

Central Bedfordshire IASS: Supporting young people with SEND during a global pandemic and beyond

The context that your service is working in

Central Bedfordshire LA has a population of around 300,000 with approximately 25% under 18 years old. It is a largely rural area with approximately half living in the countryside and the remainder in large market towns. In the 2011 census 10.3% of residents were from black or ethnic minority communities. The number of EHCPs issued each year continues to increase with over 2000 currently in place.

In November 2019 an Area SEND Inspection was completed by Ofsted which resulted in a Written Statement of Action being produced. This statement continues to be implemented resulting in rapid developments including staffing structure, SEN processes and communication and engagement. The LA hopes this is creating an ethos of change which will create a stronger SEN service and more effective partnership between the LA, CCG, parents/ carers, education settings and other stakeholders.

Central Bedfordshire SENDIASS is an in-house service. In the last 18 months the service has also experienced significant changes with a completely new staff team as well as development supported through the IASP. Essentially the service has been operating as a new service. The team consists of 3 staff members and 3 experienced volunteers.

The service has been experiencing a significant increase in referrals and demand on the team over the last 12 months. This does follow the national trend however, the Ofsted inspection and Written Statement of Action are also felt to be contributing factors.

The global pandemic and the passing of the Coronavirus Act 2020 has had a significant impact on Education Health and Social Care services. Of particular significance to the families IASS support, has been the move to home learning by education settings during periods of 'lock down' as well as the new procedures, rules and use of resources that are impacting on students when on site. From referrals coming into IASS it appears that CYP with SEND may have experienced significant changes in the delivery of SEN support and implementation of EHCPs during this period.

The issue that was identified to be tackled using IASP funding

As lockdown prevented face to face support with service users it was necessary to make better use of online communication methods and digital resources to raise awareness of the service and provide IAS. Prior to the pandemic the service recognised it needed to prioritise developing its IAS offer for CYP. This need has been reinforced as the impact of the pandemic on Education, Health and Social Care services has been felt by CYP. The service received an increase in referrals relating to conflict between the new school rules intending to reduce the spread of coronavirus and the implementation of SEN support and EHCPs in schools. More service users are contacting IASS with concerns that their needs cannot be supported at school, that individual needs are not being prioritised against other factors influencing schools currently, that SEND legislation is not being implemented fully and that they are not experiencing a person-centred approach.

Looking to transition out of the pandemic, education settings and SEN services will undoubtedly be reflecting on the impact of coronavirus on progress but also on resources. This, together with concerns already received from families, suggests it is even more important to support CYP to engage in decision-making impacting on them.

How the funding was used

- ❖ Raising awareness of SENDIASS amongst Secondary schools and colleges
- ❖ Supporting YP with SEND directly
- ❖ Production and delivery of an annual programme of events delivered online including:
 - Virtual Workshops delivered to YP
 - Virtual Workshops delivered to parents/carers
 - Attending virtual support groups
- ❖ Development of social media usage to support YP in particular.
- ❖ Development of digital resources

The difference made (i.e. the impact of your work and how your service/service users have benefitted)

Over the last 12 months there has been a steady increase in the number of people engaging with the online platforms; Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. YP more readily engage with social media meaning it is a great platform to provide information and raise awareness. Additionally, during lockdown more service users are working remotely and using online services as part of everyday life. It is anticipated that much of this activity will continue beyond the pandemic and therefore this communication and engagement channel will continue to be a key area of IASS delivery.

The service is now working directly to support over 15 YP in a range of areas including requesting an EHC needs assessment, annual review of an EHCP and the school's complaints procedures. Feedback received has demonstrated that support has been valued and helped to bring a positive outcome for that YP. A few contacts have been received where a parent has directly asked if the IASS Youth Engagement officer can support their child.

"Excellent communication throughout time spent talking through with XXX from SENDIASS about best way forward with obtaining a ECP for my Daughter"

"Your help, advice and support has been so important to me over the last few months and I cannot thank you enough especially XXX who has been there for me the whole journey so far I feel I could pick up the phone and talk to her any time she is so friendly and puts me at ease and answers any concerns or questions I have with honesty and research."

The service has produced some information videos about key SEN processes such as EHC needs assessment. These digital resources are used as part of the virtual workshops. Attendees are asked to view the videos time beforehand. This overcomes some of the issues with presenting online as well as efficient use of time available in a workshop to offer individualised advice. During a period when individuals are feeling over-whelmed, this makes better use of their time. Feedback following the workshops indicate that the delivery and information was valuable.

The service has attended online support groups led by LA services and support groups. At these events the service has offered both individualised and general advice on processes. Feedback has been very positive and has led to ongoing support to families by the service. It anticipates that collaboration with these services will continue.

*"I would just like to say a huge '**thank you**' for your presentation yesterday. It was perfect and our Parent Carers certainly gained a lot from it as did our staff."*

Schools, colleges and external providers have been very positive to working with us to raise awareness of the service to young people. Whilst it has been challenging to move this forward during lockdown, great initial steps have been made with events in the pipeline over the next academic year.

"Yes would definitely like to meet to see how we could work together, perhaps via Teams or Zoom sometime in the next week or so?"

"Thanks for this fab and very comprehensive email. I am going to forward it to colleagues working with YP."

Contact details

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