



Enfield: A multiple route approach to capacity building

Enfield is an outer London Borough with a population of approximately 330,000, 115,631 of who fall in the 0 to 25 bracket and a whole school population of almost 60000 and almost 2200 EHCPs. Enfield SENDIASS has been an outsourced service since the inception of Parent Partnership Services. It operates within the charity Every Parent & Child (EPC). Enfield is the 12th most deprived London borough according to 2015 statistics with areas of significant needs and this has a direct impact on the levels of demand for IASS.

The challenge

Enfield SENDIASS has a part-time manager and three part-time caseworkers and has struggled with capacity issues due to the significant levels of cuts in LA funding and the continuing high demand for the service. This continual decrease in funding led to issues over retention of a service manager and the need for its caseworkers to maintain a full service but with skeleton staffing levels; inevitably leading to a massive impact on staff morale.

The challenge was allowing the new part-time SENDIASS manager to have sufficient time to undertake a review in order to give consideration to how the service could be restructured and reorganised to provide an effective service whilst maintaining the wellbeing of the service team.

Initial impact of IAS programme funding

The timing and requirements of the IAS programme, including the self-review, came at a pivotal time for the service. By collaborating and undertaking a “root and branch” review the manager was able to identify service strengths and weaknesses and develop new strategic objectives that would support and strengthen the service offer from April 2019. This has informed the strategic direction of the service and the operational 2-year plan.

The immediate impact of the IAS funding has allowed the service to strengthen the core of its services by creating 2 new posts and 2 areas of development:

- SENDIASS Volunteer Trainer responsible for delivering a Volunteer Training Programme (VTP)
- SENDIASS administrator responsible for exploring, creating and improving data collection methods

The VTP addresses the need for increased staffing including operating the telephone helpline service. In the initial phase 4 new volunteers were recruited and trained. The VT was able to consolidate front line services and act as a mentor to the increasing body of volunteers.

The administrator has provided capacity in the service to investigate data collection methods and evaluate the way the service operates. One of the key roles for the new volunteers is to increase data capture. This will assist in continual improvement and evaluation of the effectiveness of the service.

As part of the strategic overview the SENDIASS manager identified the need to raise the profile of the service. In order to do so an application was made for the Advice Quality Standard (AQS) accreditation. A detailed desktop audit was successfully completed in October 2018 and in January 2019 the service

successfully passed the AQS office audit. This is nationally recognised accreditation of the telephone helpline and advice and information function of the Enfield SENDIASS. It is hoped that this will help distinguish the service from similar services by recognising it as an outstanding high quality service and will allow it to approach funders to help build its profile and improve its chances for income generation thus creating a sustainable future.

The initial funding has also allowed an increase in its engagement with both its Parent Steering Group (PSG) and our Young Peoples' Steering Group (YPSG). Topic based information sessions have been introduced for parents that run every 8 weeks and a monthly coffee morning for parents' is hosted at the SENDIASS office. This was initiated by the parents' themselves. The YPSG has continued to expand and reach more YP with SEND. The YPSG now has strong foundations and this will enable the service to expand and build upon its strategic objectives in 2019/20.

Another finding of the self-review was to increase service reach within schools. This work has begun and an outreach service for special schools and mainstream schools with specialist units is being developed and it is hoped this will allow the service be accessible for some of the hard to reach groups i.e. those who may ordinarily find it difficult to engage with services.

Funding has been instrumental in creating the space and time for strategic planning and engagement activities with stakeholders as well as raising the general profile of SENDIASS as a statutory service with the LA, other advice sector organisations and the wider community.

The outcome of forward planning has allowed the service to shape and consolidate its arrangements in a detailed action plan, placing it in a stronger position to commence strategic conversations about joint commissioning arrangements with Health and Social Care in 2019.

Impact to service beneficiaries

The launch of the new Minimum Standards provided an opportunity for senior managers and their local commissioners to attend an IASP workshop. This further increased the knowledge and understanding of SENDIASS and the changes required to meet the Minimum Standards.

The direct impact on the service beneficiaries has been immediate and extremely positive and includes:

- increase in capacity provided by the trained volunteers to deal with enquiries
- better management of service user expectations
- improved engagement with parents and YP
- effective service evaluation
- advertising for a dedicated YPs' development worker
- starting to improve contact with "hard to reach" families.

Another substantial change the SENDIASS manager has been able to implement has been to establish links with a national SEN law Solicitor's firm; Boyes Turner LLP. This has resulted in a monthly Pro Bono Clinic being established for Enfield SENDIASS service users. This has been part of the service objective to raise the Enfield SENDIASS's profile and distinguish it from similar services.

The SENDIASS 2 year operational plan has been formulated to address the service deficits identified in the self-review. The service has also undergone a reorganisation meaning more effective service delivery to all that it serves.

By addressing the capacity issues for service users and the issues relating to staff retention, morale has improved and this can only have a positive impact on beneficiaries of the service.

Lessons learnt

SENDIASS knows the importance of raising the service profile but in order to do so it is necessary first to take the time to review and improve: internal structures, quality assurance and reorganise service delivery. Careful planning and restructuring places the service in a stronger position to address and raise awareness of the statutory requirements for joint commissioning with the CCG. The requirement for the LA to offer a fully compliant SENDIASS will place joint commissioning at the heart of the local strategic agenda for commissioners and service leads alike. The new Minimum Standards provide an excellent footing for engagement with commissioners at the highest level.

How is the approach being sustained?

The work undertaken has helped to build the foundations for change. The ability to have a 2 year operational plan allows the service to detect and plan for shortfalls in funding at an early stage. It has allowed a move from a “survival mind set” to a planned future for the service. The added value of being able to plan and develop a strong strategic arm to the service cannot be overstated.

The additional funding has provided an opportunity to fill gaps in the service and build and develop expertise that will have a long-term beneficial impact.

Building strong links with strategic leads and commissioners will enable joint working to minimise the risks to the survival of the service. The service will be looking at alternative methods for generating a diversity of income streams to ensure its long-term sustainability.

With all of the above in place, it is hoped the service has a long-term future within Enfield and within the national SEN landscape.

Contact details

Lina Parmar

IAS Service Manager

Lina.parmar@epandc.org.uk

<https://epandc.org.uk/>