

# Cheshire East: Making each contact count

## The context

Following an in-depth review of the work of Cheshire East Information Advice and Support (CEIAS) team specific areas were identified for development to enhance the service user experience. One of the areas focused on has been “**First contact**” for service users.

The team have considered the following:

- Access points
- Consistency of advice

What follows is an explanation as to how IAS programme funding has been used to help the service achieve its ambitions and goals in relation to these.

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

### “First Contact”- Access points

#### 1. Website:

Contacts to the team rarely showed that anyone had accessed the website for information and if they had, they had been unsure where to look. Team members were, therefore, spending time talking through the information needed and then emailing out documents to be read. Repeatedly these proved to be the same documents each time.

Professionals spoken to did not always know about the website and so were not guiding anyone towards the information there.

The service review identified the following:

CEIAS ambitions and goals
For the website to be intuitive; enabling easy access for all users, (including a search facility)
For the number of hits to the website to be available and routinely scrutinised to inform further development

Funding has allowed for the CEIAS website to be overhauled. It now has a search facility, buttons to make navigation easier and provides data with regard to usage of the website to support the team in their analysis.

#### 2. Other teams:

The service review also identified that parents access information in other places including the Family Information Service (FIS), Family Support Workers (FSW's), Communities teams and SENCOs. Although these agencies were aware of CEIAS they were unclear of what the team did and didn't do and unaware of the availability of online materials to support and signpost parents.

### Ambitions and goals

For key agencies in Cheshire East to feel confident and knowledgeable in sharing relevant information with parents e.g. the website, leaflets, team contact details

For schools to have a link to CEIAS website/information on their own website and to be actively publicising the teams work to parents

The team have protected time in the past 4 months to proactively liaise with key agencies to raise awareness of CEIAS and the different ways information, advice and support can be provided. This has involved attendance at several meetings including with: Communities Managers, FIS, FSW, CAMHS, new members of the SEN team and SENCo's.

CEIAS attended the SENCO conference allowing the team an opportunity to ask specific questions to ascertain the level of understanding of SENCOs in relation to the role of the team and then to give key information. This resulted in the CEIAS hook leaflet being sent out to EYs, Primary and Secondary SENCOs, along with a request to include a link on their school websites.

### 3. Face to face appointments:

In addition to liaison with other key teams and development of the website, CEIAS has also established weekly appointments in different parts of Cheshire East to support user access. This provides greater opportunities for face to face meetings to be arranged when this is necessary.

### “First Contact”- Consistency of advice

The team's review of available data showed that parents who came to the team for information, advice and support as new contacts were very satisfied with the support they received. Parents who had received support for a number of years were not as satisfied; sharing concerns on social media and in response to parental surveys.

It was recognised the way the service was operating needed to change in order to increase the reach of the team including to; young people, Early Years and specific communities.

In reviewing working practice it was clear that there were differences that needed to be explored and addressed. The team looked at what they wanted to achieve with regard to this:

### Ambitions and goals

For service users to have equality of access and consistent advice no matter which member of the team is involved.

For agreed standards to have been created and implemented to enhance the service user experience

The team worked together to explore how they responded to contacts, what worked well and what to avoid in order to agree a shared understanding of what is expected in responding to contacts. This included:

- Creating a set of key questions to use with anyone making contact in order to provide them with what they require to know/need quickly and efficiently
- Creating a set of “standards” so those making contact know what they can expect and what is expected of them
- Creating a set of instructions outlining what needs to be recorded, how and where
- Ensuring that team members know how to transfer internal calls
- Setting up procedures for managing appointments efficiently, and dealing effectively with contacts into the team
- Creating proforma to support discussions with parents and data collection in relation to “escalation of concerns”

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

### “First Contact”- Access Points

#### 1. Website:

A greater number of professionals are now aware of the website and are signposting parents to it. Although it is still early days, scrutiny of data is showing that people are visiting and navigating the site. Themes being searched for are informing development of materials to be included on the site. Feedback from service users and other practitioners is that it is now far easier to navigate and has useful, relevant information.

Team members are finding it easier to signpost service users to the correct information on the site and are not having to follow up calls with lengthy emails with lots of attachments.

#### 2. Other teams:

Feedback of impact from FSW, the Communities team and FIS has been that, having input from the team, has had a dual effect of:

- a) Helping them to understand the EHCP process, meaning they are now able to guide families to relevant information.
- b) Increasing their opportunities to signpost to CEIAS due to a better understanding of the different way families can contact CEIAS.

This means that service users don't have to ring so many people and they are receiving consistent messages from those agencies/teams.

Input to SENCOs has aided their understanding of the team. Several schools have included a direct link to CEIAS information on their website, meaning that information is getting out to a wider range of parents.

#### 3. Face to face appointments:

Feedback has shown that those accessing these sessions have found them to be very useful. It is supporting efficiency of resources and effort and is expanding the service reach. It means that service users can choose where and when they attend an appointment from the list of venues and dates available.

Recently a young person made contact and an appointment was booked. The young person has autism and is anxious in new places and with new people. A team member met with them at an autism friendly venue and a volunteer from the venue supported them in accessing that support when it became clear that support was needed. This was a huge step for that young person and was the start of further engagement with that centre.

### “First Contact”- Consistency of advice and support

Taking time to reflect on the service's approach has enabled it to explore what it needs to achieve, where to focus its efforts and be clear who its work is for. By questioning why certain things were being carried out in certain ways resulted in finding alternative more cost effective, and time efficient ways of doing some things. This is benefitting service users in many ways. Some of these may seem small but they all add to the service user's experience e.g. they are more likely to speak to a person when calling the team rather than having to leave a message, less time is being

spent on the telephone explaining things, if they call the wrong team they are able to be transferred rather than having to call back, they can access the information they need independently i.e. without having to contact the team and ask questions then wait for an email etc.

## Lessons the service has learnt making service improvements

Some of the key learning points for CEIAS have been:

- **Service improvements take time to embed:** processes and information need to be clear so that everyone has the same understanding and they need to be reinforced over time. Just because something has been said once does not mean that it necessarily means that things change or are fully understood. Often they need a “drip, drip, drip” approach
- **Not everyone will see service changes as being “improvements”:** Some people are comfortable with the way things have been because it has worked for them. Aiming to increase service reach/accessibility and empowering service users to do things for themselves by providing them with the tools they need may be seen as being positive/appropriate/necessary until it affects the individual. It is essential that we recognise and acknowledge their concerns and provide data and hard evidence to help them understand the need for change and the positive impact the changes are bringing.

## The approach being taken to sustain the improvements achieved

The team are taking several measures to ensure that improvements are sustained these include:

- Employing a Business Support Assistant part-time to collect and collate specific data, and keep the website and its contents updated
- Regular and systematic interrogation of data to inform development; if data does not show the improvements expected then processes will be reviewed.
- Increasing the composition of the Governance Group to include Early Help and Communities
- Having a comprehensive communication plan to ensure the “drip, drip, drip” of information

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