



REVIEW OF THE MAX CARD

AUGUST 2023



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report delves into the Max Card program and its impact on families' experiences within the city. The findings of this report are intended to contribute to the ongoing review of the Max Card initiative.

Enabling families to access various activities is crucial in combating social isolation, a significant concern for families with diverse needs.

The methodology encompassed diverse feedback collection methods, including engagement with families and an in-depth exploration of the Max Card and Southampton Council website. This extended to the available documentation pertaining to the Max Card on these platforms.

The report offers illustrative accounts of families' experiences with the Max Card.

Survey results revealed that 86% of respondents possessed a Max Card, but merely 25% of this group utilised it regularly (on a weekly or monthly basis).

Upon the conclusion of the review, a potential relaunch of the Max Card or the introduction of a new initiative emerges as an alternative. Such an endeavor would prove beneficial for both families and local businesses, fostering a more inclusive and vibrant city environment



BACKGROUND

In recent years, there has been a notable increase in the identification of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). As time progresses, society has gained a deeper comprehension of these diverse needs, accompanied by a growing body of legislation concerning reasonable adjustments. Concurrently, a heightened awareness has emerged regarding the role of personal assistants or carers in facilitating access to events for children and young individuals who would typically navigate these situations independently.

A significant avenue for families to procure assistance for their children or young members is through the utilization of the Max Card. This card provides access to specific local activities, playing a role in reducing the social isolation experienced by these families. The max card promotes inclusivity and equal participation in the community.

Social isolation for families with children who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) refers to a situation where these families experience a lack of meaningful social interactions, support networks, and opportunities for engagement that are crucial for their well-being. This isolation can arise due to various factors related to the unique challenges faced by children with SEND and their families. Some aspects that contribute to social isolation for SEND families include limited accessibility, lack of understanding, lack of transportation and affordability.

Addressing social isolation for SEND families involves creating inclusive environments, raising awareness, and providing support services that cater to their unique needs. Initiatives such as the Max Card mentioned earlier can play a crucial role in mitigating social isolation by offering accessible and enjoyable activities for both children with SEND and their families.

Contact (2011) completed a survey of over 1,100 families asking about social isolation. The findings of the report include

- 72% experience mental ill health such as anxiety, depression or breakdown due to isolation
- almost half (49%) have felt so unwell that they asked their GP for medication or have seen a counsellor
- 57% say lack of support means they are isolated and not able to work as much as they would like
- 1 in 5 (21%) say that isolation has led to the break up of their family life.

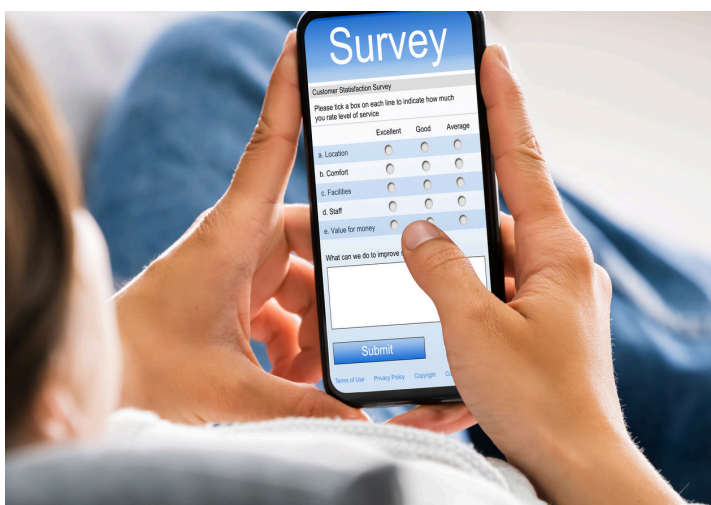


METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed by the Southampton Parent Carer Forum to support and substantiate the findings presented in this report comprises a range of actions:

1. **Feedback Review:** The forum initiated a comprehensive assessment of feedback obtained from both families and the wider community. This feedback was sourced from a variety of contexts, such as events and interactions on social media platforms like Facebook. This approach allows for a holistic understanding of the experiences, perspectives, and concerns of parent carers and the wider community.

2. **Survey Implementation:** A survey was conducted over a five-week duration, spanning from June to July. This survey aimed to systematically gather insights and opinions from a diverse respondent pool. The survey methodology involved the distribution of targeted questions to ascertain specific information related to the subject matter. The survey amassed a total of 228 responses, providing a statistically significant dataset to inform the findings.



3. **Informational Resource Evaluation:** The forum undertook a thorough assessment of the informational resources available to families within their community. This examination encompassed diverse materials, including the welcome letter, the booklet outlining short breaks (for validation of its exact title), the dedicated Max card section on the local offer website, and content hosted on the official Max card website. This scrutiny ensures that families have access to accurate, relevant, and up-to-date information to inform their decisions and actions.

Incorporating these diverse actions into their methodology underscores the forum's commitment to rigor and comprehensiveness. By engaging with feedback, conducting a survey, and evaluating informational resources, the Southampton Parent Carer Forum has adopted a multi-faceted approach to data collection and analysis. This approach contributes to the credibility and reliability of the findings presented within the report, enhancing the overall quality of the report's conclusions and recommendations.

REVIEW OF MAX CARD WEBSITE



As of July 31st, during my visit to the Max Card website, I observed that only 11 providers were listed within the Southampton City Council boundary. Some of these providers extend Special Educational Needs (SEN) discounts without necessitating a Max Card, accepting alternative verifications like the Access Card or DLA letter. This concurs with feedback from families, highlighting a dearth of usable options within the city.

Geographical accessibility is paramount, recognising that families may lack car access, relying on walking or public transport. This approach aims to ensure inclusivity across the local community.

One local provider in Eastleigh, Gambados, is notably outdated on the Max Card site. Gambados, now "Party Man," resumed operations in 2017 with specific SEN sessions and eligibility criteria. Accurate updates on the Max Card site are imperative to reflect these changes, facilitating accurate and up-to-date information dissemination.

APPLICATION EXPERIENCE

Earlier this year, the forum initiated a review of the Max Card, culminating in the first and sole meeting. During this process, Sam transitioned the application process to an electronic format. This transition to a more streamlined and accessible electronic process reflects a improved user experience for families. The forum expresses gratitude for this positive development and wishes to acknowledge Sam's contributions in driving this noteworthy advancement.

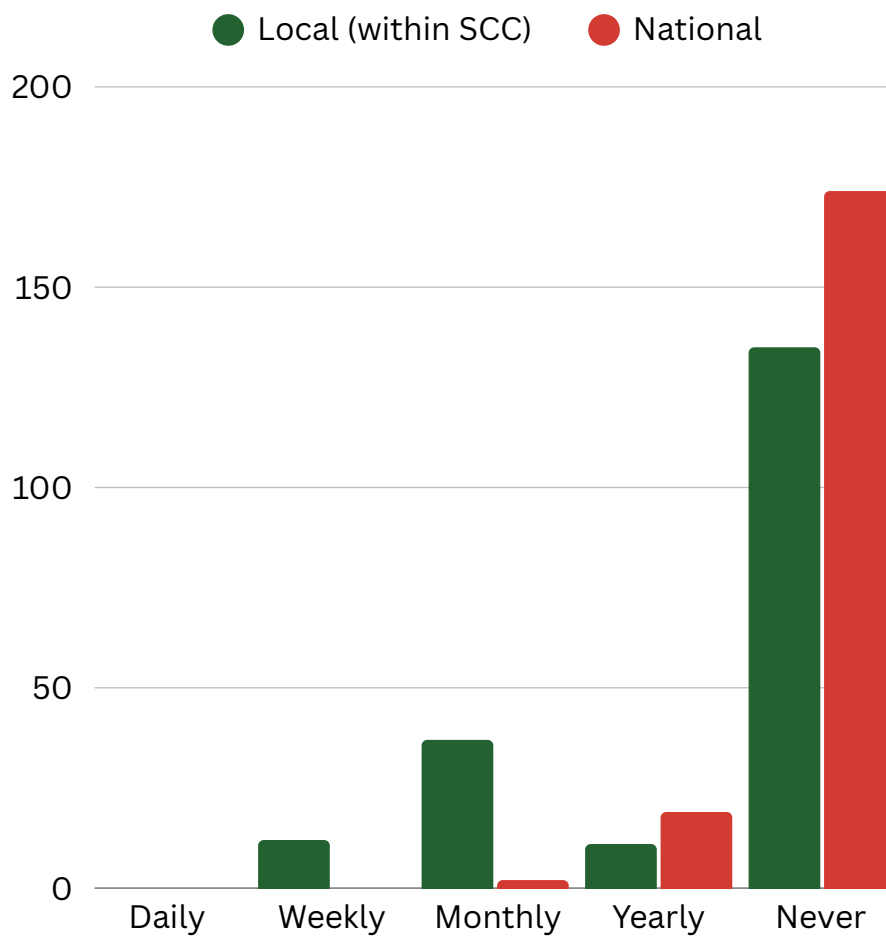


SURVEY RESULTS

During a five-week period, we conducted a survey that was accessible online for families to participate in. Within this timeframe, we received a total of 228 responses to the survey.

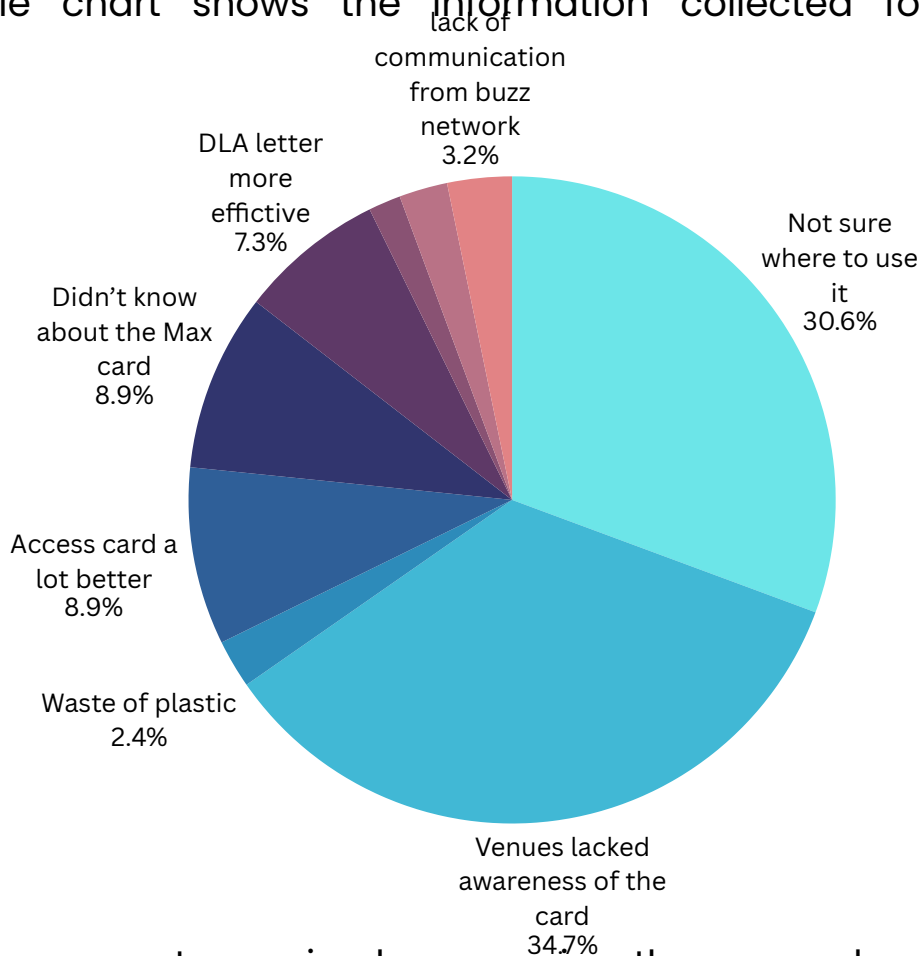
We asked the question if families had a max card. 195 (86%) did have a max card. So this seems positive on the surface that 14% did not have a max card.

However the data about how frequently it was used tells a different story. The graph shows how frequently each family uses the max card. It is used more locally at places like enjoy or active nation. However out of the 195 who have a max card 135 have never used it locally or 174 nationally. In fact only 49 families use it weekly or monthly on a regular basis which is just 25% of families who have a max card.



During a five-week period, we conducted a survey that was accessible to all. Upon inquiring about the frequency of Max Card utilisation, families were given an opportunity to share additional insights via a free-text box. Impressively, 131 families took this opportunity, offering valuable feedback. These responses have been systematically categorised based on the headings depicted in the accompanying graph. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of families' perspectives, shedding light on key aspects that influence their engagement with the Max Card initiative.

Below the pie chart shows the information collected for any other comments.



Analysing the comments received, a recurring theme revolves around the limited number of venues accepting the Max Card and the insufficient awareness of its existence at these venues. This gap in awareness can pose challenges for families, particularly when faced with queues or public discussions about their child's Special Educational Needs (SEND) requirements. Families are often hesitant to divulge personal details in such settings or engage in conversations about the Max Card.

QUOTES FROM FAMILIES

It's a waste of money & get nothing I can't already get with DLA letter

Unclear if its still valid. Not sure where/how to use it. No or very little communication from Max card/buzz over the years.

Not many places take it or even know about it locally.

My old paper buzz card was better

Applied but never got one or heard back

Shame you have to get DLA to get a max card

We dont use it. We use the access card more



An example to illustrate this issue: a parent shared an experience at New Forest Wildlife Park, a venue advertised on the Max Card website. Despite the advertisement, upon arrival, the staff was unaware of the Max Card. The parent had to display the card's details from the website on their phone to prove its validity. Even after this, the staff remained uncertain about accepting it. The parent's offered to retrieve their blue badge from the car finally being granted a free carer ticket.

Families' commentary echoes that the DLA letter and Access Card are perceived as more practical alternatives. These alternatives enjoy wider recognition and standardised acceptance at venues, streamlining the process for families and avoiding potential discomfort or drawn-out discussions. The comments emphasise the need for improved awareness among venues and the importance of standardisation to ensure smoother experiences for families relying on such accessibility support.

During a recent event, a family shared an interesting observation about the Injoy SEN session queue. They noted that the same Max Card was being circulated among at least four different families in the queue. This practice involved one family using the card, followed by an adult leaving the queue and passing the card to another family, and so forth. This situation highlights a potential misuse of the Max Card and could impact the credibility of its usage.

Jungle Jeans provides a noteworthy example of a venue that has taken proactive measures to address the misuse of the Max Card.

In response to this challenge, they have introduced their own version of a SEN pass. To acquire this pass, families are required to present a range of documents for verification purposes. These include evidence of diagnosis, such as a letter, and proof of identification, which can include a passport or parental ID if the child lacks photo identification. The reverse side of the pass displays essential details about the child.



It has come to our attention that certain families are applying for a standard Max Card from SCC without providing proof of Special Educational Needs (SEN). This loophole in the application process is being exploited, leading to the potential abuse of the system by some families within the local community.

This situation raises concerns about maintaining the integrity of the Max Card program. Ensuring that the benefits and resources are directed towards those who genuinely require them is crucial. Addressing this issue may involve implementing stricter verification procedures during the application process to safeguard the program's intended purpose and prevent misuse.

By doing so, we can guarantee that the Max Card remains a valuable tool for families with Special Educational Needs, providing the support they truly need while upholding the principles of fairness and equality.

The cost-of-living crisis is impacting many families but for a family that has a child with SEND this is greater.

Research undertaken by Scope in 2019 (pre-pandemic) showed that “on average, a family with a disabled child would have to pay £581 a month to have the same standard of living as a family with a non-disabled child.

For 1 in 5 families, these extra costs come to more than £1000 a month (Scope 2019). We heard about the financial impact that unreliable transport is having locally.

Among the 131 individuals who provided comments, 4 individuals highlighted concerns related to the Buzz Network, particularly regarding a perceived lack of communication from their end. Families mentioned that after receiving the welcome letter with the Max Card, they experienced a void in communication from Buzz Network. Even reminders about card expiration were absent, resulting in instances where families unknowingly used expired cards. This communication gap has led to frustration and inconvenience for some.

Regarding the welcome letter, an additional suggestion emerges: including information about the HAF (Holiday Activities and Food) program. The HAF program not only offers parent-led activities for families but also supports 1:1 assistance for those requiring it at holiday clubs and other events for children with EHCP/SEN. This underutilised resource can significantly benefit families and enhance short break opportunities, a point highlighted in a recent inspection report. Acknowledging the progress overseen by Ryan in strengthening SEN provision and actively sharing this information can contribute to more inclusive and well-informed support for families in need.

SHORT BREAK STATEMENT BOOKLET

The Short break statement booklet, which was updated in July 2023, contains several inaccuracies.

The Short Break Statement is currently still housing outdated information pertaining to the forum's vision, values, and purpose from the time when the organization was under Rose Road. Despite prior requests for updates, this documentation hasn't been aligned with the revised versions introduced since December 2022.

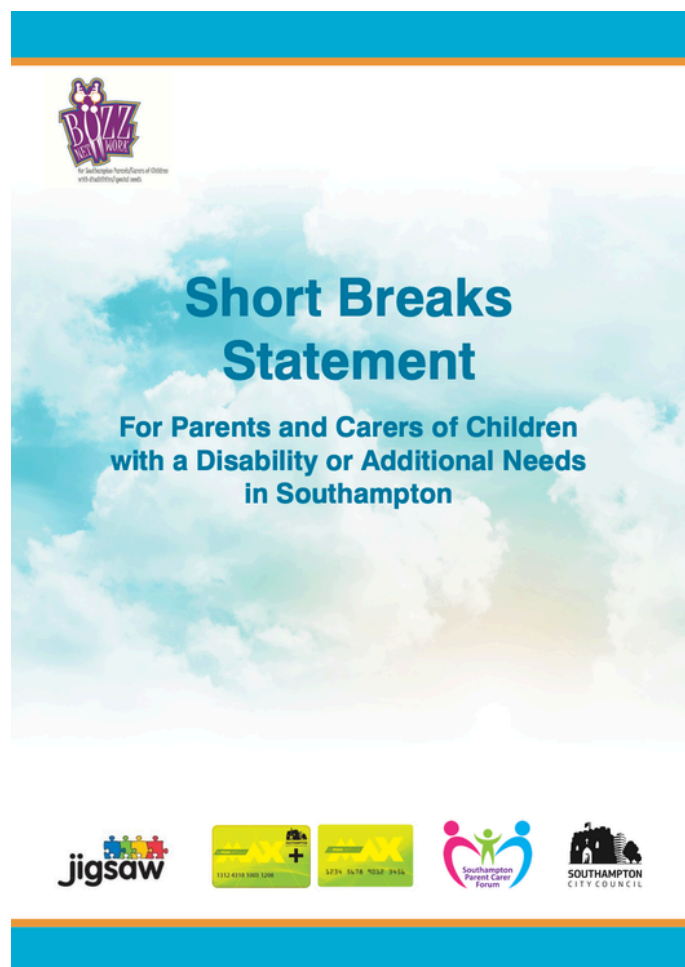
Additionally, the Short Break Statement booklet, recently updated in July 2023, along with the Max Card page on the local offer website, both make reference to a restaurant discount. It's imperative to clarify that the Max Card ceased offering this discount in 2019. The presence of this outdated information in these resources can be misleading and requires immediate rectification to ensure accurate representation of the current benefits associated with the Max Card.

Maintaining accurate and updated information in all documentation and resources is vital for conveying the correct details to families. Rectifying these discrepancies would ensure that families are well-informed about the available support and benefits, avoiding any potential confusion or misrepresentation.

The Max Card section of the local offer currently highlights five examples of venues where the card can be used, but only one of these is located within the city boundary.

Celebrating local options is essential, especially for families without access to transportation. Expanding the representation of city-based venues can greatly enhance the card's relevance for these families.

Additionally, the local offer Max Card page features a list of activities where the Max Card can be utilised, including the Isle of Wight Caravan and Lodge page. However, this link appears to be broken, potentially limiting families' access to this resource. Efforts to rectify this issue and ensure that families can access accurate and functional information are required.



Further, the mention of SCPA on the website might lead families to believe that a Max Card is necessary for accessing their activities. Clarification is required that a Max Card is not mandatory to engage with SCPA services. Similarly, Active Nation's confirmation that a Max Card is not essential for SEN sessions indicates that the Max Card information box can be left blank, preventing any misconceptions about its necessity.

Ensuring accurate and up-to-date information, as well as clarifying when the Max Card is truly required, can enhance families' experiences and contribute to the overall effectiveness of the Max Card program.

OTHER OPTIONS

Out of 131 respondents, 11 individuals mentioned using the Access Card in their survey comments. Certain areas offer codes for free or reduced-price Access Cards via the Nimbus site, demonstrating an effort to make the card accessible to more people.

	Max Card	Access Card by Nimbus
Legoland	Free Carer ticket (need to show max card and additional proof of disability on arrival for it)	Free carer ticket (or 2 in some cases depending on SEND) and queue assist pass. Only need to show access card on arrival.
Paultons Park	Nothing	Free carer ticket (or 2 in some cases depending on SEND) and queue assist pass. Only need to show access card on arrival.
Mayflower Theatre	Nothing	Half price second ticket for carer

The popularity of the Access card is steadily increasing, with many renowned attractions, including Merlin's establishments, embracing its implementation. This surge in adoption can be attributed to its association with an independent assessment process, wherein varying accommodations are assigned to each individual. These accommodations encompass a range of benefits such as queue jumping privileges, provision of free carers, and expedited access to restroom facilities. Notably, this card holds national recognition, making it a standardised and acknowledged tool across different locations.

Moreover, the reach of the access card extends to local businesses as well. This can be attributed to the practical features it offers, such as displaying a photograph of the young person along with an expiry date. These visual identifiers contribute to its effectiveness in streamlining accessibility and ensuring that its usage remains up-to-date and relevant.

A notable advantage of the Access Card is its extended usability into adulthood, setting it apart from the Max Card, which is limited to use only until an individual's 19th birthday.

More information about the access card - <https://www.accesscard.online/>

After finding this out, we completed a Facebook poll on our closed Facebook group on 20th August 2023, to see how many families currently have an access card. In total 92 answered the question and 46 have chosen to purchase an access card.

Croydon Example

Croyden have gone down the route of the national access card which is issued by nimbus. It is the same supplier a lot of the UKs big attractions use for managing the queuing jumping and carers passes.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Moving forward, it's imperative that we undertake a thorough review of the Max Card, placing our families at the forefront as key stakeholders. This evaluation will help us determine the efficacy of the Max Card in meeting the diverse needs of our families. By putting their experiences and perspectives at the centre of this assessment, we can make informed decisions about the program's direction.

For Families:

1. **Enhanced Accessibility:** A renewed or new initiative would ensure that families, particularly those with special needs, can access a wider array of activities and experiences, promoting a sense of belonging and participation.
2. **Reduced Social Isolation:** By facilitating access to activities and events, families would have greater opportunities for engagement, ultimately diminishing the feelings of social isolation that can often arise due to unique challenges.
3. **Quality Family Time:** Enabling families to partake in enriching experiences collectively strengthens familial bonds and creates cherished memories.

For Local Businesses:

1. **Positive Community Engagement:** Businesses that align with inclusive initiatives tend to foster stronger connections with their communities, fostering goodwill and positive associations.
2. **Wider Customer Base:** Catering to families with diverse needs opens up new markets and customer segments, potentially leading to increased patronage.
3. **Corporate Social Responsibility:** Active participation in initiatives that benefit families aligns with a company's commitment to social responsibility, enhancing its reputation and standing within the community.

For the City Environment:

1. **Inclusivity and Diversity:** The endeavor contributes to a more diverse and inclusive city fabric, where everyone can partake in activities regardless of their individual needs.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS CONT...

2. Enriched Community Life: An environment where families can actively engage with their surroundings enriches the overall community experience, leading to a more vibrant and interconnected city.

3. Positive Economic Impact: Increased family engagement can lead to greater spending on local businesses and activities, potentially boosting the local economy.

In summary, this initiative holds the potential to weave together families, local businesses, and the city itself in a tapestry of inclusivity, vibrancy, and mutual benefit.

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