

INDEPENDENCE PROJECT & CLUBS SUMMER SEND FEST

#HAF2025

The Independence Project has been helping young adults and children with special educational needs and disabilities achieve independence since 2018. They offer two day centers in Chelmsford, supported holidays, weekly social nights, inepenDANCE club nights, and various clubs and activities. For SEND Fest, they partnered with SAA (Stories About Autism), leveraging their strong social media presence to enhance support within the SEND community.



4,067
Total residents registered for the event



1,733
Total residents that attended on the day



713
Young people that attended the event had SEND



95.7%
of the SEND children registered were aged 0-14 years

The event received funding from Active Essex and Essex County Council, with sponsorship from Chaotic Community and Ellisons Solicitors. Various SEND-focused organisations, such as Essex SENDIASS and Autism Central, attended.

Activities included music empowerment by Eazee Learning, tailored cycling sessions by Fox Cycling, a calming sensory space by Happy Hill Essex, and social story packs from The Pods, all designed to support individuals with learning and physical disabilities.

SEND Fest aimed to promote joy, connection, and inclusivity for children and young people with SEND and their families. The successful partnership between Independence Project and SAA was crucial, combining SAA's trusted voice within the SEND community with Independence Project's support for families.

This collaboration not only provided vital information and services, but also engaged and empowered families.

Following the event, several service providers received independent bookings, and feedback highlighted the event's success and the positive interactions with attendees.

“ Thank you so much for organising this event! I felt completely at ease taking my son out, as there was no judgment, and no stares, just understanding, allowing him to explore freely without my worries!
— PARENT ”



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The partnership between SAA and the Independence Project infused the event with valuable lived experiences and a vast array of SEND contacts and networks. Throughout every phase of the event's design and execution, the voices and experiences of SEND families were prioritized. Simultaneously, the extensive reach of SEND contacts and networks enabled the gathering of diverse supporting organisations on the day, ensuring the provision of pertinent activities and information services.

💡 Key Learnings

Unintentional Impact:

- The strong demand and positive feedback revealed a significant unmet need for inclusive, seasonal events tailored to SEND families.

Response:

- Conducted surveys to better understand community needs and began planning for a broader, more sustainable year-round programme.

Future Plans:

- Aim to expand SEND Fest into a diverse calendar of events across multiple venues, catering to different age groups and life stages.
- Plans include seasonal celebrations (Easter, Halloween, Christmas), family-friendly summer festivals, and targeted support events such as transitions into adult social care.

Tips for Adaptation and Delivery:

- Design events with flexibility to accommodate varied needs.
- Tailor experiences to specific age groups and life stages.
- Prioritise emotional wellbeing and social connection to combat isolation among SEND families.



Watch the Summer SEND Fest video [here](#).



“ THANK YOU! This was an incredible experience for both me and my grandson. I've never seen him so animated and happy in his 8 years, especially since he is non-verbal autistic. I am truly grateful for the memories created!
— GRANDMA ”

“ Seeing my daughter enjoy herself was a joyful experience. Typically anxious and masking in public, she was freely stimming and laughing at the event! As a family navigating between neurodivergence and neurotypicality, we felt a sense of belonging - we hope to see more similar events soon!
— PARENT ”