



Croydon: Engaging and working with parent groups and YP by working flexibly to match their requirements

Croydon has the second highest population in London and a higher than average percentage of children with SEND. It currently has almost 2,700 education health and social care plans, the highest in London and more than 50% attend special schools or special resourced units.

Croydon SEND IAS Service is managed, supervised and run by national KIDS charity. KIDS Croydon SENDIASS aim is to support all its service users in gaining the knowledge and confidence they need to enable them to make their views heard and understood and to make informed choices about theirs or their children's education, health and social care support. The service is free and has no bias towards any groups within Croydon and actively seeks to remove barriers to any resident in Croydon wishing to access information advice and support.

In the last 2 years the IAS Service has prioritised direct engagement with YP as well as individual parents and parent groups both school and community based.

The challenge

One of the main challenges for the service is capacity. KIDS IAS Service consists of 3 members of staff: 1 full-time and 2 part-time. In the last 2 years Croydon LA experienced a 30% increase in the requests for EHCP assessments. The volume of casework increased as more people became aware of the service. The higher number of cases meant that staff cannot always support parents at school or LA meetings.

The second challenge was being able to meet the local requirements for "out of hours" support which didn't match the contracted hours of the workforce.

As the IAS Service increased its presence in the community groups, more working parents approached the service for help.

Initial impact of IAS programme funding

In order to help the service become compliant with the new national Minimum Standards, the IAS funding provided by CDC was used to create a dedicated post to work specifically with CYP. The YP Support Worker set up monthly SEND drop-ins at local youth clubs as well as working with secondary schools and colleges to promote the service directly to YP.

The additional funding also meant that the Senior Service Co-ordinator was able to be more involved in working with the LA and other local organisations reviewing and developing a new 0-25 SEND Support and Post 16 Transport Strategies.

Impact to service beneficiaries

The work with CYP has increased the IAS Service profile in colleges, secondary schools and youth groups. The YP support worker is not only developing great relationships with YP but also with youth leaders, LA post 16 team, Youth Offending teams, PRUs and Children with Disabilities Social Care team. During 2018/19, funding enabled the YP Support Worker to offer a greater number of YP support with their Annual Reviews and help secure an education placement of their choice. Currently the YP Support Worker is setting up new SEND drop-ins in the local colleges. In the future these drop-ins will be run by trained volunteers.

The IAS service has changed staff working hours to reflect the changing demands on the service i.e. to fulfil the needs of working parents, youth clubs and other YP groups; all requiring support in the evenings rather than during day-time. An evening support group has also been set up as a result of parental requests.

The Senior Service Co-ordinator had increased capacity allowing for greater involvement at a strategic level, better relationships with LA, Health and Social Care also developed.

The IAS Service has delivered joint workshops with the Parent Care Forum to parents at local Children Centres.

Lessons learnt

During 2018/19, the IAS Service staff has learnt that it is not enough to raise a profile of the service but to ensure it is able to respond accordingly. As the profile of the service increases so does the volume of new referrals. Croydon SENDIASS learned the importance of being approachable, creative and flexible and that it's crucial to not only provide the type of support parents and CYP needed but to give sufficient consideration to ensure the timing and location remains appropriate for their requirements too.

The increased presence at strategic meetings with the LA has proved invaluable in developing better relationships with local support organisations, Social Care and Health services.

How is the approach being sustained?

The IAS Service will continue to work with strategic leads and commissioners in order to develop the service which would meet the new national Minimum Standards.

The new 2 year strategic plan is based on closely working and reviewing SENDIASS together with the LA. Close liaison with the LA will be crucial in all IAS Service projects planned for the next 2 years. Any arising issues from the projects will be identified and discussed with the LA. This approach will allow the service to engage with the LA and possibly look at the increased funding opportunities for delivering a local IAS Service offer.

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