



## Introducing Sarah Haywood

Sarah is a Church of England minister currently working in a pioneer role based in a huge housing estate. Her ministry coincided with her becoming a parent to her now 3 children (aged 17, 13 & 7). As a family, they live with neurodiversity, and she explains some of the challenges as she juggles “not very routine” work commitments with her family’s needs.

Coinciding with being a young parent, it was natural for her to be involved in children’s work at church from the start. At the time, provision for families did not seem fruitful. And so, she turned to God!

Before long, she began Messy Church, which was hugely successful – and busy! But with her family insights, she realised Messy Church was too busy for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). A smaller, quieter form of Messy Church evolved – Special Church.

*And then there was COVID...*

affecting a new pioneer ministry, which had no gathered community, no church building based on a new housing estate! As restrictions allowed, Sarah began ‘Cakes in the Park’, a safe place for families to meet... It was a great success.

She noticed that *all* families (especially those living with neurodiversity) coped as they gathered with others in the open space. It was accessible for all families including those with SEND. She then met Becky, a professional SENCo and parent of children with SEND.

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*Becky had a vision for Kaleidoscope... She had the building, resources and expertise but no team and no contacts... I had loads of contacts, but no building!*

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### Kaleidoscope

A Kaleidoscope is an instrument in which light shines through colours producing beautiful and constantly changing patterns. Sarah explains it further...

God is LIGHT and Jesus commissioned us to be ‘the light of the world’. We all express this light in different ways and when we do, it results in a beautiful spectrum of colour and light. This image encapsulates the vision behind Special Church as expressed through Kaleidoscope.



The team of volunteers includes those with professional experience of working with SEND, parents and a church-based Children & Families worker.

### Creating Space for...

The aim of Kaleidoscope is to create a space where children with a range of needs can be themselves and choose from a range of experiences. Equally important is the space provided for parents/carers, a safe place where they are supported without judgement.

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*"We see the adults come in quite burdened...and leave in a better place...something has happened".*

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Every volunteer is committed to NEVER causing a parent/carer to *feel* judged.

All 6 elements of Kaleidoscope are valued, seen as important and integrated:

- The prepared space
- Activities which have an outcome or end-product (such as a craft)
- Sensory activities
- Physical play and games
- The celebration, where everyone comes together. All the activities are brought together – integrated - at this point. Families are given something tangible they might to continue at home.
- Each session ends by sharing a simple meal together.

Sarah gives an example of one child who was dysregulated for much of the session, was able to take part in the 'spiritual' element, the Celebration, "something connected".

### Support, Structures and Best Practice

The team delivering Kaleidoscope include those working in SEND and health sector, those employed by the Church (the host church and the Pioneer Church) and parents with SEND in the family. These different outlooks serve to support the team, whilst also ensuring that safeguarding and accountability structures are in place.

Sarah emphasises that volunteers do not have to be experts, just an ability to accept families, who are often isolated. Families living with neurodiversity are complex, often affecting the family on many levels.

### And finally...

Sarah encourages faith communities to realise that Special Church (Kaleidoscope) "is not so different from Messy Church". She encourages others to do something similar in their contexts.



She explains that congregations often need help to understand and accept neurodiverse families. Many are 'on our doorstep'; they are often marginalised, misunderstood and sense (accurately or not) disapproval.

Sarah's vision is for Becky to do for Special Church what Lucy Moore did for Messy Church. The image of the kaleidoscope reflecting and refracting light and colour expressed differently is a powerful metaphor for Including ALL families into our church communities. Everyone's faith MATTERS!

Further information, practical guidance and advice are available through

*Turning Little Stones*

***Delving a little Deeper***

[www.turninglittlestones.co.uk](http://www.turninglittlestones.co.uk)

***and Perfectly Patched***

*Further resources mentioned:*

[www.messychurch.brf.org.uk](http://www.messychurch.brf.org.uk)

[www.stjohnscolchester.org.uk/Groups/432463/Kaleidoscope.aspx](http://www.stjohnscolchester.org.uk/Groups/432463/Kaleidoscope.aspx)