

4) Case Study: Parents needing additional support

Thorough, unhurried communication from an IS pays off with a good EHCP and potential conflict averted.

Luka's story

Graham and Anabel have two children and live in the city centre. Anabel has anxiety issues and finds it hard to go out of the house, so Graham takes responsibility for all meetings and appointments for the children. Anabel's first language is Portuguese. Their son "Luka" is 6 and is on the Autistic Spectrum. He has speech and language delay and sensory processing difficulties. Luka may also have some learning difficulties but it has been hard to assess these because he has been unable to cooperate with the professionals trying to assess him. His range of needs also leads to social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Graham is a very committed parent who is determined to get things right for his son, but his doggedness and style of communication has sometimes meant people seeing him as "difficult to work with" which prevents them really hearing what he has to say.

Graham had IASS support from Amaze in the past, as he had been concerned about the level of support Luka was receiving at school. He was not aware that Luka was on School Action Plus and when he requested a statutory assessment of his SEN he was turned down. Eventually the school agreed that Luka needed to be assessed for an EHCP and they put in a request. Graham is in touch with a local ASD parent support group that Amaze maintains good links with, which reminded him to approach us to request the assistance of an IS.

Graham likes to use email to get advice and information at a time that suits him and in a concrete form that he can go back to and re-read. His IS, exchanged many emails over the course of supporting him, as well as having some face to face meetings. This started with a long email to explain the EHCP process and how IS could help him through it. It helped Graham to have an explanation about how the EHC process is different from the Statementing route he had tried to take in the past. The IS also conveyed to him the person-centred nature of the EHC approach which reassured him and gave him more confidence in the process.

At the start of the process Graham needed to send the LA some initial views and information about his son for them to consider when they had to decide whether to assess or not. The IS offered to check this over with Graham. The IS met him in a café where Graham felt comfortable and explained the process in more detail including where he would need to be actively involved. Graham has a lot on his plate and is very keen to understand things properly and get things right for his family. The IS explained what each section of the EHCP would cover and the relevant bits for Luka. To feel in control of a complex situation, Graham was also very keen to understand how funding works and how it would apply to Luka. The level of detail Graham needed can sometimes mean that school or LA staff respond defensively. This is where having an IS can help the parent and ease the tension in their relationships with professionals.

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The work done early on meant that when Graham needed to complete his parental contribution for the assessment process, he felt enabled to do this himself, whilst checking it with the IS through regular emails and phone calls.

At the same time as the EHCP was being developed, Graham continued to have day-to-day concerns about the support Luka was getting at school and how this was being funded. The IS was able to explain more, in particular why a school might offer small group work rather than 1 to 1. Graham was concerned that this was a cost saving measure, so the IS looked with him at how the group support could be developing social skills and the ability to work with others which was important for Luka. The IS was also able to encourage Graham to use the Week 14 meeting to go over this, rather than meet separately as it was key to the provision and outcomes in the plan.

The IS attended the Week 14 meeting with Graham and Anabel and the relevant professionals. The SEN caseworker had pre-populated the plan with some detail from the reports. This was all positive but meant it was important to keep Graham and Anabel's voices central to ensure they kept a feeling of control. At the meeting the IS helped Anabel ensure the outcomes were made "SMARTer" and add more provision related to Luka's sensory needs. After the meeting Graham emailed "We both just wanted to say a big thank you for coming along to the meeting today. You provided us with a lot of assistance along with some very good suggestions."

The preparatory work they had put in beforehand meant that when the draft EHCP arrived, and the IS met Graham to go through it, only very minor changes were needed, for example some negotiation about wording on Occupational Therapy. At this stage (with Graham's agreement) the IS had some direct contact with the SEN caseworker to make sure the wording was agreed on both sides. Luka now has a plan that is a good reflection of his needs and the outcomes his parents wish for him.

Without IS this was a case that could have ended up with a lot of conflict and misunderstanding between parent, school and LA. This was avoided because the IS could spend time explaining things in the detail Graham needed to be able to negotiate his path through the process, with sensible expectations and confidence that the views of the family were at the centre of things.