

## **PACC Spring Blog – considering the future**

The spring is always a busy time for PACC, the end of year for grants and funding means we spend time reflecting on what we have done and achieved during the year just gone, while the need to apply for the next years participation grant means we need to look forward and plan for the future. We are sure that with the impact of Coronavirus during the year just gone, and the prospect of life returning to a more normal pattern in the near future, many of you are having a similar experience.

Taking time to think about what we have done and how we coped with challenging circumstances can be difficult but can also be beneficial. We may have found out that we could do things we didn't think we are capable of or learnt that there were different ways of doing things. Thinking about these things and what we have learnt, will shape how we go forward and the plans we make for the future. Read the [PACC Annual Report 2020-21 here](#).

There are many things from the past year that PACC will take forward and build into our plans for the future. It is clear that online meetings have several benefits, we have seen a better attendance, from a greater range of practitioners. We have also been able to strengthen our relationship with the Shropshire SEND community, through offering a range of Facebook live sessions, meaning that we can all benefit from more informal, real time discussion about the issues impacting our families. So, we are considering how we can continue to offer a mix of online, virtual contact, alongside our more traditional face to face events going forward. This will also help us to overcome the challenge of us all living in such a large rural area, which sometimes makes meeting in person so difficult.

Reaching as many SEND families as possible is hugely important to PACC and we will continue to do everything we can to ensure that Shropshire parent carers know about PACC and feel able to share their thoughts and experiences with us. Currently PACC operates on a membership basis, but recently we have discussed if this is the right structure for us going forward? We know that parent carers are very busy and often overwhelmed with paperwork, so completing more forms for PACC may not be an attractive prospect. We also recognise that not everyone wants to commit to membership of a particular organisation. We want all Shropshire parent carers to benefit from the work we do, and we have never limited events or activities to 'PACC members' only. However, occasionally the feedback we provide is identified as 'only being the experience of PACC members' thereby limiting its impact. We believe that PACC has been effective in providing representation for the Shropshire SEND Community as a whole and it is important that this is recognised. PACC needs to be recognised as a voice not just for those parent carers who feel able to speak out, but also for those parent carers who are too tired, too sad or too angry to say how they feel or to share their experiences. PACC believes that there are certain experiences and challenges that as parent carers we all face in Shropshire and we want to make sure that those are heard and understood by senior decision makers locally. Of course, we want to hear from as many Shropshire parent carers as possible and we talk and listen to a wide range of parent carers on a daily basis, via social media and direct contact, but we aren't just there for those individuals, PACC wants to improve the local SEND system for everyone who uses it.

With this in mind, during the next 12 months we are going to explore how PACC can be structured to best serve its local community. We know that parent carers struggle to find time to support organisations like PACC, so it will always be difficult to find enough parent carers, with enough spare time to get actively involved in PACC and therefore our capacity to cover all the work to be done is always likely to be an issue. This is exacerbated by the fact that we are working across a large geographical area, with a community that is widely spread out. We struggle to find parent carers who are able to commit to being Trustees, or PACC representatives or even to attend the events we

host and therefore we need to adapt to reflect this. Currently as a membership-based organisation, we are required to ask the membership to vote on decision making regarding PACC as an organisation and to make this meaningful we need an active membership. An alternative to this would be to become a foundation charitable incorporated organisation (CIO). PACC would still maintain its charity status and the accountability that this brings, but we would move away from having a wider membership and instead would hold a mailing list only, making it easier for Shropshire parent carers to sign up to be kept informed about SEND issues, without any further commitment. PACC would still be run by a board of Trustees and they would make all the decisions regarding PACC, ensuring that as an organisation PACC met all its duties as required. PACC is and will remain an experience led organisation, so Trustees with voting rights would be required to be parent carers, however there would also be an opportunity to include a small number of non-voting Trustees on the Board who were not parent carers, but who did have experience of SEND. There would continue to be a focus on operating in a transparent way and an annual report would continue to be published. This move to a 'corporate' structure would give PACC the legal capacity to do many things in its own name that a person can do, such as:

- employing paid staff
- delivering charitable services under contractual agreements
- entering into commercial contracts in its own name
- owning freehold or leasehold land or other property

This we believe would enable PACC to be more sustainable as an organisation and support its growth moving forward. PACC would be interested to hear any feedback on this proposal, please email [enquiries@paccshropshire.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@paccshropshire.org.uk) with any comments. Currently we are only exploring this option and would be grateful to hear your views. When the final proposal is developed then an 'extraordinary AGM' will be called and our current membership will be invited to vote on it.

Zara Bowden & Sarah Thomas

