

## Southampton SENDIASS: Partnership working with the local Parent Carer Forum

### The context

Southampton SENDIASS is an extremely busy, inner-city service with high awareness and usage of the service. SENDIASS has multiple stakeholder organisations it endeavours to work closely with, most notably the Southampton Parent Carer Forum (PCF) which is also hosted at the Rose Road Association.

### The issue

The opportunity for service users to see staff in person and benefit from putting a friendly, trusted face to the service has been greatly reduced over the last 18 months. In the period of March to October 2021 it was still faced with the effects of the risks of Covid 19 meaning that as a service face-to-face support remains limited.

### The story

In light of this SENDIASS has been working closely with the local PCF to attend events where support can be provided to parents/carers either virtually or, with necessary precautions in place, in-person. Two recent examples of this are provided below.

Southampton SENDIASS offered to provide a talk for the Southampton PCF to provide information to the families they support. They thought it was a great idea and one of the SENDIASS team volunteered to carry out the talk. The talk was planned to be delivered live on Zoom and last approximately 45 minutes with 15 minutes for questions afterwards. It was scheduled in the evening as both parties felt that would give the best accessibility to parents/carers. The staff member approached the PCF in advance to ascertain what topics they would like the talk to cover. The PCF subsequently asked on their Facebook page and in their Facebook group for family feedback on what topics would be most beneficial. They informed SENDIASS they would like it to cover SEN support (what it is and what can be offered) and also EHCPs (what they are and when they should be applied for). On the night there was time to have a short chat with families before the talk and then the SENDIASS team member stayed to chat for an hour afterwards answering questions and sharing stories. It was a really relaxed evening with time given to answer all the questions asked which resulted in positive feedback. The relaxed atmosphere the SENDIASS staff member created made families feel comfortable staying on to hear other people's experiences and they all felt empowered to seek ongoing support from SENDIASS if they needed. The PCF said they were really happy with how the talk went and would be happy to do another one on another date, to be arranged soon.

In continued joint working SENDIASS were invited to have a stall at the PCF Family Fun Day on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> July. SENDIASS staff arrived as early as was allowed to support the PCF with setting up the event including buying milk for the PCF to serve the all-important hot drinks. Staff made sure to help neighbouring stalls set up and introduced themselves to other stall holders. During the event staff took the initiative to collect leaflets and gather information from other local organisations, which would be of benefit to the families supported by SENDIASS and provided them with their service flyers for signposting to Southampton SENDIASS. Alongside this staff spent the day talking to families and collecting their details to facilitate calling them back to discuss their support requirements in more detail and in a more confidential environment. SENDIASS stayed to support with the dismantling of the event and staff reported it was an enjoyable day that they would love to be involved in again in the future.

## The difference made

By taking on the requests from PCF service users, and providing presentation materials for sharing after the presentation, SENDIASS were able to not only support those who attended the virtual information session but also the wider PCF community with relevant information. The relaxed atmosphere provided an opportunity for peer support, alongside support from SENDIASS staff, which has been missed by many with the restrictions to group sessions Covid 19 has caused. This opportunity, therefore, not only increased the reach of the SENDIASS through maintained positive working with the PCF but also benefited the service users by providing them with greater information and support. Online sessions also provided a good balance between personalised support and increased capacity within SENDIASS as they are easier to attend without the need for staff to travel thereby increasing efficiency and overall service output.

The PCF Family Fun Day was similarly a great opportunity to meet many families face-to-face in a way that had not been possible over the previous 18 months. The fun day allowed SENDIASS to talk to families about what it could offer and show them a range of the new help sheets. As the fun day was free to attend it was accessible to all and encouraged a large number of visitors. Staff members took approximately 30 new referrals and endeavoured to build strong connections by being helpful and approachable. Staff worked hard to network with other local organisations further expanding awareness of the service and therefore, its reach. Reaching so many stakeholders and service users at one event was also an effective way of working.

Both events provided the opportunity to meet families in more personable ways and provide information and awareness raising. This was not only of benefit to the service users themselves but also to SENDIASS staff who have missed the chance to see families in person and really enjoyed attending both these events. By nurturing the relationship with the Southampton PCF, it is hope to be invited to future events in order to continue to raise awareness and increase service reach to more parents/carers.

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