

Memorandum of Understanding (MoU): ESPCF and Amaze

This agreement sets out the roles, responsibilities and relationship between East Sussex Parent Carer Forum (ESPCF) and Amaze as support provider to the forum.

This agreement is subject to ongoing review based on developments with ESPCF and Amaze, the changing operating landscape, and funding levels. Issues are to be raised at any point and this MoU amended by mutual agreement, signed by the authorised signatories.

1. Key role/purpose of ESPCF

ESPCF is the independent parent carer forum for parent carers of children and young people age 0 to 25 with any special educational need or disability (SEND) across East Sussex.

ESPCF works to ensure every parent carer in East Sussex feels that their voice, their views and their experiences matter and contribute towards developing and improving services. It does this by:

- Reaching out to parent carers to hear their views
- Representing parents' experience and expertise to decision-makers
- Making recommendations for service improvement.

Meaningful collective parent voice is built on trust, through engagement and communication, so that every parent carer from across East Sussex is assured that their voice is heard. This is achieved via a positive relationship with East Sussex County Council (ESCC), the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), and others, built also on mutual respect and trust, that of a 'critical friend' and not adversarial or campaign based. The focus is on working together through constructive communication and coproduction to ensure the best possible outcomes for all with representative parent voice at the heart of decision making.

2. Key role/purpose of Amaze

Amaze provides information, advice and support services to parents and carers of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) across Sussex. Amaze also supports young people with SEND up to 25. Amaze is an independent charity governed by a board of trustees (the majority of whom are parent carers) with day to day management delegated to a CEO and staff team.

Amaze's history and beginnings are founded in parent support groups coming together and identifying the need to provide independent, impartial and professional support services to local families with disabled children. Listening to the voice of parent carers has been at the heart of Amaze's work since its inception and through its work Amaze hears current issues of relevance and seeks to raise these strategically where possible.

3. ESPCF's role and responsibilities

ESPCF aims to work in coproduction with partner agencies to improve services for the SEND community:

- a. The ESPCF Committee is responsible for governance and overseeing strategic decision-making for the forum. The ESPCF steering group, comprised of representatives from support groups from across East Sussex, will direct and shape the forum's priorities. The steering group will provide diversity of views and reach from the SEND community.
- b. ESPCF provides a range of ways in which parent carers can get involved in its activities, including events (virtual and face to face), surveys/polls and social media interaction.
- c. ESPCF provides high quality parent carer participation at key strategic groups and meetings by recruiting, training and supporting a team of parent carer reps and facilitating feedback and input to/from the wider SEND community.
- d. ESPCF attends regular meetings with senior leaders in ESCC and East Sussex health and social care bodies, highlighting issues of the wider SEND community and providing parent carer voice. ESPCF facilitates meetings between parent carers and services to exchange feedback and action plan improvement to services, and access to those services for children and young people with SEND in East Sussex.
- e. ESPCF aims to have a diverse membership of parent carers and engage under-represented groups to ensure their voices are heard (e.g. different SEND profiles, ages, school types, geography etc.), in order to demonstrate a strong mandate and credible representation of parent carer voice.
- f. ESPCF attends regional National Network of Parent Carers Forums (NNPCF) meetings and other key regional meetings, raising the profile of ESPCF's work and sharing the learning with other forums.
- g. ESPCF is responsible for keeping families informed about its work, developments in the SEND community and opportunities for parent carers to be involved. ESPCF writes its own copy and oversees all its communications activities, seeking feedback and input to ensure factual accuracy. Amaze's comms team provides support with comms planning and delivery, including consideration of shared key messages.
- h. ESPCF develops and maintains its own key policies and procedures, including conflicts of interest, reps handbook and comms/social media with access to support from Amaze where required. Further ESPCF policies will be developed as and when needed. ESPCF staff operate within Amaze's policies and procedures with regard to all HR matters and ESPCF operates within Amaze's policies more generally, until such a time ESPCF needs to/develops its own specified policy. Amaze supports ESPCF by providing template policies and procedures.

- i. The Chair of ESPCF attends and contributes to Amaze Management Committee meetings, as an associate trustee, ensuring its plans and support needs are effectively understood and supported by Amaze trustees.
- j. ESPCF is funded by a Department for Education grant which is administered by Contact. Further funding is also received from East Sussex County Council and East Sussex Clinical Commissioning Group (the CCG) to enable ESPCF to gather the views of parent carers about key issues/topics of concern and represent parent carer experiences to commissioners and services providers. This includes facilitating engagement with families and producing research and reports as specified in any ESPCF funding agreement. ESPCF will progressively take on the responsibility for budget monitoring and decision making.

4. Amaze's role and responsibilities

Amaze is commissioned by ESCC to provide back office and strategic development support to ESPCF:

- a. ESPCF is responsible for recruiting, maintaining and developing its committee, steering group and parent carer reps. Amaze helps ESPCF in this by supporting meetings and drafting materials/documents which help to develop good practice approaches to effective governance and operations of a PCF.
- b. ESPCF is responsible for engaging its members to identify key priorities and workstreams and developing effective coproduction with service providers and commissioners. Amaze supports ESPCF in this by: supporting the development of a strategic plan and associated workplan; sharing concerns/trends from SENDIASS and other Amaze services, including Amaze support groups in East Sussex, to support ESPCF's influencing work; providing (pastoral) line management of staff ensuring clear individual workplans and objectives are in place; helping frame ESPCF's work and linking with the local/sub-regional/national policy and political influencing; supporting development of effective coproduction practice and policies with service providers and commissioners.
- c. ESPCF is responsible for recruiting its members and shaping its membership offer. Amaze supports ESPCF by helping to ensure clarity in membership comms and effective reaching out to under-represented communities. Amaze advises and supports ESPCF in developing appropriate structures and operating frameworks needed to underpin an effective membership body (e.g. Terms of Reference).
- d. ESPCF is responsible for hearing and gathering the views of parent carers. Amaze supports ESPCF by ensuring information and data is safely gathered and stored in line with GDPR requirements and is effectively analysed and reported.
- e. ESPCF is responsible for developing and delivering a communications plan which helps meet its strategic objectives. Amaze supports ESPCF by: helping to plan key messages for different priority audiences; advising on increasing reach and impact which helps ensure members feel listened to and their views heard; providing technical comms support and access to software.

- f. Amaze staff working in East Sussex will raise awareness of ESPCF, support with membership recruitment and, if they are attending a meeting where there isn't an ESPCF representative, they will ask how the parent carer voice is being heard to identify the need for ESPCF involvement. Amaze staff are available to support ESPCF staff/representatives within meetings where requested/or with any prep or follow up, where this is helpful in strengthening parent voice and input.
- g. Amaze administers the income and expenditure for ESPCF, in addition to the budget allocated to Amaze support functions. This includes supporting ESPCF to consider all its funding streams and thinking through what priorities can be funded from each, and how – setting and agreeing clear budgets for each. Amaze arranges the payments for all items set against these budgets including remuneration of parent reps (fees and expenses) and core ESPCF staff salary through the Amaze payroll. Amaze will provide finance reports to ESPCF as required.
- h. Amaze will provide graduated support for the management of the ESPCF budget with the objective of ESPCF ultimately self-managing this process. This will include grant applications and monitoring forms, financial decision making and accountability. Amaze will continue to provide accounting and administrative support.
- i. ESPCF Chair and Amaze DCEO negotiate funding from ESCC and the CCG and develop grant applications for Contact/DfE/other funders to meet identified priorities.
- j. ESPCF staff are supported by Amaze HR policies and procedures, management systems and protocols. Amaze provides formal support and supervision meetings to ESPCF staff which focus on wellbeing, workload, personal development opportunities, paid annual leave, holiday and other leave entitlements, DBS checks etc. ESPCF Chair and Committee oversee the setting of work priorities. Amaze supports monthly staff catch-up meetings where priorities and plans are discussed. ESPCF staff include Chair, Vice Chair, Engagement Co-ordinator and Admin/Comms Assistant. ESPCF staff provide support and supervision to ESPCF volunteers.
- k. Amaze supports ESPCF to effectively monitor and evaluate its work and ensures that all funders' reporting requirements are met.

5. Decision-making

- a. ESPCF is responsible for decision-making. Amaze provides an advisory role. The ESPCF Committee is responsible for the recruitment and direction of ESPCF staff.
- b. ESPCF Chair will be supported with reflective practice techniques in regular support sessions provided by Amaze
- c. The working relationship between the local authority (ISEND) and ESPCF is a key factor towards true coproduction. The nature of representing the experiences and views of parent carers will at times create differences and possibly discord. To effectively promote this working relationship it is essential that these tensions are discussed directly between

the two parties without using Amaze as an intermediary.

- d. Amaze provides the legal operating framework for ESPCF until such times ESPCF may decide it wishes to operate independently and establish its own legal structure. This means that the Amaze Board of Trustees remains ultimately and legally accountable for all ESPCF activity in terms of ensuring compliance with all relevant legal and regulatory requirements. Work undertaken by staff is paid via Amaze payroll and any serious performance or disciplinary staffing issue/complaint therefore follows the Amaze policies and procedures and would be escalated at the appropriate point to Amaze trustees.
- e. Any issues or disputes which cannot be immediately resolved to all parties' satisfaction will be escalated to Contact as a neutral party.

6. Review

This MoU should be reviewed and updated annually, involving representatives from ESPCF and Amaze.