

# Leicester City IASS : Service compliance and beyond

## The context

Leicester City is an ethnically and culturally diverse city with over 70 languages spoken and approximately 130,000 0-25 (38%) population. There are several outer city estates and areas of flux and change in the school population with a high demand for school places. The Local Area Inspection took place in May 2018 and although the overall result was a Written Statement of Action being issued for the city the IASS was identified as a strength, well managed and recognised as impartial by service users in the Inspection report.

This inspection however did not identify that capacity was an issue and the funding for the IASS has remained the same as prior to the implementation of the Children and Families Act 2014. Leicester City IASS is outsourced and has been since 1999. The LA recently launched a procurement exercise and the IASS contract was awarded to a new organisation; the Schools Development Support Agency (SDSA) and after being provided by the same organisation since 1999 the IASS moved in October 2019. This has been a positive experience and the IASS is well respected and valued by the new provider. The contract is jointly commissioned by Education and Social Care (previously only education) but not yet Health.

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

After mapping the service against the National IASS Minimum Standards, compliance and best practice became the focus of the IASS delivery and offer. IASP funding has allowed the service to identify specific gaps in delivery and consider the delivery model from a service user perspective. When asked by the IASS how they would like to access IAS, potential service users identified social media and digital resources as a great source of information and support. With the recruitment of a specific Social Media Adviser using IASP funding who is also legally trained, the IASS has been able to further develop the stand alone website, increase the digital resources available, set up and maintain a dedicated Facebook page and Twitter site. Service Users have used the Facebook Site as a booking platform for most of the IASS training/events and the stand alone website receives a high number of views.

The IASS Manager role has been recognised through evidencing strategic work, leadership and budgetary knowledge to be uplifted from that of Team Manager to Service Manager by the new host organisation. This is a permanent move and will continue post IASP thus being embedded into the IASS design. The IASS Manager is now able to ensure full involvement in all regional and national work and is the Chair of the East Midlands IASS Group and is the Regional Staff Association Representative. Involvement in such networks is utilised by the IASS Manager to support the IASS Staff team e.g training staff: the IASS Manager was part of the working group that organised and delivered the National Staff Conference 2019. The Regional IASS Group are currently designing a staff development day in 2020 to support with Staff Resilience ensuring that not only are staff trained legally but also supported thus improving the service offer to service users. The IASS offer to service users has thus been strengthened by ensuring the service is up to date, supported and well recognised.

The IASS offer for children and young people (CYP) has increased and improved with the employment of a dedicated CYP and Training and Engagement Officer. Having a dedicated role ensures this area is not an 'add on' but integral to the IAS service offer. The CYP were asked by the IASS how they would like to contact the service and receive IAS. The CYP Officer supported groups of CYP through one to one support, workshops and online questions to gather their views. As a result, the service offers IAS directly to CYP in a variety of ways to suit need and preference such as email, Facebook, website or face to face individually or

in group sessions. Using the model 'take the service to the service user' the CYP Officer has built up excellent networks with providers and services and has offered and delivered workshops in both mainstream and special secondary schools and colleges and specific CYP forums. CYP views and experiences have been captured and IAS delivered. For example, workshops have been delivered in relation to the Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) and processes to increase CYP knowledge and therefore improving chances to participate and be central to the process.

The IASS has extended the training offer to service users and professionals to improve knowledge and ensure accurate, up to date information is available. Through being supported by the IASS Network and IASP, the IASS has ensured that all IAS delivered is impartial, consistent and accurate and based on the law. The IASS now offers training/awareness workshops relating to EHCPs and the EHCP needs assessment process, annual reviews and confidence in meetings for service users as well bespoke packages for professionals.

Service access and response time has been supported by IASP extending the administrator time and ensuring all IASS staff, including the administrator, are trained to Level 3 of the legal training. Supporting the administrator to complete the 3 levels of legal training was seen as a priority given that often this is the first point of contact with the service. It is important this role has the legal knowledge and skillset to offer basic IAS immediately and triage each enquiry to then receive further IAS as identified to meet service user need. The IASS was using a substantial amount of time following up on IAS. The administrator now arranges for a specific response/call slot that works for the service user to ensure they are prepared with any paperwork and have clarified their thoughts and aims when the IASS contacts them as agreed. This has ensured smarter working and supported the IASS to respond to ever increasing demand and complexity of enquiries. This can be by email, telephone or face to face and is prioritised in terms of need, deadlines and complexity. This also ensures the IASS offer is available all year round.

Intervention-based working and database-use has continued to improve thereby supporting the IASS to respond to increasing demand as well as to empower service users. Using the 2016 National IASS Intervention Levels has supported the IASS to deliver timely and clear support to service users. IASP has focused the IASS with feedback from professionals and service users. The IASS now goes out to meet the service user as part of the IASS offer in a targeted and focused approach which works in partnership with other agencies. Groups have been identified who may be less likely to access the IASS for a variety of reasons, for example, those at risk of losing tenancy. The IASS has also made strong relationships with the Parent Carer Forum (PCF) and attends each forum meeting offering an IAS surgery each month. CYP groups and networks have been attended with a similar aim.

Governance and service user involvement have been reviewed and the governance processes in place now include a parent/carer representative and a CYP representative on the Advisory Board, as well as professionals from Education, Social Care and Health. CYP representatives participate as virtual members using varying methods to secure their input, such as video views, supported written responses etc. This was due to the CYP groups that have engaged explaining that they are already often on panels or asked for their views so find themselves very busy or otherwise may not feel comfortable in a large group and would prefer to be involved this way. The IASS now reports to the Advisory Board using the National IASS Minimum Standards and the contract with the LA.

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

The improved offer has extended the reach of the IASS and ensures that service users are able to access the service using a wide variety of routes/methods. IASP has supported the IASS to employ a dedicated Social Media/Communications Advisor to design and implement a dedicated Facebook page, digital resources and to closely monitor and update these on a regular basis. The advisor also monitors and updates the stand alone website and Twitter account ensuring that routes are open for service users to obtain information and news and to access IAS and make the service accessible. Service users are thereby provided with self-help tools, information based on the law, and with information regarding local systems, to support them to achieve the best outcomes for CYP.

The IASS Training Offer has increased, opening up the field of information and this can be booked via telephone, email, Facebook or the website, and removing as many barriers as possible to access.

In response to parent/carer request, the IASS delivered a workshop relating to annual reviews which was well received. Following on from this, the IASS launched a questionnaire seeking experiences of the review process. This feedback was then sent to the Director of Childrens Services, the Preparing for Adulthood Project Officer and the Local Offer Project Officer at the LA for their reference in order to support the review of how this process is delivered and monitored in educational settings in the city. Ultimately, processes have thus been improved through including the CYP and/or parent/carer feedback. Overall, this leads to increased service user awareness of the law and of processes through increased training which empowers service users with information and advice.

Training has now been embedded in the delivery of the IASS offer through the recruitment of the CYP and Training and Engagement Officer. From the research and development phase of IASP it became evident that service users were not always able to come to services or had the emotional resilience to do so. Working with the Supporting Tenants and Residents Teams (STAR Teams) based in the outer estates of the city, the officer designed a training package for the STAR Team staff to increase their awareness of SEND law, process and practice so as to support them in their direct work with service users. This approach ensures that professionals already working with families who may have a CYP with SEND can increase their knowledge and offer informed and accurate information to the families. The IASS offers ongoing professional support to the STAR Teams and also a surgery approach offering the IASS Officer time at the STAR bases for parents/carers or the CYP to attend. This is further supported by the partnership working with the PCF. Having more capacity due to the resources provided by IASP allows the IASS Manager to attend each monthly PCF meeting and to develop strategic links with the professionals from education, health and social care attend these meetings. The IASS offers a surgery at each PCF, again taking the service to the service users and thus extending service reach and access.

The IASS has increased its work with CYP since the beginning of IASP and has designed and delivered workshops for CYP covering topics requested by the CYP themselves. The IASS leaflet is currently being reviewed with CYP with the aim to co-design this product. The IASS has created videos of two young people's varying experiences of SEND support and systems. These have been made with the young people leading on the content and design of these resources. The videos are shared on the IASS website and social media with the aim to illustrate a young person's experience of processes and support. This, in turn, also serves to raise awareness of the CYP experience of SEND processes and to support future LA planning in this regard.

## **Lessons the service has learnt making service improvements**

The IASS has learnt that to raise awareness of the service takes time and persistence. Building networks and relationships requires a dedicated approach. Partnership working has been very productive for the service, particularly in terms of identifying potential service users that may otherwise face barriers to accessing the IASS. It has become clear that the service is valued but that further work is required to ensure that joint commissioning is on the agenda with health commissioning's full involvement. The National IASS Minimum Standards have supported this approach and again are used by the IASS to illustrate the service areas that have needed developing in order to be a fully compliant service. The IASS Manager has found the regional and national work invaluable and a source of learning, support and development. To reach full compliance will require a continued high level of commitment from the IASS Manager, the Advisory Board and the host organisation and the amount of time and networking this requires should not be underestimated.

The IASS has learnt that new service systems and approaches take time to bed in and require resourcing, appropriate recruitment and training to ensure the correct skillset is available. They also require good planning and identification of capacity and resources and the support of the host organisation and the LA. The introduction of a specific and dedicated CYP Officer post has been very successful, giving the area of work focus and energy in order to disseminate learning and ideas to the wider team. The introduction of the use of social media has been excellent in terms of IAS publicity, marketing and information sharing, training booking etc. The IASS has learnt that this needs dedication and time to monitor and to ensure content is accurate and meaningful.

## The approach being taken to sustain the improvements achieved

The IASS Manager role has been reviewed and uplifted from Team Manager to Service Manager acknowledging that the role involves working strategically both locally, regionally and nationally and managing a budget. The host organisation has also put in place some time with a specific Strategic Development Lead in role to focus on joint commissioning with Health and support the IASS Manager. The Advisory Board have set up a sub group to specifically address joint commissioning which includes the Designated Clinical Officer and the Leicestershire Partnership Trust Health SEND Lead.

CYP IAS work is now embedded in the wider team approach with workshops and training packages created which all members of the team can deliver. Digital resources, social media and the stand alone website are well established and will continue to support and empower service users to initially 'self-serve'. The intervention-based approach and system of triage support is embedded and will continue to be a model of service delivery. Obviously IASP funds specific roles and, if this ceases, capacity may be lost, but as mentioned above there are many strategies in place to continue the improvements made. Hence the IASS is strategically working to influence the LA and Health commissioners for the need to jointly commission and support the compliant service and to continue and strengthen the service offer.

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