

# **Leicestershire SENDIASS: Creating a website that empowers service users**

## **Context**

Leicestershire is a large rural county with over 203,647 children and young people. The county covers 2,156 km and is culturally diverse.

Leicestershire's SENDIAS service is an inhouse service and sits within Leicestershire County Council's Family Help service. The last Area SEND inspection took place in February 2020 and a Written Statement of Action was issued. The SENDIAS service was praised in the inspection report with the report stating that parents and carers found the advice and support they received from the service to be extremely helpful.

Unfortunately, funding for the service has not increased for many years but referrals have hugely increased. The service has had to change how it works in order to ensure that all referrals are responded to. Accordingly, the support element of the service is now offered only to those who cannot advocate for themselves.

## **The issue faced**

With referrals increasing and the capacity of the service being limited, our response times to referrals have also increased. We have adapted to this situation by ensuring we are empowering service users to use the information and advice that we provide to move things forward themselves rather than always using the support element of the service.

In 2019 we had 987 referrals. In 2023 we had 3648 which is an increase of 269%. This equates to an increase from an average of 18 referrals a week to over 70. Our staffing over this time has not increased. We are a very small service with a team supervisor who works 0.81 FTE and three SENDIAS service officers whose hours equate to 2.68 FTE. With the growing number of referrals, our response time has gone from three working days to seven working days at peak times.

Service users need to access our information at a time when they will need to use this. Having a website for all of our advice, information sheets, links to the legal resources and signposting to other services is therefore essential so that service users can self-serve and find the information need.

## **The process**

Developing the website was a huge task and long journey. It took over a year for the website to be ready to launch. Looking at other SENDIASS service websites for ideas and inspiration was really useful. We worked with Leicestershire's digital team to build a website for our service. The digital team created the site itself and our case officers wrote all of the content. So we could be sure that the site was clear, user friendly and easily navigated, we held user testing sessions including parents/carers, young people and professionals.

## **The outcome**

We now have a website that was visited over 30,000 times last year. We also have a QR code that we give out to parents/carers, young people and professionals at local offer events. The website has been shared with schools and health teams. We have regular sessions to promote website with professionals so that, when working with parents/carers and young people, they can look at the website with them, show them how to navigate the site.

This is enabling parents/carers, young people and professionals to find the information that they need at the time when they need it. Service users are not waiting up to 7 days for a response to a query as they can self-serve to find what they require. We can signpost parents to information on the website via email so referrals can be actioned quickly and efficiently.

There is the option to get in touch with us via a contact form on the website. Our email address and contact telephone number is clearly shown so if service users need additional advice and support, they can make direct contact with us.

## **Reflections on the outcome**

The website was a huge piece of work that took a long time. The work remains ongoing as the website needs to be checked regularly to ensure that all the information is correct, and that links are working. If there are changes to service procedures these also need to be updated, and this takes up resource within the team.

Ultimately, the website has enabled us to have more capacity to support those service users who cannot self-serve on the website, such as those involved in more complex cases and those who have additional needs and who cannot advocate for themselves.

## Contact details

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