

## StopGap nets award for outstanding achievement

StopGap, the Hertfordshire-based programme offering specialist training to young people with Asperger syndrome and/or emotional and behavioural difficulties, has won a regional National Training Award for demonstrating outstanding achievement in training. The award, which was presented in October by former Olympic athlete Colin Jackson, follows the StopGap team's selection in July as finalists for the National Training Awards.

StopGap was launched in 2000 by the Access-Ability team at Hertfordshire Careers Services, and is currently funded by the Learning and Skills Council as part of their regional strategy. It is targeted at 16-to 24-year-olds, and most of the young people on the programme fit into the NEET group (not in education, employment or training). These youngsters struggle to access mainstream further education, training programmes or employment opportunities because of their lack of confidence and poor social and communication skills.

**We strive to prepare the young people for life as fulfilled and self-reliant adults. Our ethos is to work with them to celebrate and develop the gifts they have been given. StopGap's vision**

StopGap is a specialist training provider offering a truly person-centred vocational programme, designed to equip learners with life skills, coping strategies and vocational knowledge while addressing their individual support needs and aspirations. Each learner has an Individual Outreach Plan (IOP), and all are offered supported work experience through partnerships with local employers. StopGap also works closely with local colleges, voluntary organisations, community groups and the local authority's children's services.

**For more information, please contact:**  
[patricia.halliday@hcs.co.uk](mailto:patricia.halliday@hcs.co.uk)



Left to right: Francesca Ntiamoah, head of Stopgap, with Access-Ability team leader Tracy Noble, Colin Jackson, and Access-Ability service manager Patricia Halliday.

### A brilliant resource

A brand new regional training database is now available at the East Together website [www.easttogether.org.uk](http://www.easttogether.org.uk), packed with information on training opportunities and education projects for children with severe autism, behaviour or sensory impairment. As well as being a mine of useful information, this new resource provides a good opportunity to share details about training projects and other initiatives.

**So if you have anything to add or recommend to the database, please contact Sue Norgrove at [sue.norgrove@ntlworld.com](mailto:sue.norgrove@ntlworld.com)**

**STOPPRESS** Congratulations are also due to Bedfordshire County Council's Children's Commissioning Service, which won Government Opportunities magazine's *Team Excellence Award* in July 2007 – and are now finalists in the *Society of Procurement Officers (SOPo) Awards for Outstanding Achievement in Procurement*.

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# Two successful years of virtual schooling

by Gareth Williams-James

Head of the Virtual School  
for Looked After Children,  
Suffolk County Council



Suffolk County Council

**In September 2005, Suffolk established its Virtual School for Looked After Children to provide a framework for the newly established Looked After Children Education Support Service.** The

virtual school supports each child by careful monitoring and individual contact as they approach National Curriculum testing in Key Stage 2 and GCSE or equivalent. The support offered includes group events, revision resources, private tuition and, for some young people, direct work from the service.

Our virtual school also provides the basis for monitoring attendance and rapid response to issues like exclusion, as well as providing a suitable recording mechanism for current Personal Education Plans and other important data.

Working with the head of Norfolk's virtual school, established recently under a Government-funded project, we have provided joint training for Suffolk and Norfolk Secondary School Improvement Partners (SIPs), giving them a good grounding in the role they'll be undertaking as local authorities try to improve outcomes for looked-after children.

So what difference have we made after two years? Well, our attendance figures have shown sustained improvement over the



*Gareth and his team*

period, thanks to the work of all field staff. We've also really got to "know" our children – some of them are now our best buddies!

Attainment in national testing is a more elusive goal, not least

**"it's the success  
for the child that's  
important"**

because of the temporary nature of being "looked after". But as one head teacher said, when we were bemoaning a poor performance indicator because children had left care before the cut-off date for inclusion in the statistics: "That doesn't matter – it's the success for the child that's important." Absolutely!

Perhaps that is one of the most important benefits arising from our virtual school. It offers us a perspective on the educational lives of looked-after children, and allows

us to tell their stories in a way that highlights the failure of performance indicators themselves. We very much hope that a more sophisticated approach will develop, acknowledging the achievement of looked-after children, against the odds, as more authorities introduce virtual schools.

**For more information on the virtual school, please contact:**  
[gareth.williams-james@educ.suffolkcc.gov.uk](mailto:gareth.williams-james@educ.suffolkcc.gov.uk)

## LATEST NEWS

5 out of 10 eastern  
region local authorities  
now have virtual  
schools for their  
looked-after children.

# The important role of the **Independent Reviewing Officer**

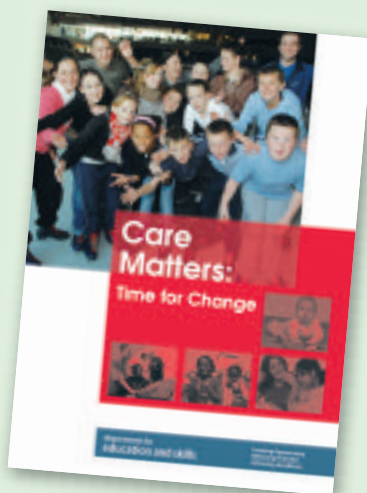


*Eastern region IROs at a government meeting in London*

**Every child in care has his or her care plan regularly reviewed – and it's the job of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) to chair these reviews.** The purpose of each review is to consider the individual child's needs, and to make sure that all of them are being met – in respect of education, health, contact with birth family members, and placement.

At the centre of this process is a review meeting, and the IRO's role is to ensure that this takes place effectively. At the meeting, recommendations are agreed by the child's social worker and team manager, and discussed with the IRO. The IRO also monitors the plan's progress after it has been agreed, and arranges subsequent review meetings.

The recent white paper *Time for Change* emphasises the importance of the IRO's role and the need for local authorities to co-operate with IROs. A regional network of IROs has now been set up, which meets termly at Government Office, and is already proving to be a useful forum for exchanging good practice and providing support.



**For further information on IROs, please contact:**  
[ganga.westwood@goeast.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ganga.westwood@goeast.gsi.gov.uk)

## Meet the new editorial team

Our editorial team has expanded and now includes Roz Rospopa, Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMHS) regional development worker, and Ganga Westwood, vulnerable children policy officer at Government Office East. Both are looking forward to working with Jackie, collecting articles from you for the Summer 2008 edition of the **Together** newsletter.

## Involving young people in service delivery

This year the eastern region's Care Services Improvement Partnership (CSIP) has developed a new resource library and database detailing involvement and participation by the region's children and young people.

Participation project worker Vicki Surzyn has collated details of all local and regional groups involving children and young people. The result is a database listing the key organisations and individuals working in user involvement and participation around the eastern region, including groups involved with disability, mental health and children in care.

The web-based resource library – which can be found at [www.cypf.csip.org.uk/cross-cutting-work/involvement-and-participation](http://www.cypf.csip.org.uk/cross-cutting-work/involvement-and-participation) – contains national and regional tools and good practice examples, and is set up so that anyone can add extra information.

**For further details please contact:**  
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[tracey.cogan@csip.org.uk](mailto:tracey.cogan@csip.org.uk)





Local authorities and schools across the region have been gearing up for another week of awareness-raising events during Anti-Bullying Week 2007. This year's theme is Bullying in the Community, and schools have received a pack full of ideas and activities for the week – have a look at [www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk](http://www.anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk) for more details. And don't forget to support 11 Million Takeover Day/Blue Friday on 23 November by wearing blue on the day!



# Safer together, safer wherever

## Anti-Bullying Week 19-23 November 2007

Last year in Norfolk, 72% of schools engaged in activities during Anti-Bullying Week, demonstrating how important the event has become within some local authorities. Rita Adair, eastern regional co-ordinator for the Anti-Bullying Alliance, believes that support for the annual event is growing each year. "The Anti-Bullying Alliance wants schools to consider how they can keep pupils safe from bullying in the wider community," she says. "The increase in cyberbullying is a good example of why the focus on bullying in the community is so important.

"A recent government survey suggests that one in three children has experienced cyberbullying. We know from research that this largely takes place outside school, but often involves pupils from the same school. Unlike other forms of bullying, cyberbullying offers no escape. Children and young people can be cyberbullied at home – even in their bedrooms. The recent government document Cyberbullying: A Whole-School Community Issue [see [www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications)] gives plenty of ideas on how schools can teach young people e-safety when using technology."

### So what's happening across the region?

**Cambridgeshire** has held three successful anti-bullying conferences to prepare for the week, and launched a Parent Partnership roadshow to provide parents with information and support. Contact [chris.whichello@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:chris.whichello@cambridgeshire.gov.uk).

**Hertfordshire** closes the week with a conference designed to share good practice, featuring 'The Scary Guy' from Teachers TV, and presentations from Parentline Plus and Rita Adair. Contact Deborah Sheppard on 01582 830 299.

In **Norfolk** there's a conference for parents on cyberbullying, schools are designing leaflets on how

to keep safe using technology, and Norfolk's first ever on-line audit of bullying takes place.

Contact [rita.adair@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:rita.adair@norfolk.gov.uk).

**Peterborough** is offering an online activity called E-engage, designed to explore bullying and community safety situations. Contact Jackie Remnant on 01733 746 007. Secondary school pupils also get the chance to see Actionwork's participative show *Silent Scream*. Contact Leonard Trevor on 01733 748 145 for more details.

In **Essex**, Connexions is providing information on bullying to shoppers in shopping malls.

Contact [tracy.harrington@est.connexions.co.uk](mailto:tracy.harrington@est.connexions.co.uk).

In **Suffolk** the Lowestoft Community Cluster is hosting a special conference, planned and delivered entirely by young people, to raise awareness of bullying issues. Contact [penny.racket@cup.suffolkcc.gov.uk](mailto:penny.racket@cup.suffolkcc.gov.uk).

**Southend** are holding a cyberbullying conference. For further details contact [carolwoolf@southend.gov.uk](mailto:carolwoolf@southend.gov.uk).

**Bedfordshire** is launching a competition for all pupils to produce a design on the theme "Bedfordshire against bullying". The winning image will be used county-wide. Contact Julia Overton on 01234 836 158.

**Luton** has just launched its anti-bullying guidance for all schools, and is encouraging schools to get actively engaged in the week. Contact [david.snape@luton.gov.uk](mailto:david.snape@luton.gov.uk).

What has your school been doing in Anti-Bullying Week? Rita would love to hear from you. Please send details and any photos taken during the week to [rita.adair@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:rita.adair@norfolk.gov.uk).



# Aim high – you can do it!

## A guide for students with disabilities entering higher education

Since September 2005, Essex, Southend and Thurrock (EST) Connexions has been in partnership with Aimhigher Essex in developing a comprehensive guide for students with disabilities who are considering entering higher education.

The first twelve months of the project were devoted to pinpointing exactly the information students with disabilities need to know before entering higher education. This resulted in a report, which was presented to a conference in November 2006 (and which can be found on the Aimhigher Essex website: [www.aimhigher.ac.uk/essex/projects](http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk/essex/projects)).

Fourteen of the conference participants then volunteered to join a working group which, with much excitement, set about writing the guide which is now ready to be used.

The guide is available as an interactive pdf document at the EST Connexions website: [www.estconnexions.co.uk/page/25751](http://www.estconnexions.co.uk/page/25751). It aims to give advice and information to all students with disabilities, as well as parents, carers, teaching staff, careers advisers, Connexions staff and other relevant practitioners. The guide explores issues such as the



higher education application process, how to access appropriate support, how to disclose a disability, and the funding and benefits available, such as the Disabled Students Allowance. It also includes a large number of links to websites and resources which specialise in disabilities.

**For more information, please contact [angela.kinloch@estconnexions.co.uk](mailto:angela.kinloch@estconnexions.co.uk).**

### Transition 14-19

**East Together's Transition Group is continuing to identify examples of good practice from around the region for their web page, and is**

**focusing at the moment on opportunities for young people in supported employment and social enterprises. The group is also setting up an electronic regional network for people who want to develop person-centred approaches.**

A national guide to good practice for professionals has now been published, and details are on the website, [www.easttogether.org.uk](http://www.easttogether.org.uk).

**For further information contact Margaret Palmer: [margaret@palmerconsulting.net](mailto:margaret@palmerconsulting.net)**



### Early Support

**Following successful pathfinder activity across the region and nationally, Early Support is now the Government's recommended way of providing effective support for young disabled children and their families. It is hoped that Early Support will be adopted by everyone involved with children and their families, including all early-years providers. Local authorities in the eastern region are welcoming this development. In Hertfordshire, for example, the Transformation Fund is being used to provide an extensive Early Support training programme across the county.**

**For further details please contact Linda Fisher, who now has a regional role offering advice and support to assist with this process. Linda's address is [linda.fisher@hertscc.gov.uk](mailto:linda.fisher@hertscc.gov.uk)**







Above: Ann Berger (right) talks with a Special school headteacher at the conference  
Above right: Conference delegates.

## Reaching out: how special schools in the eastern region are making a real difference

In October, a number of special schools and local authority representatives held a conference – sponsored by East Together and the Regional Centre of Expertise – to celebrate the increasing development of the region's outreach services, from special to mainstream schools. Ann Berger, national Ofsted lead for SEN and Inclusion, opened the day with a challenge to the region to make this development a really effective one, and a number of workshops provided the opportunity for delegates to see how the region's outreach services are operating in greater detail.

A post-conference publication is being prepared, which will draw on these workshops as case studies and set them against the framework of the draft national support service standards.

**For more information, please contact Denis Baldry:**  
[denis.baldry@ntlworld.com](mailto:denis.baldry@ntlworld.com).

**This newsletter can offer only a snapshot of some of the many activities taking place across the eastern region.**

**For more information, log on to [www.easttogether.org.uk](http://www.easttogether.org.uk) or contact the editorial team:**

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## Dates for your diary



**19-23 November 2007**

Anti-Bullying Week – see our article on page 4

**22 November**

Everybody's Business: non-CAMHS Training the Trainer workshops  
**Venue:** Eastern Leadership Centre, Cambridge

**26 November**

SEN Officers Accredited Training regional conference  
**Venue:** Cambridge Professional Development Centre

**11 December**

Regional launch of Inclusion Development Programme  
**Venue:** Holiday Inn, Peterborough

**25 January 2008**

Raising the Bar, Narrowing the Gap: GO East conference, opened by David Bell, DCSF Permanent Secretary  
**Venue:** Newmarket Racecourse

**27 February**

Everybody's Business: non-CAMHS Training the Trainer workshops  
**Venue:** Eastern Leadership Centre, Cambridge

**13 March**

Sixth annual East Together regional working day  
**Venue:** The Gonville Hotel, Cambridge