

Blackpool: IASS demonstrating the effectiveness of virtual communication

The context

Blackpool is recognised as one of the UK's most deprived towns and has a high number of transient residents. Blackpool's IASS is well established and has always aimed to provide children, parents/carers and YP with the right level of support at the right time and in the most accessible and equitable way to meet their needs. However, the current COVID Pandemic has necessitated the need for the service to become a little more creative in the way it provides support.

The story

In March of this year Jane, parent of Chloe, contacted the service for support with requesting an EHCNA. Support was given with the submission of the request to the LA. The LA agreed to carry out the assessment but once completed they declined to issue an EHCP.

Following receipt of the LA's decision Jane once again made contact with the service but by this time COVID 19 lockdown was in force.

The process for appeal was explained at length to Jane for her consideration. Jane was extremely anxious at the time about the appeal process.

Prior to Covid-19 the service hadn't had any experience of conducting virtual meetings via Zoom, Teams or Skype so getting to grips with the new technology initially proved somewhat of a challenge for staff!

Jane didn't have confidence in using Zoom, Teams or Skype but was comfortable using WhatsApp video.

This required numerous WhatsApp video sessions to support Jane in her decision making process following the LA's decision not to issue an EHCP. Jane decided to opt for Mediation as she felt this may be helpful. However, again she was anxious in regards to the actual technology which would be used on the day.

The service agreed to support her remotely with downloading of the actual app onto her tablet. Numerous coaching sessions were held in order to ensure Jane felt 100% confident to use the technology and to avoid it becoming a barrier on the day.

The service wanted to ensure Chloe was able to voice her views and attempted to do this via telephone but Chloe wouldn't engage. Chloe asked if she could FaceTime the service but as the service doesn't have any Apple devices this proved a hurdle. However, in order to ensure that Chloe's voice was captured a member of staff discussed with Jane the option of using her personal iPad and offered a personal email for use on condition that Jane was also present during the video call. Jane was delighted with this offer and the FaceTime video call with Chloe went ahead.

After the usual introductions Chloe had a lovely chat with the member of staff and was able to share how school could be better for her. Whilst playing with her toys, Chloe explained she had help from Mrs Smith for Maths and that was really good, Mrs Smith also helped her for part of her English lesson but she wasn't there to help her after playtime and that made her really angry and upset because she couldn't always finish her work, other children were telling her that she would be in trouble because she hadn't finished her work but she was trying her very hardest. Chloe stated that she felt stupid.

The outcome

Although the service offered to support Jane at the Mediation meeting which was being held remotely, Jane felt well prepared in terms of the case she wanted to present, she felt confident and empowered to attend and use the new technology without support from IASS!

Jane has since thanked the service, not only for helping her to prepare what she wanted to discuss during the meeting but also for supporting her to improve and develop her use of technology, this in turn is a skill she will be able to utilise in the future without her previous anxieties!

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