



Brighton and Hove: Big picture and little adjustments: how we get children and young people to use our service

The context

Amaze's SENDIAS services in Brighton and Hove and East Sussex have always aimed to reach children and young people (CYP) in line with expectations for IAS in the Children and Families Act, but the reality has fallen short of the good intentions. Before the IASP, virtually all the direct work with children and young people came through other parts of Amaze's activity as a charity. The success of its peer support project for 14 to 25 year olds with SEND has encouraged young people to identify Amaze as an organisation that was not "just for parents", but only a few of the participants need to take up direct IAS from us. As the IAS service provider in both areas Amaze carried out casework with young people but almost invariably alongside their parents. This was valuable in staff being able to develop skills, tools and expertise, but was exclusively focussed on the EHC needs assessment process. Amaze's SENDIASS offer was still geared to the needs of parents and there was insufficient capacity to shift that. Amaze was well placed to make best use of the IASP funding this year because it used part of the IASP self-review funding last year to consult with young people and trial some approaches.

How IASP funding has improved the IASS offer to its service users

The IASP funding has enabled Amaze to appoint a SENDIASS CYP worker this year. Amaze provides the SENDIAS service for two neighbouring local authorities. Combining part of the IASP funding for both areas meant that Amaze could afford a substantial part-time dedicated post shared between the two areas with the capacity to achieve a real gear change in its CYP work. The CYP Worker is improving the service in three ways: direct work with CYP which is benefitting those individuals whilst helping establish what works; making links with other services so that CYP most in need of support reach Amaze; taking a lead to help staff and colleagues work effectively with CYP in future.

Direct work: Amaze is providing for CYP the full scope of the SENDIASS offer in terms of education, health, social care and preparation for adulthood. The CYP Worker is carrying out this work with individuals and developing resources to support it (letters and pro forma emails, easy read leaflet, Year 9 booklet, CYP contribution for EHC needs assessment and annual reviews, library of links to websites and external resources). The CYP Worker is finding how best to make this a holistic service, building habits of cross referral with the Amazing Futures peer support activities, its DLA Project for help with PIP and for careers IAG from Amaze's Looking Forward project. The CYP Worker is also setting up workshops for parents about annual reviews in Y9 and beyond promoting active involvement of their son or daughter, and sessions on taking part in annual reviews for YP in FE settings.

Reaching out to CYP services: the CYP Worker has identified services that work with CYP and are best placed to signpost and refer to SENDIASS. This work has been about building confidence to promote referrals and joint working, helping them understand what SENDIASS can offer the young people they work with so that take up of IAS is not limited to CYP whose parents are already using the service. Valuable links have been made with the youth offending service (YOS) and youth

employability service (YES) in both areas. Both virtual schools and English as an additional language services have also been approached. The SEND team in both local authorities are better aware of Amaze's offer for CYP and this has led to joint working for example on primary and secondary pupil contributions for annual reviews. Links with smaller organisations and services such as supported internship providers and other charities are the most recent development. The CYP Worker's participation in events like college fresher's fairs or the 'What's Out There' event for people with learning disabilities reaches some young people, but also makes sure local professionals and providers think to point young people to the service.

Building skills and confidence in the team: the CYP Worker is fully embedded in the SENDIASS team, involved in the helpline as well as casework and workshops. She is modelling how to respond to CYP who reach Amaze and encouraging colleagues to actively suggest to parents that their son or daughter could have IAS for themselves alongside or separately from the parent. Where colleagues are working with a parent of an older child or young person, she is advising them how to draw the child into the work, to send the parent resources that they can use to involve their child and to explain the value of SENDIASS for CYP as they move towards adulthood and become the one entitled to make decisions about their life. This side of her work is important to change how Amaze works in the longer-term.

Ways in which improvements have positively enhanced the service user experience – provide evidence/examples

The CYP Worker has been listening to young people to find out how they like to work. This has led to her trying out a multitude of seemingly small but key changes to working practices that make the service better and more accessible for CYP. To illustrate this, from consultation with YP she established that many like using text to communicate and find it less threatening or scary than a phone call. Texts allow them time to process information. They are not put on the spot and don't have to reply immediately. Language in texts is automatically simpler and in short messages compared to email. However, there is a risk/vulnerability about using text and their personal phone number. For those where initial contact is via parent, the worker uses an introductory email with her photo and phone number. The parent can help their child put the number in their phone so they can see who it is when a text or call is made. If initial contact is not through the parent, the CYP Worker sends a letter or email (if they use this) giving her name, photo and number. She says she will text them and gives the option of email if they prefer that, which some do because it gives more distance and avoids giving their number out. She offers the option of emailing parent too, so they can ask parent to send replies on their behalf. If emails end up being sent to and fro by the parent, she will always address each text or email wholly or partly to the child or young person. These little adjustments have had clear results. Young people are responding and staying in contact. When an arrangement is made to meet, the CYP Worker can text a reminder and then again to say she is about to arrive. This helps CYP with organisation issues (saving on worker time in missed appointments) and reduces anxiety about meeting a stranger. The actual quality of the communication is key too. The worker is very careful to word texts simply and clearly, making them unambiguous with no jokes or exclamation marks. In all her communication she will repeat things each time even down to the same phrases, so things are familiar. This sets the tone and pattern for when meeting face to face.

Outreach to other CYP services is gradually succeeding in improved knowledge of what SENDIASS can offer CYP and giving them confidence to signpost and refer. To illustrate this is, contact with YOS has led to referrals of young people who would not otherwise have reached SENDIASS and would not have had that level of advice and advocacy, for example a young man released from a secure unit, living in supported accommodation for young adults with learning disabilities but NEET. His education had been disrupted before he was in custody and his relationship with his family had broken down. He was without a parent to advocate for him and was unable to engage in the EHCP process by himself. Social care and YOS workers were supportive but not expert in SEND

procedures and law. Local authority SEND services are geared to working with young people who live in more traditional family circumstances. The SENDIASS CYP worker could bring something additional and different to this scenario, which led to the young man being able to exercise his rights and participate in decisions about his education as intended by the CFA 2014.

The combined impact of big picture work such as partnership with other agencies and the small but crucial changes in ways of working directly with CYP is now apparent in the numbers of children and young people using the service. In the first six months of the IASP funding from April 2019 face to face casework was provided to 16 children and young people age 13 and upwards across the two areas. This contrasts with 3 in the same period the year before. This is now a significant percentage of total casework.

Lessons the service has learnt making service improvements

It is not a surprise that the number one lesson in direct work with CYP is about getting communication right, every time and for every individual young person. This is key to building trust and Amaze has learned that small changes can make a big difference.

It has also learned lessons about working in partnership with other organisations: how to surmount barriers thrown up by their lack of time, little understanding of SEND and SENDIASS, worries about confidentiality and consent. It is vital to understand their agenda as well as that of SENDIASS. It is worth looking for smaller organisations with specific reach, as well as the bigger and more obvious partners. And that it takes time to see the fruit of this in terms of children and young people reaching SENDIASS, but with persistence it will come.

This experience indicates that in order to shift ways of working it is important to have someone who has protected time for this but is solidly embedded in the overall team so learning is shared and incrementally adopted.

These are all really positive lessons that can be built on, but the tougher challenge is the lesson learned that direct work with children and young people is labour intensive and time consuming and even more so when you genuinely reach out to young people who do not have a family able to advocate for them or who have more complex needs.

The approach being taken to sustain the improvements achieved

Amaze is looking for other key partners to work with to reach more children and young people. It is trying to formalise how it works with the other services for clarity and mutual trust, but avoiding this becoming overly bureaucratic and inflexible. This will offer a direct route into SENDIASS for referrals for children and young people (with consent), which allows better access for those who are not able or likely to do it by themselves or via a parent.

The SENDIASS CYP Worker is sharing her expertise and her successful tools and approaches with the rest of the SENDIASS team. Because some of her time is allocated to the helpline and being in the office, she can advise and support her colleagues to think young person as well as parent in every suitable advice call and bit of casework.

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November 2019