





MACS
Microphthalmia, Anophthalmia & Coloboma Support

Registered in
England and Wales (1161897) and
Scotland (SC052711)

Big MACS Meet up



IMPACT REPORT 2026











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Big MACS Meet up



PROJECT OVERVIEW

On 22-23 August 2026, The Big MACS Meet Up returned to Drayton Manor, bringing together families affected by Microphthalmia, Anophthalmia and Coloboma from across the UK for a weekend of connection, fun and shared experiences.

For many, it was a rare chance to meet others who truly understand life with a MACS condition. Families built new friendships, strengthened existing relationships and created lasting memories in a welcoming, inclusive environment - 81% of attendees rated Drayton Manor as "very accessible" for their needs.

The event continued to grow, with attendance increasing by 18.3% demonstrating the value families place on coming together as a community.

Across the weekend, families enjoyed a mix of organised activities and informal socialising.

Saturday: Connection, Confidence and Fun
Families enjoyed a wide range of activities, including parkour, climbing walls, bumper cars, sensory play, crafts, inflatables and messy play, with opportunities for everyone to take part at their own pace. A shared buffet lunch encouraged families to connect, while the evening brought everyone together for dinner, a disco, photo booth and the ever-popular bucking bronco.

Sunday: Making Memories
The weekend concluded with a day at Drayton Manor Theme Park, giving families the chance to enjoy the attractions alongside friends old and new. Many attendees told us how special it was to see familiar faces throughout the park, helping new connections develop into lasting friendships.

By creating space for both adventure and peer support, The Big MACS Meet Up 2026 helped children, young people and adults build confidence, try new experiences and feel understood. The weekend strengthened connections across the MACS community and demonstrated the power of bringing families together.

“The events and activities were fantastic and the sense of community was brilliant. We really enjoyed coming and would come again to the same location.”

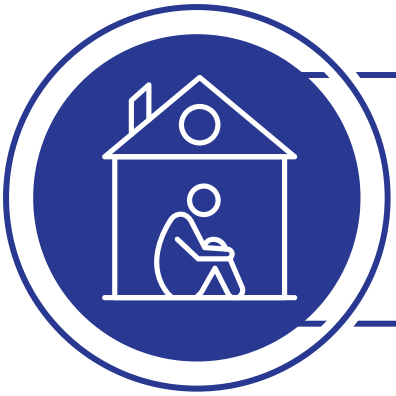
OBJECTIVES

COMMUNITY



People with MACS conditions and parents/carers will be better connected to others and sources of support

ISOLATION



People with MACS conditions and parents/carers feel less alone and isolated

FAMILY



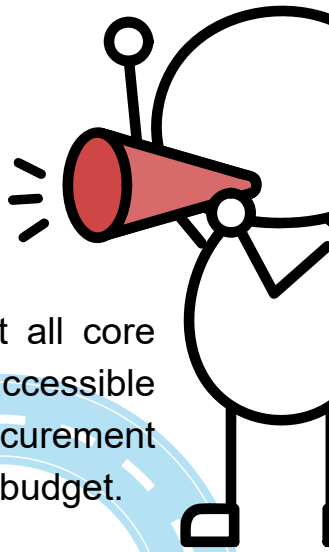
Families who attend MACS family events are able to alleviate the pressures of daily life with a MACS condition

CONFIDENCE



People with MACS conditions feel more confident, accepted and have improved self-esteem

DELIVERABLES



All-inclusive fun at The Big MACS Meet Up - just £222 per person for the whole weekend!

Budget

Financial planning for The Big MACS Meet Up 2026 ensured that all core activities could be delivered to a high standard while remaining fully accessible to the 245 participants attending the weekend. Careful budgeting, procurement and supplier negotiations enabled us to deliver the programme within budget.

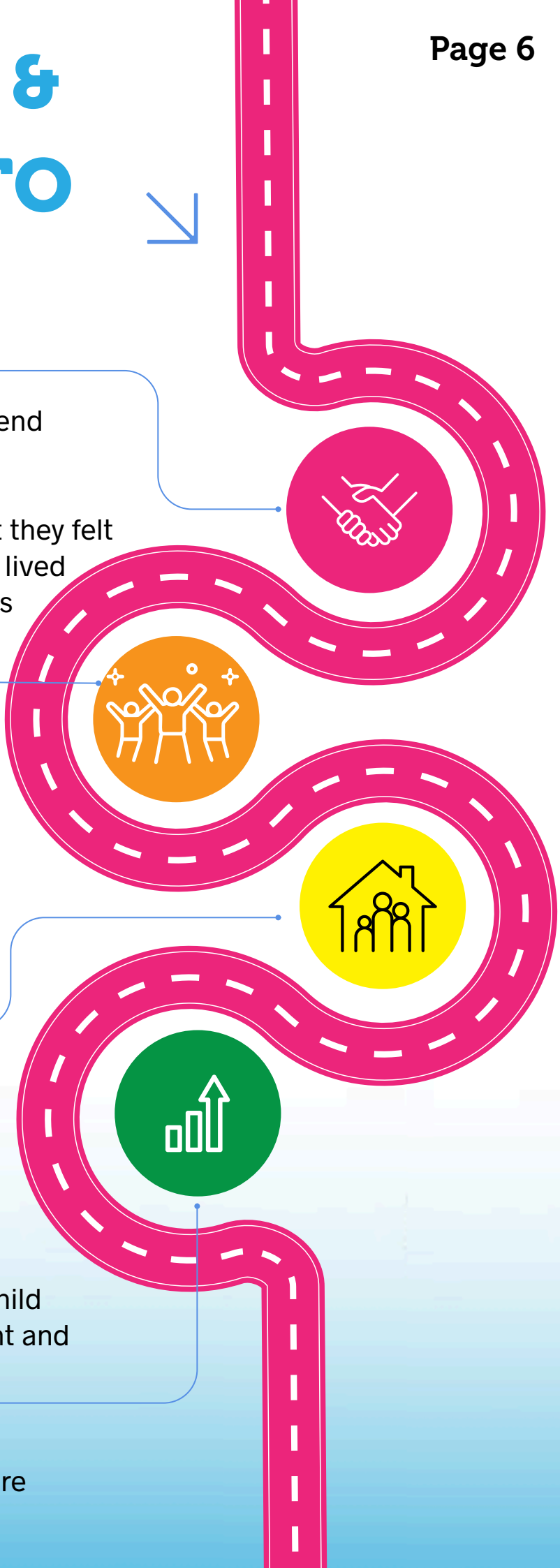
To mark the launch of MACS' new brand identity, additional provision was made so that every attendee received a complimentary MACS-branded t-shirt and hoodie. The resulting 'sea of MACS blue' throughout the weekend created a powerful visual sense of community and belonging, as well as some fab photos! The clothing extended the impact of the weekend long after families returned home, with many members wearing their t-shirts and hoodies during MACS Awareness Week the following month, helping to increase the visibility of MACS conditions and spark conversations within their local communities.

Grant funding covered 100% of event costs, enabling people with MACS conditions to attend free of charge. Accompanying family members were asked to pay a nominal fee to confirm their place, helping to maximise attendance while ensuring cost was not a barrier to participation.

Outputs

- 245 people attended from all four countries of the UK - 92% travelled more than 50 miles to attend.
- 38 families provided feedback, giving a 46% response rate - 24% of these were attending their first MACS event!
- 12 activities on the Saturday including messy play, crafts, face painting, video games, parkour, bucking bronco, photobooth, climbing wall, bumper cars, garden games, inflatable obstacle course and penalty shootout.
- 1 full day trip to Drayton Manor Theme Park for all members
- 13 families volunteered for further case studies, demonstrating strong engagement

OUTCOMES & THE ROAD TO SUCCESS



Community Connections

- 100% said they would recommend MACS events to others
- 97% agreed (71% strongly) that they felt more connected to others with lived experience of MACS conditions

Reducing Isolation

- 92% of families agreed or strongly agreed the event helped them feel less alone

Supporting Families

- 81% agreed (55% strongly) that the event strengthened family relationships
- 93% agreed (83% strongly) that the event helped them spend quality time together

Building Confidence

- 81% of parents agreed their child with MACS felt more confident and accepted as a result of MACS support
- 84% agreed their child felt more positive about themselves

Case Study

Our hearts are full after another amazing MACS Big Meet Up weekend!

I’m not sure I can fully put into words just how special this weekend was. Before we had even set off, Carter and Zara were counting down the days until they could see their friends again. If we're honest, Damien and I were just as excited to catch up with the friends we've made through MACS over the years.

There were so many activities for the children to try, and it was wonderful seeing them all having so much fun together. Carter was in his element on the inflatable obstacle course and the bumper cars - he loved them so much that he spent about 30 minutes on them refusing to come off. He also had a great time at Build-A-Bear and enjoyed painting plant pots. Zara enjoyed her first parkour session and loved every minute. She was determined to conquer the climbing wall and sfter a few tries, she made it all the way to the top, such a great experience for her

The most special part of the weekend was simply watching the Zara and Carter spend time with friends. Seeing them chatting, laughing, playing, running around, sharing meals and making memories with friends who they have met through MACS was truly heartwarming. Those moments mean more than words can say.

Sunday was spent enjoying Drayton Manor Theme Park and Zoo, where the fun continued as families explored the park together. It was lovely to see friendships formed on Saturday carrying into the next day, with children excitedly seeking each other out for rides and adventures.

For Damien and me, the weekend was equally meaningful. We enjoyed reconnecting with friends, meeting new families and spending time with people who truly understand our journey. The support, encouragement and shared experiences we find within the MACS community are invaluable.





We are endlessly grateful to MACS, not only for organising weekends like this, but for creating a community where families feel understood, supported and connected.

Weekends like this remind us just how important community is, and how lucky we are to be part of such a special one.

We are already looking forward to next year!

Testimonials



It was incredible - so much fun, lots of opportunity for our daughter to meet other children with her condition for the first time and likewise for us to meet other parents who had been in similar circumstances.

This event is one of the highlights of the year for us as a family. We feel extremely blessed to have such wonderful friends in similar situations to ourselves which we wouldn't have, if it wasn't for this big meet up through the years.





My son often feels isolated at school. After attending, he told me, 'I don't want to go to any other group because I love this group so much.' These events show children that there are others just like them, helping them build meaningful friendships and feel free to be themselves.

This year my confidence has grown. I have spoken to so many other families about children going through the same experiences as ours. I have loved chatting to other parents and supporting each other. It is such an amazing community to be a part of - the community feel of the event is second to none.





My son got the opportunity to take part in Parkour which is something I don't think I would've had the confidence to even think about letting him do and having someone facilitate this that are happy for children with visual impairments to take part is just amazing.

GALLERY









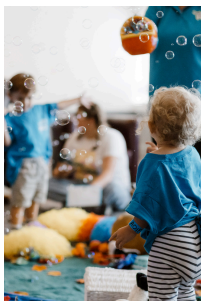




















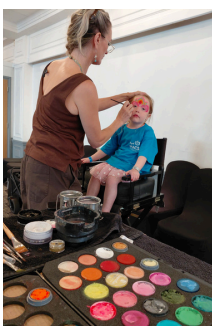






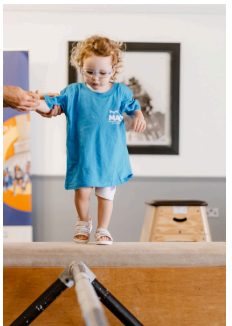












EVALUATION

Challenges & Learning

Childcare and Family Support

Challenge:

Many parents, particularly single parents and those whose children required close supervision, had limited opportunities to engage fully as their focus remained on caring responsibilities throughout the event.

Learning Point:

Providing organised childcare or supervised children's activities at key points during the weekend would enable more parents and carers to fully participate maximising the value of the event for the whole family.

Food and Catering

Challenge:

Beneficiaries reported limited choice for children and vegetarians. Delays in service impacted family routines, particularly around children's bedtimes. Buffet location outside created accessibility challenges for some families, particularly those carrying food while supporting children or navigating visual impairments.

Learning Point:

Future catering arrangements should provide a wider range of child-friendly and dietary-specific options, with meal timings planned around family routines and sufficient contingency to avoid delays. Food service locations should also be reviewed to ensure they are accessible, minimise unnecessary movement around the venue and support an inclusive experience for all attendees.

Parent Engagement Opportunities

Challenge:

While parents and carers valued opportunities to meet informally, there were limited structured opportunities specifically designed to help adults connect, share experiences and build relationships with other families facing similar challenges.

Learning Point:

Future events should consider incorporating dedicated parent-focused sessions, such as facilitated meet-and-greets, workshops, discussion groups or networking activities. Creating intentional spaces for connection would strengthen peer support, encourage the sharing of lived experience and help families derive greater long-term benefit from attendance.

Conclusion

The Big MACS Meet Up 2026 demonstrated the immense value of bringing families together in a safe, inclusive and supportive environment. With attendance growing by 18.3%, the event strengthened existing connections, welcomed many first-time families into the MACS community, and helped reduce feelings of isolation among children, young people and parents.

For many families, the greatest impact extends far beyond the weekend itself. Connections made continue through community WhatsApp groups and ongoing friendships, creating a lasting support network and helping to tackle social isolation.

Through careful financial planning, strong partnerships and responsive delivery, the event maximised impact while remaining accessible to families. Learning from participant feedback will inform future event, ensuring they continue to evolve alongside the needs of our community.

Above all, the weekend celebrated the strength, resilience and joy that come from shared understanding and belonging. The Big MACS Meet Up is becoming a cornerstone of connection for the MACS community due to the immediate and long term impact it creates.

Next Steps

Great news! With **92%** confirming they'd like to attend another MACS event like this, we're already planning the next one!

Due to the overwhelming positivity regarding venue, for its accessibility, cleanliness, facilities and range of activities, we are already in talks with Drayton Manor for a date at the end of August 2027. We hope you've been inspired to want to continue supporting this fabulous and worthwhile event. If so, please do get in touch with emily@macs.org.uk for more information.

THANK YOU!

