

Bromley IASS : Keep calm and carry on during Covid-19!

The context

The Children and Families Act 2014 was truly ambitious in its goal to have Education, Health and Social Care working together to achieve better outcomes for children. In reality, this does not happen in all cases. The pilot for the Single Route of Address Tribunal's often highlights the multi-layer systems in place, the disjointed working between services and the difficulty families and staff have to face in order to find solutions. Supporting families through these types of appeals takes an excessive amount of staff time and expertise to resolve.

Nationally, appeals registered by families to SENDIST (2019-2020) have increased 13% which is the largest number ever recorded, despite the severe impact of COVID 19. About one appeal in every seven was registered as part of the National Trial which has been extended to at least August 2021. In Bromley the number of appeals registered has increased year on year alongside an increase in parents requesting support from IASS to support with the Tribunal process.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic the service had to quickly adjust to remote working whilst ensuring that families could still access support. With some additional IT support for staff in place it meant pretty much business as usual, including continuing to adhere to outcomes the service aimed to achieve in 2020/21.

The issue that was identified to be tackled using IASP funding

In February 2020 Bromley submitted its application for funding detailing four desired outcomes:

1. To provide support (2 days support) for up to four London Region IASSs to create a tribunal support process.
2. To provide group training to London Region IASS on tribunal processes (based on IPSEA Legal Training) to increase staff knowledge and training.
3. To enhance the tribunal support provided to Bromley families.
4. To facilitate Refusal to Assess and Refusal to Issue Tribunal training to London Region IASS staff.

How the funding was used

Continued funding from the CDC enabled the contract for the Fixed term Admin worker to be extended. This additional support within the team allowed another member of staff to have time away from both the helpline and casework, to prepare and deliver the training.

Time was spent with each of the four services to explore exactly what they required regarding tribunal support. Although there was a difference in the level of experience of staff, all services wanted practical advice with resources that they could adapt for their own use.

Some concerns were raised about attending a full day training as having to do this virtually was proving tiring. Following this feedback it was decided to produce three separate two-hour sessions based on appeal types Refusal to Assess; Refusal to Issue; and contents of Sections B, F and I.

A training package was created with guidance and information based on the law and practical examples using 'dummy' forms so that colleagues were able to experience and see how to put theory into practice. The training was delivered virtually via MS Teams, allowing opportunities for questions, and sharing of experiences.

The first training session was held in October 2020. Priority places were given to staff from the four services currently being supported. The sessions were very successful and delivering to a smaller group worked really well. All the participants were able to ask questions and clarify information. The feedback was excellent.

Repeat sessions were offered for twelve other London services in November and these were fully booked within a few hours. Further sessions are planned by the end of this Financial year in line with the outcomes. A further training package for Single Route of Redress training is also being developed to support colleagues.

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

Many of the tasks and outcomes were based around training for Bromley IASS staff and colleagues from the London region Services. Providing training has consolidated their own knowledge around tribunal procedures. It has also benefited one member of staff who has facilitated training for the first time which has increased her own confidence. A new volunteer who has just completed the service's general training course has also benefited greatly from attending these sessions.

The Services that are currently being supported, all report that their confidence in supporting families around tribunal issues has increased. This has enabled them to take on more individual tribunal work. They often email or call with queries, and the service has been able to give them immediate advice. It can be difficult, particularly for a lone worker or a small service but having access to another service for support can make a huge difference. A wider range of burning issues i.e. not tribunal related are often discussed.

By sharing knowledge, experience and expertise in this way, a system of 'best practice' is being created among the London region by promoting a more consistent approach regarding support and advice offered to families who are navigating through the tribunal process.

Although COVID 19 has altered the way in which the training is being delivered and support to families has been provided the service has kept calm and carried on!

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