

Harrow IASS: Supporting Families during the Covid-19 Pandemic

The context that your service is working in

Harrow has a diverse demographic and BAME population across the borough. BAME were found to be significantly more at risk of serious illness and complications from Covid-19. Family Action and its commissioner prioritise staff and service user safety and the Harrow SENDIASS team have been working from home since March 2020. The team quickly adjusted to home working and were supported to do so by being provided with new laptops and mobile phones. Additional training around safeguarding was put in place to ensure safeguarding duties were maintained whilst seeing service users remotely. The helpline was diverted to the team's mobiles from the first week of the pandemic, ensuring families could seamlessly access advice and support via telephone. A Zoom license was bought to enable face-to-face meetings with families to take place virtually, with all advice surgeries and workshops being run virtually to ensure everyone's safety, providing families not only with access to advice and support but also establishing a connection with others during a very isolating time.

The issue that was identified to be tackled using IASP funding

Gaps had previously been identified in direct engagement with YP and aspects of the strategic role in Harrow. Careful consideration was given on how best to address these 2 issues. It was decided to recruit a YP's worker and a part time admin role to backfill some of the manager's day-to-day tasks to allow for strategic relationships to be developed with CCG, LA and Social Care.

Key aims included to develop:

- strategic planning and joint working with the LA, CCG and Family Action IAS forum.
- its involvement with the London Regional IASS Network to share and develop good practice, ensuring funding and joint up working across services in Harrow and across IAS services nationally.
- innovative resources for families, YP and professionals in relation to SEND legalisation and processes.
- the outreach service and support and resources for "hard to reach" communities, the early years and YP aged 16-25.

How the funding was used

The funding was used to fund a specific part-time YP's worker with a focus on increasing YP's access to the service, through outreach, sessions, workshops, advice surgeries and 1-2-1 casework.

A part-time caseworker was funded to provide advice and information to families in need of SEND support with lower intervention levels of casework and outreach to other services, to build networks and raise awareness of the service and support available. This helped increase outreach between April 2020 and March 2021.

A 7hr per week admin worker was employed to support with data cleansing and analysis, allowing the service to recognise trends and feedback to partners and to plan strategically using accurate data. The work of the admin officer has been invaluable in discussions with CCG and the Children's Commissioner in regards to very detailed reports on Health and Social Care enquiries and other specifics requested by the CCG.

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

Although the COVID-19 has impacted on everyone the service is proud to have been able to stay fully functional and grow as a team, while seeing large increases in service reach to families and YP across

different communities and Education, Health and Social Care professionals. Weekly advice surgeries in a range of community languages and YP's weekly advice surgeries and workshops (specific to YP) have been offered. Following the successful recruitment, training and induction of the YP's worker capacity of the team has grown. Sessions have also been delivered with parents twice a month. Due to the increased capacity the service manager has been able to work closely with the SEND Partnership of Harrow and the local PCF as well as attending bi-monthly virtual meetings with the SEND manager and the Divisional Director, Health Services and Social Care. They have been exploring what support has been offered over the past year to CYP with SEND and what else may be required. Another great benefit of the increased capacity was firmly establishing the Advisory Board. Membership includes Post 16 leads, CCG Head for Harrow, Early Years, 6 parents and a YP attending each of the meetings and contributing to the service improvement and development.

Harrow SENDIASS has used the full range of options e.g. virtual meetings, helpline, emails etc. to offer support to service users. It has found the virtual platforms, mainly Zoom and Microsoft Teams have proved to be the most supportive to families especially for one-to-one casework.

12 factsheets for parents/carers, and professionals have been developed. A YP website page has been created as well as social media avenues and YP resources have been produced including 3 new YP factsheets to add to the existing 6. The online offer has been significantly developed through the website, Facebook page and links to the Local Offer and other partners in Harrow.

Improvements in data recording demonstrate a noticeable increase in service activity each quarter. This is a direct result of increased staff capacity and the admin support, and means the service is now able to report and feedback accurately to partners as well as enabling plans to be produced for service development based on accurate data. For example, a trend in the LA ceasing plans of YP who still needed SEND support was quickly picked up which resulted in the service offering a mediation and tribunals' session aimed at YP and their parents at the end of March 2021.

The impact of the funding on service delivery and on service users is an increase in contact with families by 67%. This represents a significant increase in casework across all four intervention levels - April 20-March 21, in comparison to the previous year.

Direct work with YP has increased by 31% from April 20 –March 21 in comparison to the previous year. The service is hoping to continue to develop and grow this through its targeted work with YP.

Contact details

Family Action Harrow SENDIAS
Cedars Hall, Chicheley Road,
Harrow Weald
HA3 6QH
02084286487
www.harrow-sendias.org.uk