



East Sussex: Beyond the helpline: workshops, events and outreach

The context

Amaze runs the SENDIASS services in two neighbouring but contrasting areas. Brighton & Hove is a compact unitary authority with pockets of significant deprivation. East Sussex is a large county with some urban centres but also a rural hinterland where families can be quite isolated. One thing both areas have in common is an increasing demand for information, advice and support. Faced with this level of demand most of the IASS work is carried out by phone and email. It is possible to give high quality advice to as many people as possible in this way but acknowledges parents value direct contact and some potential users (parents, children and young people) need face to face contact to be able to use the service. High demand also makes it hard to reach out beyond those who are able to find the service and at times it is tempting not to do so when already overstretched. However, Amaze's values dictate that it tries to reach the families in most need.

How IASP funding has improved the IASS to its service users

Part of the IASP funding has been used for each area to give one SENDIASS worker a day a week to focus on workshops and outreach across both areas. Although one day shared between the city and the county sounds meagre, the impact has been substantial. This complements the outreach, events and workshops being carried out by the SENDIASS worker for children and young people, also through the IASP funding. Things were able to move quickly from April because the IASP self-review funding last year, enabled the service to plan and trial some workshops based on consultation and the most common topics on the SENDIASS helpline and to start identifying how to target any outreach.

The most visible improvement to the service is the programme of workshops. There are three core sessions: 1) getting extra help at school - SEN Support, 2) understanding EHCPs and the process to get one, and 3) how to make the most of EHCP annual reviews. These have all been delivered and further polished based on feedback and now happen across both areas on a rolling basis that is reliable and consistent. More targeted workshops are being added such as preparing for adulthood from Year 9 onwards. This will be delivered in the autumn term. The service is still establishing which locations and venues work best, particularly in East Sussex where transport links are not great. A switch to an online booking service for participants to sign up is being trialled.

Less visible but equally valuable is the increase in outreach work being delivered with the IASP funding. One strand of this is about reaching different groups of parents, for example visiting or taking bite size versions of our workshops to parents groups, and speaking at or taking information stalls to events attended by families. The other is about building links with and explaining SENDIASS to professionals and practitioners who are in contact with potential users so they can signpost or refer them e.g. SENCOs, community paediatricians, or teams in early years, learning support and English as an additional language services. This increases the chance that parents will hear about SENDIASS at an earlier stage and get timely information and advice, as well as encouraging take up by less well-connected families and parents in rural pockets.

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

Feedback from parents who attend the workshops is glowing. Typically they mention getting accurate information – “came in with little info on EHCP, came out with so much knowledge on process” and being empowered to follow up with relevant action – “will make sure existing SEN plan is more robust and SMART... insist on SENCO meeting for review and book future meetings”. They also note that the SENDIASS workers involved are knowledgeable about law and processes. And they value being brought together with other parents in a similar situation. It also shows that participants are appreciating the chance to meet SENDIASS workers face to face and feel more confident in the service after this direct contact, even if follow up is by phone and email. Participants also say they will recommend SENDIASS to other parents.

Positive outcomes from the outreach work are being seen. There will always be a time lag but after two sets of quarterly figures there is an increase in contacts from parents living in less affluent parts of East Sussex such as Hastings and from more rural communities. Relationship building with other services is allowing the service to reach parents who have not heard of SENDIASS e.g. by attending events put on for parents of children with SEND due to start school next year. Service reach in Brighton and Hove is already good but cannot be taken for granted. Outreach still has an impact. For example parents in the big outlying housing estates find it hard to come to book on and join workshops and events in the city centre even though this is only a couple of miles away. By offering a taster session at a parent coffee morning in one of these areas convinced 7 parents to book on the full workshop that was running a fortnight later.

Lessons the service has learnt making service improvements

Being well known and valued in an area where Amaze has worked for a long time, does not automatically transfer to families and professionals in other areas. Links with parent groups are key and being clear about the impartial nature of SENDIASS. Learning how to make better use of social media to reach different areas and to promote the workshop programme. The importance of repeating sessions and planning dates well in advance as some parents will only book when they hear a positive buzz about a previous event. Discover who are the best influencers, sign posters and referrers. Above all, the increased capacity from IASP funding has been a reminder of the importance of the personal approach, for service users obviously but also for building relationships with other services and professionals who are in contact with the families SENDIASS wants to reach.

The approach being taken to sustain the improvements achieved

IASP funding was deliberately used to jump start the work on workshops and outreach. By the end of the year there will be well-polished workshop content and handouts, a tried and tested selection of venues and an approach to publicity and booking that works smoothly. The SENDIASS worker who is doing this development work is delivering the sessions with other team members so all of the team are up skilled to continue this in the future.

Similarly the level of outreach work being delivered this year will not be sustainable without the additional IASP funding but once relationships and habits are established, an effort will be made to maintain them. For example if the work has been done to find out about SENCO hubs or early years inclusion events, by persuading them to invite SENDIASS for the first time, then it is hoped it will be possible to periodically attend these meetings going forward even with less capacity. Experience shows that once inroads have been made and trust built by good casework in less well-served communities; this will become more self-sustaining through word of mouth recommendation by both parents and grassroots workers.

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