

Hertfordshire: IASS adapting to a new way of working due to Covid-19

The context

Service delivery has significantly changed since the announcement of lockdown in March. The team quickly made the transition from being office based to working from home by learning to use new technology, finding a space to work (including adapting corners and sitting on the bed). All of this was done while balancing caring responsibilities, home learning and a new way of life. Despite personal challenges the team pulled together to find solutions by working tirelessly to continue to offer support to families during an extremely difficult time.

Access to the IASS in Hertfordshire is through a triage helpline, which the service was keen to continue to offer during lockdown. A daily meeting was set up to plan for the day ahead, which included time for everyone to chat as this was missing from the daily contact in the office. A Teams group was set up in order to provide each other with prompt support and answers. Knowledge on a wide range of virtual platforms has been actively developed in order to better support and interact with families. Frontline workers captured common themes through their direct work and the feedback has been shared with the LA to ensure that appropriate updates were available for families on the Local Offer or on social media.

The story

The need to remain up to date with the changes and resources has been the focus, albeit a challenge. Updates have been collated by one person who shared the information with the rest of the team to make sure everyone was up to date and able to provide accurate information and advice. The service website has been used to share updates including resources to support CYP at home.

By working closely with the PCF new ways of working with families have been explored. The PCF has purchased a virtual platform which in turn supports IASS as they have allowed the service to use to share three new webinars. The PCF attend a weekly COVID group with the LA which provides a mechanism to identify issues and resolve them through a multiagency group. The IASS has also been able to feed into this group and receive feedback.

The team were keen to let families know that the service remained available to help them and developed a short video. Each team member took their photo while holding a sign reminding families that they were available. The video was circulated with voluntary groups, the PCF, the Local Offer and the service website. Feedback has been really positive; *"lovely video, really upbeat and personal"* *"Like that you have used written word with signs rather than speech."*

Peer support from Eastern Region colleagues has been vital. The group has attended three virtual meetings which included sharing local and national COVID updates as well as exploring ways in which to further develop the training offer for families and professionals. The latter session was led by Suffolk who helped the service to consider ways in which to increase service reach and meet minimum standards through a comprehensive training offer. The service will continue to collaborate. The new smart ways of working have afforded time to explore ways of resolving issues at an early stage, an

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example of which is where nine families have been supported to resolve their issues outside of the mediation process. Families have told the service that they appreciate the help and support during the pandemic.

The outcome

The outbreak of COVID-19 has had a devastating effect and is something that will never be forgotten, however, as things begin to change it is important to focus on some of the positive outcomes. The service has developed expertise at using technology to find alternative ways to meet with people through virtual meetings. Working practices are now smarter and therefore, able to offer support to a wider group of people. Out of necessity creative ways and quick solutions have been found. More time has been available to spend listening to families about the difficulties they're facing in trying to help their children at home.

The team should all feel really proud of their extraordinary efforts to help families through the pandemic by talking to them, "attending" annual reviews, mediations and tribunals and by keeping families up to date with an ever-changing landscape. The team have also been able to attend more training as it is so accessible.

Next steps....to continue work on a recovery plan by developing a robust training offer, a range of helpful resources together with a new social media strategy. It is hoped that this will enable the service to better meet the potential spike in demand during the autumn term. While not forgetting the importance of face-to-face contact, lockdown has enabled the adoption of new and creative ways to provide support which will be built into future planning. This will shape service delivery in ways that may not have been considered before lockdown.

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