

# Fuel for the imagination

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SHOUTS of 'all aboard' and the sound of passing trains brought autistic children and their families together for an anniversary celebration. Controlling the electric engines through an obstacle course of tunnels and stations, youngsters from across

Berkshire gathered for The Engine Shed's second anniversary on Saturday.

The community project, in Katesgrove children's centre, runs once a month for children with learning disabilities to help focus their concentration in a large group.

Sarah Snow set it up two years ago, with the help of model railway enthusiast John Jeffery, after she struggled

to find anywhere to take her nine-year-old son Marcus, who has autism.

She said: "There are so many children with autism who are interested in trains, there has been some research done to prove it, I think it's the predictability of it that the children love, the anticipation of it coming round the corner.

"We got funding to set up from the Big Lottery's Awards

for All so we could pay for the venue and some new trains. It has run out now but it got us going so well."

Screams and shouts of delight echoed around the room as the excited children, despite the occasional derailment, kept their own railway network moving smoothly.

Tilehurst's Oscar Wrigley, who has autism and became the youngest British boy to be

accepted by Mensa three years ago when he was just two, has a passion for trains.

His mother Hannah, 29, said: "We have been coming since it started, Oscar is home-schooled so this is a great way for him to meet other children with an interest in trains."

Every month John Sumner, 66, brings 10-year-old grandson, Joe Day, from Emmer Green. John said: "He looks

forward to coming so much and always asks for me to come because I'm the only one who really shows any interest in trains like him.

"At school, he may be left out or not feel comfortable with a lot of the activities. Here he can relax, there's no need for us to be here really, they get lost in it straight away."

Call 0118 3751432 or email mail@theengineshed.org.uk



**A share of the fun:** Above, Alan Hobbs, of South West Herts Modern Railway Society, and group organiser Sarah Snow cut The Engine Shed's second anniversary cake with rail enthusiasts, from left, Wilfred Leith-Snow, six, Dominic Mayling, four, Samuel Redman, six, and Kai Gull and JJ Crosby, both eight. 130213

To view or buy any of the photos taken on the day see [www.readingchronicle.co.uk/photos](http://www.readingchronicle.co.uk/photos)



**A rail-ly good time:** Above, from back left, Simon Thorpe and John Jeffrey, who help run the model train sessions, and Robert Masters, three, with his cousin Oscar Wrigley, five. Left, Ethan Law, 15, watches a red electric engine run around one of The Engine Shed's tracks. Below, a blue train steams around the track at The Engine Shed's second anniversary celebrations. 130213



**Close circuit:** Left, Kai Gull, eight, is shown around one of the tracks by Alan Hobbs, member of the South West Herts Modern Railway Society, while, right, Wilfred Leith-Snow, six, pushes model trains around one of The Engine Shed's circuits.

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**PHOTOS:**  
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