



Leeds IASS : Development of a volunteering scheme, service steering group and advice drop-in sessions

The context

Leeds SENDIASS received funding under the Information Advice and Support Programme Funds 1-5. This is an outline of how the funding and aspects of the subsequent project work have impacted on the delivery of key areas of service contribution, supporting core functions, enhancing skills/professional development and supporting innovation.

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

The funding has allowed for experienced SENDIASS officers to be released from case work (with their roles back filled to minimise impact on current service users) to take on the project officer roles. This has allowed for capacity to;

- build on the existing Leeds SENDIASS volunteer scheme and the subsequent offer to service users making this a sustainable valued part of the service offer with a clear recruitment and retention approach,
- develop the role of Leeds SENDIASS steering group arrangements so that we now have “fixed” and “roaming” steering groups leading to greater representation and participation from service users, parents, carers and young people, promoting the views of service users in the development of service delivery,
- develop and implement the structure for advice drop-in sessions for service users, evaluating and adapting these sessions to ensure they are a sustainable core of the future Leeds SENDIASS offer,
- increase evaluation opportunities to support the culture of Leeds SENDIASS “investing” in service users and volunteers views,
- promote opportunity for engagement with service users and potential service users; training and consultation events are being well received.

Ways in which improvements have positively enhanced the service user experience

- **Volunteers.** Prior to the project work Leeds SENDIASS had one volunteer who supported parents and carers with SEND Tribunals. It now has 7 volunteers who have undertaken a thorough recruitment process and received induction and role specific training, ready to support with advice drop-in sessions and events, SEND Tribunals, service newsletter and website development and maintenance. Some of these volunteers have been service users and the volunteering opportunities are providing positive and constructive outlets for their SEND experience and knowledge, supporting other service users in an appropriate supported way. The volunteer input regarding the newsletter and website development is supporting these aspects of service delivery to develop, so that IASS can be offered in a range of formats to better meet the diverse needs of its service users, i.e. some service users “self-serving” by accessing the information and advice they need via Leeds SENDIASS website and the newsletter information. This has increased case officer time for those who need to access the service via the phone or face-to-face.
- **Steering group.** Leeds SENDIASS has a “fixed” steering group, which meets termly. Despite continually looking to recruit service users to join, has remained made up mostly of professionals.

Leeds SENDIASS now holds two termly “roaming” steering groups, one with parents and carers and the other with young people. The service goes to these groups in the community, in their own environments, and discusses the same agenda as the ‘fixed’ steering group, ensuring there is a flow of information between the groups. This allows service users to be given a positive voice to steer the development of Leeds SENDIASS. A “You Said, We Did” approach is used so service users who contribute to the roaming steering groups feel their views are valued.

- **Advice drop-ins.** The advice drop-in session format has allowed case officers to give IASS in the community, in places where service users feel comfortable and which are familiar to them. The sessions give targeted next steps for the service user to follow, empowering them with this information and advice. Service users experience of accessing Leeds SENDIASS is enhanced by the awareness that as and when they require IASS, they can access these sessions, increasing the offer of the range of ways service users can access the service.

Lessons the service has learnt making service improvements

The feedback from service users through written and verbal feedback and evaluation has been invaluable in allowing the service to gauge the success of these changes; the steering group format and introduction of the advice drop-ins, as well as internal service evaluation and reflection of these sessions – what has gone well and what could be done better next time. Leeds SENDIASS has learnt how to make these sessions successful and that service users are keen to be involved with service improvement and change in general, to better support their child’s/their SEND needs.

By learning what needs to be in place to offer a supportive environment to its service volunteers, Leeds SENDIASS has established a framework that is clearly embedded in its ways of working and has been positively received by the group of volunteers. It’ss indicating good volunteer retention rates.

The approach being taken to sustain the improvements achieved

The initiatives of the renewed volunteer scheme and advice drop-in sessions have been well supported by the project team work. The short term intense work on the volunteer scheme and advice drop-in sessions has given a solid base to the sustainability of this scheme, with a clear framework around it for the team to incorporate at the end of the life of the project. A clear written process is now in place regarding all aspects of volunteer recruitment, induction, training, handbook support and on-going supervision. A toolkit of paperwork is in place to give structure to the advice drop-in sessions and evaluation of these.

The links made at the roaming steering groups will be used to encourage and support future participation of service users in the fixed Leeds SENDIASS steering groups which will continue after the life of the project work.

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