

6) Case Study: Building trust

This case study illustrates that by keeping an open mind, staying patient and by demonstrating that you're really listening, can help parents lose their previous negative labels.

Ronnie's Story

Ronnie made a self-referral to the IS Service because he needed help that was independent of the school by someone objective. He explains that he used to know the educational statement system inside out but didn't know where to start now. He knew the changes were positive and he wanted to grasp this opportunity of forward thinking, aspirations and personalisation for his daughter's future; he just didn't know where to start.

Prior to the 1-2-1 appointment, the IS service provided a "transfer introduction meeting" at Ronnie's daughter's school. Many parents came along to learn more about what to expect and how to access IS. Ronnie was quite vocal that he would be working with IS. Comments were made after the event to the IS service that he was a "problem parent", "confrontational", "he records conversations in secret", "frequently disengages". The relationship with the school was clearly strained and had deteriorated to a point that the child was not at the centre and the families voice had been turned to mute.

An IS was assigned to the family and as with all 1-2-1s, it was important that the IS explained the reason behind the reforms, what to expect in the EHCP process, the value of Ronnie and his daughter engaging and how to engage and participate as part of the co-production ethos. Then it was about building the support and information around the family's needs.

During the relationship with the family there were times when it was difficult to reach them and Ronnie would cancel meetings. As a community based service, we recognise that this is not a family disengaging it is a family spinning many plates, and they need us to be consistent with them. The IS maintained contact and continued to support at a distance until the parent was able and ready to engage again. Fortunately this was in time for the "conversion meeting".

At the conversion meeting Ronnie was prepared and informed; he had prepared with the IS what was "important to" and "for" his daughter. He was able to reference the relevant paragraphs in the Code and share outcomes that he had written that reflected what was important to his daughter, that would take her closer to her aspiration of starting her own social enterprise, using recycled items to build bikes. Ronnie was able to do this confidently and calmly allowing his voice to be fully listened to and acted upon so that his daughter could achieve her best possible outcomes.

Ronnie told the IS that he felt failed by the whole system (school and LA) and that whenever he had asked for anything he would hit a brick wall. He felt there had been a lack of communication and people would avoid speaking to him because he'd been labelled as "challenging". At the end of the conversion meeting he turned to the IS and smiled - he said that he was happy with the result. He also said that he wouldn't have been able to do it on his own and that they were so grateful for everything that she had done to empower them.

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The IS said “I must admit that I was really apprehensive, if not slightly worried about dealing with a so called challenging family; but actually they were not challenging they were a family who wanted the best possible outcomes for their daughter. It's been a positive experience and highlights to me why the service is needed, and I feel proud to be part of it. My training prepared me really well; I knew the Code and the Principles that underpin it. Plus with the supervision from Scope, I knew I was never on my own. I was equipped to support the family and I did something that they didn't feel they'd had before; I listened”.