

Bromley: Planning for future sustainability

Bromley is the largest London Borough and is geographically diverse with a dense population in and around town centres in the north and west of the Borough and less populated rural areas in the south. The IAS Service in Bromley is well established with an experienced team of staff and volunteers. The service is able to offer the full range of statutory services to support children, young people (CYP) and their families throughout the SEND processes.

The challenge

The SEND reforms in 2014 were welcomed by the service and the families it supports. However, the service's remit widened greatly to encompass information on Health & Social Care and to provide support for CYP from 0 -25. It has been a challenge to provide this broader range of support without any increase to the service's core funding.

The IAS service has seen an increase in referrals each year with issues becoming more complex. Particular challenges are CYP unable to access school due to high anxiety and schools use of prolonged part-time timetables.

All of the schools in Bromley were encouraged by the local authority (LA) to convert to academies. This has led to a large number of multi-academy trusts (MAT's) being formed. The service is working with individual schools and MAT's to ensure internal policies are consistent with SEND law and guidance.

Initial impact of IAS programme funding

An IAS Service Manager has to constantly juggle competing priorities. During 2018/19 funding provided by the Information Advice and Support (IAS) programme has enabled the Service Manager to undertake a comprehensive review of the current support provided. It has been extremely beneficial to have been able to allocate time to look at every aspect of service provision and reflect on the successes and challenges. Feedback from families has always been crucial in shaping the way the service provides support. The ability to carry out a detailed analysis of the feedback has led to enhancements to service provision including the addition of a weekly evening drop-in session.

Impact to service beneficiaries

During 2018/19 funding provided by the IAS programme has been pivotal in enabling the promotion of the new minimum Standards¹ within the LA and Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). For the first time, the service has had meaningful discussions with the CCG around joint commissioning and training opportunities. The LA is clearer about its statutory duties and partnership working has been fostered with Social Care teams. The IAS Service was recently commended by the Children with Disabilities Team in the LA for its provision of an interactive training session on education, health and care (EHC) plans.

¹ <https://councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk/information-advice-and-support-services-network/resources/minimum-standards-ias>

Analysis of data shows that we don't currently reach enough of our families in the traveller community, one of the largest in the country. Consultation with current families and relevant professionals has allowed the service to plan an exciting new project that will promote meaningful engagement with families including via the use of video technology.

Feedback from families has overwhelmingly stated that they particularly value face-to-face support and the role of our Independent Volunteers Supporters is crucial in providing this. The IASS team has been able to rewrite its training package to allow the facilitation of training for other IAS Services. This will enable services to offer enhanced support to families in their communities.

Lessons learnt

It takes time and persistence to raise awareness of the IAS Service with strategic leads and commissioners within both the LA and CCG. However, this is vital to discussions about the sustainability of the service. The ability to provide a detailed two-year operational plan has given the service the ability to hold discussions with stakeholders to showcase the range of support that our statutory service currently provides and our ambitious plans for the future.

How is the approach being sustained?

As a result of the work undertaken with IAS Programme funding the service has a higher profile within the LA. The Service Manager is now being invited to be a part of strategic groups within the LA. The service will continue to work with the LA to ensure that there is an on-going commitment not only to sustain the current service provision but to work in partnership to look at innovative ways to support families going forward.

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https://www.bromley.gov.uk/info/8/special_educational_needs/64/information_advice_and_support_services/vice_iass