

## Solihull IASS: delivering a series of transition workshop

### The context

In summer 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, schools were still mostly closed but some were just starting to take in vulnerable children, such as those with EHCPs. All Solihull SENDIASS staff were working remotely – some being at high risk or to protect high risk family members who were required to shield. The service had purchased and been trained in how to use Zoom to support families and the IT equipment had been upgraded for home working where necessary. Staff were made aware of safe working practices, including through e-learning, and detailed COVID-19 risk assessments were completed and regularly reviewed, so that the service remained both effective and safe. All of one-to-one and group meetings with families were moved to remote delivery using Zoom, WhatsApp, Teams and phone calls.

### The issue that was identified to be tackled using IASP funding

When the Government introduced the first return to face-to-face delivery of school teaching, a lot of the parents the service supports had questions about how their children with SEND would be supported. This included questions around transport plans, support services that were previously available, and more. The Solihull SENDIASS wasn't in a position to answer many of these questions due to new Government guidance coming out or updating so frequently and some decisions hadn't yet been made by the LA.

It was decided the best way to address parental concerns was to organise a series of virtual meetings between LA officers and parents. The concept was very well received by parents, whilst some LA officers were naturally somewhat hesitant due to concerns about possible hostility; however, these virtual meetings were enabled to go ahead due to the enthusiasm of the new Deputy Director of Children's Services, who paved the way for other LA Officers to follow suit.

### How the funding was used

We used some of the funding to arrange and host a series of 3 virtual workshops between LA officers and parents; hosted by SENDIASS as the LA did not have access to a virtual platform, this enabled parents to ask their questions about the transition back to school.

The Deputy Director of Children's Services led a session on SEND and inclusion, the Strategic SEND Lead led one on the link between the LA and schools, and the Head of Transport led a session on transport arrangements to and from schools. Each session started with the LA officer introducing themselves, and sharing what their role is, their vision for the LA area & any updates from their department.

The sessions were chaired and facilitated by the SENDIASS Manager (Hazel). Each session was limited to 20 parents so all parents could ask their questions. Demand was high, with every session fully booked. They were advertised through social media, highlighted by staff to parents they were supporting, and through the Parent Carer Forum and other local groups. It was explained to parents beforehand that the workshops were not opportunities for a case discussion about their child but that they could ask generalised questions rather

than referring to their individual situation. Although this was sometimes difficult to manage overall it worked well. Parents had the option to submit their questions to SENDIASS in advance if they preferred their question to be asked anonymously or it could be added via the chat function during the session and could be read out on their behalf. Alternatively, they could alert SENDIASS that they wished to speak and would be invited to ask their question during the session.

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

This series of workshops made a significant difference to both parents and LA officers, breaking down barriers that had previously existed between them.

LA Officers told SENDIASS how they had greatly appreciated the opportunity to hear parents' views and feelings and take those on board and that they had gradually relaxed more as the sessions continued, with fewer concerns about possible antagonism being directed at them.

Feedback from LA officers:

*"I have been hugely impressed with the work of SENDIASS and the impact they are having. They are clearly stepping in to support families through an increasing number of virtual meetings; helping to ensure families continue to feel support during these difficult days. It has gratifying to see the trust Hazel engenders with families and the way the service continues to seek new ways in which to support them – identifying and responding to needs as they arise"*

*"Thanks Hazel – I would be very happy to do that again... It was great to get feedback from parents, e.g. use of PPE for drivers guides, and we will factor it all in to our updated advice..."*

For parents, it was an opportunity to put faces to names of the officers in their LA that they hadn't met before. They fed back that the LA felt more approachable now, and the sessions had helped them see the bigger picture and feel more positive. They also became more aware and understanding of the constraints the LA was under.

Feedback from parents:

*"Thank you for arranging this meeting and for asking my question, I don't think I'd have been brave enough to, was really good to hear the LA's response – straight from the horse's mouth. I'm deffo joining more of these"*

*"Was good to put faces to names, and great to hear that the transport man will take what we said into his plans when kids return to school in taxis. thank you"*

*"Inspiring to hear the vision for Solihull, just what we need. Thank you for all you & your team have done throughout this awful time. Always there when we need you, just a zoom screen away lol. "*

Overall, it was a very positive experience, with some previous barriers broken down.

### **Contact details**

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