

Leeds SENDIASS: Digital solutions to support and enhance the IASS offer

The context

Leeds SENDIASS is made up of a service co-ordinator and 4 full time equivalent advice officers. We are working with an ever-increasing SEND population. We have recently become a jointly commissioned service between education and health.

The issue

In April 2021, following the end of the IASP 2019-2021 funding programme, Leeds SENDIASS had a comprehensive digital IAS offer via the new service website which promoted self-serve, as well as a social media presence which promoted participation and engagement opportunities for service users. With the support of service volunteers, city wide face to face drop-in advice sessions had been introduced which received very good feedback but these were on hold due to Covid restrictions. Instead webinars and various walk-through guides and factsheets were shared directly with service users in response to their queries.

Service users had differing levels of IT skills and digital preferences with some preferring the self-serve method and some requiring the more interpersonal approach.

There were positives about moving forward with service delivery but concerns about the sustainability and equality of how the service was responding to individual case work queries along with concerns over waiting times for responses to individual queries.

IAS programme funding 2019-21 had been used to staff two full time equivalent officers to project lead on the digital offer and website. A business case was made to Leeds City Council to maintain the existing level of staffing but it was unclear whether this would be granted. The service was faced with the dilemma of how to continue this key development work and maintain individual case work if staffing levels were reduced. Insufficient staffing would mean the service was at risk of becoming reactive rather than the preferred proactive way of working. This made it essential to take another look at how the service could be delivered in a fairer and more equitable way. Key to this was the use of digital innovation.

Feedback from a young person participation survey that the service had carried out, identified their preference for a simple digital way to access their IAS to include pictures, apps and videos.

The support provided by IASS

A new service offer was launched in June 2021 and a key part of this is the use of digital innovation to support service delivery of timely and relevant IAS.

By reviewing the key SEND queries the service received from service users via the advice line (renamed from helpline), online workshops and webinars were developed in response. 2 SEND topic-based-workshops are delivered weekly via Zoom. This allows up to 12 attendees at a 1 hour session delivered whereas previously this would have been potentially 24 separate incidents of contact. This has meant officer time has been freed up for other aspects of IASS work. There is a Q and A section within the workshop for individual IAS queries with the answer to one parent's query often being pertinent to another parent's situation.

The IASS has an active and engaged social media presence on Instagram and Facebook which is used to promote the overall service offer, including the upcoming workshops, and a YouTube channel for the training

offer and SEND topic webinars. This is an interactive social media approach with service requests for input from service users, and the use of Facebook polls to gather input as to which SEND topic webinar to prioritise producing next. The training offer is also regularly updated and promoted through the website news and events page. This increases service user confidence in the website and overall web content, as they can see that it is a resource that is actively maintained and current.

Phone advice slots are pre-booked via the service digital booking system with the option of being delivered via either audio or video, the latter allowing face to face and interactive sharing of documents if necessary, according to the service user's needs. This provides service users with up to 1 hour of individualised IAS and has freed up the advice line for less in-depth queries.

The service helpline has been renamed the advice line, to help service users understand the core purpose of the phone line. All queries come through the advice line and receive up to a 15-minute consultation. During this consultation the query is either resolved by sending information from the resource bank or they will be invited to use the digital offer to book an advice slot, book their place on a workshop and/or access relevant webinars.

The YP section of the service website has been developed in line with what YP said they wanted and there will be on-going evaluation and contributions from YP as content continues to be developed.

The difference made

Reduction in wait time for a case work officer after initial contact had been made via the advice line. An example of this would be a parent wanting support to understand and then make a request for an Education Health and Care needs assessment. Previously advice would have been given via the helpline, and information sent out, and if the service user needed more support a referral would have been taken and a case work officer would have been allocated with a wait time of up to 10 working days for the contact back. Now the service user will contact the advice line and there are the options of receiving same day links to our website pages and webinar on EHC needs assessment, factsheet and guide to completing the request form, being booked onto an upcoming online workshop on EHC needs assessment, including practical advice on how to complete the form, and being booked onto a phone advice session slot of up to 1 hour to go through any remaining queries and support to complete the request form with an individual officer (these sessions are currently available to be booked within 3 days).

The ability to provide digital IAS in a more proactive self-serve way via the website, YouTube and social media has had a positive impact on the availability of officers to support those more vulnerable and high need service users who may require individual support, including SENDIASS attendance at a school meeting. The digital offer allows a more personalised service to be provided, so for example whilst many parents enjoy the interactive workshops with peers, some users reported that they would feel uncomfortable in a workshop due to their own needs. On such occasions a 1:1 advice slot is offered within a timeframe suitable to the service user. Some service users have preferred being signposted to the relevant areas of the website and supplied with guides and checklists developed by the IASS, and only come back with queries or to seek further information on their potential next steps

Online workshops allow best use of officer time improving overall efficiency. They also provide benefits for service users, including working parents or parents with children at home, who can attend virtually for 1 hour perhaps during their lunch break, rather than take extended time off work, or need extended childcare, to get to and from and attend a face to face session.

The self-serve resources developed by the IASS can be accessed by professionals to use during their direct contact with service users. These existing resources are helping to highlight to professionals the service offer of training to professionals as well as families. This is supporting working partnerships particularly with the health and care sector and digital training resources and packages are being developed for professionals in line with their requests.

Social media and digital platforms (Facebook, Instagram and YouTube) are supporting the service in developing a community of support, increasing access to useful IAS, as well as providing the service with a source of consultation as well as more spontaneous feedback from service users.

Using the different formats of IAS makes it possible to pitch IAS at different levels to make it accessible and appropriate to the differing abilities and range of needs of service users.

Digital working is helping to raise the profile and reach of the IASS offer.

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