



Manchester IASS : Increasing the SEN training offer to improve service engagement with diverse groups

The context

The broad aim of this work has been to bring together the voluntary sector, LA team reps, schools, parent champions and BAME groups in order to undertake joint training and support for participants in SEN legislation. This will enable the groups to have a greater understanding of SEN, how these needs can be met and some of the law and surrounding legislation.

These trained practitioners will then be available to the schools/nurseries/colleges in the area to support both parents/staff in having a greater understanding of SEN and will support those disadvantaged groups known to schools but not always on the radar of other services. They will be able to provide practical assistance and information or signpost on to relevant supporting agencies.

This supported group will mean more parent/carers increasing their resilience and being more informed at meetings, understanding what is happening and being able to ensure families that the needs of their children with SEND are being met.

Outcomes including greater ethnic involvement and also greater presence and influence within schools. Having this supportive multi-agency group will bring greater understanding between practitioners, parents and carers and build longer lasting relationships, which will help to alleviate the isolation which many BAME groups feel. The training and working together will also help to support the LA Ofsted/CDC Inspections as IASS will have a greater knowledge of the support available in an area and how to access and/or signpost to it. This will also support the Early Help hubs in each area and link to the neighbourhood managers as local authority services continue to be reformed and integrated and an even greater understanding of SEND is required.

The main outcomes are to enhance the outcomes for SEN pupils in BAME groups and reduce their vulnerability, high exclusion rates and also to increase parent/carer resilience with improved knowledge of SEN available support within a mutually supportive group.

To give practitioners the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of how the cultural views of BAME parents/carers can be supported within a context of what is best for the child's SEND needs. A greater understanding of SEND support availability and the positives of this for children can be discussed in a more mutually supportive setting. The group are to develop their own case studies reflecting the journey they are undertaking regarding membership of the group and its benefits with the aim that they obtain possible future employment/volunteering opportunities in the area of SEND. The project will have operated for one year including evaluation and then will be rolled out to central and south districts of Manchester in the following year subject to funding.

The work will also ensure that IAS is compliant with standards 2.3 (working with local partners to influence policy/practice in the local area) and 4.3 (offering training to local professionals and parent carers to increase their knowledge of SEND law, guidance, local policy and participation).

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

IASP funding has enabled the service to release a member of staff in order to plan the project, recruit through various meetings with groups in the north of the city, organise venues and refreshments and plan the training programme alongside a parent, who specialises in training parents on the Equality Act. The service has been

able to buy-in a trained expert in SEND law, who is parent friendly and able to put across difficult concepts in a simplified jargon-free fashion.

The funding has enabled the IASS to up-skill parent champions, who advocate on behalf of the Local Offer and also widen the interaction between school, social workers and Early Help to increase their understanding of SEN support in its wider sense with the families they work with. The myth busting elements of the training were greatly appreciated and useful for parents understanding of what can and cannot be done with regard to a child's SEN and provision.

The initial SEND training is being followed up with training in getting your message across in meetings including entering into difficult conversations and including practical training around the Equality Act and how reasonable adjustments can be made without having to use IASS (although there have been no expectations on participants to attend meetings to support parents/young people at meetings during the training period). From calls to the IASS, it has been possible to determine the area of the city where there are more difficult relationships with schools regarding a child's SEN and parent/carers, who are not always in a position to be able to buy-in services to gain additional support. The IASS has been able to target underrepresented groups to the north of the city, who have a tendency not to engage with services.

The IASS staff attending were also able to reinforce their own knowledge and expertise with a view that even though trained to level three, there are still opportunities to improve and up-skill their legal knowledge.

A resource pack to underpin the training was also made available to participants as well as the Code of Practice booklets.

Ways in which improvements have positively enhanced the service user experience

IASS holds a monthly drop-in alongside other services but this supports parents on a 1-1 basis, which is unsustainable due to the rising numbers of parents moving into the city with children with SEND. The service has already started a weekly drop-in north of the city to support the families there rather than wait for the tri-monthly session.

IASS has delivered training using bite-sized SEND workshops on a drop-in basis but due to lack of admin support could not ensure numbers attending, which was seen as an inefficient use of IASS.

Being able to buy in an SEN legal expert has given the service more time to organise training with far greater numbers and it is in the position of being able to follow this up with a Level 1 IPSEA training offer. To date sixteen people from a variety of groups have signed up to participate in this training, which is due to begin this month.

Some of the quotes from the current training programme are:

"My son has been identified as having SEN. At first I sat there in the school meeting clueless. Next time I'll be actively involved and motivated to pursue child/youth advocacy and understanding of the law."

"I now understand the complexities around provision and placement."

"I now have a clearer picture of my duties as a SENCO."

"I have learned that reasonable adjustments can always be made."

"I have learned that my son is capable of going to a mainstream school and I should not let the LA stop me."

"I will re-read all the training information and apply it to signpost other parents."

"I have learnt a lot about the factual legal information to support parents/carers in meeting their child's needs."

“This training should be provided to all health/social/education professionals so that the EHC process can be better understood. I will pass this onto other professionals.”

“The sections on EHCP myths and the Equality Act should be given to all staff in Early Help.”

“I need to make sure that the EHCP comes together to meet my child’s needs.”

“I would love to learn more about SEND and use for my future career and would like to do the IPSEA Level 1 training.”

“How the law overrides all the misinformation from schools, health, LA and social care.”

Lessons the service has learnt making service improvements

As with any change it takes time to embed change into an organisation and IASS realised that with the continually rising school population, pressure on school places, (especially special schools) and the rise in social and mental health issues, the service could not sustain a training programme in its current form due to the increasing demand for IASS support.

IASS believed that enhancing the SEND knowledge of local groups would support parents in their local area and help to build better relationships with education providers and become less reliant on IASS. Requesting continual support from a small service was leading to the possibility of longer waiting times, especially for increasing number of higher level cases. However, recruiting people to a full days training in the first instance has proved more difficult than expected, especially in trying to attract the right people and engage with the hard to reach groups, who are reluctant to access services.

IASS recognises it was too ambitious in trying to do too many individual projects in the given time limits, with a reduced staffing level, which was not known at the time of writing the bids. It also underestimated the time commitment required in order to plan, recruit and organise and the related practicalities.

The monitoring of all/any changes in calls to the service and types of call will need more careful scrutiny and as a service it will need greater support regarding using social media as a mechanism for coordinating and advertising courses.

The approach being taken to sustain the improvements achieved

The training days are to be followed by a smaller group to be trained over a longer period in order to imbed the practical applications of the completed training.

IASS have already planned to look at further training for additional groups particularly targeting those who work with young people, which will take place in December.

IASS also plan to roll the programme out (after full evaluation) to the central part of the city in order to increase participation and understanding of SEND support and knowledge. Followed by support from IASS and monitoring to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of this work.

The service manager will be meeting other groups/managers to look at how the training programme can be utilised with them.

A separate briefing has been offered to councillors to assist them with their clinics when dealing with complaints/queries of an SEN nature. The service is currently waiting to see if this offer is taken up.

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