



Calderdale and Kirklees: Building on our offer

The context

Calderdale and Kirklees SENDIASS merged at the same time new Minimum Standards were introduced. Three areas of concern were identified by the Calderdale and Kirklees Steering Group. These were:

1. Lack of capacity to offer children and young people advocacy in their own right.
2. An inability to offer training opportunities
3. To raise the possibility of joint commissioning at a more strategic level.

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

IASP funding has meant that the SENDIASS offer has improved immediately because the service has been able to “build” upon its previous offer and is now able to fulfil the IASS recommendations in the SEND Code of Practice. This was achieved by recruiting and funding a SENDIASS Officer and Children and Young People Advocate thus increasing overall capacity, for example to organise meetings to discuss training with close partners such as Parent Forums and Family Voice, the ASD Service for parents and the Exclusions Team.

Discussions are currently underway to explore the possibilities for putting training opportunities in place alongside SENDIASS’s close partners hopefully next year.

The possibility of exploring Joint Commissioning across the Local Authorities has now been raised and is being looked into further by Assistant Director and Senior Commissioners.

The funding has also been used to support a new volunteer who has completed Level 1 legal training, has started Level 2 legal training and has their equipment and travel expenses provided. Having a fully trained volunteer means families can ask for an Independent Supporter at meetings if they prefer.

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

Recently there was a young person who required their own Advocate because their views differed from that of the school and their parents. The school suggested the young person continue their studies at a local College, the parents stated a preference for their son to remain at school but the young person wanted to follow an Apprenticeship. With the appointment of a Young Person Advocate the young person’s views were heard and in the end prevailed. He has since started his Apprenticeship this term.

If we use the month of October 2019 as an example, fifteen young people have been individually advised and supported by the Young Person Advocate who has attended twelve meetings with the

child or young person which we otherwise could not have attended. Concerns raised range from the EHCP not being followed by College, to discussions about the My Support plan not being sufficient in school, support at Mediations, meetings about placement, educational provisions needing to make reasonable adjustments and setting up Virtual School Education for a very anxious young person unable to access the College environment while still being on roll. They were also able to attend a Local Offer day and a post 16 information meeting which had a range of stalls, provisions and information on display which will help develop networking connections and provide useful guidance for young people when they contact SENDIASS for further advice.

By having more capacity it has meant SENDIASS Officers have more time to use their excellent mediation and negotiation skills with more complex cases. This helps to keep numbers of Tribunals and Appeals low, so reducing the stress and anxiety for parents and young people going through this process, but at the same time working hard to produce good outcomes for them. In Kirklees the service has been involved in 5 SENDIASS Tribunals and in Calderdale 2 so far this year.

SENDIASS has recently been able to centralise its Helpline system to cover both areas in the first instance, meaning that users should be able to get a more effective and consistent response to their call. It is early days yet and the outcomes will be monitored but most responses to users using the new way of working have been achieved within 48 hours. This time last year we were considering opening a waiting list so response times have been much improved with the extra capacity. It has also impacted on an improved independent website and Local Offer.

Lessons the service has learnt making service improvements

Senior Commissioners initially were unfamiliar with the new Minimum Standards required by SENDIASS so by raising the issues around Joint Commissioning this has raised the profile of SENDIASS at a more strategic level and may result in Health and Social Care taking a more active interest in SENDIASS improvements. One of the ways we have tried to improve the service is to invite representatives from Health and Social Care onto our steering group.

SENDIASS now attends the Strategic Disability Board Meetings once a term and has joined the local Engagement and Participation work stream that feeds into this Board and helps network more effectively with local partners. Merging the 2 services has meant greater efficiency and a better use of SENDIASS Officers strengths, expertise and experience.

Although not easy, the service has learnt it must also try to keep up with improving the SENDIASS website, data collecting and Local Offer information.

The approach being taken to sustain the improvements achieved

The Steering group is pivotal in raising the SENDIASS profile strategically and has a really good attendance and representation from Local schools, All Age Disability (Social Care), Designated Medical Officer, voluntary agencies and parent groups, including Parent Forums from both areas. Regular monthly data is collected around number of referrals and the level of interventions and this is fed into the Local Authority and this has led to a better understanding of the good outcomes and low levels of Tribunal referrals SENDIASS achieves through excellent negotiation and mediation skills. It was also very helpful to have this data and examples of good practice ready for the SEND Inspection by Ofsted and HMI this year. The Evaluations collected over the year gave 100% good or better response, with some fantastic comments on Facebook, webinar, messages, texts and emails direct to SENDIASS.

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