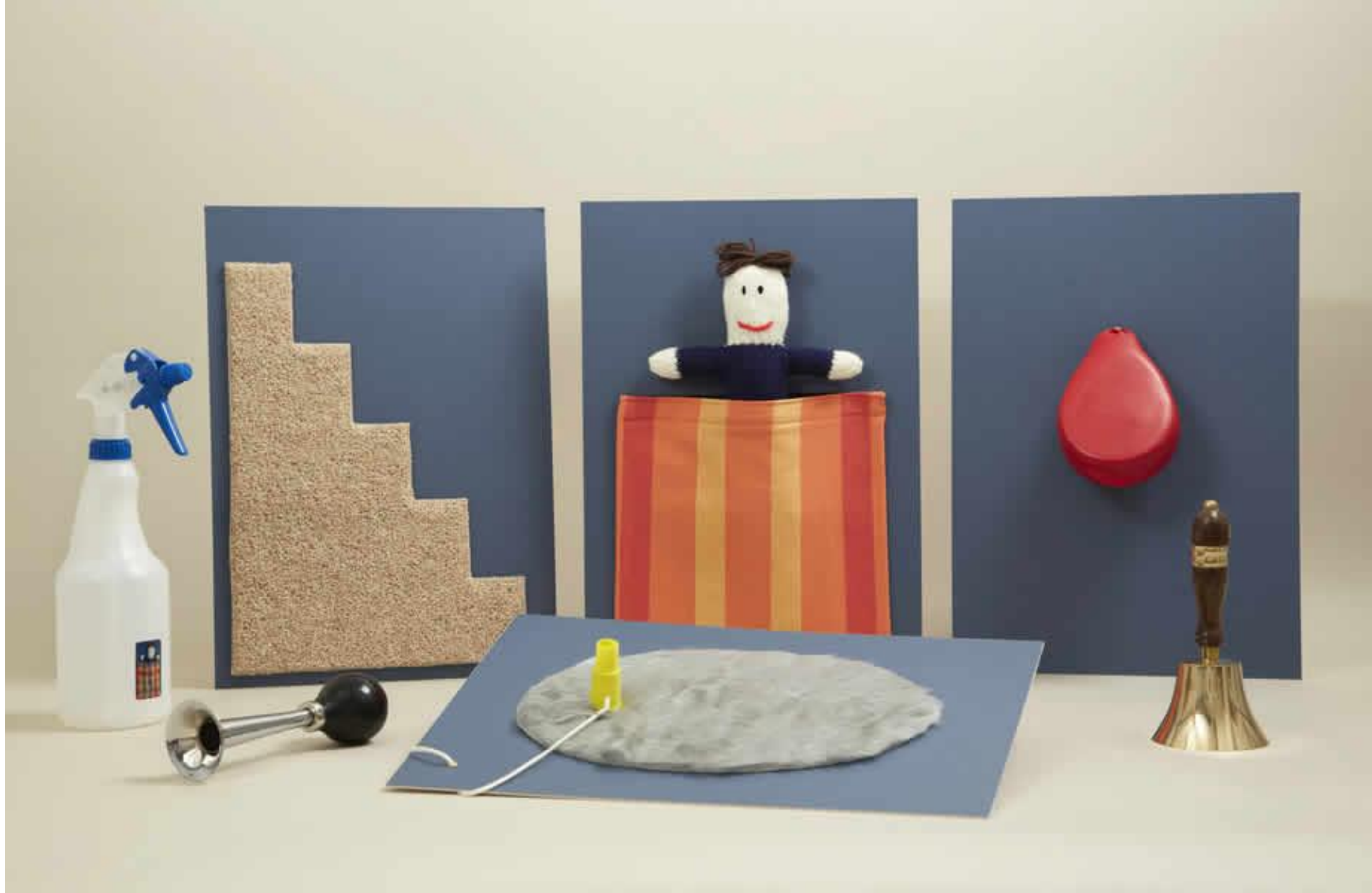


Towards a disability friendly Borough How do we make it happen?

**Heather Mathew - Children and Young People
Voluntary Sector Strategic Lead Manager**





The biggest risk of not including a child with disabilities is that we limit everyone's potential as human beings (Nicole Eredics)

- 2014 Richmond Council, working with the Alzheimers Society, made a commitment to making the borough dementia friendly.
- They looked at the borough from every aspect of human experience from interaction with businesses and council departments, to the enjoyment of the outdoors and heritage attractions and took a consistent approach through freely available online training to start the process of building up understanding and confidence to support attitudinal and practical change.
- As awareness grew this led to greater awareness in the community, and a rise in activities that included those with dementia and their carers – parks, arts, sport and libraries.
- In five years there has been a significant cultural shift, the needs of those with dementia and their carers is much more visible, and are now part of core planning for future services in the borough. Most importantly stigma and social isolation is being broken down, through local community awareness and community involvement.

Diversity is being invited to the party, inclusion is being asked to dance (Verna Myers)

Inclusion is not:

- Simply putting a child with SEND in a mainstream setting (with or without a support worker).

Inclusion can mean

- Making a mainstream setting work for all the children, including those with SEND by modifying the activities, communication methods, approaches, structures and strategies to overcome barriers and provide all attendees with an experience that meets their needs and preferences.
- Being inclusive of all disabilities in a disability setting and creating opportunities for children to mix with their peer group.
- For me, it is also about attitudinal change, how through greater awareness and understanding we can all facilitate inclusion, not only through activity, but through interaction and an expectation that activities particularly those provided by public services involve and recognise the whole family regardless of their needs.

What parents and children are telling us

- A mixture of mainstream, and specialist activities.
- Variety so they can choose how they want to spend their leisure time.
- Social isolation is a significant problem – a Richmond survey two years ago found that 66% of parents felt their child spent too much time on their own, 58% felt their child often felt left out. When asked what the main benefit of short breaks were, 66% rated supported social opportunities as most important.
- What parents and young people want is regular, fun and imaginative activities, delivered locally and by trusted and suitably trained staff where friendships are nurtured and self confidence is built.

What does inclusion feel like?

- *“ TAG has been a wonderful change of scene for our son on Friday evenings and has come at a time when he is really ready to do some sort of after school activity. It’s age appropriate for him and gives an opportunity to interact with his peers as well as with trusted adults. The activities are always imaginative and fun and he always comes out happy.”*
- *“TAG has helped me communicate better and I have made lots of friends and the activities are great fun and the helpers are really helpful to us all”*

Richmond Music Trust school holiday music programme Band-It. The criteria for joining is that the young person wants to make music together with other young people, the only question asked. “ What do you need to help them make the most out of the activity”

- *BandIt is so welcoming that the word ‘inclusive’ isn’t needed. BandIt isn’t about ‘mainstream’ or ‘special’. It welcomes all young people. That’s it. Everyone is welcome.” Parent 2019*

Barriers to inclusion

- **Lack of confidence in staff competencies and the physical and emotional support provided**
“I have considered 1:1 at mainstream but have concerns over whether the person provided would have the skills and experience required”
- **Accessibility of venues and activities –location and physical access**
- **Financial Constraints**
- **Public response to people with disabilities**
“ I have given up mainstream activities or places. The reaction to my son by other parents is often so nasty”

In addition young people said *“I have no-one to go with”*.

In a national study young people reported that bullying or fear of bullying spoils their experiences or stops them accessing inclusive activities or using local leisure and recreation facilities

Examples of good practice

- “ *I cannot be quiet in a library but I love books. People need to understand so I can have a nice time to*” - Dimensions, a not-for-profit provider of support for people with autism and learning difficulties - autism friendly cinema, free online training now extended to include museums and libraries. <https://www.dimensions-uk.org/press-release/free-autism-friendly-training-venues/>
- Mandy Mouse in Peppa Pig.
- Merton libraries – recent Arts Council funding to create inclusive libraries – focus on breaking down barriers and dispel misconceptions, training, family learning, library membership for all special schools with regular class visits.
- Premier Inn, Coventry working in partnership with local FE college – three bed hotel staffed by people with learning difficulties/ Weatherspoon pubs.
- Internationally renowned dance company Balletboyz working with Strathmore School – crowdfunding.

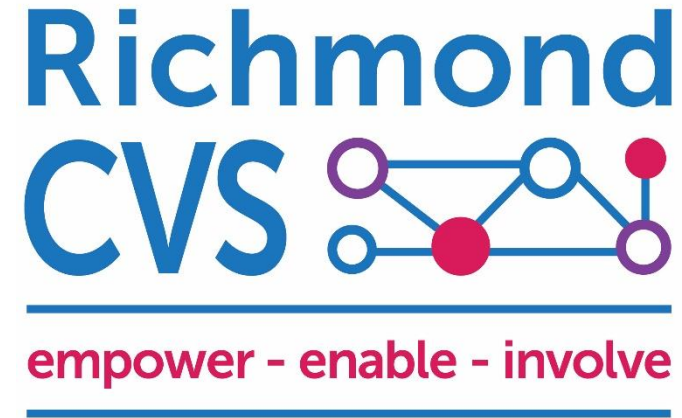
Next steps

The theme for this years recent Learning Disability Week was “Sport and Inclusion”. In her blog Cllr Penny Frost, Chair of the Education and Children’s Services Committees highlighted a range of inclusion opportunities in Richmond, but also makes the point that in a recent Mencap survey 1 in 3 young people with learning difficulties spend less than an hour outside their homes on a typical Saturday and 20% of those surveyed feel alone and left out of social activities. She finishes with a call to action.

“We don’t want to read surveys showing that young people with learning disabilities are stuck at home on Saturdays feeling isolated – we want them out joining with their peers as much as they can. So, if your children takes part in a weekend sports or social activity for young people, here’s *your* challenge – with all the creative resources and support available to us in this borough, how can *you* help to make your children’s activities more accessible, so that all our young people can make good friends and enjoy great social activities at the weekends as well as at school “.

Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow. Just walk beside me and be my friend (Winnie the Pooh)

- Thinking about the barriers to inclusion – training, public attitude, location and venues, lack of support to access opportunities, financial constraints - what will help to break these down? Highlight any examples of good practice locally.
- For each of the following Council services, identify an activity or next step to progress inclusion in social and leisure and employment activities and any opportunities to work in partnership with local charities to share skills and develop joint funding bids:
 - Sport
 - Parks and Leisure
 - Arts, Heritage and Libraries
 - Employment



Heather Mathew

Children and Young People's Voluntary Sector Strategic Lead Manager

heatherm@richmondcvv.org.uk

020 8843 7945