



## Tower Hamlets Independent Parents and Carers Forum Send (THSEND)

### Challenges and Opportunities for SEN Children and Their Caregivers

Parents and caregivers of children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities face significant challenges in accessing suitable activities, services, and support in their communities. This document highlights key issues and potential solutions based on their experiences.

#### *Barriers to Accessibility*

- **Public Transport Struggles:** Parents report difficulties using TFL buses and trains due to staff lacking autism awareness and training.
- **Limited SEN-Friendly Cultural Spaces:** While some museums, like the V&A, offer inclusive sessions, others, such as the Science Museum, fail to provide adequate accommodations even during designated sensory-friendly hours.
- **Outdoor Play and Accessibility Issues:**
  - Parents acknowledge that parks have made significant improvements in making spaces more inclusive. However, what works for one disability may not work for another. For example, while sensory play areas may benefit some children, wheelchair users still struggle to navigate uneven park paths.
  - Skate ramps are often dominated by adults, making them unsafe for children. There is a call for supervised indoor skate parks with trained staff to ensure accessibility and security.
- **Exclusion from Support Centers:** Some centers, such as Haileybury, have denied access to children requiring additional support, leaving parents feeling excluded. Additionally, SEN places in holiday childcare schemes remain insufficient.

#### *Gaps in SEN-Specific Facilities and Services*

- **Lack of Sensory and Soft Play Areas:** Parents emphasize the need for sensory rooms and soft play spaces designed for older children with larger bodies but similar sensory needs.
- **Mainstream School Challenges:** Schools often struggle to accommodate children with ADHD and autism, leading to exclusions and inadequate afterschool support.



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- **Limited Access to SEN-Friendly Activities:** There is a strong demand for more inclusive programs in drama, swimming, and sports that cater specifically to children with disabilities.

### *Positive Examples and Community Initiatives*

- **Victoria Park's Efforts to Include SEN:**

This year, Victoria Park's recreation team has worked hard to make all activities more inclusive by collaborating with the THSEND Forum and the Children with Disabilities Team. Events such as the *SEN Picnic*, *boating on the Lake*, *Halloween Pumpkin Carving*, *Pond Dipping*, and the recent *Get Your Skates On* have been tailored to accommodate SEN children. While *Get Your Skates On* was not an SEN-only event, it was SEN-focused and featured specific activities to ensure accessibility.

- **Welcoming Cultural Venues:** The British Museum and the Tower of London have been praised for their spacious environments and accommodating staff.
- **Successful Inclusive Programs:**
  - *Independent You* and *disability sports sessions* have received positive feedback for their welcoming approach.
  - *The V&A*, *Halfmoon Theatre*, *Rich Mix*, and *Love to Swim Disability Sports* have provided enjoyable experiences for SEN children.
  - *The EVA Armsby Centre Stay and Play* and *John Smith Centre* offer beneficial play sessions, though these are mostly targeted at younger children.
- **Holiday Schemes Making an Impact:**

Independent You, in collaboration with the Linc Centre (Harca) and the THSEND Forum, has provided successful holiday programs, enabling nearly 100 SEN children to participate in fun activities while giving parents much-needed respite. This was accomplished with minimal resources and dedicated volunteers, many of whom are local authority TAs giving up their own holidays.



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### *Recommendations for a More Inclusive Future*

- **Improved Communication and Awareness:** Parents call for better information-sharing about activity schedules and greater efforts to include SEN children.
- **More Trained Staff:** Expanding staff training in autism and SEN support across transport, museums, and activity centers is crucial.
- **Better Accessibility in Parks and Public Spaces:** While progress has been made, further adjustments are needed to ensure parks are truly accessible for all disabilities, including improved pathways for wheelchair users.
- **Increased Support for Caregivers:** There is a growing need for respite services, supervised SEN-friendly complexes, and caregiver retreats to provide mental health breaks.

By addressing these challenges and expanding successful programs, communities can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for SEN children and their families.