

# Suffolk IASS : Supporting ethnic minorities and English as an Additional Language (EAL) within the county

## The context

The development of this strand of IASP funding, began with a discussion as to whether to provide service leaflets in languages other than English on a routine basis, rather than by request. It was recognised that potentially a communications barrier existed and that there might be groups within Suffolk who were not aware of IASS. However, as the discussion continued, it became apparent that the whole team was not collectively confident in its specific knowledge of ethnic minority groups and those who had English as an Additional Language within the county.

The discussion widened as to how and what resources, other than leaflets, might be useful to enable access to the IASS but the issue remained that the service lacked anything other than anecdotal evidence as to ethnic minority groups within Suffolk and whether EAL was a significant issue.

Within the service some data on ethnicity was held. In the past this was collected as a matter of course when gaining consent to add service user details to our database, however, when interrogating the existing data, it was discovered the service was not as robust at collecting information on ethnicity as it might have been. The information held was not particularly helpful in developing materials to support this area of work. The conclusion was that lack of knowledge was preventing the service being confident in developing the service offer by creating appropriate communications tools, while making best use of limited resources.

## Our Approach

Utilising the offer from the IASP enabled the service to fund an experienced caseworker to undertake an IAS specific project on ethnic minorities and EAL in Suffolk.

As the intention was to improve the service offer, it was felt that a caseworker perspective would be most useful. The caseworker concerned had significant experience in working directly with families and understood the role of IAS well. It was hoped that in undertaking the project she would be very aware of how the information gathered could inform her own and other team members casework practice. In addition, she was tasked with gathering information that would enable the service to develop its wider training and communications offers.

Key issues were identified on which to gather information.

- Who and where were the ethnic minority groups in Suffolk?
- Who if anyone, was already working with those identified?
- Was there a need for additional/different support to that which Suffolk Sendiass already provided?
- What might this look like - What would the service like to do going forward?
- What opportunities and/or constraints might there be with regards continuing this workstream?

As the highest concentration of ethnic minority groups in Suffolk are found in the county town of Ipswich it was decided to focus on that town in the first instance.

The caseworker then proceeded to contact, visit and gather information from a variety of sources including:

- Suffolk County Council Head of Operations (on translation and interpretations services)
- Headteachers, Teachers and Teaching assistants at the six schools in Suffolk with the highest number of pupils from ethnic minorities/EAL
- Local community groups who support families with EAL
- Professionals who work with families with children who have SEND
- Attendance at EAL Networking opportunities and Roma cultural awareness and training day

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

At this stage of the project (Autumn 2019) the information gathered has been used to upskill the team and improve its knowledge and awareness of ethnic minority and EAL issues in Suffolk.

Time was allocated at the service team meeting at the beginning of Autumn term 2019 to discuss the caseworker's findings. The information shared included:

- Where and from which ethnic minorities the highest numbers of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds/with EAL were found in the county.
- Statistics from Suffolk County Council including "Top 10" and "Top 5" languages which were supported through translation and interpretation services for telephone conversations, written correspondence and face to face contacts.
- The type and level of support that was available in six of the Suffolk schools with the highest numbers of pupils from ethnic minorities and with EAL.
- What wider community support groups and organisations already existed in the county, supporting ethnic minority groups.

The sharing of this knowledge immediately raised the level of understanding within the team regarding ethnic minorities and EAL and provided some clear areas of development to focus on.

The caseworker's research activities also provided some very helpful contacts and networking opportunities, in addition to raising awareness of IASS among professionals working with families and pupils with EAL in schools.

## Ways in which improvements have positively enhanced the service user experience

What was extremely positive to hear was that schools welcomed many aspects of IASS that are already "business as usual". The opportunity for face to face support, help with completing forms, attendance at meetings such as Annual Reviews, having a helpline where parents can book a call with a caseworker, use of Facebook and Twitter, were all seen as positive resources which schools could support parents and carers to make use of.

As a result of the focus on this area it became clear that not all Suffolk SENDIASS staff were confident about how to access translation or interpretation services to support their work. Up to date information has now been circulated to the whole team who now feel better prepared to support service users for whom English is not their first language.

At this stage it is still difficult to provide evidence of directly enhanced service user experience. There is still some development work to complete. (See below) However, what can be said is that the level of knowledge and understanding within the SENDIASS team is improved significantly which is believed can only improve the service user experience.

## Lessons the service has learnt making service improvements

### Referral process

A key message from schools and community groups was that expecting parents to refer themselves to the service was simply unrealistic in many cases. Those schools most successful in engaging with parents from ethnic minority groups and with EAL were those who put a significant emphasis on building trust and developing long term relationships. Schools asked for the service to adjust its referral process to enable professionals, working with a family, to contact the service on behalf of the family.

As a result, the service is looking to clarify the message on how to access it.

### Video resources

Some schools identified a “more visual” version of the service leaflet might be helpful for some groups with limited English. However, professionals from community groups, particularly those working with the Roma and Romanian speaking communities, suggested that short video introductions to the service, which could be viewed on mobile phones, might be more helpful.

### Schools suggested Suffolk SENDIASS could:

- Improve its publicity to schools, particularly with regards to the training offer for parents on SEND issues and about the availability of the online resources such as the website and You Tube videos.
- Be available to attend SEND coffee mornings or Parent Evenings at schools
- Provide a named caseworker for each school who could become a familiar face and develop relationships with families over time. This was a service model schools were finding most effective in working with parents, particularly those who were quite wary of services offered by “the state”.
- Be clear in communications about how IASS “fits” in between schools and the LA, i.e. that it is independent, impartial and confidential.
- Adapt some of the leaflets to be more visual as this technique worked well for families with some/limited English.
- Use QR Codes which, with the use of a smart phone, can enable translation of written materials.

### Improvement on data gathering

The service also learned that it needs to improve its own data collection methods to enable it to gauge whether it is supporting an increased number of families from ethnic minorities with EAL.

## The approach being taken to sustain the improvements achieved

### Keeping in touch

By keeping the teams knowledge up to date and relevant it is more likely to provide an appropriate service to ethnic minority/EAL families. The service will continue to maintain contacts through EAL Network Meetings and Roma Awareness Days. It will also build on the positive networking opportunities which came about as a result of the caseworker meeting with school staff and others.

## **Parent events**

This term the service had a stall at a parent consultation day at the request of one of the schools with a very high number of EAL students. It will endeavour to be available at parent events going forward.

## **Video introduction**

The Training and Development Officer is taking a piece of work forward, working with two bi-lingual teaching assistants and two representatives of a community support group, in developing short video introductions to the service in one or more languages.

## **Leaflets**

Finally, bringing this full circle with the issue which sparked the interest in this area of work in the first place; the Information Officer is investigating the use of QR codes on leaflets to help with the translation process and considering how to make the main service leaflet more visual.

## **Final thoughts**

At Suffolk SENDIASS this workstream (although not yet complete) is already seen as a highly successful piece of development work which has enabled the upskilling of staff and provided some key development points on which to focus going forward. The research has already led to some service improvements being implemented, with more to follow. It will be able to achieve and sustain significant improvement in this area within the current service model and existing resource allocations.

It is, however, noted that those parts of the service which were deemed to be of most value in supporting ethnic minority and EAL parents and carers were those of face to face support, attendance at and support with meetings and completion of SEND related paperwork. These are part of the “business as usual” but that business has experienced a sustained increase in demand since the SEND reforms of 2014.

While the service is always happy to publicise its service offer, the individual support, which is so valued, requires significant casework resources to achieve. The concern as always is, that while it is right that it should encourage anyone who requires support to access the service, it will struggle to meet any increase in demand without additional allocation of funding to support more caseworker hours across the county.

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