

Barnsley SENDIAS Service: Using Social Media to Increase Engagement, Information and Participation

Context

Barnsley Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIAS) is an in-house service that operates at arm's length from the Local Authority, enabling it to provide impartial information, advice, and support to children, young people, and their families. Annual survey feedback consistently highlights the service's impartiality as one of its key strengths, helping families feel listened to, respected, and empowered in decision-making. Barnsley SENDIAS is recognised as a valued strategic partner within the local area, contributing to service development and improvement. The service's latest Annual Report has been subject to robust oversight and governance processes and has been positively received as a strong reflection of the impact, quality, and effectiveness of the service.

The issue faced

At Barnsley SENDIAS, we are committed to finding creative and accessible ways to engage with children, young people, parents, and carers. We continually review how families prefer to access information, advice, and support, and adapt our methods accordingly. Social media has become an important platform for extending our reach, encouraging participation, and creating opportunities for meaningful dialogue.

The process

One of our most successful initiatives has been the introduction of regular Facebook Live sessions. Following feedback from parents and carers, these sessions are often held in the evening to maximise accessibility and participation. The live format provides families with an opportunity to ask questions in real time, engage in discussions about SEND-related issues, and receive timely information and support.

These sessions enable Barnsley SENDIAS to deliver support across the Information, Advice and Support Standards continuum. They provide an effective platform for:

- **Level 1 Information** by sharing impartial information about SEND processes, rights, and available services.
- **Level 2 Advice and Support** through responding to individual questions, providing guidance, and helping families explore available options.
- **Level 3 Casework Intervention** where more complex issues are identified and families are supported to access individual appointments or casework support where appropriate.

While the primary focus of the sessions is on information and advice at Levels 1 and 2, they also provide an opportunity to discuss current developments in SEND policy and practice, raise awareness of new initiatives, and undertake informal wellbeing check-ins with families.

An additional benefit of the sessions has been the creation of a supportive peer community. The conversational format encourages parents and carers to share their own experiences, offer practical suggestions, and signpost one another to useful resources. Families frequently contribute lived experience perspectives, helping to create a collaborative environment where knowledge and support are shared across the wider SEND community.

The outcome

The positive response to these sessions has informed further developments in our participation and co-production work. Building on this success, Barnsley SENDIAS has introduced a virtual team meeting approach, inviting parents and carers to join agenda-specific discussions with the service. These meetings provide a valuable opportunity for families to share their views, experiences, and ideas directly with the Barnsley SENDIAS team. Feedback gathered through these conversations helps to shape service development, improve practice, and ensure that the voice of children, young people, parents, and carers remains central to service planning and decision-making.

This approach has strengthened engagement, increased accessibility, and provided families with multiple opportunities to influence and contribute to the ongoing development of the Barnsley SENDIAS service.

Reflections on the outcome

By listening to families and adapting our engagement methods accordingly, Barnsley SENDIAS has created accessible, supportive and inclusive spaces where information, advice, participation and peer support can thrive. What began as a Facebook Live initiative has evolved into a wider approach to co-production, ensuring that the voices of children, young people, parents and carers remain at the heart of service development.

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