

Hackney IASS: Reflections on service improvements

The context

Hackney SENDIAGS offers a full range of statutory services to children, young people and their families and endeavours to work with all members of our community. Partnership working is very important in Hackney and as a service we are seen more and more as a key player in helping facilitate and improve multi-agency working. Direct casework, is a mainstay of our role, as well as outreach activities and offering training to parents and practitioners.

In order to further all aspects of our work, it was recognised that applying for funding in all strands of the IAS programme would be vital. The funding has enabled the recruitment of a young people's caseworker and an additional information officer. The young people's caseworker has been in post since January 2019 and the additional information officer has been in post since May 2019. The focus of work for these two posts have been underpinned by the new Minimum Standards.

How IASP funding has improved the IASS offer to its service users

The young people's case worker has worked in partnership with a number of organisations to raise awareness of the importance of capturing and including the voice of young people in service development. There has also been direct work with young people. This has involved raising their awareness of their rights as well as access to information and the provision they are entitled to. To this end, the service has been able to provide weekly drop-in sessions for young people. Thanks to the strong working relationship with Young Hackney, the drop-in sessions, have been delivered at one of the local youth hubs. The venue is a convenient place to deliver the drop-in sessions, due to the fact that Monday evenings are specifically aimed at young people with SEND. The flexibility of these sessions means that, if there is no take up for the drop-in the young person's caseworker has been able to meet and interact with the young people generally in attendance. This has enabled relationships to be built up and has been a great way for the caseworker to make initial contact with young people. In addition to the above, the young people's caseworker will signpost young people to other services as and when required.

The additional information officer role has a main focus of organising the service user and stakeholder evaluations, in addition to providing information and advice.

Hackney SENDIAGS is a busy service. The monthly data generated from our database pays testimony to this. From direct work with parents, children and young people we know that the service is valued and the support provided has positive feedback. Having someone in post who has been focusing solely on the evaluation of the work we do and the service provided has resulted in a shift from anecdotal evidence to data driven evidence. Having this data has enabled our service to strengthen the discussions we are engaged in regarding the trends that we see and the need for investment in increasing the capacity of the service. Overall, as a service we are more confident in our ability in meeting all strands of the Minimum Standards. Having a young people's case worker means that there is a dedicated person within the team to meet this need. The increase in the numbers of young people who are now known to the service has been a key indicator. The service evaluations and stakeholder evaluations have enabled the triangulation of the service we provide and allowed for a more regular cycle of evaluation to be put in place. The creation and development of the website will enhance service users' accessibility to information provided by the service and enable them to be more empowered through access the information and advice they need at the point they need it.

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

Overall, the funding has contributed to the recruitment of three new members of staff, two fixed term and one permanent. Consequently the staffing levels (5 fte) are back to where they were in the spring of 2018. We are now in a position where all the initial activities that were in place at that time have been reinstated with the opportunity to build on and further develop them.

From an operational perspective IASP has helped Hackney SENDIAGS to:

- Reinstated the weekly information briefings for staff members. This has kept them up to date with local, regional and national developments and initiatives, which then feed into the direct work they do.
- Ensure the advice line is covered every day within the operating hours. The voicemail messages are logged and recently we have begun to capture the number of calls coming in to the service. Voicemails and calls are responded to readily.
- Reinstated the weekly allocation meetings. Cases are allocated weekly and families are in receipt of the support they require. The information officers have completed both parts of the IPSEA level 1 and 2 legal training enabling them to get to grips with the legislation quickly. They now have a wide range of information at their fingertips resulting in much more advice, in some cases, being offered before a parent or young person is allocated for casework.
- Introduce new systems in order to account for the fact that there are now two information officers. Clear internal communication is key in ensuring clarity to all of our service users.
- Continue to respond to invitations to attend coffee morning, information and school-based workshops for parents, events.
- Implement a regular cycle of service evaluation of the support provided to parents and young people. Service users have been given the opportunity to shape the service provided for them. Two cycles (May (41) and September (30) 2019) have been conducted. A total of 71 individuals have been contacted, with 22 (54%) and 27 (90%) responses respectively. The data supports the verbal feedback that caseworkers receive: 'The service is very good but it is hard to get through.' We often get told by parents and practitioners alike that 'more of you' is needed.
- Using the New Minimum standards as leverage in conversations regarding service development. The agreement to a website has been a major win. The website is well on the way to being completed and is due to be launched at the end of October 2019. The website will provide an additional platform for the service to provide information, advice and support to service users. In turn, the website will enable parents, children and young people to be more empowered in accessing the information they require at the point that they need it.

Lessons the service has learnt making service improvements

One of the key learning in making the improvements is that, we have always been fully aware of what we needed to do in order to provide the best service to parents, children and young people. We were limited in our ambition due to diminishing capacity over the past three years, and lost some ground in certain areas.

In making improvements, it is important to have robust systems and procedures in place. Having two information officers has highlighted the need for additional systems to ensure they work in a complimentary way. Our service email inbox is one example where it has been agreed that each week the information officers will take turns to manage the inbox and deal with all enquiries. This ensures clarity of which emails have been responded to and the action taken.

In putting additional services in place, further demand is created as we proactively reach out to service users. This has been the case with the increase in children and young people using the service and immediate responses to enquiries from the information officers. Once the website is launched, there will be another platform for accessing the service. In light of the above, the question of how to sustain the service improvements without any additional funding to maintain the current staffing level is always at the back of our

minds. The issue of capacity and staff retention is an ongoing one within the service. The improvements made have further highlighted this.

The approach being taken to sustain the improvements achieved

Young people's caseworker - In terms of sustaining the improvements that have been achieved, the young people's caseworker has already been having discussions with the partners she works with. There have been discussions about how to empower young people to access the more generic drop-in sessions provided by the service if the bespoke sessions are unsustainable. There have also been discussions with other services who provide support to young people to utilise Monday evening slot to reach the young people already known to the service.

Information officer – data and website - Once the website is launched and operational, the next phase will be to give service users the opportunity to give feedback and comment. This would provide a continual cycle of communication and improvement. To ensure the relevance of all content, a dedicated person to update the website would be required. In addition, further work is required to create a dedicated section for young people. This is something that the young people's caseworker will begin to work on with the information officer. Overall, the role of the information officer could be extended to include outreach. Taking on more of these activities would free up the advisers and caseworkers to focus on the 1:1 work with parents and young people.

For evaluations to be more automatic, conversations have already begun regarding the capability of our data base to flag up active cases after three months so that a service evaluation can be carried out and projects closed. A refresher training on our data base will be held at the end of November 2019 and hopefully we will know whether this is possible.

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