Case Study: Effective Partnership Working in Bromley

This case study describes how a consortium of voluntary sector organisations worked in partnership with the local authority in Bromley to deliver the Independent Support Service with a clear focus on providing support and guidance to parents/carers and young people going through the Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan process. The consortium engages actively with local stakeholders to help ensure a positive experience.

Bromley Mencap, Burgess Autistic Trust, Bromley Parent Voice and Experts by Experience formed an alliance to provide Independent Support with Bromley Mencap as the lead organisation.

A steering group committee comprising of representatives from the Local Authority (LA), Bromley SEN and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) and each of the four organisations in the consortium was formed to plan for roll out and a Memorandum of Understanding was put in place setting out the approach for delivering the service. The LA organised workshops and focus groups to create awareness among professionals and the IS and IASS teams had the opportunity to introduce the Independent Support service as well as meet education, health and social care service providers. These events helped all involved to have a clearer understanding of the Children and Families Act SEN and disability reforms, referral routes and working relationships between partners without compromising the independent nature of the IS service. Further training on EHC Plans and outcomes, an EHC template review and writing a one-page profile were planned and jointly attended by all parties to establish a clear process. Independent Support, in collaboration with SENCOs in schools, organised coffee sessions and workshops to reach out to parents/carers.

This close partnership working has enabled professionals to appreciate their respective responsibilities and focus more on joint working to ensure better outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and their families. Parents have been able to express their views and any concerns as well as aspirations for their children. Better outcomes are being set out and there is more effective communication between professionals who work together on different cases at review and transition meetings. Independent Support has networked with professionals in the LA without compromising on the independent nature of the service. Parents who have made use of the service have been positive about its value and results.

The views expressed by all the partners in Bromley (below) demonstrate the success of this local partnership working:

**Young person (19) says about his transition meeting:** “The meeting went smoothly and in a good direction. They asked me simple questions and most of the time I could answer them. I told them my plans for the future and they understood that I want to work in a gym and continue with my boxing. There was a lot of stuff I didn’t understand previously when they weren’t talking to me”

**Parent:** “The Independent Support programme has empowered me to do more and learn about my rights. They supported me at the transition review and subsequent meetings. I know I still have a long battle ahead but I feel that by working collaboratively we can make this a positive experience and come together to get the right outcome for my child”
**Lead for Pre-School Specialist Support and Disability Service:** “Partnership working is a real strength of the work we do in Bromley to support all children under 5 with special educational needs and/or disability and their parents. Feedback from parents and colleagues about the EHC process has enabled us to regularly review our approach to ensure assessment and planning truly has families at the centre of the process. To do this we look for a range of ways to support and encourage families to be involved. Through good partnership working with local organisations representing parents, we have been able to have joint information sessions for parents and signpost them to Independent Supporters. Parents tell us they feel their voice and that of their child is heard in a meaningful way”.

**16-25 Commissioning Manager (SEND):** “Delivering quality plans and provision that enable young people with special educational needs and disabilities to have better life outcomes depends on strong partnership working between local authorities, partners and providers. Partnership working in Bromley is very strong, with a collective responsibility. With the constraints all agencies and partners undoubtedly face, there is definitely an appreciation of how working together creates solutions.”

**Head of Speech and Language Classes Green Street Green Primary School:** “Our partnership goes back a long way. I invited you and the team from Bromley Parent Voice to the Speech & Language Class Parent Open Afternoon on 24th February 2015 to talk to parents about the EHC process with specific emphasis on Part A. Parents had the opportunity to ask frank and open questions and everyone who attended felt confident and encouraged to write openly and honestly about their child and his/her aspirations and desire for the future. They felt in a strong position to provide appropriate and relevant information; facts that will help ensure that their child’s future needs will be met. It was particularly helpful for them to see an example of a completed EHC plan and a template for Part A as a guide to completing their own. It’s important for parents to know what the expectation is when submitting a crucial piece of evidence that will have significant impact on their child’s future. You have also been very generous with your time offering to attend conversion review meetings to support the parents. This partnership is invaluable to parents and reassures them that they do have a voice in their child’s future educational experience. I know that you will continue to support and guide parents through this process and we will continue to call upon your expertise and experience to provide this service. Thank you.”

**Group Manager, Disabled Children’s Team** “The ‘Independent Support Project’ has been very good in sharing information with our team, attending two team meetings and discussing how they can support parents with the EHC process. This has resulted in team members being able to inform parents about the support available as and when families require support.”

**Kirsty Wilkinson, Assessment, Review and Placement Officer:** “From an SEN perspective, where each child is supported by a wide variety of designated professionals, positive partnership working is critical. Across Bromley local partners have been able to successfully and effectively provide this type of approach in delivering the required changes in line with the new reforms. This ensures that each individual Bromley child with particular needs receives co-ordinated, specific and timely support to endeavour to achieve positive outcomes for their own specific progress and achievements. A sustained and constant review of this working relationship will ensure that the child’s special educational needs and provision for their families across the borough will be sufficiently and appropriately met now and in the future.”

**Head of Children’s Speech and Language Therapy, Phoenix Children’s Resource Centre:** “Working with our partners in the local authority has given Bromley Healthcare the opportunity to develop further involvement with our children and families through the EHC process. The joint
training sessions have been very positive in influencing the development of services and it has been particularly helpful in exploring the best way to develop meaningful outcomes for local children and their families”.

**Interim Head of SEN and Disability:** “The successful implementation of the SEN reforms in Bromley has been entirely due to the excellent partnership working we have in the borough. Without these positive relationships and the will to find common solutions it would not have been possible to make the culture changes at the heart of the reforms. We have learned from each other throughout the Pathfinder phase and continue to do so.”

**Information, Advice and Support Service: Bromley Co-ordinator:** “The Information, Advice and Support Service and the IS Consortium have built strong links to ensure that Bromley parents/carers and young people can access holistic support. Joint training opportunities and sharing of expertise enable services to provide individualised support to families during the transition to the new system”

These testimonies capture the Bromley experience of partnership working and co-production. A culture of continuous improvement and learning is being applied as we all learn from one another and jointly work towards ensuring positive outcomes for all children and young people with special educational needs and their families.