

Thurrock IASS: How has the IASP funding benefitted our service and service users curing the Covid crisis

The context

On the advice and guidance of the TLS Management Board the PATT offices closed their doors to staff and families on 17th March 2020. This meant the service had to adapt its methods of delivery to families fast. Fortunately, the website appointment booking system was already established and had been running successfully for some time. This meant advising families that their existing appointments and any follow-ups would be delivered remotely, relatively straightforward. This aspect happened quite seamlessly, most families opting for telephone appointments although we were offering WhatsApp video calls, almost all were happy with calls. The telephone answering system, was already operated remotely as when the service moved into its new premises, it was unable to move the phone line as it is fixed to the Beehive telephone exchange. This was remedied by using a VoiceBridge which is connected to an office mobile phone. In order that calls can be picked up by any of the team, access to the Beehive building was possible before it was closed so the VoiceBridge could be linked to everyone's mobile phone. This meant all team members were able to access the phone system making it possible to allocate who was responsible for the phone service more efficiently.

Working with colleagues in Southend SENDIASS, a Covid-19 Information page was added to the homepage of the website and information on the changes to the service on the bookings page. The service maintained contact with families daily via its Facebook group (currently has over 450 members). Additional private groups were created for ADHD Support group and a Thurrock SENCO forum to disseminate information and guidance to schools.

The issue that was identified to be tackled using IASP funding

Maintaining direct contact with families and CYP during the pandemic was the main focus. All families whose cases were currently open were contacted to establish what, if anything, they needed from the service, and to let them know how they could make contact should they need to. Several referrals were made to the LA PASS (Prevent and Support Service) to ensure families did not "slip through the net". Contact was also made with some of the more vulnerable families whose cases had previously been closed to ensure they too had support and to make sure that they knew who to contact should they need to.

After the initial panic and worry of the lockdown the service found that many of the families it supports felt more relaxed without the stresses of getting their CYP into school, and early on phone calls to the service reduced. It is anticipated there will be a rise in new cases when schools reopen fully on March 8th 2021.

A significant amount of time was spent adapting the online resources to make them editable online for those families who do not have access to a printer. The website was updated and documents and person-centred resources were re-developed to ensure every document available had either a guidance document or an example sheet. As families were notified of their September school places, the service heavily promoted the creation and use of One Page Profiles. This helped focus families on the future and enabled them to feel they were doing something positive.

How the funding was used

To promote the service in engaging more families, professionals, CYP in the work it undertakes, in partnership with Southend SENDIASS, a programme of SEND information/training events hosting/delivering information on SEND Law (focusing on the duties on schools), EHC Needs Assessment and Annual Review processes and a range of SEND topics have been delivered. During the period of school closures and lockdown, these were delivered remotely using Zoom and MS Teams. Demand for places at these events continues to grow and subject to funding it is intended to continue this offer. Resources for YP have also been created and a YP's section of the website is currently being developed alongside the Evans Commission section which will detail forthcoming training and engagement events.

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

Currently, the service feels it is able to offer a high quality, person centred service to families. It is able to provide a good range of resources, free training and methods of communicating key information at speed using its social media arrangements.

Whilst undertaking the strategic and operational work required as part of the IAS programme, it has been of great benefit to work closely with the other SENDIASS in the region. It has been important to be honest when reviewing, identifying and then discussing areas of weakness across regional services and sharing ideas as part of developing the service offers. The service is very proud of its collaboration with Southend SENDIASS.

By providing peer-to-peer support and recognising that going forward (especially when grant funding will be ending), that collaborative working and support from neighbouring IASS is essential in being able to deliver a compliant, consistent service offer with the resources available.

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