

## **Lesley Platts, Designated Clinical Officer for Islington**

### **Introduction to Lesley's profile**

Lesley is a Designated Clinical Officer, based at Whittington Health Northern Health Centre in Islington. She has been a DCO since 2014 and her background is in occupational therapy. Lesley works two days per week in her DCO position.

Lesley defines her role as a strategic adviser to the CCG on commissioning around SEND. "It's all about improving the quality of provision and support for children with SEND". The DCO role is key to identifying and addressing challenges and barriers in the system and to hold service providers into account.

Lesley works in close partnership with hospital-based services and community services. Lesley is responsible for following up on emergency admissions of children with mental health conditions. Her work also covers the early identification of mental health needs for children in care and managing follow up and support programmes.

### **Lesley's work and responsibilities as a DCO**

When starting in the DCO role, Lesley worked only on the operational side. She coordinated young people's transition between services, and supported the preparation, monitoring and review of EHC plans.

Lesley has since become more closely involved in the strategic planning of services for children and young people with SEND within her local area. She is working to reduce the number of emergency admissions, to develop Positive Behaviour Support services, and is collaborating with GPs to establish an 18-25 service offer for health. Lesley attends CCG board meetings, and is involved in discussions and planning for personal health budgets, EHC plans, residential placements, Children's Continuing Care assessments and the area's SEND strategy. Moreover, Lesley is now participating in SEND tribunals as a witness, and supports the preparation of court cases.

The development of the staff's responsibilities around SEND is also an important part of her role as a senior manager. For example, she has worked with Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) to

promote a greater focus on children and young people with SEND and greater understanding of the EHC assessment and planning processes.

Lesley emphasises that the DCO role should be statutory. She feels this would really help develop the role. She explains that the DCO role is a demanding job, and feels that she needs more time to carry out her duties. In particular, she would value having more time to work directly with families, and to engage them in the planning and development of local services: "The CCG is not close enough to the families to be really able to influence change".

Lesley feels that a strong clinical background and excellent leadership and influencing skills are crucial to making an impact in the role. "Being able to think strategically is paramount for this role, especially for commissioning services," she says.

### **Working with the DMO**

Lesley works with a DMO in her local area. Working half a day per week, her colleague is focussed on working with children with complex medical conditions and works closely with General Practitioners to improve Children's Continuing Care assessments.

Lesley feels that the key differences between the DCO and DMO roles are around professional background and breadth of responsibilities. Lesley explains that the DMO position is medically-focussed, whilst the DCO works both on the strategic development of the local area's SEND offer and as an operational lead. Lesley finds that working with a DMO is an advantage, and that their roles, knowledge and experience complement one another.

Lesley and the DMO both receive supervision from the CCG and have a common workplan of objectives and outcomes to achieve every six months. They attend meetings with the CCG, health leads, school nurses and therapy leads every six months and work closely on few key projects. For instance, they worked collaboratively on the design and delivery of training for doctors and nurses on the early identification of needs. In addition, the DMO codes the diagnosis received from doctors and therapists, and collects and analyses data on children with SEND.

### **The voice of children and young people**

Lesley feels that her position meaningfully supports the participation of families, children and young people with SEND, through her focus on co-production and promoting an outcomes-based approach.

Lesley is very involved with the local Parent Carer Forum and with developing 'Young Champions'. Lesley also conducts forums in hospitals. "We believe that this is what strengthens families", says Lesley, "they have this broad overview and experience of what is working or not working within services". Lesley dedicates a lot of her time to raising the profile of SEND, especially in hospitals. For example, she worked with the Emergency Department and Ambitious About Autism to provide training for doctors on autism and learning disabilities, and on creating autism-friendly spaces in hospitals.

### **The evolution of the DCO role**

Lesley is keen to integrate her work and that of other DCOs more closely within the local Sustainability Transformation Partnership (STP) and the planning of health and social care services across a larger area. In particular, Lesley sees opportunities to align her work around SEND with STP-led mental health and wellbeing programmes, which share many of the same priorities for children and young people.

Lesley is also keen to work more closely with GPs in future, particularly around the identification of children and young people with SEND.

### **Lesley's advice for new starters**

Lesley would recommend that any starter in the DCO role apply to take part in the SEND Leadership Programme, run by the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTI). Lesley's involvement in this programme has helped her to develop a broader perspective on the SEND agenda and to learn from other areas' examples. She also suggests meeting with and learning from other DCOs wherever possible, and joining regional SEND networks such as the London Strategic Managers Network for SEND.

