

Alison

Coming to the SEND parent support group at Honley Library has been a life-changer for me and my family.

Firstly, the emotional support is invaluable and unconditional.

Being a parent of a SEND child can feel lonely, as if you are the only parent around who is struggling with a very different kind of normal. Most of the parents I know just don't get it and can be dismissive, rude about the experience, judgemental (about me, or my child). I was tired of hearing that "all children do that" when I knew that wasn't the case. Finding a group who nod, who understand, who can empathise with all of it (the battles, the little wins and more) was hugely emotionally and spiritually uplifting. Finally I wasn't alone. Other people saw me. All of me. And they got it. I left each evening feeling that I was doing my best (for the first time in years).

Life as a SEND parent is exhausting – it is unpredictable, a rollercoaster, and there are so many more demands on your time and energy. Not just in keeping your child safe and regulated, but in balancing the needs of other children, of the family as a whole, navigating things that other families find easy – like a trip out, or a meal outside the home. It is easy to be entirely overwhelmed and drained, both emotionally and physically. But this group refills my energy.

Secondly the practical advice and support has been invaluable.

Having a place where each month I am encouraged, supported and gently nudged to do the things that keep falling off my To Do list has been vital in creating real progress. I leave every month feeling uplifted, inspired and re-energised to fight the fight all over again. For a few days after each meeting, I send emails. I ring groups or services. I fill out forms. That monthly boost has helped me make more progress since coming to the group (3 times in 3 months) than I had in perhaps a whole year beforehand. It has helped highlight groups, opportunities, services and more that I never knew about and made the Local Offer and SEND support more relevant to me. By connecting with Alison on Facebook, I found a fabulous course for my teen to explore their neurodiversity that I would never have known about before.

Sometimes it's just a phrase that makes a difference – my mind was blown when I learnt that my daughter might be both **hypo** and **hypersensitive** to things. Or that it might take two years to recover from autistic burnout. But it's also the nudges that move me forward – that it's worth trying hormone treatment – it might make it better or worse, but it could be amazing. Or encouraging me to get back in touch with the CAMHS crisis team to push for the support my child needs.

PCAN encouraged me to apply for and complete a Disabled Living Allowance form, which I had contemplated and ignored for well over a year. Whilst I'm still awaiting the outcome, there is no longer that dragging exhaustion of feeling that I have ***yet another*** big thing to sort out. And I hope that the financial support will help us pay for more help for my daughter. The group has helped me navigate mediation and getting an EHCP for my

daughter, which has now been approved. I know now that when the draft EHCP comes through that there are people who can help me refine and review it.

This group also encouraged me to consider a youth group for my daughter, another thing that I hadn't found the time or energy to progress. Alison you have offered great support with this. That little extra support and nudge has really made a difference. Last week we met the Youth Worker and she tried it for just over an hour. She was immediately welcomed by a group of like-minded teens and I feel that she may find real in-person friends who will accept her for the first time since infant school.

But mostly, it is that feeling of being heard, belonging and finding a home for all this weird emotionally challenging life I lead. A group that gets my life. That listens. That empathises but also encourages me every month to take more steps in the right direction, to fight for my daughter and my family. I feel this group has got my back after ten years of exhaustion and feeling that I was fighting against Goliath on my own.

Now I have PCAN, Alison Drake and other SEND parents beside me. Cheering on those little wins, sharing advice on how to cope with it all, and passing the tissues when I need those too.

This year, we could start to feel the impact on my daughter too – not huge, but small steps in the right direction. I'm no longer floundering and drowning, but slowly going in the right direction, with the support of people who have been there before. It has been one of the best things I have done to help me personally and my family in the ten long years of struggle. This group has changed my life. Thank you."

With love

E*****