

CrowdJustice crowdfunding campaign



Staff with some of the pupils at Bright Futures School on World Book Day 2017

A group of six parents whose children with autism all attend Bright Futures School in Oldham have banded together to try to make big changes to the way parents are supported to help their children as part of their education. Research has shown that if parents can be supported to work in a particular ‘social communication’ way in the family environment with their children, the severity of their children’s autism can be reduced.

The families have launched a crowdfunding campaign to cover legal fees relating to the cases and the online donation page can be found here: <https://www.crowdjustice.org/case/social-communication-interventions-for-autism/>

Zoe Thompson, Head of Development at Bright Futures School and one of the parents bringing one of the appeals, said:

“The core difficulties at the heart of autism mean that our children struggle to lead ‘ordinary lives’. They struggle to make and keep friendships at the same time as dearly wanting friends; they become easily emotionally overwhelmed and then struggle with low mood. Before their placements at Bright Futures School, some have contemplated suicide; they are unable to take part in many/most of the activities and life opportunities that their typically developing peers take for granted (e.g. getting a bus to go somewhere with mates, going to the cinema, going bowling, going out for a meal, going on holiday).

We are each making the case to Special Educational Needs (SEN) tribunal that this special type of ‘social communication’ provision in the home is essential to meet some of the needs

outlined in our children's Education Health and Care (EHC) Plans. We are seeking crowdfunding to pay for legal guidance from a solicitor and legal representation from a barrister at these upcoming SEN tribunals."

Zoe continued, "Social communication provision in the home will give us parents a chance to help our kids develop the abilities they need in order to lead ordinary lives, and to be ready for and able to engage in learning....we just want our kids to have the same opportunities and chances as other kids. If we win these cases, we will share our legal arguments so that other families can use them to secure similar social communication provision in the home."

The first case seeking to secure this input as educational provision has already gone to tribunal and although the family weren't successful in securing it for their son, they did manage, with the help of a barrister who provided guidance for free, to win the legal argument that this special social communication provision qualifies as 'educational provision'.

This is a big first step towards achieving the changes the families are seeking, so now they are working on making their argument for the provision smarter, collecting better supporting evidence and getting 'expert' reports to back up their cases. Having legal support to do that will make an enormous difference. The tribunal hearings are scheduled from May 2017 onwards, so the sooner they get legal support, the better. The parents need to raise £3,600 towards the initial cost of legal advice and support for the second of the six cases and will need further funding for subsequent cases.

If they raise more than they need, any surplus will go into a fund to pay for special expert reports that will help families to secure this social communication input in their children's EHC Plans.