PEGIS IN THE PARK 2023

PEGiS is built by parents for parents to help parents around special educational needs or disabilities. It's completely voluntary and nobody takes a wage. It's a fully inclusive community where everybody helps each other. Nobody is left behind and together we thrive. It's a support group/forum that deals with local matters trying to ensure we make it better for everybody.

Seven years ago, PEGiS in the park was born. It started with two PEGiS board members sitting in a park within the community welcoming families into the park. The aim was to stop insolation, offer parent-to-parent support and coping strategies to help each other and of course bring our children and young people together to become friends and enjoy the summer break. As parents, we had also experienced the reality of the holidays and it's extremely hard. Resilience is a word that is used so many times by professionals it means the capacity to withstand or to recover quickly from difficulties. For so many families who have children with special educational needs being resilient is hard because they don't have the ability to recover from difficulties to repair and recover and families can only become resilient if they have time to recover.

For many families the six-week holidays are a time to recover and repair, however for families who are living with a loved one who lives with a special educational need or disability, it's a time of less support and structure. The holidays soon become inaccessible and lonely.
Many special needs families struggle to access their local community from shopping to going to the community park. Since the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, we knew it was more important than ever to make our local communities inclusive, accessible and enjoyable for everybody. The mainstream world had to meet the special needs world to learn about each other. Everybody talks about acceptance, belonging and inclusion and to do this we must all come together to learn from each other. We must be that change for tomorrow.

PEGiS in the park this year grew from strength to strength and thanks to the HAF (holiday activities and food scheme) and the professionals who joined us we helped to support over 150 families based in Stoke. We would like to take the opportunity to thank all the professionals who came out of the office to meet the families they support.

So much has been learnt and we are so proud of everybody involved. We learnt that if we want change, we must be prepared to change too. We didn't want the special needs world

hidden from the mainstream world and wanted to celebrate our families. We wanted to not hide from the community not to join the community. We needed to teach and learn from each other because regardless of disability and diversity we are all parents first. We may not have the same challenges as each other but we love our children and young people just as much as another fellow parent.

PEGiS in the park rebuilt fractured relationships between professionals and parents, It was impressive to watch the two sides of the special needs world come together and not talk about the challenges of the system but to live in the moment of sitting in the sun and in a park talking laughing and supporting children to access their community. Sometimes when you're in a system it becomes very easy to de-personalise each other, however, PEGiS in the park personalises a system and makes everybody human.

PEGiS in the park did bring everybody together including the mainstream world with all the children in the parks playing together. They joined our activities and ALL children didn't see the disabilities just new friends to enjoy the summer.

During our second week of the holidays, one of our mums messaged us to ask where we had got the chalk and the bubbles from as her daughter who usually hates the park wanted to go to the park and do PEGiS in the park. We told her where we got them from and let us know how she got on. Two days later Mum rang me in tears her daughter had spent 2 hours in the park playing with her chalk and bubbles. What was more emotional though was for the first time ever, she had been able to go to her son's football practice and not leave early. Those two little items had brought so much joy.

During PEGiS in the park we gathered feedback and quotes from the events and here are just a few:

“PEGiS in the park has been helpful in motivating my young person to go out. She is struggling a lot with her mental health and getting out and seeing friends at the park has really helped her. I have found it very supportive from a carers point of view too, being surrounded by other parents and carers who just understand is amazing. We have been grateful for the assistance with travel costs, as this can be a barrier for us getting out and about too. It’s been beautiful to see our local parks filled with SEND young people, enjoying themselves, feeling comfortable around their peers, laughing and socialising.”

“PEGiS in the park and haf has been part of the activities that has absolutely been a life saver over a long summer holiday which filled us with dread. Having extra activities with PEGiS the people who just get our lives and our son. The strain this has taken away I cannot put into words, the hugs on tough days and the people sharing in your joy on those beautiful days your child can enjoy an activity to its fullest. Without PEGiS and the support we gain from volunteers and parents we would be feeling very alone and isolated”

“Bit of everything for everyone to do.
Michelle is easy talk to if needed.
Fun
Didn't feel as uncomfortable as thought I would as no judges 🙂”

“PEGiS in the park was a great way for children to mix with others like themselves. It was also an opportunity for parents to meet others in similar situations to their own. No one judged the children for melt downs or out bursts. I found lots of professional attending who were willing to offer advice on many subjects and services available to us. Other parents also shared clubs and activities for our children. I would recommend PEGiS in the park for any parent or guardian of an SEN child”

“I found PEGiS in the park to be refreshing. As a mum of 5, 3 with confirmed SEN needs it was amazing to see children of all abilities playing together, learning to understand each other and most of all enjoying their time.”

“It was encouraging meeting other mums in our area who understood our frustrations when parenting children realising it was OK to be tired, frustrated and sad all at the same time as loving as hard as you could and generally grieving a child you never had. “

“PEGiS has given me encouragement when I've needed it as well of practical support and emotional warmth in what can be a lonely and cold journey.”

“I'm glad I got the opportunity to meet friends with the same worries.”

“We all had an amazing time; so thank you for taking the time to arrange it for us all; from us all xxx”

“I wasn't sure what to expect from the HAF PEGiS in the Park but it was a breath of fresh air to be in a space where you're not judged. I had a good chat with a SEN advisor who gave me some awesome advice which I've been able to take action on x”

“Been able go to a park that’s further afield to my house where I been able to relax knowing I had some support if there was any issue melt down etc and even to just be able to leave my things somewhere safe so I could run round after the child “

“Met different people was able to have nice chats in-between running around after the child and loved getting advice on different sensory things etc for my child “

“Lovely session able to look forward to doing something each week leaving the house with support!”

“We enjoyed spending time with families that understand each other's children’s special powers our Bridget was able to see it's okay just to be her true self and that she is not the only child with superpowers. It's good to see no judgement from parents when you’re walking around feeding your child food as they find it hard to sit and eat when not at home. It was also nice for Bridget to eat and play. Thank you, sweetheart xx, xx”

“A huge thank you to all at PEGiS in the park today. It was the first one we could attend this, Summer. Having been with Pegis since these started, I was in awe watching the acceptance of everyone’s quirks and needs, as well as adults and children helping each other out. If you are ever concerned about bringing your child out, please don't be concerned about bringing them to PEGiS. We are all in the same tribe.”

“Having three children with conflicting needs makes holidays, in particular Summer, a tricky time. As parents we are stretched thinly and isolated. PEGiS in the park has been a lifeline this year. It has been a chance to not feel alone, in fact if it wasn't for PEGiS we would barely have spoken to anyone this Summer. Professionals attending has also been helpful. PEGiS in the park has a good balance, a good atmosphere, welcoming and inclusive. No- one is left behind - which is worth its weight in gold in the society we live in as so much is a battle, and so often not included. The bottom line: thank you PEGiS for keeping us going - we are still standing against all odds. Xxx”

“I had recently had a major operation and my friends from PEGiS helped me and my son to access the Hanley Forest Park event
What melted my heart was when we were navigating my 7-year-old son, who has severe learning disability and Autism over the younger playground a young girl possibly aged 2-3 asked him what his name was and waited for him, in his own time before it was her turn, her mother was very patient and understanding moral of the story kids just see kids ❤️”

“Personally, I think that PEGiS in the park was the perfect opportunity to take my kids out into a public place and know that everyone there will not be staring at them and whispering about behaviour that for a lot of sen parents is normal! I felt supported by complete strangers and found a place where we belong ❤️ the event has had nothing but a positive outcome for me and my children it gave me the opportunity to not worry so much and speak to like-minded parents without judgement and the confidence to engage at places I would usually avoid, and the children had the space to be themselves unapologetically and for me as a parent it really was magic”

“We really enjoyed the PEGiS in the park event, my son made lots of friends and I got chatting to other parents with similar circumstances which is always nice to do. The event was relaxed, friendly with plenty of activities. Thank you xx”

“It was great to meet other parents and their children in a relaxed and fun setting. The events were well organized, and the games and toys were a lovely added touch. My son doesn’t have any friends out of school, so it was so nice seeing him playing with others ❤️”

“I would just like to thank this amazing group and Michelle in particular and her team for arranging everything these last few weeks. Both my children with additional needs have come on leaps and bounds over the last few weeks and I believe this is because of our involvement with the wonderful people of this group! James has grown as an individual and has become calmer I feel, and Warren is actually attempting words in context. This is massive for our family, and I could cry at how proud I am of my children right now! This group has given them the freedom to be themselves, the confidence to try new things and home away from home with understanding people and like-minded children! Anyone who is considering attending events and perhaps isn’t sure it’s for you or are concerned your kids might act up.. I fully encourage you to come along. This is the kind of acceptance I have not experienced anywhere else and

my kids are flourishing because of it! The biggest heart felt thank you to everyone that makes this group special ❤️❤️❤️”

"I've been struggling with feeling alone and scared of the future, through the haf meet ups it stopped me feeling so isolated and I found families sadly, in the same situation as me we want more than just 1 day a week”

“PEGiS doesn’t understand what it does. You advocate that the community's needs to integrate our kids. But the world needs people like you to show us we can do it and it is doable. PEGiS is incredible and I know how lucky I am to be a member of this amazing group”

This year thanks to the HAF we were able to offer our families a day trip. Parents voted where they wanted to go along with the date. We never quite realised the impact this would have on families until one parent told us “I have never taken my children far from Stoke because I'm wheelchair dependent and we just can’t get there it's ok if we can’t come with you I just wanted to say thank you for all the support you have given us all over the summer holidays”. As you can imagine we rang around everywhere to get a coach which was wheelchair accessible. It was more important than ever to include this family on our day trip and as you can all guess we did it!!!
Blackpool was amazing and 45 families went to the seaside they felt secure and not alone as they stepped off the bus, we gave everybody our SEND ribbons which means im here I see you if you need help ask and I want to help you. This meant so much to parents because as we walked around Blackpool making ourselves visible, we could see parents talking and helping each other. Money wasn’t needed as lunches were provided along with lots of drinks and a lot of tips about Blackpool.

Blackpool feedback

“ Today has been precious! It has given me and my daughter some 1:1 time we dearly crave. So magical 💫💜🌈”

“ Fantastic trip spent with great company , most enjoyable trip we’ve been on !! Felt so calm and welcoming 🥰”

“ Fantastic trip, the fact that we were on a coach with people who understand how difficult taking our children out can be, and how anxious they can be made it alot more relaxing and enjoyable as if we went on another coach trip I’d panic what If we had a melt down and then had the usual judgment and moans”

“ Todays trip has meant that I got to spend quality and fun time with my children. It is extremely hard for me to organise anything with two special needs kids and this meant that they could see the beach during the summer holidays.”

“ Spending time with Clarissa and Joe together was a great day”

“ it's meant to us that we have been able to take the girls out without having their grandparents with us as we get a little scared to go out alone as the girls can be a handful when all together so for us it's the 1st time we have been to the seaside with the girls on our own but also with guys that understand that sometimes kids have challenging behaviour as my Carly was showing at the back of coach and I was apologising to people for her screaming meltdowns half way home and people were so nice and understanding and it didn't bother anyone so for us it was nice to have a day with us and our kids at the seaside and the understanding and the none staring while carly had her meltdown xxx”

“ Thank you so much for a day of creating new memories in what has been a rough 2 weeks since we lost my nan last week, its the 1st time weve laughed and smiled in the last 2 weeks. Xxx”

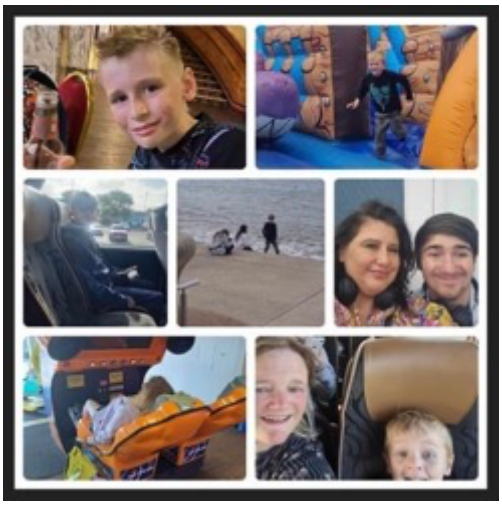
“ What a fantastic day! I was worried my daughter would hate being on the coach but she loved it. I was scared the noise in the arcades might frighten her but she thought it was brilliant. I was anxious that the crowds of people would stress her out but she embraced it.

It just goes to show how our wonderful children never cease to amaze us. Thank you so much for today. It was just what our little family needed.”

“ I loved turning the corner and seeing so many families waiting for the coaches to arrive and all of the children so excited. Everything was planned in such a thoughtful way with the ribbons, wrist straps and lunch packs. I always find the Pegis families so easy to be around because everyone understands the tricky moments and I never feel judged. Thank you for planning such a lovely trip, we had a relaxing, fun filled day. Thanks to all xx

Jude said: The trip to Blackpool was incredible thank you for taking us. I loved playing football by the sea, the tower was really exciting being so high. I played bowling and beat my mum lots of times on the air hockey and won lots sweets.”

“Today was a wonderful end to the summer holiday. Time spent with family and friends. Loved seeing the kids play on the beach.
“Loved helping Michelle and the others set this up for our pegis families to enjoy and have a deserved break”
“An amazing day one that I couldn’t have done without you guys”



Last but not least this summer there has been partnerships formed, parents with professionals and peer to peer friendships.

Throughout the summer many memories and partnerships were made and if one photo could really capture the true meaning of PEGiS and the importance of friendships being formed this picture really is it.

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A very special thank you to everybody who helped us to make the summer holidays of 2023 a huge success. From Natalie Williams and her special needs team, Jenny Haines and her social care team and Combined Health who provided us resources for our day trip. Together we certainly made a difference.

A huge thank you to Adam Yates, Nausheen Latif and Michelle Nagington who provided us so much support through the HAF and the Hub foundation.

Of course, we can never forget the families who support and attend PEGiS they are amazing. PEGiS is a community, its family and together we joined the mainstream world together showing our city how amazing our children and young people.

ACCESSIBILITY is being able to get into the building, **DIVERSITY** is having a seat at the table, **INCLUSION** is having a voice and **BELONGING** is having that voice heard....