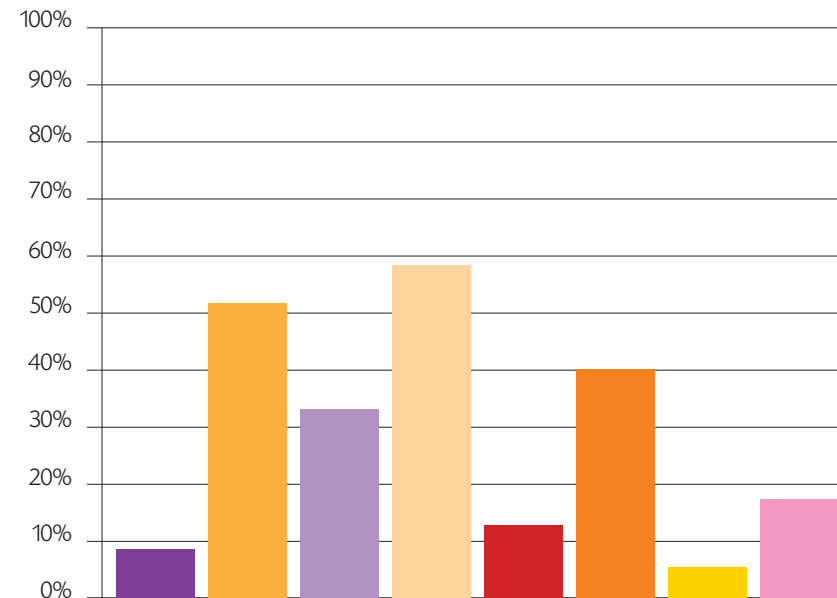
- I feel more confident
- I feel the same
- I feel less confident

Total Respondents: 61

Responses

- 77%
- 23%
- 0%

If we had not supported you or your family, could any of the following statements be true for you?



Answer choices

- My child may have been excluded from school
- My child would not be receiving the right support at school
- The family would have broken down and been in crisis
- My mental health would be affected
- My marriage may have broken down
- My child would be socially isolated
- My child may have been placed in local authority care
- None of the above applies to me

Responses

- 9%
- 52%
- 34%
- 59%
- 12%
- 40%
- 5%
- 18%

Total Respondents: 56

Cygnnet Parenting Programme 2021/2022

59 parents have completed the Cygnnet Parenting Programme

The Cygnnet Parenting programme is for parents of children with ASD aged between 5 – 17 years. The programme runs for 6 weeks and covers the following topics

- What is ASD?
- Communication
- Sensory issues
- Understanding Behaviour
- Managing Behaviour-coping strategies

There is a follow up session after a few months to assess the impact and changes within the family and to offer further direction if needed.



98% of attendees agreed with our statement - The programme should support your mental health and wellbeing by giving you new strategies and skills.

100% of attendees said the programme helped them develop new parenting skills

100% learned new coping strategies of how to deal with their child

98% of attendees agreed that this type of support reduced their feelings of isolation and they also became a member of the charity to keep up to date on services.

"It has allowed us to better understand certain behaviours and situations, and then how we can change to produce a different outcome"

The outcomes from the Cygnet programme support families in these key areas



Case Studies - Kelly's Story

"The Cygnet Parenting Programme Really Helped My Family"



Kelly is Mum to 5 children, 3 boys and 2 girls. Her son Zach aged 9 has been diagnosed with ADHD and her daughter Alyssa aged 4 is showing signs of ASD, the others are very bright and always full of energy.

Kelly felt as though she was unable to deal with her children's behaviour at home and school. She was at crisis point, she was feeling overwhelmed and was in need of help. Kelly contacted We Are Beams and was put in touch with the Family Advice Team. She spoke to a helpful advisor and was immediately given the ammunition to tackle schooling problems and was advised to take part in the Cygnet Parenting Programme.

Once a place was available Kelly felt excited to be taking part. From the first session our Family Advisors made Kelly feel at ease, they had empathy and they listened to her concerns. By listening to stories from other parents whose children were on the autistic spectrum she felt relieved to know that she was not alone and started to feel less isolated. Over the following 6 weeks, the programme covered the topics of autism and diagnosis, communication, sensory issues, understanding behavior and managing behaviour. Kelly was given slides and videos on each topic so that she could refer to them

"I have made great friends through Beams with other parents and we have supported each other through tough times"

in the future. Kelly said she felt as though she was being educated every week, she enjoyed sharing her new knowledge of autism and disability with family and friends. She could now understand her child's perspective and view on the world.

Before the programme, Dad found it hard to accept the children's behaviour which often led to bad temper, shouting and tears. Kelly learnt coping strategies that taught her that there was usually an underlying issue that caused Zach's meltdowns.

She started to analyse and record events that contributed to his behaviour. Kelly said **'We are now able to stay composed, take a deep breath and we sit and talk about problems gently, and we look at what triggers Zach's behaviour. We have explained to our other children that Zach cannot help his rages, they have learnt to be more tolerant and understanding. Zach's school now have a story board to refer to so they are able to pre-empt his meltdowns. Zach is happier and more confident. I know that if there was no Beams, we would have no-one to help us'**

Case Studies - Esme's Story

Esme now 7 years old was adopted at just 9 months old by a loving, childless couple who dreamed of having a family. Esme had a very poor start to life. She was born with FASD, (Foetal Alcohol and Class A Drug Syndrome). This has resulted in a neurodevelopment disability and complex additional needs.

Esme struggled at school, which resulted in exclusion from reception year at a mainstream school. Following this fixed term exclusion, the relationship with the school became damaged and the family were at breaking point and exhausted.

The Family Advice Team started to support the family when Esme was just 4 years old and the family really wanted her to attend the local mainstream school but with an EHCP (education health and care plan).

"Despite having the regular support of the Local Authority's post adoption service, and virtual school, and the advice from a SEMH STLS, senior PEO and Inclusion lead, without Beams support and advice we

would be struggling even more than we are. We were utterly exhausted and fed up."

The Family Advice team quickly set to work advising the parents via advice clinics, via our helpline and reviewing all correspondence received from Education officials. The team helped the parents understand the legal framework surrounding the exclusions and the legal responsibilities of both the school and parents.

With the continued help of Family Advice, the local authority finally reversed its decision and Esme was issued with EHCP. This should have given the family and their daughter a chance to move forward but due to the Esme's complex additional needs many Kent schools said they were unable to meet her needs full time resulting in her presently only attending school for 2 hrs each day.

We Are Beams continue to support the family to secure the right of appeal and start the very slow process of challenging the authority to secure full

time education to meet the Esme's needs. Family Advice also supported the couple throughout by explaining all options available whichever route they choose to take.

The family explain why they feel incredibly lucky to have been helped by We Are Beams.

"Throughout the EHCP process, to get our daughter the help she so desperately needs, We Are Beams have always been there to provide support, constructive advice and have a comprehensive awareness of the legalities.

The Family Advice Team at Beams have continued to support us through various challenges and were instrumental in getting the Local Authority to agree that our daughter requires a specialist provision. We recommend Beams to all parents with children with special needs and cannot sing their praises enough. We dread to think where we would be without their support over the months and years"

Parent comments

"Every interaction I've ever had with Beams has been great. They are positive, professional and at the same time I feel so comfortable talking to them especially Donna and Kim, they really go out of their way for everyone and are so essential to Beams"

"The course has made me calmer in dealing with my child's behaviours. I feel like I am a better mum because I understand him more now and this has helped him"

"I have learnt so much over this 6 week course and will be able to recall this when situations arise"

"Please keep the service going - its such a great support to us parents and I cannot thank you all enough."

"We are in a better place, we feel better equipped, we understand more and my son seems happier as a result of us having this knowledge and new strategies"

"My husband feels he has more clarity, understanding and therefore patience for our son. It has also made us feel that we would like to be engaged more with places like We Are Beams, and further support the excellent job that they are doing"