



TOWER HAMLETS

Issue 52 Autumn 2020

Families Matter

A magazine full of news and information to support your work with families

Children and young people in Tower Hamlets have started to go back to school. For some, this may be the first time they have set foot in a classroom since March.

To help families, children and young people prepare, the council has collected the latest advice, information and support on www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/backtoschool.

**OUR SCHOOLS ARE
SAFE PLACES AND THE
BEST PLACE TO LEARN**

Visit: [www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/
backtoschool](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/backtoschool)

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Welcome to the autumn edition of Families Matter

I am particularly proud of the Parent and Family Support Service and would like to take this opportunity to say thank you for the creative and resourceful ways team members have adapted and delivered our information, parenting, SEND advice and support service, schools support, engagement and childcare services. Practitioners have successfully delivered virtual sessions, developed online support, one-to-one, and group programmes, all whilst responding quickly to new government guidelines.

This has been a challenging and potentially anxious time for us all. We are pleased to share the wonderful range of work that is taking place and show how schools and services have adapted in response to events and the evolving needs of children and families in Tower Hamlets.

This edition is full of information and services to support families including ideas to help parents and professionals returning to school - **our schools are safe places and the best place to learn.**

Visit www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/backtoschool to read the back to school articles in this edition.

We look forward to working with you in the autumn.

Best wishes,
Jill McGinley
Head of Parent and Family Support Service

Working with families?

Sign up to the Parental Engagement Team's network mailing list

If you are working with families in the borough, sign up to the Parental Engagement Team's network mailing list to receive the latest news and information to support your work.

Recent information sent via the professionals network included updates on the council's community offer to provide free meals to families in need during the school holiday as well as NHS guidance to parents on managing childhood illnesses during lockdown.

Encourage your colleagues to sign up to the Parental Engagement Team's network mailing list. For more information, email parentalengagement@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Families Matter: Bitesize E-bulletin

In addition to the regular termly Families Matter magazine, we've recently launched a brand new monthly email bulletin. This provides regular updates, information, advice, and support for all parents, guardians and carers in Tower Hamlets.

Parents and carers can sign up via the council's resident subscriber list, choosing 'children and education' as their preferred topic (after closing the initial pop-up box) and completing the form on the main webpage.

www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/signup

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With so much information out there for parents, the Parent and Family Support Service's advice is really on point and easy for parents to access and understand.

They provide a fantastic service and are dedicated to ensuring our children and families get the best deal. All schools should have a direct link to Families Matter on their website.

Dawn Pritchard, Assistant Headteacher and SENCO,
Shapla Primary School

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www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/familiesmatter

Parent and Carer Survey 2019

197 parents and carers in Tower Hamlets shared their thoughts and experience with us. This report summarises the views of those who took part in the survey.



77 per cent of parents and carers feel confident monitoring their children's mobile phone, laptop or other device and **75 per cent** feel confident about internet usage.



62 per cent of parents and carers agree that their children's school provides opportunities for them to contribute to discussions which affect learning and development.



64 per cent of parents and carers were satisfied with the support from the Parent and Family Support Service and agency.



49 per cent of parents and carers said access to more information about places to go with their children would improve their lives.



42 per cent of parents and carers have accessed support from health centres/GPs in the last year.



68 per cent of parents and carers said that their children's learning environment is adequately supporting their needs.



18 per cent of parents and carers reported their children receive private tuition, mostly on a weekly basis.



46 per cent of parents and carers said that they have not had enough information to help them plan their child(ren)'s future.



60 per cent of parents and carers prefer to receive information by email.



22 per cent of parents and carers reported that their children have been bullied in the last year.

For data, statistics and research about Tower Hamlets visit www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/statistics
For more information contact our Intelligence and Performance Team on cru@towerhamlets.gov.uk

This newsletter is produced by the Parental Engagement Team within the Parent and Family Support Service, Children and Culture Directorate. To share news in future editions of Families Matter contact

Fiona Stokes

Tel: **020 7364 6049**

Email: fiona.stokes@towerhamlets.gov.uk

References to 'parents' describes any caregiver responsible for the care, protection and upbringing of a child or young person, including foster parents or connected persons, grandparents, sibling or other family members.

References to 'SEND' as used in some articles is the abbreviation of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Family Support Practitioners provide invaluable support

The Parental Engagement Team's Family Support Practitioners (FSPs) have continued to support schools and families during Covid-19. Lockdown meant a drastic change to normal ways of working in schools but the support from our FSPs ensured that children were safe, fed and had access to learning during the summer term. Regular contact with the FSPs was an invaluable source of support for families, helping them to overcome some huge challenges.

FSPs have:

- Supported families to apply for food vouchers, Free School Meals and food parcels
- Helped families access free lunches from Billingsgate Cookery School
- Provided toys, games, learning resources, and activity packs
- Supported school staff teams via virtual meetings
- Played key roles in Team Around the Child/Family meetings
- Helped schools to identify those vulnerable families most at risk
- Supported parents with stress and anxiety linked to poverty and isolation
- Accessed funding for IT equipment
- Supported families with housing, eviction and debt
- Provided support for families with medical needs
- Offered flexible support for families including evenings and weekends

Discussion groups

FSPs have also been delivering small Time to Talk discussion groups for parents on a range of issues including emotional wellbeing, keeping children happy and supporting their child's learning. As well, the Keeping Healthy - Keeping Happy group has been playing a key role in supporting parents' emotional wellbeing. Parents have really valued these groups as a way of staying connected with others.

Family support at St John's Primary

FSPs from the Parental Engagement Team have been working tirelessly to ensure families from **St John's CE Primary School** are getting all the support they need.

Rashina Begum and Denise Foster play a key role in the school's wellbeing committee and have been checking in with families regularly and providing support. They have launched weekly virtual wellbeing support sessions which give parents an opportunity to talk through any anxieties they may have. In

addition, they have been providing practical advice on a range of issues from benefits and housing to navigating the Free School Meal (FSM) voucher system (find out how to check for free school meal eligibility on page 33).

The practitioners have also secured grants to purchase food bags for vulnerable families or those still waiting for FSM vouchers (a successful partnership with the Kidz Café also provided meals for children and families each day).

In addition to the work of the FSPs, the school has sourced laptops so that all families can access online learning. Teachers have been providing online lessons including storytelling, art, singing, and cooking. Weekly assemblies have also been uploaded to the school's YouTube channel.

To view a special message of support to families from school staff and FSPs visit

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITMqfN6XqpU



FSPs – a Headteacher's perspective

By **Darren Rubin**,
Executive
Head of
School,
St John's
CE
Primary
School



The FSPs from the Parental Engagement Team are incredibly knowledgeable and have helped our families overcome many obstacles. They have been successful in tapping into and signposting to agencies that can support families.

Rashina has been great for many of our harder to reach Bangladeshi families and both have supported families and schools with Early Help or Social Care interventions.

Denise is excellent at supporting our vulnerable families – they seem to gravitate towards her. She is a font of knowledge, able to tap into grants whilst treating our families with respect and patience. She has brought a much needed strategic overview to our work with families, sharing her skills and knowledge, and helping us to develop action plans and evaluate our work. I rely on her a great deal and she is always at the end of the phone when she is not here.

The FSPs have engaged with our school community and galvanised them.

Parental Engagement Network meeting for school staff

With virtual communication rapidly becoming the norm, our summer network meeting took place via Zoom.

Primary and secondary school staff shared their experiences of supporting families during Covid-19, outlining the challenges many families are facing. The pandemic has highlighted how schools in Tower Hamlets really do have their families at the heart of everything they do, with many continuing to go that extra mile to ensure families are supported.

Food parcel distribution, assisting with free school meal vouchers, Universal Credit applications and home learning resources are just some of the elements that have characterised the work of schools in the current climate. This, together with hundreds of signposting interventions and actively campaigning for free school meals to continue throughout the summer, has helped support many vulnerable families throughout this crisis.

At the meeting, Alison Jones from Richardson Primary School, introduced a piece of research about post traumatic growth in children. This led to staff expressing concerns that families would also need additional support to help their children readjust to returning to school.

Further support and information will be available at the next meeting on **Wednesday 21 October**. To join the network email parentalengagement@towerhamlets.gov.uk

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Often it can seem as if each of us are small islands delivering great projects to the families in our schools but not necessarily sharing resources and ideas. I came away from the meeting buzzing with new ideas of how we can all work together to support one another as we help parents adjust to their new normal.

Alison Jones, Marion Richardson Primary School

The parental engagement role has never been so vital for families struggling during Covid-19. Meeting up was a chance to share what others have been doing and celebrate best practice.

Janice Hill-Kocoglu

Family Learning and Parental Engagement Co-ordinator
Shadwell and St Katharine's Collaborative of Schools

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A date with Jamie Oliver

In February, practitioners from the Parental Engagement Team joined celebrity chef Jamie Oliver at his Islington headquarters for a special event to celebrate the achievements of the Ministry of Food programme.

The programme was devised by Jamie Oliver and combines basic cooking skills with healthy eating messages in order to empower participants to eat well and improve their health. The team, who have been delivering the programme since 2015, joined partners from across the UK to reflect on the programme and the plans for its future.

The team used the visit to share their unique experiences of delivering the programme in Tower Hamlets, where they have run parent only sessions, parent and child sessions in schools and children only sessions as part of the Tower Hamlets Holiday Childcare Scheme.

They also highlighted how the programme compliments their existing work around family health and wellbeing, particularly the Healthy Families programme.

Parental Engagement Team's work recognised by Ministry of Food

Ministry of Food has been using Twitter to highlight the inspiring work that the Parental Engagement Team and the Kidz Café have been doing to tackle food poverty.

The partners have been working together to provide vulnerable families with freshly prepared meals ensuring that no child goes hungry during lockdown.

For more information on the Ministry of Food programme email parentalengagement@towerhamlets.gov.uk



Healthy Families

Time to Talk Health

The Parental Engagement Team developed a Healthy Family virtual session during the summer term.

This fast paced session offered families the opportunity to share their experiences and challenges during lockdown, tips for feeding a family with less money but with healthy options and advice on how to prevent children constantly snacking due to boredom.

Sessions included tips on making small changes, recipes for creating healthy meals from scratch on a tight budget and ideas involving the whole family.

For more information email parentalengagement@towerhamlets.gov.uk

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This could be a worrying time for families in the borough. Food poverty has become an increasing struggle. It's been wonderful to make a small difference supporting them to make healthier choices with recipes that are affordable and seeing them leave the sessions full of ideas.

Murude Mehmet
Parental Engagement Team

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The session was great. I came away feeling that I'm not on my own not knowing what to give the kids to eat day after day. I'm going to try making the yogurt and fruit lollies with my children.

Connie
Parent at Langdon Park School

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Looking ahead with the Children and Families Partnership

The Children and Families Partnership Board met in July to take stock of progress and plan for the year ahead. Although there are very many challenges facing the borough as a result of the pandemic, members of the board agreed that the focus areas in the Tower Hamlets 'Every Chance for Every Child' strategy remain important:

**EVERY
CHANCE
for EVERY
CHILD**

- Preparing children with skills for their future
- Good health
- Wellbeing and healthy relationships for families
- Safety for children and young people across Tower Hamlets.

In a discussion chaired by Deputy Young Mayor Muhsin Mahmud, young people shared their experiences of lockdown with members of the board:

- Highlighting the need for better digital communications
- Creative ways to combat loneliness
- Support for young people who face bereavement.

Over the next twelve months, the board will focus on specific priorities to support children and young people during the recovery period:

- Helping young people prepare for the world of work and training
- Supporting children's play
- Looking at how organisations across the borough can support children's mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Working together to provide children and families with the help they need at the earliest possible moment
- Championing engagement and participation with children and families.

For more information about the work of the Children and Families Partnership Board, email

Children.andCultureSPP@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Message from Councillor Danny Hassell



The last few months have been difficult ones for our community and I want to start by thanking you for all you and your family have done to adapt to home learning, in following government guidance on social distancing and contributing to wider community efforts. I know it has not been easy for many of our families and that there will be worries about the ongoing impact of Covid-19.

At the council we have been working to support families, children and young people at this time. Our social workers and Early Help teams have continued their support and our parent groups have continued to meet remotely. We have supported schools in providing food vouchers and other support to families in need. Under challenging circumstances our schools continued to open for vulnerable children and key worker parents, whilst also providing home learning.

The return to school is so important for our children's life chances and wellbeing. We cannot eliminate the risk of infection entirely, but we are adopting sensible measures to manage and reduce this risk by working with schools to undertake thorough risk assessments and implement measures to keep children safe. Like parents, we want to see local children back in a safe learning environment so they can catch up on learning, and not fall behind. We are now re-opening face-to-face services and support, such as from our children's centres and we want to ensure we have a focus on the physical and mental wellbeing of our children and young people as part of our approach.

Over the coming months, there will likely be further pressures and challenges on us all. However, I know that the strong sense of community and the focus that we have had on protecting our children and supporting families will remain at the core of our continued work.

Stay safe,

CLlr Danny Hassell
Cabinet Member for Children and Schools
London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Cabinet reshuffle

In June, there was a reshuffle of the Mayor's Cabinet – the chosen group of councillors who support the Mayor to deliver on his priorities, during his term as the Mayor of Tower Hamlets.

Councillor Danny Hassell (Bromley South) is now the Cabinet Member for Children and Schools, with responsibility for children's services; child poverty; early years, learning and play and children's centres; young people and learning; school improvement; children with disabilities and special needs; children's social care; looked after children and child protection; and, youth offending and youth services.

Part of Councillor Hassell's previous remit, looking after youth services, has been transferred to Councillor Asma Begum (Bow West), who is the new Deputy Mayor for Safety, Youth and Equalities, with responsibility for youth services and much more.

Visit www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/News_events/2020/June-20/Mayor_John_Biggs_announces_new_Cabinet.aspx to learn more.

Back to school – your questions answered

Children and young people from Tower Hamlets recently put their questions about going back to school to Katie Cole, the council's Associate Director of Public Health for Children and Families.



The council has also released several new videos featuring students, staff and parents discussing what they have missed about school, how they continued their learning during lockdown and why they're looking forward to going back to school.

For more information visit www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/backtoschool



Back to school virtual meetings

Relationships between parents and schools have never been more important, especially as some parents may be anxious about sending children back to school.

During the summer term, the Parental Engagement Team continued to support schools and families by offering virtual meetings for small groups of parents covering a range of topics including:

- Home learning
- Health
- Calm kids
- Talking about worry.

The workshops also offered an opportunity for parents to discuss any concerns about their child's return to school and what their school is doing to keep children safe. Schools can book these workshops via a service level agreement with the Parental Engagement Team so that these important conversations with parents can continue in the autumn term.

Meetings can take place in small groups online or through one-to-one phone calls.

Our services are delivered flexibly to meet the needs of all schools.

For more information on the support available, email parentalengagement@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Managing the transition to secondary school

Transition to secondary school is a big moment for every family. Parents have visited schools, talked to family and friends, waited for the confirmation email and then Covid-19 happened.

Support services like the Behaviour and Attendance Team, the Support for Learning Service and the Education Psychology Service have all been working with school staff to prepare materials to support transition which can be delivered in school, at home or virtually.

These support services have also been working with secondary schools to develop virtual tours and introductory packs to help with transition.

Parents have many worries including how secondary schools will manage social distancing and how the time away from school will impact on their child(ren)'s learning.

Secondary school websites provide answers to many of these questions and schools have dedicated staff for transition who parents can speak to. School staff will talk to support services and parents to ensure children have the support they need, particularly those with SEND or who have been identified as vulnerable.

Many schools have been identifying key staff members who have made contact with parents and children before they started school. Having a key person can really help the transition process and means that children entering secondary school will have at least one known face.

There is no doubt that transition is different this year. Teachers and support staff are very mindful of this and are taking extra care so that children can make a successful transition despite the challenges they face.

For more details contact

Nichola Baker

Lead on secondary transition project

Behaviour and Attendance Support Service

Email: nichola.baker@towerhamlets.gov.uk



The Transition Support Service (TSS)

The TSS offers a comprehensive service to parents and carers, providing independent and impartial advice at key points of transition. In addition, it can support parents with school applications, secondary transfer and mid-term admissions as well as admission and exclusion appeals.

Transition Support Officers can provide support with:

- Returning to school after Covid-19 – all year groups
- Moving up 2021 – from September 2020 (secondary applications).

Supporting resources:

- Telephone/video support
- Case work to support families with transition
- Supporting home/school communication
- Tips for managing transition

- Transition video – applying to and preparing for secondary school
- Signposting to parenting support and other agencies.

The team has been delivering school based virtual workshops for parents and community virtual workshops that parents

can book independently via self-referral. These will continue to October half term. Details have been sent to schools and are also posted on Tower Hamlets Local Offer.

The team also provides information on current changes to the school exclusion process.

Changes to school admission appeals

The waiting period for school admission announcements can be an anxious time for many families. If a parent has received notification that their child has not been allocated a place at a preferred school, they can appeal this decision.

Covid-19 has impacted on the ability of admission authorities to carry out appeals in the usual way. As a result, changes have been made which relax some of the requirements set out in the School Admission Appeals Code 2012. These changes came into force on 24 April 2020 and are valid until 31 January 2021.

Appeal panels will now be permitted to conduct appeals using:

- Video conferencing through Zoom
- Telephone conferencing
- Appeal form with any evidence provided.

For help and information about transition support and to see the School Admissions Appeals Code, email the Transitions Support Service transitions@towerhamlets.gov.uk



Addressing the digital divide

National research shows that in areas of high deprivation, only 16 per cent of pupils took part in online lessons during lockdown, worsening an already significant attainment gap between the poorest and richest children.

Now an innovative digital inclusion project aims to bridge the digital divide by providing eligible local families with a good internet connection, a device and training – all for free.

LETTA Trust schools have been working with housing association Poplar HARCA, Tower Hamlets Council, the East End Community Foundation, and Community Fibre to provide the devices, tackle the digital divide and minimise the impact of the pandemic on educational achievement.

The partners aim to expand the programme to up to 10,000 families across the borough over the next year.

For more information visit www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/laptopsforfamilies

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Finding ways to address the digital divide in our communities has never been more important. Moving forward we will look to expand not only this scheme, but also other initiatives that make digital inclusion a priority.



John Biggs, Mayor of Tower Hamlets

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Support for Learning Service during the pandemic

The Support for Learning Service (SLS) continues to work in partnership with colleagues from early years, Early Help, health, social care and across different agencies, so that children can access learning and stay safe. The service has been working behind the scenes with professionals and parents to join up services and systems.

The SLS are currently providing telephone and online support for parents – especially for the families of children with hearing and vision impairment, physical disability and complex medical conditions. As part of its effort to provide remote support for parents and schools, it is launching a helpline for parents to support their child's learning at home.

Language and Literacy Helpline

The SLS is providing telephone and email support to parents who would like advice on supporting their child at home with literacy, language communication and general learning difficulties.

Tel: 020 7364 6444

Email: janet.pritchard@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Please note the helpline is unable to offer advice about the processing of Education Health and Care Plans or for pupils with a diagnosis of autism.

For advice about Special Educational Needs and Disabilities or Education and Health Care Plans contact SEND Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS).

Tel: 020 7364 6489

Email: TowerHamlets&City.SENDIASS@towerhamlets.gov.uk

For more details about the Support for Learning Service, contact Roland Ramanan.

Tel: 020 73646458

Email: roland.ramanan@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Children's centres provide vital support during pandemic

Children's centres have been providing vital support and advice to families in need during the pandemic. They have been providing families with advice on a range of issues from home learning activities to dealing with stress and anxiety during the lockdown. Since many parents are anxious that their child may have missed out on key early learning opportunities that settings usually provide, children's centres have been providing extra support to families to ensure children's start to school goes smoothly.

In addition, family support workers have been sending out activity packs to families who need them most. These include books, creative play materials as well as some valuable tips and key information.

For more details

Tel: **020 7364 5277**

Email: CC.Referrals@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Online resources

Children's centres are now providing play sessions online and are launching some useful videos including stories from play workers and advice from health visitors. Visit the Tower Hamlets website for links to online resources for families.

The children's centres' virtual timetables include sessions such as chat time with play workers so that they can provide support to meet the unique needs of each family. For more details visit www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/EarlyYearsCovid19

Services

Children's centres are still providing midwifery and health visiting services. You can access some services and courses online such as employment support and childcare. Healthy Start vouchers and vitamins are still available to collect at children's centres. For more details on service delivery during the autumn term:

Tel: **020 7364 5277**

Email: early.years@towerhamlets.gov.uk



Getting the best start in life: Support for children and families from the Integrated Early Years' Service during COVID-19

Who we support

The Integrated Early Years team supports children and families with children and young people from conception to 25 years of age.

We also work with childcare settings and schools around quality improvement, SEND support and sufficiency.

Family Support

Our Family Support Workers are continuing to support and provide advice to families in need.

Play and Learning

We have gone virtual! We run play sessions online where you can join in the fun with your child. Online resources for children are available on our website.

Services

We have been providing midwifery and health visiting services through children's centres. You can access some services and courses online such as employment support and childcare. You can also pick up your Healthy Start Vouchers and vitamins at the centre.

Childcare for key workers and vulnerable children including those with SEND

We are continuing to find childcare places for the above in order to support communities during this challenging time.

Contact Us

Call: 020 7364 5277

Email: early.years@towerhamlets.gov.uk



For latest information please visit
www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/EarlyYearsCovid19

Calling families with young children

Covid-19 has changed life for all of us. To understand the impact, Tower Hamlets Council and University College London are collaborating on a new study to find out what it has meant for families with children aged from birth to five. The study will examine the impact of lockdown and its aftermath for the borough's young children and their families.

The researchers are working with a team in Bradford and researchers from across Europe. They want to find out about work, job security, housing, health, day-to-day activities and the way the community has pulled together to support residents.

The team are looking for at least 2,000 families to take part through an online survey. All families with children aged from birth to five-years-old (0 to 59 months) as well as pregnant women are invited to participate. There is a £10 high street shopping voucher available for each person who completes a survey.

The study will support the council to shape its services for families with young children, especially those who are vulnerable.

For more details visit www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/UCLsurvey

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I'm delighted that the London Borough of Tower Hamlets is a partner in this timely and valuable programme of research.



Somen Banerjee, Director of Public Health

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Blue Gate Fields – a creative hub

Blue Gate Fields Infants and Junior Schools were designated community hub schools during lockdown. This involved not only supporting children from their own schools, but also key worker children from other local schools.

The hub was a centre of creativity with children of all ages and from different schools coming together to collaborate and create. They made impressive models and sculptures using waste packaging. The technique, often referred to as 'junk modelling' was a great way to keep the children engaged and the act of making contributed to their emotional wellbeing during these uncertain times.



The creative process has been good for their learning too – working together, planning their ideas and figuring out how to join items are all higher-level thinking skills.

Lockdown – a busy time for Marner

Marner Primary School was open on a rota system for children of key workers and staff during the summer term.



The children enjoyed new and exciting activities including bike riding – they can now all ride a bike with confidence! The school was also busy distributing food and offering families an option to collect food.

In an effort to support families with their home schooling, the school distributed learning packs and art resources to all children. It also provided a laptop borrowing scheme to some of the children to ensure all their children could access online learning.

The school received some generous offers of support including a donation of hundreds of books from The Book Trust. These have since been distributed to eager Marner readers!

Business as usual for Cubitt Town

It was business as usual for **Cubitt Town Infants' and Junior Schools**, despite the lockdown. They continued to forge partnerships with local businesses and community groups to help support families. Donations from local businesses together with extra food from the local church provided vital support to local vulnerable families.



The schools would like to thank their business partners, staff and families for supporting one another through these times.

**Jacqui Jenkins, Parent Liaison Coordinator
Cubitt Town Infants' and Junior Schools**

Lockdown stories from Shadwell



Primary schools in the Shadwell area have been working alongside local community action group, Shadwell Responds, to provide activity packs for the children who went to school during the summer term.

St Paul's Whitechapel Primary School handed out fresh food boxes to families in need. The food was donated by the Felix Project, a local restaurant and other local food providers. They also had a socially distancing library.

Harry Gosling Primary School

was open during lockdown for children of key workers and vulnerable children. The school offered a broad range of learning opportunities and created a home away from home atmosphere for the children.

It provided valuable telephone support for families who were struggling to navigate the free school meals vouchers system or manage their home-schooling routines.

Shapla Primary School

was open on Fridays so that families could come along and collect food boxes, activity packs and reading books. Like all schools, everyone from the headteacher to support staff pulled together to support families during lockdown. The school provided laptops so that their families could access online learning opportunities and signposted parents to other sources of support from food banks to domestic violence information and more.

Routines provide structure in an uncertain world

In an uncertain world where normal life may have changed a great deal, routines can provide a structure that can be comforting. When families are at home all the time, it can be easy to drift away from their regular routines. Here are some simple ideas to help families manage daily routines at home.

Involve children



Involving children in creating a daily routine shows them that their ideas matter and makes the schedule more likely to work. Have a clear start time each day and try to stick to it. It can be challenging to keep children engaged in learning all day so make sure you include a mixture of activities and opportunities to have fun, be active and rest as well as learn.

Identify chores



Identify some daily chores that your child could do on their own. This will not only free up your time, but it can also provide children with a sense of achievement.

Even very young children can help out at home. This is a great way to help develop their independence, initiative and sense of self-reliance. Don't forget to acknowledge how they are contributing to family life.

Plan mealtimes



Include the whole family in meal planning for the week. Allow everyone to pick a favourite meal and create a shopping list together. Shopping once a week will cut down costs and help you stick to a budget.

Encourage children to help you to prepare and cook meals. Don't forget to get them to help out with the cleaning up afterwards too!

Limit news time



Limit the doom and gloom – try to stick to just one news update per day.

For children, use child-friendly news sources like BBC's Newsround. This is a reputable news source and it always ensures that the tone, content and imagery are age appropriate. It even consults experts on the likely psychological impact of its news features on children.

Schedule worry time



It may sound counter-intuitive, but scheduling in some worry time can actually help you develop control over the frequency and timing of your worry.

This technique, which is derived from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), means you contain your worry to designated periods, freeing up your mind for other important, interesting or fun activities.

Manage bedtimes



Keep bedtimes consistent and gradually unwind each evening towards it. Avoid over stimulating activities in the evening, and it's better not to use devices close to bedtimes – the light can disrupt sleep patterns. Choose soothing activities that allow children to relax from their day and settle into sleep.

Remember teenagers require more sleep, so allowing them to sleep in may be beneficial!

For more information on developing routines to support your family, contact the parenting team email parenting@towerhamlets.gov.uk or call **020 7364 6398**.

Keeping children safe online

The current pandemic has resulted in children spending more time on devices, so it's important that parents are involved in their online lives. There are some simple things parents can



do to ensure that children are using the internet sensibly and safely.

- Talk to children about what apps they are using. This is how children connect with their friends and classmates. Knowing what apps they use is a key part of understanding their online world.
- Take an interest in what they do online. Find out what videos they enjoy watching and who they follow on video sharing platforms like YouTube, TikTok and Snapchat. If they are in touch with friends and classmates, it's reasonable for parents to know who they are talking to.
- Be willing to have awkward conversations. Talk to them about not putting pressure on others to share photos or videos that they wouldn't want their family to see. Encourage them to let you know if something makes them feel uncomfortable and to say no to things they don't want to do.
- Have rules about how much time children spend online. Being online can be addictive and there can be a sense you might be missing out on something important. Agree a time that devices are switched off before bedtime. It's a good idea not to allow tablets or phones in the bedroom if you want children to get a good night's sleep.
- Give them some room to be themselves online. They are developing their own personalities and working out how to get on with other people, so don't expect to know absolutely everything about them. Just notice if they are more sleepless or anxious than normal and try to find out what is wrong.
- Ask for help if you don't know what to do. There are lots of online resources for parents. For example, the NSPCC website has sections on using video apps, parental settings on devices and online safety.

Liam McQuade

Tower Hamlets Behaviour and Attendance Service

The Parental Engagement Team also deliver internet safety workshops for parents. Schools can email parenting@towerhamlets.gov.uk for more information.

Parenting support during the pandemic

The Parent and Family Support Service recognise that this is a potentially worrying time for parents and carers as it juggles the needs of the family with the additional pressures that the pandemic may pose.

The parenting team provides flexible support and advice via telephone, text, email, and video calls to parents and professionals.

Experienced practitioners are on hand to provide parenting advice based on extensive knowledge of strategies proven to work. English, Bengali and Somali speaking practitioners are available where possible.

Practitioners can:

- Offer parenting tips for parents of children of all ages from toddlers to teens
- Advise on how to talk to children who may be worried about Covid-19
- Talk through tried and tested behaviour management strategies
- Signpost to online resources and services.

For more information on parenting support email parenting@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Virtual parenting sessions

Although the parenting team are currently unable to offer group parenting programmes in the community, they are offering a range of virtual parenting groups.

The parenting groups focus on key topics such as encouraging positive behaviour, getting teens to cooperate and an introduction to the Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities (SFSC) programme.

Parenting Programme Timetable Autumn Term (delivered virtually) September – December 2020

Programme	Age	Additional info	Delivery dates
SFSC*	Birth-18 years	NEW for September 2020. A five-week shortened version of SFSC adapted for virtual delivery. Delivered in Bengali.	Rolling programme Tuesday 10am – 12noon
SFSC	Birth-18 years	NEW for September 2020. A five-week shortened version of SFSC adapted for virtual delivery. Delivered in English.	Tuesday, 5.30 – 7.30pm or Wednesday, 10am – 12noon
Triple P Group Teen Programme	12-18 years	Delivered in English.	Tuesday 1 – 3pm
Triple P Group	18 months - 18 years	Delivered in English.	Tuesday or Friday 10am – 12noon
Triple P Seminars – The Power of Positive Parenting	18 months - 18 years	NEW for September 2020. One-off session introducing positive parenting strategies.	Rolling programme Wednesday 10am – 12noon
Triple P Group and Teen Discussion Group Series	18 months - 18 years	Topic specific sessions covering a range of parenting concerns. Delivered in English.	Dates TBC (one-off sessions)
Triple P Family Transitions	Birth-18 years	NEW for September 2020. For parents who are experiencing personal distress from separation or divorce, which is impacting on their parenting.	Thursday 1 – 3pm
ADHD -The Parent Factor	5-18 years (with diagnosis of ADHD)	For parents of a child with a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Delivered in English.	Fridays (time TBC)
Triple P Online	18 months- 18 years	An individual online programme for parents to access and complete at their own pace. Practitioner support and guidance to complete the programme is available on request.	Start dates depending on parental preference and availability.

* *Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities*

Triple P online programme

The Triple P (positive parenting programme) has introduced new online sessions which offer a fantastic solution for parents to access the same evidenced-based information they would normally get from a structured group programme.

Triple P online is available for parents of children up to the age of 11-years-old as well as a separate programme for parents of teenagers.

Programmes feature expert advice from child psychologist, Dr Matt Sanders, as well as video clips of real families. Topics relate to everyday challenges of parenting and a recently added module 'Parenting during Covid-19', provides practical strategies to help parents reduce stress and cope with changes to family life.

Parents can personalise the programme to fit their needs



and work at their own pace. Parenting practitioners are on hand to guide and support parents as they progress through the course. All participants receive worksheets, podcasts, email summaries along with tailored workbooks and additional printable resources. A total of 48 parents successfully registered and completed the Triple P online programme during the Covid-19 period.

Parents interested in completing the online course can discuss their needs with a practitioner. Parents will receive a certificate from Triple P on completion.

“

It's good because it gets me and my partner to talk about things and decide how we are going to work together to handle situations with the children.

Parent

”

For more information on parenting support email parenting@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Support for young carers

Life in lockdown has presented challenges for all of us. For young people with caring responsibilities, it can be even more distressing as they may have to take on additional responsibilities with little or no respite. The Tower Hamlets Young Carer Project usually provides face-to-face support sessions for young carers, but it has had to devise different ways to offer support during these times.

For older young carers, the project has been offering weekly group video calls so carers can share their experiences, connect with others and take a break from the pressures at home. In addition, it has been running weekly mindfulness and meditation sessions to help young carers prioritise their emotional wellbeing and give them coping mechanisms for stress.

For the younger age group, the project has been regularly checking in with parents to provide support as needed. Responding to the need for paper-based resources for the younger carers, the project has been sending out activity packs full of fun activities to keep them busy at home. Virtual hang out sessions are planned for the future, so that the younger carers can all catch up.

It is likely that there will be an increase in young carers because of the pandemic as family members become ill with COVID-19 so supporting our young carers now is more important than ever.

To find out more about the Young Carers Project and the support it can provide, email young.carers@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Early Help during COVID-19

The Early Help service is available to ensure families and professionals working with it get all the support they need during the current pandemic and beyond.

Supporting professionals

The Early Help Hub practitioners and managers are available to support professionals with many different issues including:

- Step up/down from children's social care
- Safeguarding concerns
- Threshold enquiries
- Completing assessments
- Support to move cases on
- Addressing cases that are stuck
- Additional support available for families
- Strategies to improve outcomes for families

Contact us

Early Help Hub Managers

Nicola Mutale or Kamran Miah

Tel: 020 7364 5006 (Option 2)

Email:

nicola.mutale@towerhamlets.gov.uk or

kamran.miah@towerhamlets.gov.uk

towerhamlets.gov.uk

Early Help Coordinators

Karen Simpson (West Locality)

Tel: 020 7364 3939

Email: karen.simpson@towerhamlets.gov.uk

towerhamlets.gov.uk

Tanya Rajfeld (East Locality)

Tel: 020 7364 2975

Email: tanya.rajfeld@towerhamlets.gov.uk

towerhamlets.gov.uk



Right Help,
Right Time

Professional Support Services

- Return to school planning and family support
- Training
- Listening circles/supervision
- Problem solving circles
- Welfare check support
- Service level agreements available for school social workers
- Mini-cluster partner engagement meetings

To sign up to join a meeting or to receive ongoing support and information, email your name and organisation to earlyhelp@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Supporting families

Early Help practitioners are based in all children's centres across the borough. They offer family support, alongside their colleagues in children's centres, to families with children from conception to 19 years (or 25 years for young people with additional needs). At this time support can be offered over the telephone, FaceTime, WhatsApp or Zoom.

Practitioners are using creative methods to engage families and are using alternative tools to assess need. The child's voice is difficult to obtain during these times therefore a more creative approach involving technology is the way forward. Staff are multi-skilled and have good connections to support young people into education training and employment.

For more details or to discuss the possibility of support before you complete the enquiry, call the Early Help Hub on **020 7364 5006 (Option 2)**.

Professionals can refer a family that requires support (with consent) or parents can refer themselves by visiting <https://forms.towerhamlets.gov.uk/service/ehenquiries>



AT HOME SHOULDN'T MEAN AT RISK

Domestic Abuse #YouAreNotAlone

During lockdown, domestic abuse helplines and websites saw significant increases in people reaching out for support. There is a concern that residents experiencing abuse will not know that support services are still operating.

Support is still being provided over the phone by local organisations (Victim Support and Look Ahead), refuges are still open and people can still seek help through local authority housing.

To compound matters, the lockdown has made it even more difficult to find a safe space to talk to someone over the phone. There are, however, online sources of support, such as Women's Aid webchat: <https://chat.womensaid.org.uk> (10am – 12pm Monday to Friday)

Now more than ever it is important for families, friends and neighbours to recognise the signs of abuse – more controlling behaviour, more extreme levels of isolation or more arguments.

Please don't turn away. You could have an important role in increasing someone's safety. Abuse can be reported to the police (999/101) or to CrimeStoppers anonymously:

<https://crimestoppers-uk.org>

The main message is **#YouAreNotAlone**.

Although the One Stop Shop Domestic Abuse Drop-in has been temporarily closed, the services (solicitors, housing team, independent domestic violence advocates) are still operating. Please visit the domestic abuse services page on the Tower Hamlets website, with updates to services due to Covid-19:

www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/domesticabuse

For support, contact

Victim Support

Tel: **020 7364 7957**

(9am-5pm Monday-Friday)

National Domestic Abuse Helpline

Tel: **0808 2000 247**

(24 hrs, 7 days a week).

There is also the silent distress call function

Victims of abuse can call 999 and press 55 – only by pressing 55, tapping the phone, coughing, or making noise are you guaranteed a response to your call from a police call handler despite your silence.

#YouAreNotAlone

New online VAWG Service Directory

The borough now has an online VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls) Service Directory that details local and national specialist support services that support victims and perpetrators of VAWG.
www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/VAWGServiceDirectory

Advice for parents during coronavirus

Whilst coronavirus is infectious to children it is rarely serious. If your child is unwell it is likely to be a non-coronavirus illness, rather than coronavirus itself.

Whilst it is extremely important to follow Government advice to stay at home during this period, it can be confusing to know what to do when your child is unwell or injured. Remember that NHS 111, GPs and hospitals are still providing the same safe care that they have always done. Here is some advice to help:



RED

If your child has any of the following:

- Becomes pale, mottled and feels abnormally cold to the touch
- Has pauses in their breathing (apnoeas), has an irregular breathing pattern or starts **grunting**
- Severe difficulty in breathing becoming agitated or unresponsive
- Is going blue round the lips
- Has a fit/seizure
- Becomes extremely distressed (crying inconsolably despite distraction), confused, very lethargic (difficult to wake) or unresponsive
- Develops a rash that does not disappear with pressure (the 'Glass test')
- Has testicular pain, especially in teenage boys

You need urgent help:

Go to the nearest A&E department or phone 999



AMBER

If your child has any of the following:

- Is finding it hard to breathe including drawing in of the muscles below their lower ribs, at their neck or between their ribs (**recession**) or **head bobbing**
- Seems dehydrated (dry mouth, sunken eyes, no tears, drowsy or passing less urine than usual)
- Is becoming drowsy (excessively sleepy) or irritable (unable to settle them with toys, TV, food or picking up) - especially if they remain drowsy or irritable despite their fever coming down
- Has extreme shivering or complains of muscle pain
- Babies under 3 months of age with a temperature above 38°C / 100.4°F
- Infants 3-6 months of age with a temperature above 39°C / 102.2°F
- For all infants and children with a fever above 38°C for more than 5 days.
- Is getting worse or if you are worried
- Has persistent vomiting and/or persistent severe abdominal pain
- Has blood in their poo or wee
- Any limb injury causing reduced movement, persistent pain or head injury causing persistent crying or drowsiness

You need to contact a doctor or nurse today.

Please ring your GP surgery or call NHS 111 - dial 111

The NHS is working for you. However, we recognise during the current coronavirus crisis at peak times, access to a health care professional may be delayed. If symptoms persist for 4 hours or more and you have not been able to speak to either a GP or 111, then take your child to the nearest A&E



GREEN

If none of the above features are present

- You can continue to provide your child care at home. Information is also available on NHS Choices
- Additional **advice** is available to families for coping with crying of well babies 
- Additional **advice** is available for children with complex health needs and disabilities.

Self care

Continue providing your child's care at home. If you are still concerned about your child, call NHS 111 - dial 111



Helping shielded children play

During the pandemic, the Parental Engagement Team (PET) have been working with colleagues in the voluntary sector to make up play and activity bags for families in need across the borough.

The project has worked closely with public health colleagues and schools contributing to the play pathway which is part of the shielded families programme. The project donated 500 play and activity bags for children under five years to 12 years plus.

Toyhouse led on the development of the bag for children under five and Play Association Tower Hamlets (PATH) worked with PET to create an arts, crafts and games bag for older children along with play activity tip sheets for children and their parents.

Practitioners from PET also created 'fun with numbers' games packs and devised a creative activity ideas booklet with origami tips for older children to try. There were donations from the East London Business Alliance (ELBA) and the Integrated Early Years Service supplied Bookstart packs for the under-five bags. The community mobilisation leads and facilities management staff at Mulberry Place helped with the logistics of receiving the deliveries and identifying appropriate space at the Town Hall. The Tackling Poverty Team also arranged for toys to be delivered and these were included in some of the packs for targeted children in need.

Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets also supported the recruitment of the community volunteers

who helped make up the play bags, supporting the project under the supervision of the PET.

All this has been possible thanks to the commitment of our partners and the community volunteers who came into Mulberry Place during lockdown to support the project.



“

Parents are a child's most important educators and though mums often do the bulk of the work, dads along with other carers have a huge impact too.

Speaking as a parent and as a grandparent, I know that the patience, knowledge and skills that are needed to raise a baby to adulthood are beyond most of us and at some point, we all need help. But help can be difficult to accept. Therefore the work of the PET to support parents and carers to take an active role in their child's education is so important.

The team takes an evidence-based approach to developing a good relationship between home and school, so that life chances and outcomes for children and young people are improved. PET works with schools and settings to provide programmes and personalised support to tackle barriers to a successful education.

During the current situation the team, in addition to phoning families, have been doing a range of other work to support families. A huge thank you to the PET for their ongoing work in the community and particularly for their work over the last few months that has provided a lifeline to many of our families.

Christine McInnes
Divisional Director, Education and Partnerships



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Workshop offer to schools

Parent self-care should come first not last according to Marie McLeod.

Marie is a local parent, who has studied extensively around mental health and community cohesion. She uses her expertise to head up the mental health project as part of her role as a Tower Hamlets Parent Champion.

She has two grown up children herself and is aware of the challenges of parenting and has made it her personal mission to support other parents in this role. As well as running two community support groups, she provides one-to-one support in her role as a parent coach.

The workshops

Marie has created three parent workshops aimed at improving wellbeing and building connections within the community:

- Supporting children's and young people's mental wellbeing

- Parent self-care and their community
- The basics of our young people's changing brains.

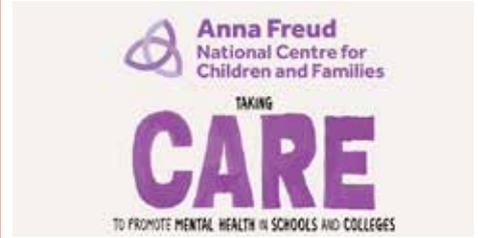
Her ground-breaking community work was recognised when she won the National Parent Champions Volunteer of the Year Award from Coram Family and Childcare in 2018 as well as an Outstanding Service to the Community award at the Docklands Community Champion Awards in 2019.

A large scale portrait of Marie also features on a Shoreditch gallery wall. The piece, entitled 'Trapped in Zone 1', shared a common theme in Marie's community work – to raise awareness of mental health within the community.

To find out more about Marie's workshops or to book one for your school, workplace or community setting, contact Marie McLeod.

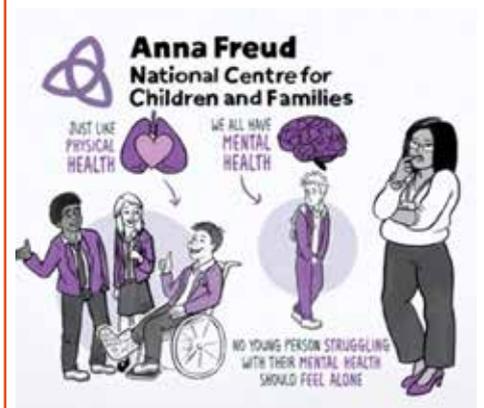
Email: dcmuk@mail.com
Tel: 07446 390 577

Anna Freud Centre launches CARE animation



The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families has produced a useful new resource that aims to help support children and young people's mental health.

The resource takes the form of a unique animation that encourages that all staff in educational settings to use the acronym CARE (Curious, Approachable, Refer, Empathy) as a reminder of how to best support youngsters who may be experiencing mental health difficulties. The centre hopes that the animation could be used in staff trainings, meetings and bulletins.



To view the CARE animation and guidance notes visit www.annafreud.org/careanimation

World Mental Health Day is on Saturday 10 October 2020.
www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Tower Hamlets Arts and Music Education Service (THAMES)

THAMES continues to work with schools and families by providing online lessons, music, and performances as well as signposting to useful resources.



THAMES Virtual Saturday Music Centre

The virtual centre was set up to ensure that children and young people who are used to rehearsing each Saturday morning were able to continue this despite the pandemic. There are currently 12 ensembles taking place on Zoom with over 100 students working to create musical collage performances, which culminated in a virtual summer concert.

The Isle of Dogs Children's Choir

The choir currently has 30 choir members and worked with digital resources provided by THAMES and their singing partners as part of the Summer Singing Challenge. The choir is free and open to anyone in Tower Hamlets aged seven to 11.

Soundbox

Soundbox is an inclusive music ensemble for disabled and non-disabled young people aged 11 plus. It takes places at the THAMES Saturday Music Centre and has continued as a virtual ensemble during lockdown. Activities have included a digital recording project, music-making in real time using Zoom, and a blog to keep everyone connected.

For more details on THAMES programmes, visit

Web: <https://thames.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Home.aspx>

YouTube channel: [youtube.com/user/THAMESSMC](https://www.youtube.com/user/THAMESSMC)

Twitter: @thames_music



Join the Tower Hamlets Dads' Network

Dads and male carers from across the borough came together on 19 June and again on 14 July to meet and talk about fatherhood during the pandemic and to celebrate Fathers' Day Weekend.

The group chatted about the challenges of working from home and juggling family life, keeping children happy, occupied and engaged in their education and more.

Participants also got a free activity bag with lots of resources to support play and creative learning for their children.

All said, they found the meeting enjoyable and informative and are keen to meet again.

All Tower Hamlets dads and male carers are encouraged to join the Dads' Network to receive updates about national and local information on family life and strengthening relationships with children through positive parenting and play.

The next Dads' Network meeting will take place on **Friday 2 October 2020 2-3 pm.**

For more information visit www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/dads

Or email parentalengagement@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Black Lives Matter

On Wednesday 3 June, Bromley Public Hall was illuminated in purple to show solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, following the tragic killing of George Floyd by a policeman in the United States. In Tower Hamlets there is a long history of standing up to racism and it continues to be a borough where there is No Place for Hate.



Play your part

Everyone has a part to play in achieving equality and social justice. Residents can help by speaking out against all forms of prejudice and discrimination. Other ways include reading, researching and learning about the history of systemic racism and signing petitions and donating to causes and organisations that are working to eliminate race-based discrimination.

Make your personal pledge against hate at www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/npfh-pledge

“

In Tower Hamlets we have used the message of 'No Place for Hate' which simply means not discriminating because of the colour of someone's skin, where they are from, who they are or who they love. We show solidarity with those affected by injustice on this basis and reflect on what we can do in our lives to ensure that we are part of that ongoing fight for equality.

John Biggs, Mayor of Tower Hamlets



”

The Somali Parents and Carers Network

The Parental Engagement Team has been adapting to the current situation and inviting Somali parents and carers to virtual network meetings instead of the usual face-to-face meetings.

The network is an established support group for Somali parents in the borough. It provides a space for Somali parents to share their experiences and discuss topics relating to education, health, parenting and safeguarding.

The meeting held in July welcomed Manal Adam, Public Health Programme Officer, who shared the latest guidance and led a discussion on keeping safe during the pandemic. The information was very well received by the parents who attended.

“The session was very well prepared, and professionally presented. It was very informative. I found it very useful in terms of the information. It was scientific and supported with a lot of research findings.”
Parent

“I knew a little bit about Covid-19 but now, after this session, I have better knowledge about the disease and how to protect my family.”
Parent

I would like to thank the presenter, Manal Adam, for being so professional and answering our questions.”
Parent

The network will continue to meet monthly during the autumn term and will provide more opportunities for parents to discuss a range of topics and to hear important news and updates from guest speakers.

The next meeting will be on **Monday 21 September 2020**. To find out more or to join the Somali Parents and Carers Network, contact parenting@towerhamlets.gov.uk or call **020 7364 6398**.

The next Parent and Carer Council meeting will take place on **Saturday 10 October 2020**. For more information visit www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/parentcouncil

A day in the life of a SEND IASS caseworker

My name is Denise and I joined Tower Hamlets as a SEND IASS Case Officer in June 2019. Previously I had spent 10 years working on the 'other side' of SEND services, as an Education, Health and Care Plan Case Officer within another London borough.

The years I've spent writing Education and Health Care Plans have given me a practical understanding of council processes which has proven invaluable as a SEND IASS advisor for parents.

What is SEND IASS?

SEND IASS is the Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service. It is a free and impartial service which every local authority is obliged to make available for parents and young people with SEND.

My work mainly consists of:

- Helping parents apply for an Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessment and explaining the process to them.
- Supporting parents to mediate with and/or appeal against the council if their application is declined.
- Reviewing draft EHCP with parents to help them ensure that the plan is fit-for-purpose, and that their child has the support they need.
- Supporting parents with meetings and reviews at schools. Parents often comment that school meetings are very different when someone from SEND IASS attends – they feel more listened to and taken more seriously. I feel I make a difference by helping parents explain their concerns so that they come away feeling those concerns have been addressed.
- Speaking with parents on the phone or at our drop-in sessions – offering advice or taking a formal referral so that they can be allocated a caseworker. Sometimes, I become their caseworker, which they find helpful as they already know me.
- Planning and delivering workshops for parents to give them an understanding of the EHCP process, how the council makes its decisions and what government legislation must be followed. My key objective is to give parents more knowledge, confidence, and self-sufficiency around SEND issues.

I am just one member of a team with a great deal of knowledge and expertise in different areas of education and SEND. My role is one of impartiality and managing family expectations. It's a rewarding role and I'm happy to help parents and families of SEND children and young people to get the support they need.

Denise Galea
Family Partnership Officer



SEND Parent Ambassador Programme

The SEND Parent Ambassador programme is coordinated by the Family Information Service – all ambassadors are parents/carers of children with additional needs. They are passionate about ensuring that other parents/carers are informed, consulted and able to participate in their children's wellbeing. Their aim is to promote inclusion in the community and ensure that parents and professionals are informed and communicating effectively.

The SEND Parent Ambassadors hold regular meetings with Cllr Danny Hassell. Since lockdown, they have been meeting with him virtually via Zoom to ensure SEND issues remain a priority in Tower Hamlets. When restrictions are completely lifted, the SEND Parent Ambassadors will be back visiting settings across the borough in order to promote parent participation.

If you are interested in the SEND Parent Ambassadors running a session in your school or setting email sendparentambassadors@gmail.com or call 020 7364 6481.

Independent SEND Parents Forum website launched



The Tower Hamlets Independent SEND Parents Forum has launched an exciting new website. The forum represents the collective voice of parents and carers who have children with additional needs and/or disabilities in Tower Hamlets.

The forum works with local partners to deliver change and improve services for families. The aim is to help create a national picture of SEND need, issues and provision. They hope to empower families by keeping them informed of legislation, rights and of good practice.

Their new website is packed full of useful features from jargon busters to answers to common questions. Future activities include relaxation and wellbeing sessions which will take place on Zoom.

To find out more and to take part in parent surveys, visit

www.thsendforum.co.uk

Email: thsendforum@gmail.com Twitter @ThsendFor

Family Information Service provides support during pandemic

The Family Information Service (FIS) provides free, impartial information and advice on services for children and young people, parents and families.

While their offices remain closed, they are still available to take your telephone enquiries. The telephone service is available from Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm.



Tower Hamlets

Family Information Service

Tel: 020 7364 6495



Family Fund

Family Fund is the UK's largest charity providing grants for families raising disabled or seriously ill children and young people. Last year, they provided 89,101 grants or services worth over £33 million to families across the

UK. There are currently around one million families in the UK who are raising disabled children. The Family Fund's aim is to improve the lives of low-income families raising disabled or seriously ill children and young people. The grants are available for a wide range of items, such as washing machines, sensory toys, family breaks, bedding, tablets, furniture, outdoor play equipment, clothing and computers.

For more information about Family Fund and how to apply visit www.familyfund.org.uk/FAQs/how-do-they-apply



Family Fund
Helping disabled children

The Young People's Advice Centre

The Young People's Advice Centre is still open. Young people with special needs and disabilities, up to 25-years-old, can contact the team by text, phone or email to get information, advice and support.

The service supports young people with their education, health and social care and helps them to achieve their goals and aspirations. They can help young people request additional help with their learning, have their views heard in meetings and signpost to other services. Staff are also available just for a chat.

The service has been helping the Our Time All Ability Youth Forum to get online. If any young person you know has any photos, art, stories or films they would like to share on their social media pages please send them to us and we can post them on the forum's social media pages.

This summer, Our Time took part in a consultation on a new online young people's zone and a research project with the University of East London. The research looks at what young people want professionals to know about their experience of an employability course designed for those with special educational needs.

Our Time Youth are also working on a spoken word, film-making project with the 'A' Team Arts. Young people who would like to get involved, or members of staff who would like to know more, please contact the **Family Information Service** on **020 7364 6495**.

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THE ALL ABILITY YOUTH FORUM

**OUR
TIME**

WE MEET ONLINE
ONCE A WEEK TO
LEARN NEW SKILLS
AND GIVE YOUNG
PEOPLE A VOICE

WEDNESDAYS
3-4PM

EMAIL OURTIME.YF@GMAIL.COM
TWITTER/OURTIMEYF
INSTAGRAM.COM/OURTIME_YF
WWW.OURTIMEYF.COM

Holiday Childcare Scheme

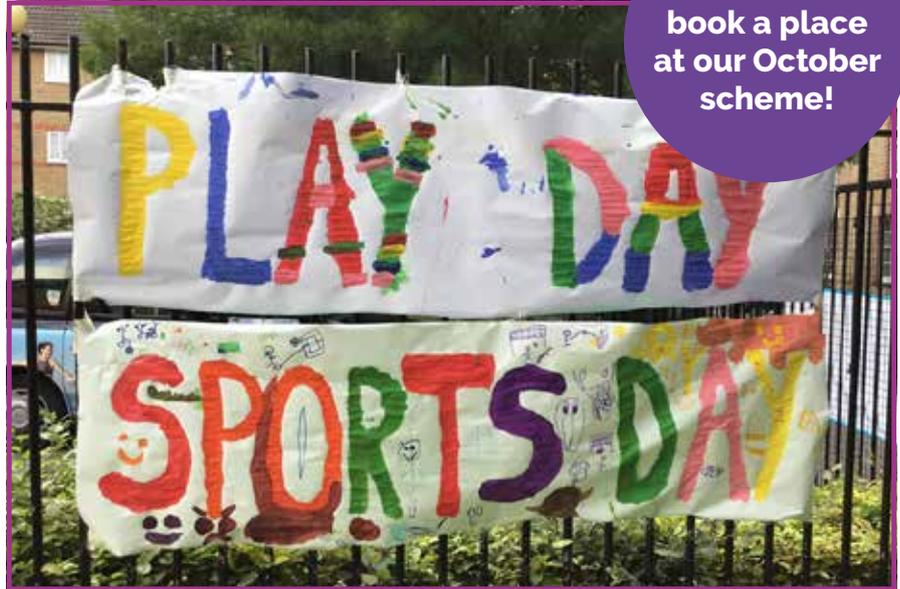
Don't miss out
book a place
at our October
scheme!

The Tower Hamlets Holiday Childcare Scheme is Ofsted registered and provides childcare for children aged three to 13-years-old. The holiday provision takes place in Tower Hamlets schools and operates during the school holidays (excluding the Christmas break).

Summer holiday childcare scheme took place at St Matthias Primary School between Monday 27 July and Friday 21 August (inclusive).

We followed Department for Education advice and put in place stringent health and safety measures to make our summer scheme Covid-19 secure.

A number of places were provided for children with children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and vulnerable referrals from children's social care, schools and other partner agencies.



Active travel

The holiday childcare scheme promotes anti-idling. We promote active travel such as walking, cycling or scooting to the scheme. Staff and children are sharing key messages with parents/carers to raise awareness of pollution in our borough and the action we can take as a community.



1,643

sessions booked



179

children supported



126

total families supported



109

working families supported



13

vulnerable families supported



40

LBTH schools represented in bookings



The Holiday Childcare Team is part of the Parent and Family Support Service.
For more information, to leave feedback or to book places visit www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/hcs
Parents/carers who use the scheme are encouraged to give ongoing feedback.



Early Years

The children have been enjoying activities surrounding the theme Once Upon a Time. The children created forts and castles for their fairy tale story. Children took part in several arts and crafts activities such as learning to sow their own cushion and creating pillows from sleeping beauty. Botley the robot our newest addition to the scheme was enjoyed as part of a technology session. Children also took part in an interactive imaginary story telling workshop. Outside children took part in a variety of activities such as athletics and javelin. This summer the children's favourite activity was hide and seek.



Main Scheme and Teen Space

This summer the theme for main scheme was Castles, Dragons, Kings and Queens. Children made their own kingdoms and took part in role play activities. Our recently expanded library of books was enjoyed by many children. Staff reinvented games such as rounders with a twist whereby children sit on chairs and throw the ball to each other to get kicked out. Bench ball was another firm favourite amongst the children. Some children enjoyed the more focused activities such as chess with great concentration during the games. As always, our arts and crafts room was very popular with children learning how to sew as they made hand puppets. Virtual trips were a success with children exploring places such as The Eiffel Tower, Disney World, The Planet Mars and other exciting places. Finally, our Playday event was a special day for children with children enjoying our sports day and virtual workshops.



Playday

I thought the playday was really fun and we need to do it more often.
Eva (child)

On Wednesday 5 August, the Holiday Childcare Scheme joined children and adults across the UK to celebrate **Playday 2020**. This year Playday, an annual celebration which started in 1987, was themed around 'every day freedoms and every day adventures'.

Children took part in sporting activities before being awarded medals and trophies for their success. Games included scooter races, egg and spoon, and a balancing game that involved walking with a beanbag on your head.

There were also workshops organised by students visitors from the **HEC Global Learning Centre**. Children their own raps, learnt some Spanish and Italian, and drew dinosaurs on adventures.

The event was attended by the Tower Hamlets Director of Children and Culture, James Thomas (pictured below handing out medals and trophies); the Divisional Director of Education and Partnerships, Christine McInnes; Head of Parent and Family Support Service, Jill McGinley; and, Councillor Danny Hassell, Cabinet Member for Children and Families.

James Thomas, Corporate Director, Children and Culture said: "What a great day! The highlight of my week, seeing so many children playing and enjoying themselves. Great work by the whole team involved to provide opportunities for play during summer, so a big thank you to all of them."

It was wonderful to see all the kids (I was watching from outside the gates) out together doing lots of team sports and showing their cooperation especially between year groups.
Ben (parent)



The children had an exciting interactive day. There were lots of fun sports. All the children took part in the activities. The children with additional needs were included in all area of activities. Some of the activities were altered to suit their particular needs. The weather was really good and wasn't too hot for the children. All of the children were laughing and smiling which was amazing to see.

Patricia Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator (SENCO)



Because we have never done a playday before it was a really enjoyable experience and would love it to be on again.
Esther (child)

Sonny loved the water balloon race especially because his team won!
Andy (parent)



Students

The holiday childcare scheme has been hosting student and volunteer placements since February 2020 with virtual placements starting in April 2020 as we adapted our offer in response to Covid-19, offering either an admin or childcare placement, or a blended placement, involving both. All students and volunteers go through a thorough induction process which includes safeguarding, GDPR and accessibility training.

To date those on placements have organised and delivered workshops to children both face-to-face and more recently, remotely. We have received [student feedback](#). Highlights include supporting the team in planning an exciting [Playday event](#), and much more, including: producing a comprehensive training programme, collating evidence portfolios for accreditation and marketing the scheme to the wider community.

Lance Lathino, Holiday Childcare Team Manager said: "Our experience of hosting placement students has been hugely positive. We provide transferable skills which support students and volunteers in preparing for employment. We greatly value their fresh perspective and new ideas, which help us to improve our service to children and families."

Interested students and volunteers from Tower Hamlets should contact Lance Lathino, Holiday Childcare Team Manager via lance.lathino@towerhamlets.gov.uk to learn more about applying.

Find out more about the Holiday Childcare Scheme [here](#).



Workshops

Children at the scheme took part in an idling action video protest challenge with Natalie Curd from Idling Action London. Children learnt about pollution, how it affects us and where it comes from. The workshop challenged children to create their own video to target car pollution, particularly idling. We will share the videos once available.

Thanks to Erasmus+ funding, and as part of HEC's Sankofa Storytelling Project, HEC Global Learning Centre were able to offer the children at the holiday childcare scheme storytelling workshops based on identity and migration.

The workshops were developed using the project's videos resources created by partners across three countries in Europe to combine traditional storytelling techniques with digital technologies to explore local and global themes.

The team from HEC Global Learning Centre will be back for our next scheme!

Virtual trips

The children at the scheme took part in numerous virtual trips. There was no clear favourite trip and some at the top of the list include;

- Disney World Tour
- Natural History Museum
- Animal Watch
- The Eiffel Tower

"I really enjoyed the zoo trip as I have never thought of doing a trip virtually."
Jasmin, child

Help with Universal Credit applications

The Tower Hamlets Resident Support Outreach Team can provide support with Universal Credit applications. The team usually delivers services in the community, but while these centres are closed, they are providing support by email, telephone and will soon be offering live webcam chat.

Available support includes:

- Help with making a Universal Credit claim online
- Understanding the requirements of Universal Credit
- Benefit entitlement checks
- Help with claims – hardship grants, discretionary housing payments, etc.
- Managing money and debts
- Referrals to welfare benefit and debt advice services
- Referrals to WorkPath to help getting back to work.

For help with Universal Credit applications, book an appointment with a council officer by emailing LBTHResidentSupport@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Hardship grants

The Residents' Support Scheme is designed to help residents who are either in, or at risk of, being in crisis or are in need of immediate help and have no source of financial support available to them. The scheme can help with short-term living costs such as food, utility bills and in some instance's white goods/furniture.

Cash is not awarded but some payments are made via Paypoint which can be redeemed for cash at several local shops.

For more details, visit www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/RSS.

For parents who are finding it difficult to apply online, or have a query about a new or existing application, please email lwpqueries@northgateps.com or call **020 7520 7217**.

To appeal refused applications, or to make a formal complaint email lwpappeal@northgateps.com.

Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network

The Tower Hamlets Community Advice Network (THCAN) is a partnership of local advice centres that provide free advice and representation in areas of social welfare law. The advice centres (funded by the council) work together through THCAN to ensure that Tower Hamlets residents have access to free, high quality advice on welfare benefits, debt, housing and other areas of social welfare law.

For more details, visit <http://thcan.org.uk/>

Help with food

The council has been working hard to provide supplies to their food providers who support residents with food parcels, ready meals and hot food across the borough. They set up a food distribution hub for the Voluntary Community Sector at New City College and are supporting many organisations to provide over 5,500 residents with food.

For support with food, please contact call the Support Outreach Team

Tel: **020 7364 7010**

For information, visit <http://thcan.org.uk/>



Checking Free School Meals Eligibility – Call the Family Information Service

Parents of primary school children in Tower Hamlets would ordinarily receive school meals at no charge through a combination of the government's Universal Infant Free School Meals for Reception, Year 1 and Year 2, and locally funded free school meals for Years 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Although these meals are free, they are not the same as Free School Meals. To receive Free School Meals, parents must meet strict eligibility criteria.

To learn more about the support available to parents, including support to check eligibility for Free School Meals, contact the Family Information Service

Tel: **020 7364 6495**

Monday to Friday
9am – 5pm.

For more information on Free School Meals eligibility, visit www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/fsm

Tower Hamlets Food Partnership Local Food Resource

The Tower Hamlets Food Partnership is hosted by the Women's Environmental Network, a charity that has been working alongside local communities to take action for a healthy environment for over 20 years. The partnership is a network of organisations and individuals taking action to achieve good food for everyone in Tower Hamlets.



Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the partnership has been compiling a local food resource every fortnight. The useful resource includes information on food banks, projects and Healthy Start vouchers. It also provides details of restaurants and shops that offer takeaway and delivery.

Organisations and individuals interested in building a more equitable and sustainable food system for the borough are welcome to join the partnership.

Email: jo@wen.org.uk

www.wen.org.uk/foodpartnership

School holiday meals

To ensure that no child went hungry during the holidays, the council worked closely with the Felix Project and local schools to provide meals to families.

During the Easter holidays, the council delivered 1,578 meals to pupils across the borough. For half-term it supplied 4,615 meals to schools and voluntary organisations. During the summer, it provided prepared meals for families in need at several community venues across the borough.

Families were also able to collect activity packs full of ideas, advice and inspiration to keep them active and eating well over the summer.

Self-isolation and food support

Residents who are self-isolating or vulnerable can access food and wider support services through a dedicated phone line. Tel: **020 7364 3030**

They can also use an online self-isolation form to request support or apply to the Residents' Support Scheme for help with food.

Useful contacts

The Tackling Poverty Team have pulled together some useful contacts to support your work with families.

ORGANISATION	TELEPHONE ADVICE	EMAIL
Account 3	020 7739 7720	admin@account3.org.uk
Age UK	020 8981 7124	info@ageukeastlondon.org.uk
Apasen	020 7001 2266	syeda.ara@apasen.org.uk
Bromley by Bow Centre	020 8709 9757 020 8709 9745	advice@bbbc.org.uk
Carers Centre Tower Hamlets	020 7709 1765	enquiries@ccth.org.uk
Citizens Advice Bureau	0203 855 4472	advice@eastendcab.org.uk
DeafPlus	077 4570 8878 (Text only)	aiysha.begum@deafplus.org
Fair Finance	020 3475 8811	info@fairmoneyadvice.co.uk
Financial Health Centre	020 7364 2200	fhc@thh.org.uk
Island Advice Centre	020 7987 9379	admin@island-advice.org.uk
Legal Advice Centre	020 3606 0372	admin@legaladvicecentre.london
Limehouse Project	020 7538 0075	info@limehouseproject.org.uk
Mind in Tower Hamlets and Newham	020 7510 1081	info@mithn.org.uk
Ocean Somali Community Centre	020 7749 7608 (Wednesday 2 - 4pm) 020 7749 7605 (Thursday 10am - 12.30pm)	abdi@oceansomali.org.uk
Paxis		admin@praxis.org.uk
Positive East	020 7791 2855	talktome@positiveeast.org.uk
St Hildas	020 7739 8066 (Monday to Thursday, 10am - 2pm)	alaya@sthildas.org.uk
St Peter	020 7729 1036	stpetersba@live.co.uk
Stifford Centre	020 7790 3632	info@stifford.org.uk
Tower Hamlets Law Centre	020 7538 4909	info@thlc.co.uk
Tower Hamlets Resident Support Outreach Service	020 7364 7010	LBTHResidentSupport@towerhamlets.gov.uk
Toynbee	020 7392 2953	advice@toynbeehall.org.uk

The Local Offer's dedicated Covid-19 page

The Local Offer is an online resource for all families and provides information on the support that is available for children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities and their families. It also features information on training, employment and independent living for young people with special educational needs or disabilities.



The Local Offer has a dedicated Covid-19 page with up-to-date information and useful resources to support all families. The page is updated regularly and includes varied content ranging from health and wellbeing to bereavement, parenting, money matters and much more.

To find out more, visit www.localoffertowerhamlets.co.uk/pages/local-offer/covid-19