

5th May 2021

Hi there,

**JOIN AN ONLINE LEWISHAM SEND FORUM ON 15 JUNE AT 7PM,**

I am writing to invite you to join an exciting movement in Lewisham to create a step-change for the lives of young people in Lewisham with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Approximately 13% of children in Lewisham have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), higher than the average for England. Yet these children and young adults are all too often seen as peripheral by the rest of society.

When young people graduate from mainstream schools, they will be embracing further education, employment or training opportunities, with increasing independence from the family home. In contrast, these prospects are not readily available to youth with SEND. In 2017, just 8.8% of adults with learning disabilities in Lewisham were in paid employment – a decrease from 10.3% in the previous year.

Our young people with SEND all have the potential to be active, thoughtful members of the South East London community. They just need your help to do so. We’re calling upon visionary and caring people like you to join a grassroots movement to make a real difference to the lives of youth with SEND and their families.

**BE A MEMBER OF OUR FORUM FOR SEND YOUTH IN LEWISHAM**

Please consider lending your voice and support to a **Forum** that encompasses some of the key goals of the Brent Knoll and Watergate Co-operative Trust. Our Trust has been active since 2012, and was formed by two of Lewisham’s special schools, Brent Knoll School and Watergate School. Our vision for this Forum is to encourage wider discussion about how we can improve things for SEND children, to share ideas and advice, and to foster a culture of advocacy for friends or family members. Above all, we want you to experience the excitement of achieving goals for the benefit of the community.

For years, our Trust has been working in alliance with other strategic partners, including Lewisham local authorities, the Ravensbourne Trust and Phoenix Community Housing. SEND schools across Lewisham provide their pupils with an outstanding educational experience, with well-resourced facilities and talented and dedicated staff. However, outside school, it’s a completely different story: these young people continue to be marginalised and denied ~~of~~ spaces and opportunities for them to learn.

Our Trust espouses wider values of **self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity** and **solidarity**, which we feel are integral to all we want to achieve for our young people. Moreover, the Co-operative model works through bottom-up participation, rather than being top-down. This is why we are calling for your engagement with this Forum, to give SEND learners in Lewisham the chance to lead a life that every single young person deserves.

**WE COULD ACHIEVE MUCH MORE WITH YOUR HELP**

In the last nine years, our Trust has made a real difference to the lives of our young people and their families. Government funding cuts removed holiday provision for children with SEND, so we have successfully raised funds to be able to run holiday clubs at both schools, without recourse to school educational budget funding, to enable our children to continue to socialise and develop through play and families have some respite time in the holidays. During the first wave of the pandemic in 2020, the Trust organised the delivery of food parcels to around 120 families a week for **five months**. We applied for grants for specialist equipment like an Eyegaze machine which opened up the possibility of family communication and for school uniform when lack of exercise meant that children outgrew their clothes and funds weren’t available at home to buy new. We were one of the recipients of the Mayor’s Award for this work. We have received grant funding for counselling and for sensory equipment to assist development.

But our children and families deserve a more ambitious agenda. We aim for a community in which our young people can thrive. Key areas currently closed to young people with SEND now need our attention, namely:

* post-16 educational opportunities;
* employment and training opportunities through the establishment of a social enterprise;
* supported independent residential provision.

Our aim has always been to support **all young people** with SEND in our local area, and we welcome discussion on how we can grant them access to these opportunities.

To create ripples of change that turn aspirations into reality, we need support from **all those** **directly or indirectly** involved in the lives of children with SEND and their families.

Please consider becoming a member of our Forum. This is not a plea for fund-raising or for time-consuming commitment. Ultimately, the Forum will elect three additional Trustees to sit on our Trust board, along with our member organisations, but it is the members of the Forum itself who will guide us on how to improve the lives of these very special young people.

If you have ever wanted to make a meaningful difference on a local basis, **now** is your opportunity. Click the link [here](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=hXDIcBCgiE64U6-9aCed95ExqhG5_S9PsjB1Yj7OcTtUQ0lYVVU4ME83T0MwN0I0TjhCV0MwNjkyVS4u) to register for our Forum meeting which will take you to an RSVP form.

If you want to find out more please visit our website [here](https://www.bkwgtrust.org.uk/) or feel free to send me an email at info@bkwgtrust.org.uk.

Yours sincerely



Andy Taylor

CEO