



Bracknell Forest IASS : How IASP funding has benefitted the service during the Covid crisis

The context that your service is working in

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Bracknell Forest IASS staff have not attended an office setting in person since March 2020 and nearly all meetings with CYP, parents/carers, schools and the LA have been held virtually instead. During this time of great challenge, change and worry it was important to ensure that the IASS was there for service users and could continue to work efficiently and in a supportive manner.

The issue that was identified to be tackled using IASP funding

Of particular importance was to make sure the service could still work with CYP and ensure their feedback about the service was sought and their voice was heard in matters relating to their SEND.

How the funding was used

IASP funding was used to support the retention of the CYP officer, to work on raising awareness of the IASS amongst CYP, to collect their views about the service provided to them to inform service delivery and ensure they were actively involved in all matters relating to their SEND.

The CYP officer, along with the rest of the staff was able maintain contact with service users and provide reassurance, support and information on the Government advice at this time. Continued support was provided using phone and in virtual meetings along with raising awareness of the service amongst schools and colleges.

Although it was originally planned to meet CYP face-to-face to collect their views on IASS resources and webpage, this was adapted by creating a questionnaire for them to complete instead, thus still ensuring their views were captured.

This case study focuses on how IASP funding was used to help ensure the CYP's voice was still heard in matters relating to their SEND despite the challenges brought by the Covid crisis. The CYP officer was able to support CYP to contribute their views towards section A of EHCPs, in appeal situations, at a mediation and in school meetings. During the past year, the service has also noticed an increased trend of heightened anxiety and it has been able to support CYP in a new way to reflect this.

Although schools were closed to most or had moved to remote learning, there was still a school place for many of the most vulnerable children, including those with EHCPs. However, not all children with an available place felt able to attend, even with schools having only a handful of children attending compared to usual. This year, more than previously, the CYP officer began working with CYP who were school refusing due to heightened anxiety.

One parent explained the impact lockdown had on their child, who had previously needed very little support. They found when all the usual coping mechanisms such as the routine of school, the outlet for anxiety of seeing friends, and the consistency of life were all taken away and replaced instead with the uncertainty of the immediate future, it was too much to handle, and heightened anxiety and later school refusal struck. IASS has provided consistent support to the family during these challenging times.

In another case, a primary aged child felt unable to attend school or to communicate their views about this to others. The CYP officer, who had previously worked with the child, offered to “meet” again virtually. The CYP officer logged into a Microsoft Teams meeting and whilst the child did not feel able to come to the screen for quite some time, the mother was reassured that they could wait for as long as felt comfortable to them both. After a time, the child felt confident enough to come to talk and once they started to talk, they felt able to share, in a detailed and honest way, their thoughts and feelings about life, school and the support they required. These views were then typed up into a document with the child’s photo, and permission was given for them to be shared amongst those working with the family. IASS, in conjunction with the family was able to create a list of questions based on the child’s views, and subsequently there was a well-attended professional meeting. The entire focus of the meeting was a discussion of the child’s views and the questions that arose from them. A reintroduction programme for the child was planned, fully informed by their views.

On another occasion, the CYP officer supported a child who was struggling to attend school. This time, their views were gained during a virtual meeting and the child was supported to express their views and concerns at a school meeting, helping the school and child create a personalised plan to meet their needs.

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

These practical examples have highlighted the value of gaining a child’s views in situations of school refusal scenarios including when high anxiety is a major factor. Due to their success, it has helped the service to confidently offer this widely to all CYP with heightened anxiety. Schools and professionals have also been made aware that this is something that IASS has successfully introduced. It has been agreed that the service will continue to offer this remote/virtual meeting approach even when face-to-face meetings are resumed as sometimes this be a preferable or more acceptable option. This could include circumstances when perhaps a child is nervous about talking or may require time to be ready to talk - a case officer can wait patiently and inconspicuously on a laptop until the child is ready.

Particularly in cases of anxiety and school refusal, service users have been empowered as their voice has been heard and acted upon. Reintroduction programmes informed in this way combined with children being provided with this experience to contribute, means there’s a greater chance of success. It also fosters the formation of trusting relationships between the pupil and school. Experience shows it can be difficult for some CYP to speak openly with school staff or their parents about their views for fear the adult may be upset or concerned. An impartial person, who is able to take time to meet and hear views, collect them and create a document to be shared along with support in expressing them at a meeting, or mediation has proved extremely valuable.

Therefore, IASP funding has benefited the service and service users by continuing to support the CYP’s voice to be heard, influence and acted upon during the Covid crisis.

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