



**Understanding the Need:  
The Experiences of SEND  
Families in Wigan**  
June 2026

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## Executive Summary

FamilyKind was established in response to a growing need identified through conversations with families, community organisations and professionals supporting children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) across Wigan.

Nationally and locally, demand for SEND support continues to rise. Wigan's SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2024) identifies increasing numbers of children and young people requiring SEN Support and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), alongside growing prevalence of neurodevelopmental needs including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN), and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

Alongside this increasing demand, families frequently report difficulties navigating complex systems, understanding available support, accessing assessments and obtaining timely intervention. While Wigan benefits from a wide range of services and support pathways, local evidence suggests that many families remain uncertain about what help is available, how to access it and where to turn when concerns first arise.

To better understand these experiences, FamilyKind undertook a Family and Carer Listening Questionnaire, inviting parents and carers to share their experiences of raising children and young people with SEND in Wigan. The findings paint a consistent picture of families who are committed advocates for their children, but who often feel overwhelmed by fragmented systems, long waiting times and the responsibility of coordinating support across education, health and social care services.

Many families described feeling isolated, exhausted and unsure where to seek advice. Parents frequently reported becoming the primary coordinator of support, spending significant time researching pathways, chasing professionals, attending appointments and advocating for their child's needs. Whilst individual experiences varied, several common themes emerged including difficulties accessing information, challenges communicating with services, concerns regarding waiting times and a desire for earlier, more accessible support.

Importantly, families did not only describe challenges. They also highlighted the value of trusted relationships, practical guidance, peer support and opportunities to speak with people who genuinely understood their experiences. Many expressed a desire for preventative support that could help them navigate systems confidently before difficulties escalated to crisis point.

The findings from this report align closely with wider local intelligence. Wigan's SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment highlights increasing demand for SEND services, rising numbers of EHCP requests, growing prevalence of neurodevelopmental conditions and the need to improve awareness of available support. Together, these findings demonstrate a clear need for accessible, community-based support that helps families understand systems, build confidence and access the right help at the right time.

This report brings together local data and family voices to provide a clearer understanding of the experiences of SEND families in Wigan. It seeks to inform future service development, strengthen early intervention approaches and ensure that the lived experiences of families remain central to decision making.

Ultimately, the evidence presented throughout this report suggests that families do not simply need more services. They need support that is accessible, understandable, responsive and rooted within their communities. By listening to families and responding to what they tell us, there is a significant opportunity to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND whilst reducing the pressure placed on families navigating increasingly complex systems.

### Why We Undertook This Work

FamilyKind was created in response to a growing recognition that many families raising children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) were struggling to access the support, information and guidance they needed.

Through conversations with parents, carers, schools, community organisations and professionals across Wigan, a consistent message emerged. Families were often navigating complex systems with little support, spending significant time researching services, interpreting reports, attending meetings and advocating for their children. Many described feeling overwhelmed by processes that were difficult to understand and uncertain about where to turn when concerns first arose.

Whilst statutory services play a vital role in supporting children and young people with SEND, many families reported needing practical support long before formal interventions, assessments or specialist services became available. Parents frequently spoke about the emotional impact of waiting for assessments, trying to secure support within educational settings and balancing their child's needs alongside the demands of everyday family life.

These experiences became increasingly evident through FamilyKind's early engagement activities, including informal conversations with families, community outreach work and the development of The Unfiltered Parent Circle. Parents consistently described wanting access to trusted information, opportunities to connect with others who understood their experiences and practical guidance to help them navigate SEND systems with greater confidence.

As a result, FamilyKind launched the Family and Carer Listening Questionnaire to better understand the experiences of families across Wigan. The aim was not only to identify the challenges families face, but also to understand what support they value, where gaps currently exist and what changes could make the greatest difference to their lives.

This report has been developed to ensure that the voices of families remain central to future conversations about SEND provision, early intervention and community support. By combining the experiences shared by parents and carers with wider local data and intelligence, we aim to build a clearer picture of need across Wigan and contribute to the ongoing development of services that are accessible, responsive and shaped by those who use them.

Most importantly, this work reflects FamilyKind's commitment to listening first. Behind every statistic is a child, a family and a unique journey. Understanding those experiences is essential if we are to create systems and support networks that genuinely meet the needs of children and young people with SEND and those who care for them.

## About the Families Who Took Part

To better understand the experiences of SEND families across Wigan, FamilyKind invited parents and carers to complete a Family and Carer Listening Questionnaire during Spring 2026.

A total of 28 parents and carers shared their experiences, providing valuable insight into the realities of raising children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) within the borough. Responses were received from families supporting children with a wide range of needs, including neurodevelopmental differences, learning difficulties, communication needs, social, emotional and mental health needs, and complex SEND presentations.

The questionnaire sought to explore families' experiences of accessing support, navigating services, understanding available provision and the impact these experiences have on family life. Parents and carers were also asked about the types of support they value most and what changes they believe would make the greatest difference to their lives.

### **Respondent Profile**

Of those who completed the questionnaire:

- **82%** identified as parents (23 respondents)
- **7%** identified as carers (2 respondents)
- **4%** identified as foster carers (1 respondent)
- **4%** identified as grandparents (1 respondent)
- **4%** identified as parent carers (1 respondent)

Whilst the questionnaire sample is relatively small, the experiences shared reflect many of the themes identified within wider local and national SEND research. The consistency of responses across participants suggests that the challenges described are not isolated experiences but form part of a broader pattern affecting many families navigating SEND systems.

The findings presented throughout this report should therefore be considered alongside wider local intelligence, including Wigan's SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, to provide a richer understanding of the needs, experiences and priorities of SEND families across the borough.

### **Note on the Findings**

This report does not seek to represent the experiences of every SEND family in Wigan. Rather, it provides an important snapshot of the experiences, challenges and aspirations shared by a group of local parents and carers at a particular point in time.

Their voices offer valuable insight into what is working well, where barriers remain and how support for children, young people and families may be strengthened in the future.

### SEND in Wigan at a Glance

Before exploring the experiences shared by families through the FamilyKind Parent and Carer Listening Questionnaire, it is important to understand the wider context of SEND provision across Wigan.

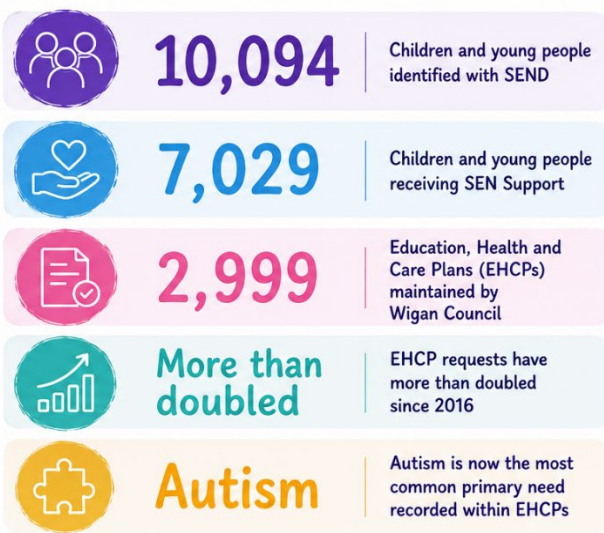
Nationally and locally, demand for SEND support continues to increase. Wigan's SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment highlights growing numbers of children and young people requiring additional support, increasing requests for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), and rising prevalence of neurodevelopmental needs including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

These increasing levels of need place growing pressure on education, health and community services whilst also increasing the number of families requiring information, guidance and support.

## SEND in Wigan at a Glance



A snapshot of local data from Wigan's SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2024) to provide context for the experiences shared by families in this report.



### Why This Matters

- As the number of children and young people requiring SEND support continues to rise, more families are navigating complex systems and seeking the right help for their child.
- Increasing demand places growing pressure on education, health and community services and highlights the need for clear information, timely support and joined-up working.
- These figures demonstrate why early intervention, accessible information and community-based support are essential to help families access the right support at the right time.
- The experiences shared in this report provide valuable insight into how these wider system pressures are felt by families every day.

These figures are from Wigan's SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2024). They help to shape our understanding of local need alongside the voices of families.

### Why This Matters

As the number of children and young people requiring SEND support continues to rise, more families are required to navigate increasingly complex systems and support pathways.

Whilst statutory services remain vital, the growing demand for support highlights the importance of accessible information, early intervention and community-based support that can help families understand their options, access appropriate services and feel confident navigating their journey.

The experiences shared throughout the remainder of this report provide valuable insight into how these wider system pressures are experienced by families on a day-to-day basis.

### What Families Told Us

At the heart of this report are the experiences of parents and carers raising children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) across Wigan.

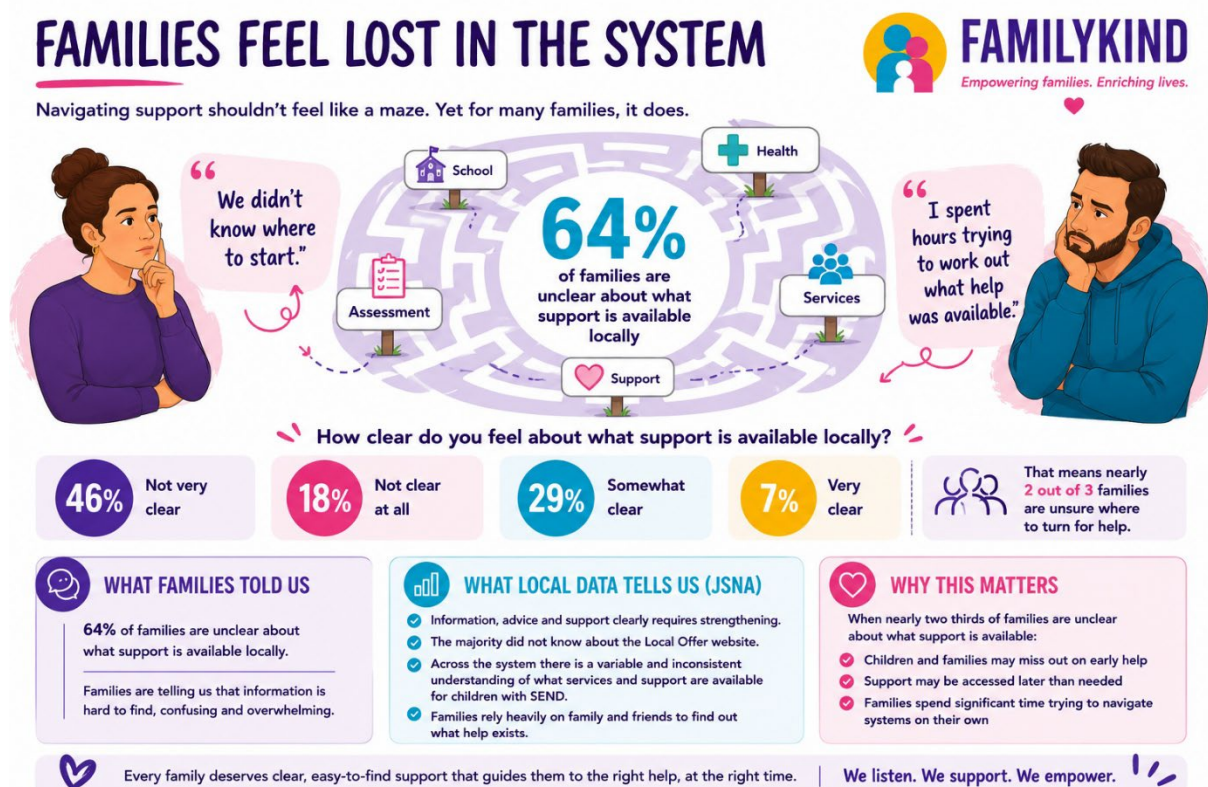
Through FamilyKind's Family and Carer Listening Questionnaire, families were invited to share their experiences of seeking support, navigating services and accessing help for their children. Responses were received from families supporting children across a range of ages, needs and circumstances, providing valuable insight into the realities of living with SEND in Wigan today.

Whilst every family's journey was unique, clear themes emerged across responses. Families consistently described challenges navigating complex systems, accessing timely support and understanding the services available to them. Alongside these challenges, parents and carers also highlighted the importance of feeling listened to, receiving practical guidance and connecting with others who understood their experiences.

### Families Feel Lost in the System

One of the strongest themes emerging from the FamilyKind Parent and Carer Listening Questionnaire was the challenge families face in understanding and accessing support. Parents frequently described feeling overwhelmed by the number of services, processes and pathways involved in seeking help for their child.

For many families, the difficulty was not simply the availability of support but knowing where to begin. Respondents spoke about uncertainty around referral routes, assessment processes and understanding which services might be able to help. Several parents described spending significant amounts of time independently researching information, seeking advice from other families or attempting to navigate systems through trial and error.



The questionnaire findings highlight the scale of this challenge. Nearly two thirds of respondents (64%) reported that they were either "not very clear" or "not clear at all" about what support is

available locally for families like theirs. Only 7% of respondents reported feeling very clear about the support available.

Parents frequently described feeling uncertain about who to contact, where to seek advice and what steps they should take when concerns first emerged. This uncertainty often resulted in families spending considerable time searching for information, contacting multiple organisations or relying on informal networks for guidance.

These experiences are reflected within Wigan's SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. The JSNA identified that information, advice and support for families requires strengthening and reported that the majority of families were unaware of the Local Offer website. It also highlighted variable and inconsistent understanding of available services across the wider system, creating additional barriers for families attempting to access support.

The findings suggest that families are not necessarily seeking more services, but clearer routes into existing support. Accessible information, trusted guidance and help navigating systems may play a significant role in reducing stress, improving confidence and ensuring children and young people receive support at the earliest opportunity.

### Parents Become the Coordinators

Many respondents described becoming the central coordinator of their child's support, often acting as the link between schools, health services, assessment pathways and wider support systems.

**Parents Become the Coordinators**

Families often become the central coordinator of their child's support, bringing together services that can feel disconnected and hard to navigate.

**FAMILYKIND**  
Empowering families. Enriching lives.

**THE IMPACT IS REAL**

Our Parent & Carer Listening Questionnaire found:

- 75% said supporting their child impacts their work, training or daily routines.
- 96% do not consistently feel listened to and understood.
- 100% have questioned whether their concerns were serious enough to ask for help.

**FAMILIES TOLD US...**

- "I feel like I'm constantly chasing updates."
- "I'm the one making sure everyone knows what's going on."
- "I spend more time coordinating support than receiving it."

**WHAT LOCAL DATA TELLS US (JSNA)**

The Wigan SEND JSNA found that:

- Families rely heavily on family members, friends and informal networks to understand and access support.
- There is a variable and inconsistent understanding of what services and support are available for children with SEND across the system.

**KEY INSIGHT**

Parents often become the link between services, ensuring information is shared, appointments are attended and support keeps moving forward. This invisible work is essential, yet rarely recognised.

**WHY THIS MATTERS**

When families are expected to coordinate support themselves:

- Stress increases
- Work and daily life are affected
- Information can be missed
- Support may be delayed
- Families can feel overwhelmed and isolated

**We listen. We support. We empower.** Together, we can make support easier to find and simpler to access. **Stronger families. Brighter futures.**

Parents reported spending significant amounts of time arranging appointments, chasing updates, communicating between professionals and ensuring information was shared across

services. Rather than receiving coordinated support, many families felt responsible for holding together systems that appeared disconnected from one another.

The impact of this responsibility was evident within the questionnaire findings. Three quarters of respondents (75%) reported that supporting their child affects their work, training or daily routines. Families frequently described balancing caring responsibilities alongside employment, appointments, paperwork and ongoing advocacy for their child.

Many parents also reported feeling that progress often depended on their ability to continually push for support, follow up on actions and ensure that information was not lost between services. Several respondents described repeatedly explaining their circumstances to different professionals, creating additional pressure at an already challenging time.

These experiences reflect wider findings within Wigan's SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, which identified that families frequently rely on informal networks and their own efforts to understand and access support. The JSNA also highlighted variable and inconsistent understanding of available services across the wider system.

Whilst this coordinating role is often invisible, the findings suggest it carries a significant emotional and practical burden for families. Many parents are not only caring for their child but are also acting as advocates, administrators, communicators and coordinators of support. This additional responsibility can contribute to increased stress, reduced wellbeing and difficulties balancing family life, employment and other commitments.

The findings highlight the importance of services working together effectively, communicating clearly and reducing the burden placed on families to coordinate support independently.

### **Support Often Comes Too Late**

Families frequently spoke about the gap between recognising concerns and receiving meaningful support. Many respondents described lengthy periods of uncertainty whilst awaiting assessments, referrals or decisions regarding support. During these waiting periods, parents often reported feeling unsupported and unsure how best to meet their child's needs.

For many families, the challenge was not simply waiting for formal support but navigating uncertainty whilst trying to determine what action to take next. Parents frequently described spending time seeking advice, researching information and questioning whether their concerns were significant enough to warrant professional support.

# Support Often Comes Too Late



The gap between recognising concerns and receiving meaningful support is too long for many families.



The questionnaire findings suggest that delays can begin long before formal referrals are made. Every respondent reported that they had, at some point, questioned whether their concerns were serious enough to ask for help. This finding highlights the uncertainty many families experience when concerns first emerge and suggests that some families may delay seeking support whilst attempting to manage difficulties independently.

Several parents reflected that earlier intervention, clearer advice and access to practical support at the point concerns first emerged could have prevented difficulties from escalating. Families consistently expressed a desire for preventative support that would help them understand available options, make informed decisions and feel more confident about seeking help when needed.

These experiences are reflected within Wigan's SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, which identified waiting times for neurodevelopmental pathways, Speech and Language Therapy services and CAMHS provision as ongoing concerns for families. The JSNA also highlighted the need to strengthen support both before and after diagnosis, recognising the challenges families face during periods of uncertainty and waiting.

The findings suggest that early support is not solely about reducing waiting times. Families also need access to trusted information, reassurance and practical guidance whilst waiting for assessments, decisions or interventions. Providing support earlier in a family's journey may help reduce stress, improve confidence and prevent difficulties from escalating to crisis point.

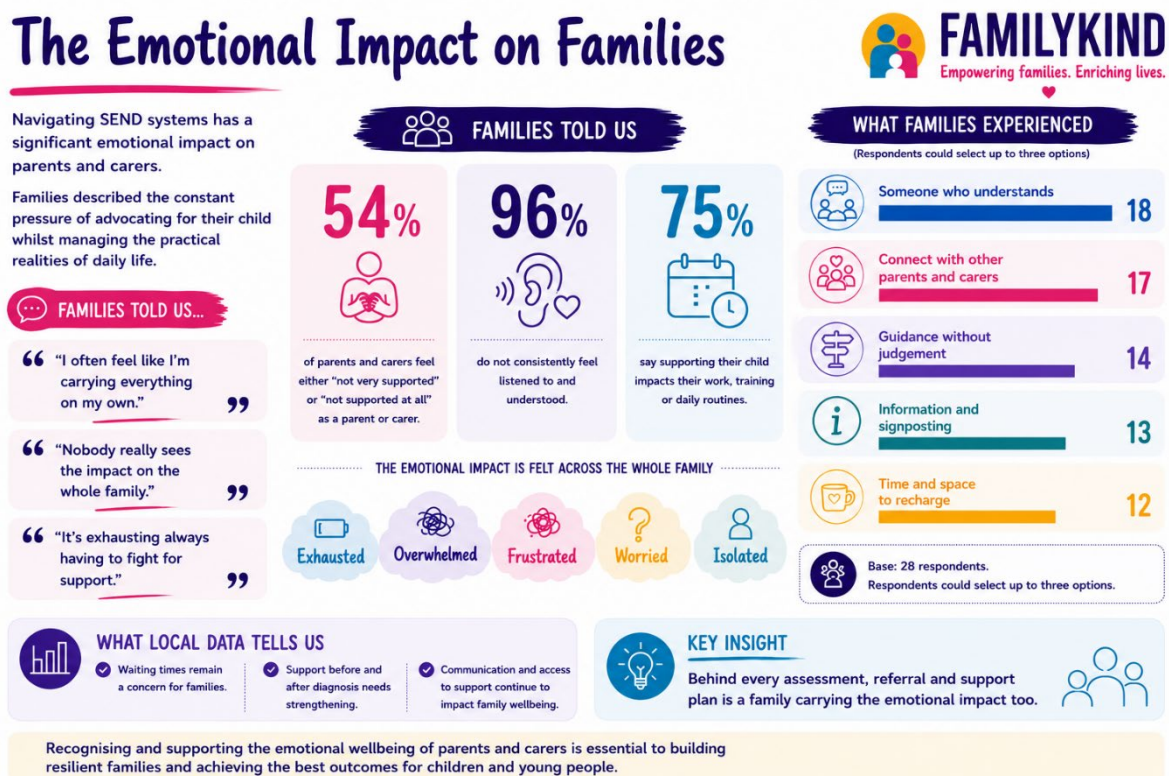
Ultimately, families described wanting support that is available when concerns first arise, rather than only once difficulties have become more complex or severe. Strengthening early

intervention and providing accessible navigation support may help ensure that families receive the right support at the right time.

## The Emotional Impact on Families

The emotional impact of navigating SEND systems was a recurring theme throughout responses. Parents and carers frequently described the pressures associated with seeking support, advocating for their child and managing uncertainty whilst attempting to meet the needs of their family.

Many respondents spoke about feelings of exhaustion, frustration, anxiety and isolation. Alongside caring responsibilities, families often found themselves navigating assessments, appointments, paperwork and ongoing communication with multiple services. For some, this created a significant emotional burden that extended far beyond the practical aspects of supporting their child.



The questionnaire findings suggest that many families do not feel adequately supported in their caring role. More than half of respondents (54%) reported feeling either not very supported or not supported at all as a parent or carer. In addition, 96% of respondents indicated that they do not consistently feel listened to and understood when seeking support.

Several parents reflected on the wider impact SEND-related challenges had on their wellbeing, confidence and family relationships. Whilst services understandably focus on the needs of the child, families often felt that the emotional impact on parents, carers and siblings was not always recognised.

Respondents frequently highlighted the value of having opportunities to speak openly about their experiences in supportive and non-judgemental environments. Many described the importance of being able to connect with others who understood their circumstances, share experiences and receive reassurance that they were not facing challenges alone.

These findings reinforce the importance of family-centred approaches that recognise the wellbeing of parents and carers alongside the needs of children and young people. Supporting families emotionally, as well as practically, may help strengthen resilience, improve wellbeing and enable families to continue advocating effectively for their children.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that behind every assessment, referral and support plan is a family navigating the emotional realities of caring, advocating and hoping for the best possible outcomes for their child.

### Families Need Trusted Support

Alongside the challenges identified throughout the questionnaire, parents and carers were clear about the types of support that made the greatest difference to their lives.

Families consistently highlighted the importance of practical guidance, clear information and support from individuals who understood both SEND systems and the lived realities of raising a child with additional needs. Many respondents described the value of speaking with someone who could help them make sense of processes, explore options and provide reassurance during periods of uncertainty.

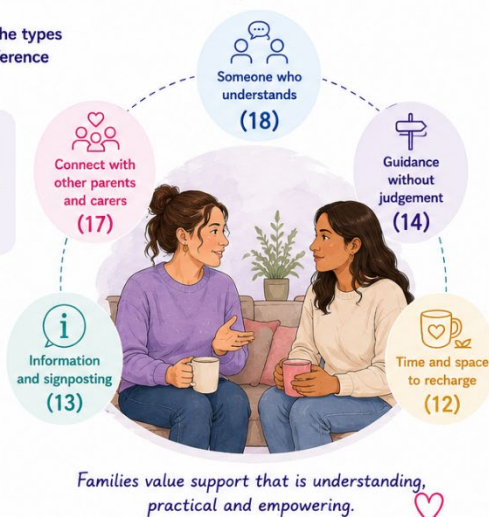
## Families Need Trusted Support

Parents and carers were clear about the types of support that make the greatest difference to their lives.

**The most requested form of support was simply having someone who understands.**  
(18 out of 28 respondents)

#### FAMILIES TOLD US...

- “Sometimes you just need somebody who gets it.”
- “Knowing you’re not alone makes a huge difference.”
- “I wanted guidance without feeling judged.”



#### WHAT FAMILIES ASKED FOR MOST

(Respondents could select up to three options)



#### WHAT LOCAL DATA TELLS US

- The Wigan SEND JSNA identified a need to strengthen information, advice and support for families.
- Parents reported relying heavily on family members, friends and informal networks.
- Access to trusted guidance and understandable information remains essential.

#### KEY INSIGHT

Families are not simply seeking answers. They are seeking trusted relationships, practical guidance and reassurance that they do not have to navigate their journey alone.

The questionnaire findings suggest that trusted relationships are highly valued by families. The most frequently requested form of support was having access to someone who understands, closely followed by opportunities to connect with other parents and carers facing similar experiences. Families also highlighted the importance of receiving guidance without judgement, accessible information and opportunities to take time for themselves.

Parents consistently spoke about wanting to feel listened to, understood and taken seriously. Many described the benefits of being able to discuss concerns openly with somebody who recognised both the practical challenges of navigating systems and the emotional realities of supporting a child with additional needs.

These findings reflect wider themes identified within Wigan's SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, which highlighted the need to strengthen information, advice and support for families. The JSNA also noted that many parents rely heavily on informal networks to understand available services, reinforcing the importance of trusted sources of guidance and support.

The responses suggest that families are not simply seeking answers to individual questions. They are looking for meaningful relationships, practical guidance and reassurance that they do not have to navigate their journey alone. Creating opportunities for families to access trusted support may help build confidence, reduce isolation and strengthen outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Ultimately, the findings demonstrate that support is most effective when families feel heard, understood and empowered to take the next step forward.

### What This Means for Wigan

The findings presented throughout this report highlight a clear and consistent message from families across Wigan. Whilst individual experiences differ, many parents and carers are facing similar challenges when seeking support for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Families described difficulties understanding available support, navigating complex systems and accessing timely intervention. Many reported becoming the primary coordinator of support for their child, spending significant time researching information, communicating between professionals, attending appointments and advocating for appropriate provision. Alongside these practical challenges, parents frequently described the emotional impact of navigating SEND systems, including feelings of exhaustion, frustration, anxiety and isolation.

These experiences are occurring within a context of increasing demand. Wigan's SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment identifies growing numbers of children and young people requiring SEND support, increasing requests for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and rising prevalence of neurodevelopmental needs. As demand continues to increase, it is likely that more families will require support to understand systems, access services and navigate pathways effectively.

The findings suggest that many of the challenges families experience are not solely linked to the availability of services. Instead, families frequently highlighted difficulties understanding what support exists, how services connect together and where to turn when concerns first emerge. This suggests that information, navigation and guidance remain critical areas of need.

Importantly, the findings also demonstrate that support needs extend beyond formal assessments, diagnoses and statutory processes. Families consistently described the value of trusted relationships, practical guidance and opportunities to connect with others who understood their experiences. Many expressed a desire for support that was available earlier in their journey, before difficulties escalated and before families reached crisis point.

Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of a whole-family approach to SEND support. Whilst children and young people remain at the centre of decision making, the wellbeing, confidence and capacity of parents and carers play a significant role in achieving positive outcomes. Supporting families to feel informed, connected and empowered may help reduce stress, strengthen resilience and improve engagement with services.

The findings also suggest a growing role for community-based and preventative support within Wigan's wider SEND landscape. Accessible support delivered within local communities has the potential to complement statutory provision by providing families with trusted information, practical guidance, peer support and early intervention at the point it is most needed.

Ultimately, the experiences shared through this report demonstrate that families do not simply need more services. They need systems that are easier to understand, support that is available earlier and trusted relationships that help them navigate their journey with confidence.

Addressing these needs presents a significant opportunity to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND whilst reducing the pressures experienced by the families who care for them.

### Opportunities for Early Intervention and Community Support

The findings from this report highlight a significant opportunity to strengthen early intervention and preventative support for families of children and young people with SEND across Wigan.

Throughout the questionnaire, families consistently described wanting support earlier in their journey. Parents frequently reported spending considerable time trying to understand concerns, navigate systems and identify appropriate sources of help before accessing meaningful support. Many reflected that earlier access to information, guidance and reassurance could have reduced uncertainty and prevented difficulties from escalating.

The findings suggest that there is particular value in support that bridges the gap between initial concerns and formal intervention. Whilst statutory services play a vital role in assessment, diagnosis and specialist provision, families often require practical guidance and emotional support long before these services become available. Accessible community-based support has the potential to provide families with a trusted first point of contact during this period.

Parents and carers also highlighted the importance of speaking with people who understood both SEND systems and the lived realities of raising a child with additional needs. Opportunities to ask questions, explore concerns and receive non-judgemental guidance were consistently valued throughout responses. This suggests that navigation support and trusted advice may play an important role in helping families access the right support at the right time.

The findings additionally demonstrate the value of peer support and community connection. Many respondents expressed a desire to connect with other parents and carers facing similar experiences. Opportunities to share experiences, reduce isolation and learn from others can help families build confidence and strengthen their ability to advocate for their children.

Alongside supporting individual families, preventative and community-based approaches may also help reduce pressure on wider systems. Families who are able to access clear information, understand available pathways and receive support earlier are often better placed to make informed decisions, engage positively with services and seek help before difficulties reach crisis point.

As demand for SEND support continues to grow, there is an opportunity to complement statutory provision through accessible, community-rooted support that focuses on early intervention, family wellbeing, navigation assistance and peer connection. Such approaches have the potential to strengthen outcomes for children and young people whilst ensuring that families feel supported, informed and empowered throughout their journey.

The experiences shared through this report demonstrate that early intervention is not solely about earlier assessments or diagnoses. It is also about ensuring that families have access to the information, relationships and support networks that help them navigate uncertainty with confidence. Investing in these approaches may help create a more responsive, preventative and family-centred system of support across Wigan.

### Recommendations for Service Development

The findings from this report identify several opportunities to strengthen support for children, young people and families across Wigan. Whilst many families recognised the dedication and commitment of individual professionals and services, responses consistently highlighted areas where additional support, improved communication and earlier intervention could make a significant difference.

#### **Recommendation 1: Strengthen Information, Advice and Navigation Support**

Families consistently reported difficulties understanding available support, navigating pathways and knowing where to turn when concerns first emerged. Improving access to clear, accessible and consistent information could help families access support more confidently and reduce the time spent navigating systems independently.

Consideration should be given to strengthening navigation support, improving awareness of existing resources and ensuring that families receive clear guidance at key points within their journey.

**Recommendation 2: Increase Access to Early Intervention and Preventative Support**

Many respondents described a gap between recognising concerns and receiving meaningful support. Families frequently expressed a desire for earlier advice, guidance and reassurance before difficulties escalated.

Investment in preventative approaches and early intervention support may help families access appropriate guidance sooner, improve confidence and reduce the likelihood of difficulties reaching crisis point before support becomes available.

**Recommendation 3: Reduce the Burden on Families to Coordinate Support**

Parents frequently described acting as the central coordinator of their child's support, spending significant time communicating between professionals, arranging appointments and ensuring information was shared across services.

Opportunities should be explored to strengthen multi-agency communication, improve information sharing and reduce duplication wherever possible. A more coordinated approach may help reduce pressure on families whilst improving the overall experience of navigating support.

**Recommendation 4: Strengthen Emotional Wellbeing Support for Parents and Carers**

The emotional impact of supporting a child with SEND was evident throughout the questionnaire findings. Parents and carers frequently described feelings of stress, exhaustion, anxiety and isolation.

Future service development should continue to recognise the wellbeing needs of parents and carers alongside those of children and young people. Providing opportunities for families to access emotional support, peer connection and trusted relationships may help strengthen resilience and improve family wellbeing.

**Recommendation 5: Expand Opportunities for Peer Support and Community Connection**

Families consistently highlighted the value of speaking with others who understood their experiences. Many respondents expressed a desire for greater opportunities to connect with other parents and carers facing similar challenges.

Community-based peer support initiatives can play an important role in reducing isolation, building confidence and helping families share knowledge, experiences and practical advice.

**Recommendation 6: Continue to Involve Families in Service Design and Development**

The experiences shared through this report demonstrate the value of listening directly to families. Parents and carers possess unique insight into the realities of navigating SEND systems and the barriers that exist within them.

Future service planning and development should continue to be informed by the voices of families, ensuring that support is shaped by lived experience and remains responsive to the needs of local communities.

### **Recommendation 7: Improve Awareness of Existing Support**

Families consistently reported uncertainty about what support is available locally and where to turn when concerns first arise. Nearly two thirds of respondents (64%) indicated that they were either not very clear or not clear at all about the support available to families like theirs.

This finding aligns with Wigan's SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, which identified that awareness of available services, including the Local Offer, remains low amongst many families. Parents frequently described relying on informal networks, social media groups and personal recommendations to identify appropriate support.

There is an opportunity to strengthen awareness of existing services through improved communication, outreach and promotion. This may include ensuring information is accessible, consistent and available through a variety of channels, as well as supporting professionals and community organisations to act as effective signposts to available support.

Improving awareness of existing provision may help families access support earlier, reduce confusion and ensure that children, young people and their families are able to benefit from the services already available within the borough.

### **Moving Forward**

The findings from this report demonstrate that families are not simply seeking additional services. They are seeking support that is easier to access, easier to understand and available at the point it is most needed. By strengthening early intervention, improving navigation support, investing in family wellbeing and creating opportunities for meaningful connection, there is significant potential to improve experiences and outcomes for SEND families across Wigan. Collectively, these recommendations provide an opportunity to build a more accessible, preventative and family-centred system of support that empowers families and enables children and young people to thrive.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps**

The experiences shared through this report provide valuable insight into the realities of raising a child or young person with SEND in Wigan.

Whilst every family's journey is unique, the findings reveal a number of common experiences. Families frequently described feeling lost within complex systems, carrying significant responsibility for coordinating support and facing uncertainty whilst waiting for assessments, interventions and decisions. Many also highlighted the emotional impact these challenges can have on parents, carers and wider family life.

At the same time, the findings demonstrate the resilience, determination and commitment shown by families across Wigan. Parents and carers consistently described advocating for their children, seeking information, building knowledge and doing everything possible to secure the support their children need.

Perhaps most importantly, families were clear about what would make a difference. They spoke about the value of trusted relationships, practical guidance, accessible information and opportunities to connect with others who understand their experiences. Families consistently

expressed a desire for support that is available earlier, easier to navigate and rooted within their communities.

The findings contained within this report align closely with wider local evidence and reinforce the importance of strengthening early intervention, improving access to information and supporting family wellbeing alongside the needs of children and young people.

Families do not simply need more services. They need support that is easier to find, easier to understand and available before they reach crisis point.

There is a significant opportunity for Wigan to strengthen early intervention, improve family wellbeing and create a more connected system of support. By listening to families, investing in early support and creating opportunities for meaningful connection, partners across the borough can help ensure that children, young people and their families receive the right support at the right time.

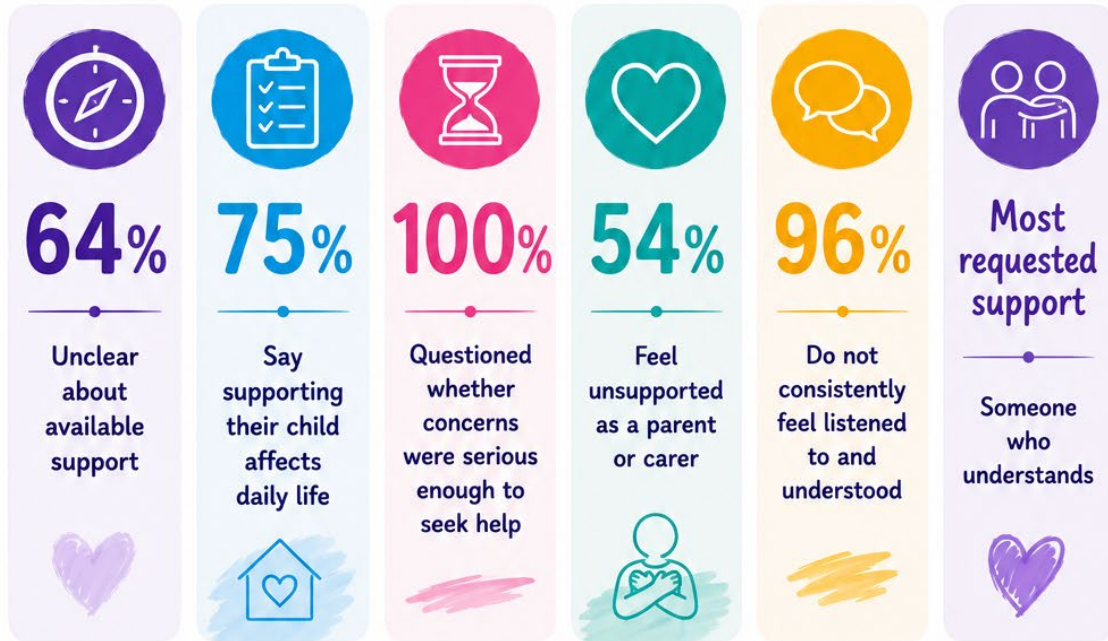
This report represents the beginning of an ongoing conversation. FamilyKind remains committed to listening to families, amplifying their voices and working collaboratively with partners to help shape support that reflects the needs, experiences and aspirations of SEND families across Wigan.

Because behind every referral, assessment and support plan is a child, a family and a story that deserves to be heard.

# Key Findings at a Glance



Based on responses from 28 parents and carers across Wigan



### What Families Told Us

“We didn’t know where to start.”

“It’s exhausting always having to fight for support.”

“Sometimes you just need somebody who gets it.”

### Why This Matters

These findings highlight the importance of clear information, early support, trusted relationships and opportunities for families to be heard, understood and supported before difficulties reach crisis point.

### Key Message

**Families are not simply seeking answers.**

They are seeking trusted relationships, practical guidance and reassurance that they do not have to navigate their journey alone.

Listening to families today helps build a stronger, more connected Wigan where every child and family gets the right support, at the right time.

### Acknowledgements

FamilyKind would like to thank every parent and carer who took the time to complete the Family and Carer Listening Questionnaire and share their experiences.

We are also grateful to the community organisations, schools, professionals and partners who continue to support SEND families across Wigan.

Most importantly, we would like to recognise the children and young people whose experiences sit at the heart of this report. Their families' voices help shape a better understanding of local need and contribute to the development of more responsive, inclusive and family-centred support.