



Amaze SENDIASS sustainability plan and strategy

Funding Background

Amaze has provided the SENDIASS service in Brighton and Hove for over 20 years, and in East Sussex since 2017. We were contracted by the CDC to deliver Independent Support across all 3 Sussex LA areas, to support the transfer of statements to EHCPs under the implementation of the reforms between 2014-2017.

Since 2018, Amaze has been funded under the IASP to continue to develop our SENDIASS, in line with the SEN Code of Practice and IASS Minimum Standards. This investment is on top of core funding received from our local authorities and CCGs, in jointly commissioned local contracts.

The table below outlines our funding for this financial year.

	Brighton & Hove	East Sussex
Contribution from IASP	£27,882 [20%]	£27,882 [20%]
Contribution from Council & CCGs (joint contracts)	£110,000	£110,000
Total budget	£137,882	£137,882

As part of the contract requirements for this financial year, each service has been asked to provide a Sustainability Plan as well as a final monitoring report. We have written one plan as we run the two services together in the interests of value for money, so most risk and sustainability issues are interdependent.

Why do a sustainability plan?

Central development funding of SENDIASS services has been negotiated annually, and we are aware this might not be continuing after March 2021. We know the CDC are doing all they can to actively lobby government to continue their investment in supporting and developing SENDIASS services so they can better hope to deliver all the varied requirements set out in the Minimum Standards, but the CDC have asked us to plan in case this is not forthcoming.

Clearly, if Amaze was to lose this income, the SENDIASS in both areas would seriously suffer as this would remove 20% of the current funding for each service.

This plan aims to set out how the SENDIASS would continue to operate, and we would try to protect our recent developments if we lost this income. But we have to be realistic, as our services are run on a very lean cost structure already, and



are incredibly over-subscribed so any loss in income will lead to a loss in staff, and thus a reduction in services to families.

Nonetheless, we will try to set out how investments made in the services in recent years will not be lost, and continue to have lasting impact.

The impact Covid-19

While we understand the need for and value of planning beyond March, the reality on the ground is we are still operating in crisis mode. Our two SENDIASS services are drowning in demand. The situation is worse than it has ever been for a number of reasons:

- CV19 means families have their children at home 24-7 and are ringing more often on the edge of crisis. These calls take longer to handle and support
- CV19 means that many families don't have anywhere else to turn – their child is not in school, and has lost/reduced access to health/therapies/respite or other support/services
- CV19 means we have more staff off sick or caring for disabled children at home as schools are in lockdown – so work is backing up

Reminder of IASP developments at Amaze SENDIASS

Investments building our service for CYP:

We have used IASP funding to increase our capacity, skills and knowledge around direct work with children and young people. There is a risk to the dedicated CYP worker role (shared between our two areas) if funding is lower in future. Direct work with CYP is time hungry and involves a different style of work. Much will be lost if we cannot keep a dedicated staff member for this. However, we will retain the learning in terms of how to work effectively with young people, tools we have developed and information materials, as well as the contacts we have developed with other services who can refer CYP to us. More broadly maintaining a dedicated worker doing casework for CYP and the associated development work has brought a shift in focus for the service so that CYP are central to our thinking rather than tagged on to a primary focus on serving parents. The importance of this change cannot be underestimated.

Investments building our tribunal support service:

IASP funding has helped us become compliant with the minimum standards in terms of support for families going to tribunal. Experience of working on appeals with parents and CYP, through the stages of mediation, lodging an appeal, preparing for tribunal and at hearings when a case goes that far have built our knowledge, skills and confidence in this area of work. Even with the additional capacity from IASP we have not been able to offer close support in every case, but it has enabled us to develop guides that we can share with parents to enhance lighter touch advice. We will retain the learning and the resources.



Other sustainable change which has a long-term effect:

Over the past two years, we have developed a suite of workshops on key topics and all SENDIASS staff have had the opportunity to deliver these. This year we have converted these to work online (Zoom). We will continue to use these materials and this experience in future. Similarly, we have used added capacity from IASP to improve our information resources. These require a constant process of updating of course, nevertheless we are working on a stronger foundation. This year the priority shifted to Covid related information. This has been a challenge but doing it well has increased the number of parents and professionals using us for information and built trust and appreciation of the service.

Achievements with regards commissioning:

Over the last 12 months we have made the case to our commissioners in East Sussex to increase their core funding level to Amaze for our SENDIASS there. We supported their evaluation of the service, which concluded that the service needed more investment from the CCG on a permanent basis. Sadly this won't deliver a real-time increase, as we had been receiving this additional money on an ad hoc basis while they carried out the review. But none the less this officially brings the service funding level in line with the national average for SENDIASS services, albeit still on the lower end of the scale, and is secured for another two years.

We have also been working with BHCC to support their recruitment of a commissioning/brokerage function for SEND services, including interviewing key candidates who are beginning in their roles soon. This should lead to a less ad hoc process for contract review and future commissioning for the Brighton and Hove SENDIASS.

Achievements with regards governance:

The IASP has supported management time for the service that has allowed us to look beyond day to day priorities to broader considerations, for example more clearly defining SENDIASS as distinct from Amaze as a whole. This is a gradual but significant shift that we will retain and build on further. Our funders and partners are much clearer about this now but we need to keep working on this for users who often like a holistic Amaze offer. We have developed the role of the SENDIASS Manager and improved our staff training, recording, monitoring and feedback processes. The SENDIASS Steering Group for each area has been strengthened. We expect to sustain these achievements.

Establishing our stakeholder priorities for SENDIASS

We have recently undertaken evaluations/reviews with each of our key stakeholders and summarise their priorities for the SENDIASS below:



Priorities for CYP:

- Access to a person who they trust/can build a trusted relationship with
- Information available in YP-friendly formats e.g. video, e-magazine, website area, more visual factsheets/guides
- Information/training delivered alongside parent carer (or trusted adult)

Priorities for parent carers:

- Currently, they want to be able to turn to us for quickly turned around trusted, impartial IAS about Coronavirus and all things related to this, translated/summarised from government guidance, updated on local services
- Faster response times on our Helpline – current waiting time fluctuates but typically is 5 working days for a call back
- More individual support, including at meetings and with appeals

Priorities for commissioners in East Sussex:

- Want us to increase our reach / target our outreach to communities with high levels of disadvantage
- Faster response times
- More sharing of data and intelligence to inform LA and health services

Priorities for commissioners in Brighton & Hove:

- They are supporting us to just cope on day-to-day basis during this crisis – understanding that our staff are nearly all parent carers with children at home, and we are doing all we possibly can to keep the service functioning
- Want us to increase our reach / target our outreach to BAME communities
- Faster response times

Desired Outcomes for SENDIASS

Key outcomes we want to sustain for our SENDIASS are:

- An impartial service that offers reliable high quality information and advice
- An accessible service that is easy to use for CYP and parents from across our local community
- A supportive service that helps families overcome exclusion and disadvantage, and is shaped by what our users want and need
- A connected service that works with partners strategically and promotes the voice of CYP and parents

Our future planning, including how we respond to reduced funding, will be based on retaining these outcomes even if the shape and offer from the service has to change.



Our vision for SENDIASS for the next 3 years – what needs to continue or change

This vision is embedded in Amaze's overall strategic planning process and we have included in italics relevant sections from the strategic principles we are in the process of agreeing for the organisation as a whole for 2021-25.

Develop our Digital Strategy, so more people self-service in first instance or after initial advice

We will support as many people as possible; developing more digital resources, growing peer support and offering hands-on help for those that need it most.

We want to support more people to be self-servicing, accessing the information or resources that they need via our website. We are looking at how we make different levels of information available without overwhelming a user initially. We are considering developing a "members area" which will offer access to enhanced content to use after initial advice e.g. toolkits, step by step guides, training content and videos. We will need to invest in redeveloping our website. We have seen increased reliance on social media as a channel for information during the Covid pandemic and we will use this experience to develop this further.

I1: We will provide high quality, impartial information, advice and support – in a variety of accessible formats including digital, phone/remote and face-to-face

S1: We will develop our digital offer – updating and relaunching our website including more step by step guides, video resources and online training, so those who can be, are more 'self-servicing'. We will look into establishing a membership area for enhanced content e.g. toolkits/forums.

S2: We will explore ways we can support digitally-excluded CYP and families to access support online, and will look into developing and facilitating 'safe spaces/forums' to encourage more people to engage with us online.

Prioritise our more intensive, face to face, support to the most vulnerable YP or families

We will extend our effort to make sure all families who need IAS know about and feel able to use our service. We will listen to people from groups who face additional barriers and try to change our offer to suit them rather than expect them to adapt to how we work.

L2: We will better communicate with, reach, and support our most isolated local communities (incl. BAME, traveller families, SEN rather than disabled).



L3: We will ensure >50% of staff, volunteers and trustees have personal experience of disability or caring, and we will recruit more YP with SEND, and people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, to ensure our team reflects our communities.

We will use our helpline to effectively triage enquiries so we make best use of finite capacity for more detailed and sustained individual casework. Most people will be offered brief but person-centred and holistic information and advice. In addition to developing our digital offer as described above, we will build our resources for young people and make use of workshops and groups to offer responsive and interactive opportunities to get information.

We will use fair and transparent processes to prioritise who we can give more intensive advice and support, including with appeals up to and including tribunal. We will further develop the ways we use volunteers and support them. This will include using volunteers to offer individual support such as attending meetings, but also to support the running of the service in ways that free up the capacity of staff to offer advice and more support to those that need it most.

I1: We will provide high quality, impartial information, advice and support – in a variety of accessible formats including digital, phone/remote and face-to-face.

I2: Our information and advice will be person-centred and holistic, covering a range of topics/themes, as required.

I4: Working with young people, we will increase our range of information resources for young people with SEND.

S5: We will introduce a centralised volunteer co-ordination function, to help increase the number of volunteers we use to support all our core services.

Many parents and CYP who contact SENDIASS need emotional or practical support that goes beyond the SENDIASS remit. We will work with the rest of Amaze and other partners (e.g. parent groups, youth services) to promote the development of more group and peer support activities to meet this need, contributing information and advice to what these offer to those who participate.

S3: We will offer peer support / face to face 1:1 support and groups to YP and parent carers who are at particular risk of isolation, or who are facing stressful transition points e.g. diagnosis, preparing for adulthood.

Work together in partnership across Sussex

The needs of disabled children and young people and their families are at the heart of all that we do. We work together with families and SEND professionals, to plan, develop and improve services.

Amaze worked hard to convince ESCC to commission out their SENDIASS service to the voluntary sector. Since 2017 we have demonstrated the synergies and



value for money associated with us running two SENDIASS together with one team. We would like to explore even greater synergies and value for money across the three LAs and CCGs in Sussex by closer work with West Sussex. This could help deliver greater economies of scale and greater parity/quality of service for Sussex families and YP. We already work in partnership with the WSPCF and the West Sussex charity Reaching Families, as well as the West Sussex SENDIAS service but we are keen to look at more things we can do together across the patch

T2: We will co-design and co-deliver Amaze services together with YP with SEND and their families.

T3: We will collaborate, build partnerships and share learning with the parent support groups and forums (being careful to clearly communicate our unique roles) as well as within the CVS and wider public sector teams – to develop/improve the overall service offer, long term outcomes and drive up the inclusion of CYP with SEND across Sussex.

Empowering CYP with SEND and their families

We empower children and young people with SEND and their parent carers by building their confidence, knowledge, skills and resilience.

Promoting the voice of parents and CYP both individually and collectively is a key part of this. Some of this work is done by SENDIASS, some by Amaze as whole and some through partnerships. Amaze provides infrastructure support for the parent carer forums in Brighton and Hove and East Sussex. We will be clear about the different roles of SENDIASS and PCFs but work together in the interests of our SEND community. Amaze has recently initiated a youth management team to bring the voice of CYP with SEND into the heart of our work and development. We will draw on them to help guide our SENDIASS for CYP.

E2: We will support and empower YP and parent carers to take an active role in the services they access both at Amaze and outside, by getting involved in voice/participation activities, and offering interpreting/translation support where necessary.

E3: We will develop a new YP's Youth Management Team in Amaze to help shape our YP's offer and ensure YP are involved in all areas of our work.

E4: We will support the B&H PaCC and ESPCF with back office functions, training and capacity building to enable the independent voices of parents to be heard effectively via co-production with services.

E5: We will work closely with all three local PCFs, as well as national bodies, inputting intelligence and learning gathered from our service provision and the Compass Databases, to inform our influencing work, to improve policy and practice for all families.

Our Funding strategy

- East Sussex funding is secured until Sept'2023

- Brighton & Hove funding is secured until Mar'22
- Maintain constructive, supportive relationships with key partners, hosting termly SENDIASS steering group meetings, and providing quarterly KPIs
- When contracts are recommissioned, ensure the case has been made for investment to continue at (at least) current levels
- Core statutory funding is prioritised on staffing the above key areas of work
- Continue to build relationships with key officers in WSCC and begin conversations about whether our SENDIAS services can do more work together
- Continue to provide CDC/IASN partners with case studies about the need for additional national investment in SENDIASS services
- We do not currently feel able to fundraise charitably to meet gaps in funding for SENDIASS as:
 - Funders can see this is a statutory service and will be reluctant to fill gaps in funding
 - We have significant gaps in other areas of our service that we have prioritised for fundraising effort
 - Our fundraising capacity is much reduced as opportunities to raise money through events is virtually nil during the Covid pandemic.

Action Plan for reduced funding

Our strategic plans above aim to make the service as efficient as possible, prioritise how we use our capacity, maintain existing funding levels as far as is possible and mitigate the impact of some loss of funding at a time of rising demand. If we face a more significant reduction in funding we will need to take additional steps.

What elements of service could we cease? What are the risks?

We cannot remove any discrete element of the existing service without becoming non-compliant. We have to look at ways to trim the scope and quality of the service.

Any significant reduction in funding will mean the need to carry out a restructure, reducing staff hours. All staff are already part time so we may need to make skilled, trained and experienced individuals redundant.

Maintaining a reliable advice line is the bottom line for our service. If we reduce the staffing for this, waiting times will increase. Some people may give up or go elsewhere so demand may drop off a little but the long-term impact of parents and CYP having reduced access to impartial and reliable IAS will affect families and the wider SEND system locally. The most immediate risk will be loss of



confidence from the community because the service is less accessible and responsive.

Tribunal support is high cost in relation to the number of people supported. We could suspend this side of our service in order to continue to offer a broad advice service to as many people as possible, whilst continuing to provide advice and information about appeals. This will affect a relatively small number of people but will impact most on those who are already more disadvantaged and less able to advocate for themselves or buy support. Again there may be a loss of confidence in the service as it is seen to be less supportive.

Direct work with CYP is similarly high cost per individual user. We could reduce how much we offer. Suspending this casework altogether and only offering helpline-based IAS for CYP would mean we would lose the skills and expertise we have built up and be harder to rebuild than tribunal support. We have worked hard to shift SENDIASS to be a CYP service as well as one for parents and this complements an overall move by the charity to address the needs of disabled young people directly as well as via their parents. We are exploring fundraising charitably for other YP work which if successful may eke out a more limited SENDIASS offer.

We could abandon work on an improved digital offer of information and better resources for CYP, and could stop offering workshops. In the short term, these options might be less unpalatable to users but will reduce our ability to shift demand away from an overstretched helpline and casework service.

We can reduce our contribution to local strategic and partnership work. This will free up capacity for information and advice work. It will reduce our ability to achieve more systemic change and positive outcomes for the SEND community. It also carries risk of damaging relationships with statutory partners, which may have funding implications for the service in the long term.

Immediate actions and communication/key messages to stakeholders/families

We are keeping the SENDIASS steering group for both areas informed about the potential loss of or reduction in support through the IASP and involving them in this planning and exit strategy process.

We have spoken to our funders but the impact of Covid means this is not a high profile issue from their perspective.

We are keeping the Amaze trustees abreast of the situation and working with them to look at the implications for Amaze's overall budget planning, strategy and risk management.



We are keeping both PCFs informed and warning them of a potential reduction in the service.

We are keeping staff up to date with realistic messages about the future, but balancing this with an awareness of the impact of Covid on the team at the moment.

We are drawing on our previous experience of carrying out restructures and starting to plan a process and timetable that complies with HR good practice.

We have started to plan our communication to families about service changes.