

## Derby City: IASS adjusting the service offer to meet the needs of service users during Covid-19

### The context

After lockdown was announced in March 2020, this led to the service having to quickly rethink how to deliver services to ensure continuity throughout this period. The building the service is based in closed, requiring all staff to work from home, a relatively easy transition as they were equipped with the correct technology.

### The story

The service operated as “business as usual” with the office phone diverted to a staff mobile. Skype was utilised as the secure software to communicate virtually among staff and was also rolled out to the parental offer. Parents/carers/YP who did not have access to this technology were still able to contact the service via telephone, email, Facebook or the website. Family Visitors and Social Care staff were also able to refer to the service with parental/YP consent, as per usual protocol, ensuring the service continued to be as accessible as possible.

Meetings with the LA and parental rep and engagement with other stakeholders continue via Skype to ensure communication remains consistent and updates circulated and discussed as usual. These have been successful, particularly as the LA is in the process of working towards targets relating to the Written Statement of Action and have enabled targets to be met and progress to be made in relation to meeting overall outcomes. IASS has a key role in meeting one particular outcome relating to reducing the high level of mediation and appeals. This has involved the service offering a dispute resolution approach, including liaising with the LA and supporting parents to meet with the LA and other professionals to discuss their case and work towards a solution, thus preventing escalation. This approach has continued throughout lockdown with a very strong success outcome for parents/carers.

In addition, information packs have been created to enable service users to have “one stop” information resources to support them through particular issues. Examples included “Applying for a Needs Assessment” and Tribunal Support packs relating to individual grounds of appeal. For other service users, upon initial contact and depending on their area of support need, some parents were offered the option to email a list of questions they needed responses to, or a telephone call. The majority requested email communication.

All staff have enrolled on a Level 2 distance learning course – Information, Advice and Guidance. The current situation has allowed a little more time to complete the course, something that had been planned for a while but due to capacity issues and high demand for the service, this had not been previously been possible.

## The outcome

Parents continue to receive the same level of service offered prior to the lockdown period. Due to meetings being held virtually and overall demand reducing, staff have more time available and as a result have been able to reduce the response time to either same day contact (in the vast majority of cases) or occasionally, the next day. The service continues to receive very positive feedback from the dispute resolution service offered to all parents who contact the service regarding wanting to appeal an LA decision.

### Feedback from parents

*"Many thanks to you for your help and support at what was a very distressing time- without your advice I would have been lost- you really have made a huge impact on my Sons future and I can't thank you enough."*

*"I just wanted to stress to yourself and whoever else views the evaluation that I was amazed by the service you provided. Obviously we got the outcome that we so desperately wanted and clearly we are over the moon however even if we hadn't got the outcome we so desired I would still have been extremely happy with the service you provided for us. You were constantly in touch and replied to me extremely quickly each time I asked you questions. You kept me informed at all times and I can't thank you enough for the service you provided us! It has made all the difference to xxx complete future and his mental health for the rest of his life and I can't thank you enough for that."*

*"Thank you for all your help and continued support. I would love to thank you in person whenever lockdown is over and also have the chance to put a face to your name!"*

### Feedback from a member of the IASS team

*"I feel this way of working has provided parents with more initial information. For example, we are always ready to meet with parents help complete needs assessment forms etc. However, now the information is readily available in the form of information packs, I feel confident to pass on that information with a detailed explanation, spending more time on that initial conversation, rather than booking in a visit. For the vast majority that is sufficient enough for them to complete the paperwork themselves. Therefore, empowering and boosting confidence. We would spend a great amount of time at meetings, home visits etc, I feel this way does free up some time to be able to give more information and speak to more service users in greater detail."*

### Summary

The service continues to meet with the LA, parents and other stakeholders to allow parent voices to be shared and work towards improving the offer to parents/carers and YP throughout Derby City via virtual means.

On production of IASS monthly reports, it has become clear that by issuing parents with detailed written information on their issue, either by information packs or tailored email support, rather than lengthy telephone conversations, this has reduced escalation of cases. There has been a marked increase in cases remaining at a Level One intervention. This can only be anecdotal at this stage, but it



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suggests that by providing this level of detail in written form, parents can then refer back to this and empower them to challenge or work with professionals to resolve the issue. Monitoring of this will continue including seeking feedback from parents who opted for this method of communication, to quantify the outcomes. This is of course not appropriate for all parents, particularly those with additional needs themselves, who continue to be supported by telephone conversations.

The service is confident that by completing the Information, Advice and Guidance course staff members will continue to evaluate and improve the service to parents/carers/YP in Derby City. This has given the team the opportunity to update their skills and qualifications to enable a quality provision to those seeking support.

### **Contact details**

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