



Waltham Forest IASS : Redesign services to meet the demand

The Context

The London Borough of Waltham Forest is in North East London. It is one of the most richly diverse areas in the country, and is home to 276,700 residents.

Citizens Advice Waltham Forest started delivery of SENDIASS in 2016 and until February 2019, has been resourced by one Caseworker (0.8 FTE) and a Volunteer (0.2 FTE). Waltham Forest SENDIASS is able to offer statutory support to families with CYP with SEND.

The Challenge

The service has always been aware that its resource allocation was very low in comparison to other areas and that IASS was constantly juggling in order to meet the needs of families in its reach. During February 2019, funding provided by the IASP enabled an in depth review of the service. Findings as a result from the report were an eye opener in identifying where the service was and where it should be heading in order to offer a broader range of support to families.

With the end of the service review and emergence of the new Minimum Standards, it prompted the need to widen the services remit. The general feeling from the review was the service lacked reach or awareness in the community; an immediate need for a more effective and quicker response rate when families contact the service; a lack of funding dedicated specifically for SENDIASS in order to fully deliver all aspects of the minimum standards and a need to establish a more visibly independent advisory service.

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

Funding awarded by the IAS programme has contributed to much needed change and call for growth to the IASS. Prior to the involvement from the IASP, Waltham Forest SENDIASS was purely a respondent service, reacting only to referrals and supporting those families through SEND processes. There was little opportunity to reflect on service improvements, what was working well, what practices needed to be revised, whether the service was maximising its reach and more importantly whether the service was meeting local needs. A key enhancement made since the funding, was through supporting recruitment of additional members of the team, the service is now going through a service remodelling.

- IAS Team Leader responsible for coordinating the implementation of the operational plan and the service developments
- IAS Caseworker role increased from a part time to a full time post.
- Additional IAS Caseworker (0.6 FTE) including one day Youth Forum Facilitation
- 4 Volunteers to support cover for SENDIASS helpline and once trained offer IAS intervention

Waltham Forest's IASS is on a better footing and any concerns or reservations around the future of the service have now been resolved, resulting in the IASS now being able to spend time in consultation and strategic planning. The service now has a robust operational plan, something it had not had before. Although there was always intentions for progression there were no means and capacity to dedicate time for planning and establishing new measures. Waltham Forest SENDIASS now has a clear plan for the year ahead that

will enhance the service offer and properly refine and strengthen areas of support that it already delivers. The profile of the IASS service locally has been boosted. The LA commissioners invited the IASS to present to their team its operational strategy and vision for SENDIASS moving forward, prompting further discussions into joint commissioning.

The review also identified the need to increase the visibility of the service. Efforts were then made to develop its own logo, removing the Citizens Advice Waltham Forest brand from all its publications and resources so that Waltham Forest SENDIASS, is furthermore seen as a stand alone service. Moreover, to emphasise the arms length from the LA and the local Citizens Advice it has begun to develop its own independent SENDIASS website. In doing so, it has adopted and developed a new communication approach, increasing social media presence, which in turn improves accessibility to the service.

Ways in which improvements have positively enhanced the service user experience

The impact on service users has been extensive and meaningful in the following ways:

- Analysis of data suggests that the service has increased awareness and extended its reach. For quarter 2 of this year (April-September 2019) it had seen 110 clients in comparison to the same quarter last year (2018) where it supported 64 clients. This indicates that the community is clearer about the role that SENDIASS plays and increased access and knowledge of how they can be supported.
- The IASS was recently commended on its commitment and engagement in outreach sessions in the Children and Family Centres, not only does this support the service's promise to increase visibility but allows service users to associate the IASS with a friendly face in places they are used to attending.
- Boost in engagement in steering group, rewriting terms of reference and revising membership in partnership with stakeholders. This has increased relations with community partners, thus beginning the journey of becoming more integrated into the local community.
- Delivering training to parent/carers on popular topics, provides the chance to empower families on issues relating to their children, supporting feelings of self confidence.
- With two caseworkers on board it has increased service capacity to support more families improving overall service contribution. Having a team from a range of backgrounds also enhances the service user experience by improving cultural insights.
- Recruiting another case worker has also meant being able to provide the initial caseworker with a peer support system, developing resilience and work morale means increasing productivity and the richness of the advice and support they can offer families
- The new SENDIASS website will instil confidence in service users. Investing in this area has really allowed parents to see that the service cares for the needs of the community. Working closely with the parent forum in this aspect has increased transparency. therefore, building trust.
- Relocation of Waltham Forest SENDIASS base emphasising sense of impartiality and arms length from the LA.

Lessons the service has learnt making service improvements

The service has learnt the value and necessity to consistently review and improve. By doing so it can remain current and also adapt and respond to the changing needs of the families it aims to serve.

A valid lesson to be taken has been the importance of concentrating more efforts in improving relations with local services. At times when contacting local services there have been difficulties in engaging and building commitment. This primarily goes back to raising awareness of the IASS and developing community partnerships, highlighting a need to develop campaigns in promoting the service with a range of stakeholders.

Reflecting on data capture, the service has been able to identify that clients who contact SENDIASS are predominantly requiring support with education related matters. There are virtually no queries regarding Health and Care, indicating an area of future development. A possible reason for this is that families do not realise they can seek advice about a wider range of issues. To take this forward the service is considering how to open up discussions to increase its visibility in Health and Care settings e.g. setting up drop-in sessions in health centres. This in turn will assist to increase client awareness and engagement with these issues.

The service is mainly contacted by mothers or female carers. There is a noticeable lack of fathers and YP accessing the service directly. This has indicated the need to do more work on increasing participation from fathers, during outreach sessions there has been interest in a father's group, thus another area of development to consider in the future.

To address the lack of engagement by YP accessing the service independently the service is considering some in-depth work with the Youth Forum and the need to increase its presence in FE settings.

And lastly the service has one full time caseworker who works part time on the youth facilitation and one part time caseworker. Alongside increasing the service's presence in the community is the need to balance the requirements of meeting the significant rise in demand for the service. This continual increase in service users has meant the service is operating at maximum capacity. This indicates a major need to increase the workforce to match the growing demands to the service.

The approach being taken to sustain the improvements achieved

As a result of the developments undertaken with the funding received from the IASP, the service is renewing its profile with the community. It is seen as a foremost objective to maintain this. The team leader will continue to increase promotional activities and participate in strategic groups/forums that operate within the borough. The service will continue to work with the LA, as already the LA and the CCG have committed to continue to resource the IASS and are dedicated to ensuring that the service is an integral part of the Local Offer. The service offer and strategic plan will be continually reviewed. By improving local partnerships and by seeking further opportunities for co-production and co-delivery it is hoped to enhance the service offer. This will include monitoring, challenging and evaluating progress that is being made and ensuring that CYP with SEND and their families will receive the full service they are entitled to. In underpinning all the above, Waltham forest SENDIASS endeavours to make commitments in establishing an IASS that fulfils its statutory obligations and develops a sustainable service offer which will continually meet local need.

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