

Just Say's open meeting for Early Years open meeting on the 3rd of October 2025.

Special guests.

Cheryl Kearney -CEO Sycamore trust.

Mollie Roddan -Doctoral Researcher | Department of Experimental Psychology.

Kathryn Losq | Team Manager | Portage – Children & Young People Disabilities Team

Early Years SEND Support: Key Issues & Insights

Diagnosis & Initial Support

- Inconsistent support after diagnosis; no follow-up pathways.
- Two out of five parents found accessing support challenging.
- Lack of face-to-face training; timing often unsuitable for parents.
- Language barriers and absence of individualised support.
- Parents feel overwhelmed and emotionally drained.

Education & School Access

- Confusion around how school places are allocated.
- SEND placement often feels like “first come, first served.”
- Lack of clarity on whether placement is based on need.
- Trinity School cited as not providing the right support.
- Specialist schools increase isolation – children taken by

bus, limiting parent connection.

- Redbridge praised for better early years services and training.

Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing

- Rising mental health concerns among early years parents.
- Parents unaware of where to seek mental health support.
- GPs only aware of EHCPs if specific health leads are involved.
- No follow-up or emotional support post-diagnosis.
- Parents judged by others; feel alone and unheard.

Health & Personalised Care

- Very little understanding of parents' needs.
- Health professionals and schools overlook neurodiverse parents.
- Feeding services lack face-to-face support.
- Referrals and pathways unclear across different disabilities.
- Sycamore Trust seen as a rare source of understanding.

Navigating Services

- Low awareness of the Local Offer and Access Card.
- Families struggle to find time for after-school clubs.
- Family Hubs not well-informed about borough-wide services.
- Sycamore Trust helps families feel understood.
- Other boroughs offer better, more accessible services.
- Blue badge. Parents and professionals weren't aware application are done on each child.

Social Care & Community

- Lack of awareness of support beyond Sycamore Trust.
- Parents need opportunities to meet others in specialist settings.
- Isolation and lack of inclusion from other parents.
- Small changes (e.g. sensory OTs) can make a big difference.

Special recognition to.

Sycamore Trust team.

Dr Naila Nazi. Early intervention.

Marsha SENDCo at Sydney Russell.

Recommendations

A. Improve Post-Diagnosis Pathways

- Introduce structured follow-up support after diagnosis.
- Offer face-to-face training with flexible timing and interpreters.
- Embed individualised support planning from the outset.

B. Clarify Placement Processes

- Publish transparent criteria for SEND school placements.
- Ensure placements are needs-led, not availability-led.
- Promote awareness of the Access Card and Local Offer through trusted community channels.

C. Support Parent Mental Health

- Create clear referral pathways for parent mental health support.
- Train professionals to recognise and support neurodiverse

parents.

- Fund peer-led workshops and emotional wellbeing sessions.

D. Strengthen Navigation & Inclusion

- Equip Family Hubs with up-to-date SEND service maps.
- Facilitate parent connection in specialist settings (e.g. coffee mornings, shared transport).
- Invest in sensory OTs and disability-specific referral pathways.