

Staffordshire IASS : Service route to better engagement

The context

As the strategic lead for SENDIASS Staffordshire I am aware that partnership working is key to successful engagement. As relationships build the impact of IASP is starting to emerge for this year some of which is detailed below. SENDIASS Staffordshire are working in partnership with a number of young people, parents and professionals to support engagement with the community as part of the IASP contract.

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

IASP funding has allowed us to recruit and extend the contract of an officer who leads on engagement with children and young people (CYP) across the county, who is working to improve communication with our young people and raise their awareness of SENDIASS whilst we continue to support parents and carers.

We are currently working towards the creation of a Young People's Forum to empower CYP to have a voice, share their experiences and ideas for improvements to our service. This forum will also identify representatives to hold a seat at the SEND Partnership Group hosted by the Local Authority (LA) to share their voice and to influence positive change for our CYP within the complex area of SEND.

The CYP Lead is working across the county with parents, young people, education partners and professionals to ensure young people are included and their views expressed and represented and to develop the Young People's Forum. Although it is at an early stage, key partners and a group of young people (age 14+), have been identified and are engaging with SENDIASS in a school setting in order to share their views and take part in consultation on areas that affect them. For example, the November meeting will focus on relationship building with the group and there will be consultation on a specific area. SENDIASS are working in partnership with the Voice Project for this purpose. An example on consultation is our capturing young people's views on the Local Offer, this is being sought as part of an engagement activity. SENDIASS are also providing service talks tailored to young people.

The CYP Lead has also made links with providers, schools, colleges and a Young Offender Institution. The project is enabling our CYP lead to extend the reach of engagement work across Staffordshire districts.

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

The funding has helped to improve the SENDIASS offer to our service users by providing extra resources to increase our engagement and to increase awareness of service. Although we are seeing numbers of parents with children in early years accessing the service, getting a direct link with parents willing to engage to provide their views has proved to be more difficult. IASP has allowed capacity for me to engage with the LA to develop ways to increase participation. SENDIASS is also represented on the Early Years Group hosted by the LA, chaired by a head teacher of a nursery. This demonstrates that our relationships are evolving. Direct engagement with parents with early years children will be seen in the coming months.

To support the development of the SEND Young People's Forum, progress on this is demonstrated through engagement work with Liberty Staffordshire (provider), SENDIASS and the Voice Project. A group of young people have been identified to work on activities to progress this.

SENDIASS has also started to provide a route for working with hard to reach groups, the first of which are young offenders with SEND. An initial meeting has taken place with a Young Offender Institute and they are excited to engage with the service to support their young people. Activities are currently being planned for this purpose. This may include cross border collaborative working with other SENDIASS services in the future.

As part of the work with young people, we are brokering a piece of work to support the Local Offer to see if the young people in one of our groups know of the Local Offer, how to access it and provide feedback.

For our parents, we are building our membership on our existing SENDIASS Advisory Group, we have recently reviewed the membership to include other partners, new members include the new Councillor for SEND, CCG colleagues, Senior LA colleagues and Parents from the Voice for Change Parent Carer Group. Our new structured group holds its first meeting early in November.

Part of the funding from IASP is also to support events for our service users. The focus of our service events this year is mental health and we have provided a workshop in South Staffordshire for 30 parents on the topic of anxiety. This was greatly received and we were fully booked within a few hours of the event going live. Due to the success, we aim to replicate this event in North Staffordshire in the Spring. We also have an event planned for November in Stafford on the topic of Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) for 50 parents which is also fully booked, again demonstrating the demand for our workshops. We have a young person presenting his own experiences of PDA and a professional delivering a workshop for the afternoon session.

We work closely with the Voice for Change (VfC) Parent Carer Group which has been established in Staffordshire and is the recognised group by the LA. As part of our engagement work we ask VfC to present on their work at our events. They have presented at our Summer event and are one of our guest speakers at the Autumn event. We have also received support from a parent of the SENDIASS Advisory Group who was invited to be a panel member at interview for officer posts as part of our recruitment process. In addition, SENDIASS Staffordshire continues to provide service talks to groups in districts where resources allow and professionals are invited to team meetings for updates as appropriate.

Added value has been provided by the CYP Lead's work with colleagues in the IASSN at the Regional CYP Officers group, which is proving most beneficial for sharing good practice and areas for improvement. SENDIASS Staffordshire has supported partners by sending out surveys during the course of the year. So far we have supported the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the LA with the process. For example, requests for parent involvement in AAD, peer groups and the Local Offer.

Improvements to service user experience has been evidenced through event feedback. IASP has allowed for funding of events for our service users through our Staffordshire Umbrella Network (SUN). SENDIASS provided these events previously, however, they were aimed at very small number of delegates as there was no budget attached to the project. This funding has enabled us to increase the number of delegates at the events and provide expert speakers based on the topics parents request us to deliver in relation to SEND. The feedback from delegates has been positive and demand for future events is high. We take a whole team approach at events, delegates have stated that it is nice to engage with the SENDIASS team in person particularly with our administrators who they may only come into contact with by telephone.

The value of the additional officer resource has enabled the service to increase the number of services users supported through casework activities by 749 from September 2018 to September 2019, whilst still maintaining our response time. Our response time is something that we pride ourselves on. As the calls are increasing we have noticed that we are receiving more complex enquiries which take longer to process. We would not have been able to support as many people without this funding. However, it is fair to say that numbers of young people contacting the service directly are still low. We expect to see this increase following the implementation of the first year of IASP through engagement activities as awareness of SENDIASS is raised.

Lessons the service has learnt making service improvements

We have found that engagement and partnership working can be a slow process. It has proved vital to have the CYP Lead in order to identify and establish relationships with our partners, to support engagement with CYP, particularly hard to reach groups, and to plan and co-ordinate meetings. Organising events has proved difficult and, although district officers lead on their areas, demand for casework has prevented us from completing as many events as we would have liked up to this point. Consideration is being given to have one officer lead on events to drive the process for the rest of the year.

Lessons the service has learnt making service improvements

As the programme continues to evolve and outcomes are achieved it will determine the impact of IASP-funded interventions and the level of sustainability the service can offer in the future in this area of work. The aim is for the CYP element of IASP to continue, and to be embedded within the service as business as usual following the end of the programme. However, although partnership working with professionals, providers, the LA, schools, Young People's Forum, parents etc. and district work will continue in the future in some form, the level of engagement across the county will be limited if there is no further funding to support the additional officer post. This post has been an enabler to the success of the programme so far.

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