Newcastle SENDIASS

Annual Report

2024-2025

Contents

Introduction

This annual report aims to provide a formal service evaluation and an informative reflection that will give a sense of the achievement of the service.

We wanted to create a document which provides parents and professionals with information about the service enabling them to have a really clear understanding of what it does, how it helps and who can use it.

We have included feedback from parents, carers and young people as their views are important to us.

The world of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is complex; in this review we will try to present information in a way that doesn't have any jargon or require any specialist knowledge to understand.

We are here to help so if there is anything in this review that you do not understand, please let us know.

Service values and practice

Newcastle Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) offers **impartial** and **confidential** information, advice and support to parents, carers, children and young people about matters related to their or their child's special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Staff are trained and have accurate and up to date knowledge of

· Education, social care and health law relating to SEND

· National and local policy and practice in meeting SEND

· SEND processes including Tribunal

Support is tailored to the individual service user, with the aim to build on that individual's skills, knowledge and confidence to promote independence and self-advocacy.

The service is free for young people, parents and carers to use.

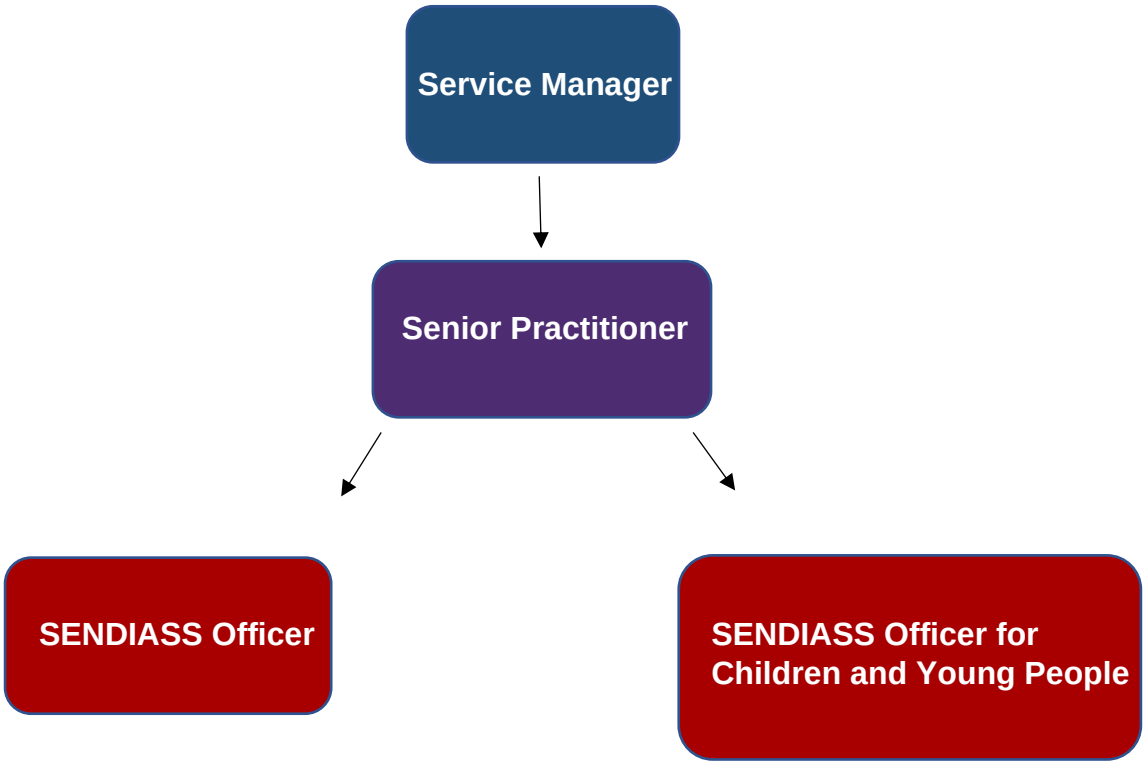
You choose whether or not to use the service – you contact us not the other way around.

The service is confidential and impartial.

The service can be accessed by children and young people independent of their parents. The service has adapted to include a text line and school drop-in clinics to make the service accessible for children and young people.

Who delivers SENDIASS?

Newcastle SENDIASS is now jointly commissioned by education, health and social care in line with the national minimum standards. Following the joint commissioning agreement, the service has expanded and restructured. The diagram details the current structure.



The service also has one part time business administrator.

Newcastle SENDIASS does not work in isolation. Each local authority has its own service, and they are all overseen by a national co-ordinator at the National Children's Bureau. The national co-ordinator

- Liaises with government, in particular the Department of Education
- Hosts an e-forum for all SENDIASS staff
- Gathers and publishes benchmarking data for each service
- Provides training on the law, mediation skills and regular updates on SEN policy and practice.
- Provides the National Minimum Standards that all services must adhere to

Advisory group

The National minimum standards state that all SENDIAS services must have an advisory group made up of key stakeholders.

1.7 The Governance arrangements outline a clear management structure, encompassing a strategic manager within the IASS and a steering group or advisory body which includes representatives from service user groups and key stakeholders from education, social care and health.

1.8 The IASS has a development plan reviewed annually with the steering group/advisory body, which includes specific actions and improvement targets.

Newcastle SENDIASS have formed an advisory group consisting of key stakeholders from education, health, social care and parents/carers. The group meet every academic term to review the progress of the service and feed into the next priorities.

Autumn Term

Annual Report for the previous academic year including parent/children/young people evaluations and feedback.

Agree the Service Development Plan for the academic year.

Spring Term

Progress with areas identified on the Service Development Plan.

Summer Term

Review Service Development Plan and achievements.

Identify local and national priorities.

Discuss areas for SENDIASS development.

The aim of the group is

- To monitor the continued development of the service in a way that best meets the needs of children, young people with SEND in Newcastle and their parents and carers
- To demonstrate the impartiality of the service and ensure it remains at ‘arm’s length’ to the Local Authority and the Integrated Care Board.
- To ensure that the service impartiality and confidentiality policies are reviewed and monitored and that they are implemented consistently and effectively.
- To evaluate the level to which the service achieves the Minimum Standards for services providing impartial, information, advice and support, as supported by the Department for Education, and is compliant with the SEND Code of Practice 2015.
- To monitor the impact of the service on improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND and their parents and carers, using service user feedback.
- To monitor that the service is engaging effectively with all relevant partners, locally, regionally and nationally.

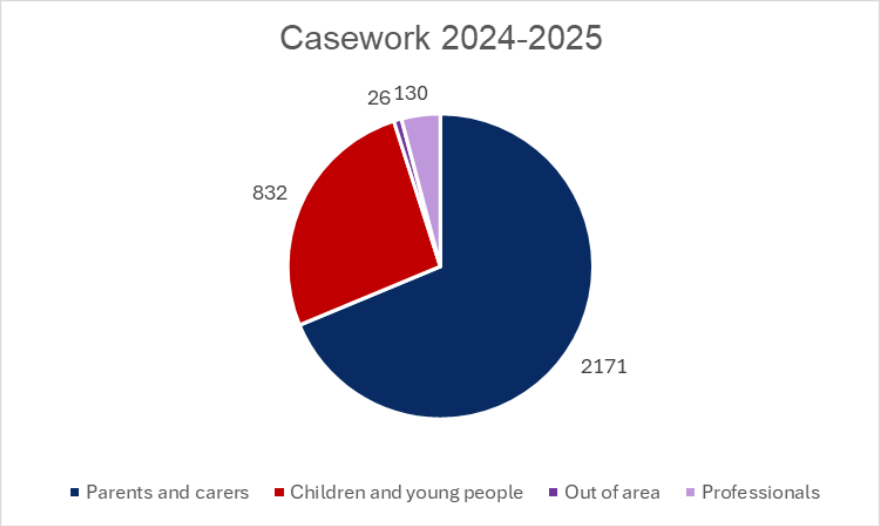
The advisory group met 3 times in the academic year 2024-2025. They looked at the service achievements over this academic year, the continued growth and increase in demand, and agreed the priorities for the service for the next academic year.

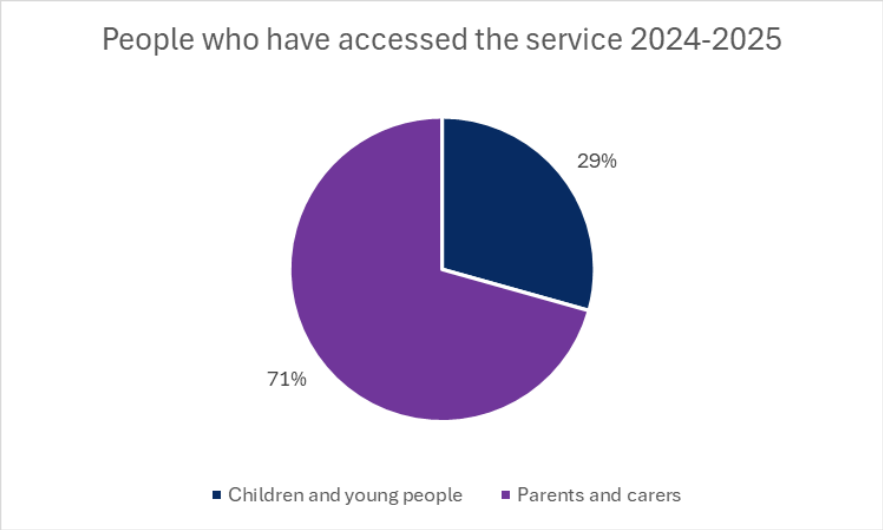
Casework statistics

The Council for Disabled Children (CDC) recognised that the amount of work and complexity of work that SENDIASS do was not reflected in the way in which we recorded our work. As an example, each family accessing the service was allocated a case number which was their number for the academic year. Some of these families would access the service to support them through statutory assessment, they then may come back to the service to support them with a complaint, and then return again to support them with an appeal to the tribunal. All of those pieces of work would only count as one number on our statistics. We now allocate case numbers based on each piece of casework, so one family may end up with several case numbers by the end of the year. This gives us a more realistic reflection of the amount of work the service is doing.

In order to be able to monitor the growth of the service and compare our statistics from previous years we are also counting the number of families who access the service.

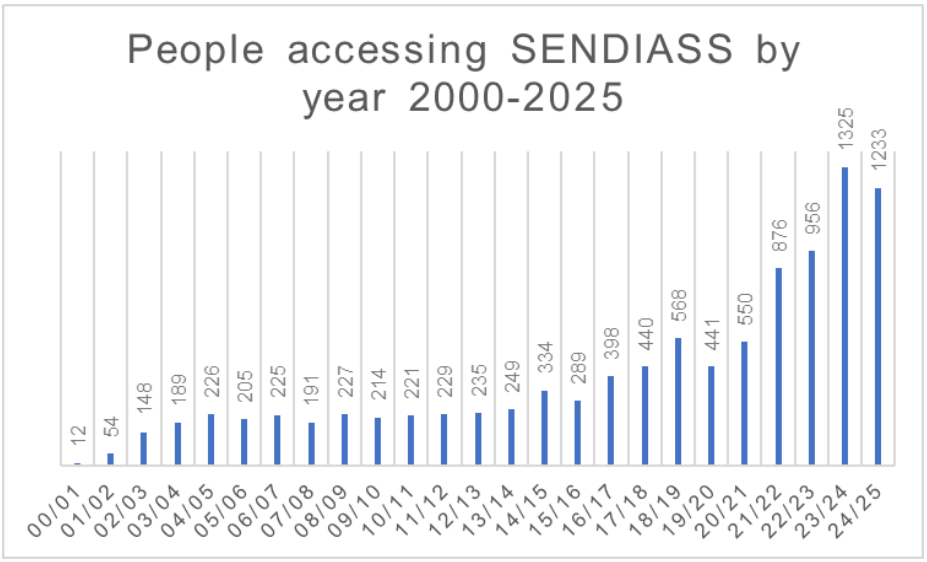
The service runs on an academic year, all case numbers are allocated starting in September 2024. We took the figures for this report from the end of July 2025. This academic year the service has provided information, advice and support for 3003 cases, this has been delivered to 1233 parents, carers, children and young people. There are 362 children and young people who have accessed the service independent of their parents; which works out around 29% of our service users. This demonstrates the difference that making the service accessible to children and young people has made. On top of this the service also provided a service to 130 professionals and 26 parents and carers from neighbouring local authorities.



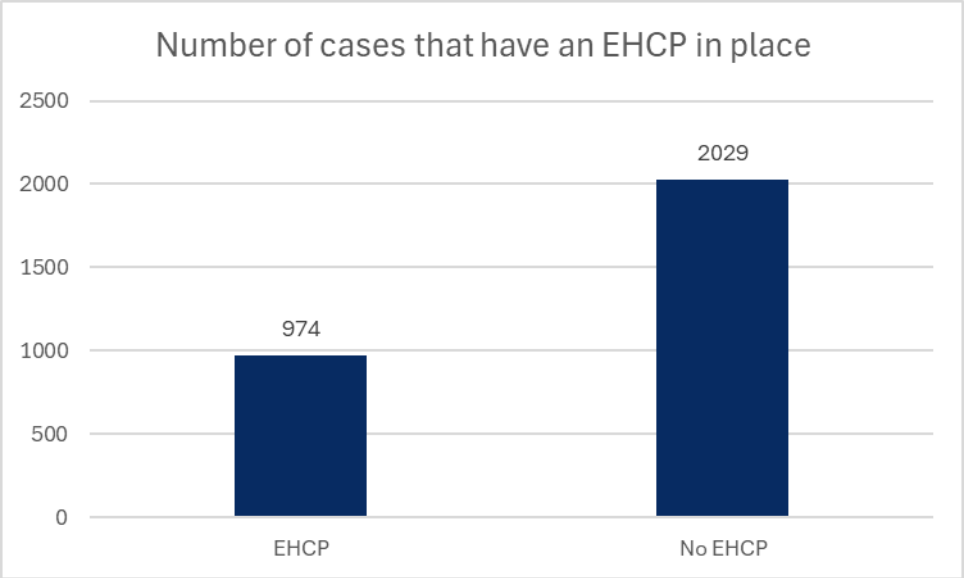


SENDIASS regularly attend events where we can deliver information to a much wider audience. This includes school coffee mornings, training events, team briefings and careers events. It is not possible to capture how many people we provide information for at all of these events; however, we can factor in that we are delivering information to a much wider audience than our records demonstrate.

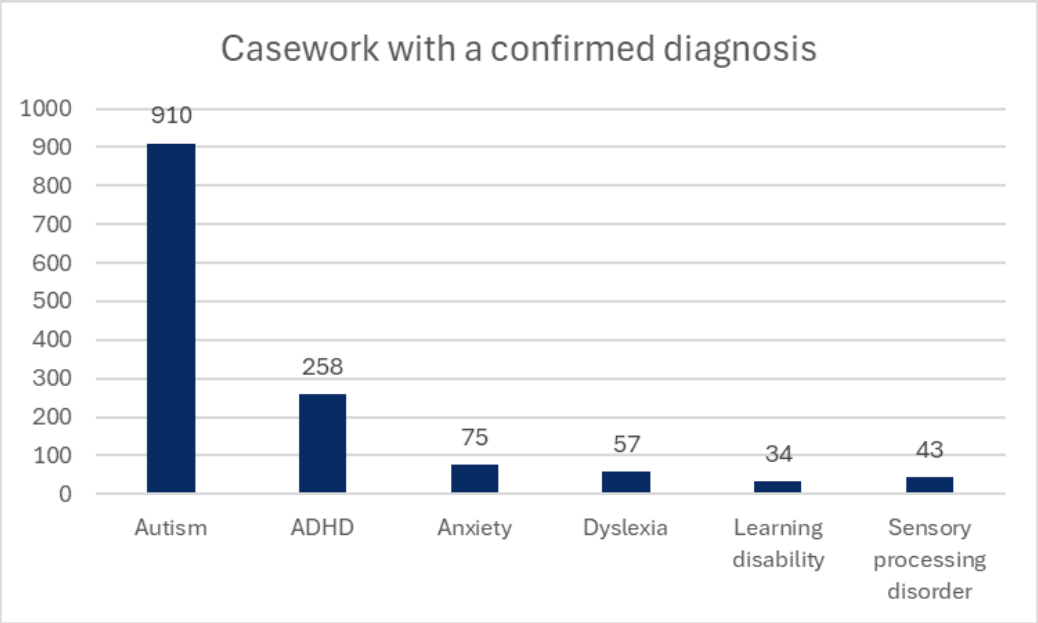
The service has been seeing increasing demand with the number of cases going up every year. This year the service has handled 3003 cases, an increase on last year's 2237 cases. We also record the number of people who access the service. This year is the first year since the pandemic where we have seen a slight dip in the numbers. We have spent a significant amount of time this year delivering training to different frontline teams across education, health and social care. This training has included universally available provision, SEN support, the EHC process and legal tests, SEND law and help and support available for families. This has meant that fewer families have needed SENDIASS for basic enquiries and signposting. Upskilling other teams has helped SENDIASS to cope with the increasing demand as we continue to see the number of cases and the complexity of the casework increase.



Out of the 3003 cases 974 had an Education, Health and Care Plan in place.

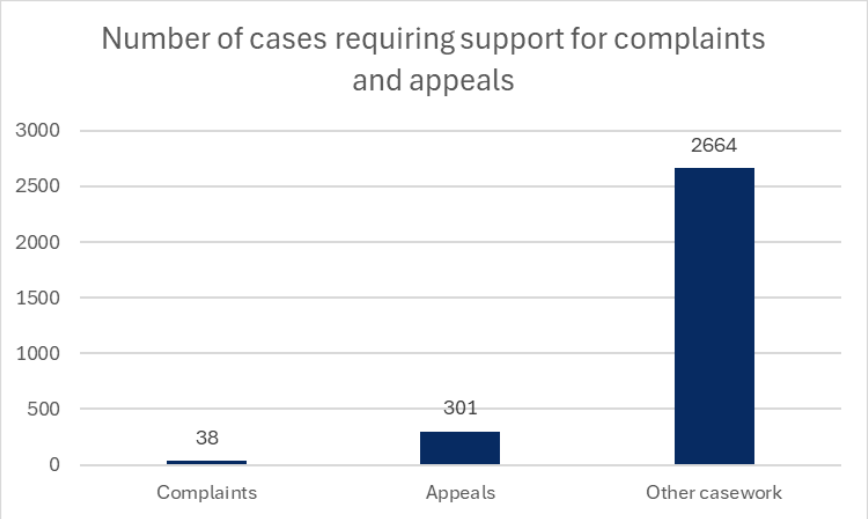


SENDIASS provide support to children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, there is not a requirement to have a diagnosis in order to access the service. We do collect data relating to diagnosis. This chart illustrates the top primary needs identified for cases this year. There are a large number of children and young people who are currently waiting for assessment, they are not reflected in this data.

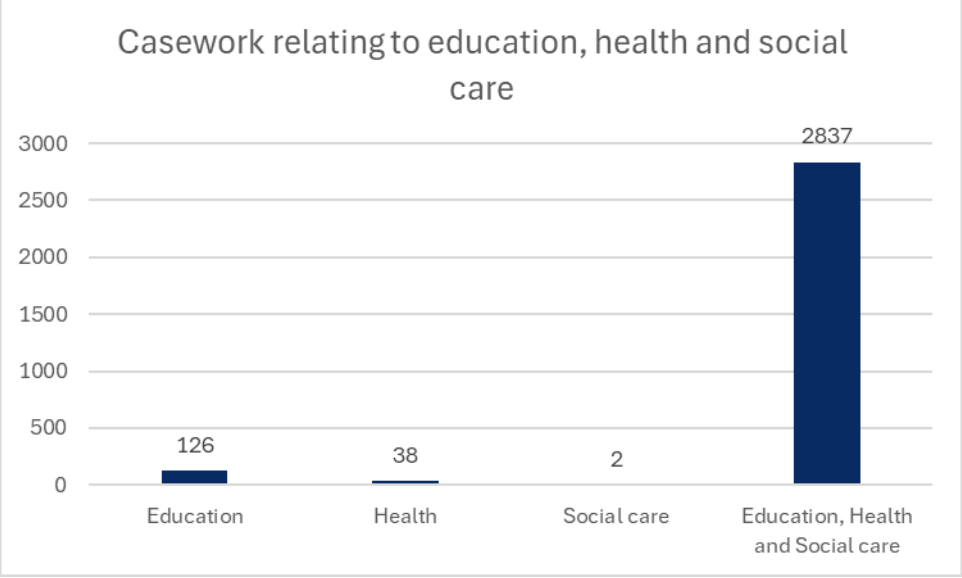


SENDIASS has the role to provide support when things go wrong. This academic year we have seen a rise in the number of cases that would like support to appeal to the

tribunal and to submit formal complaints. Of the 3003 cases we have worked with this academic year 301 wanted advice and support to appeal to the first-tier tribunal, and 38 wanted support to submit a formal complaint. Whilst SENDIASS provide the information for individuals to be able challenge decisions through formal process, we also mediate and help to open up communications between parents, schools and the local authority. This means that although 301 people asked for advice on how to appeal to the tribunal, the number of appeals lodged with the tribunal is far lower. Only 25 of these cases progressed to requiring support and representation at mediation and tribunal preparation.



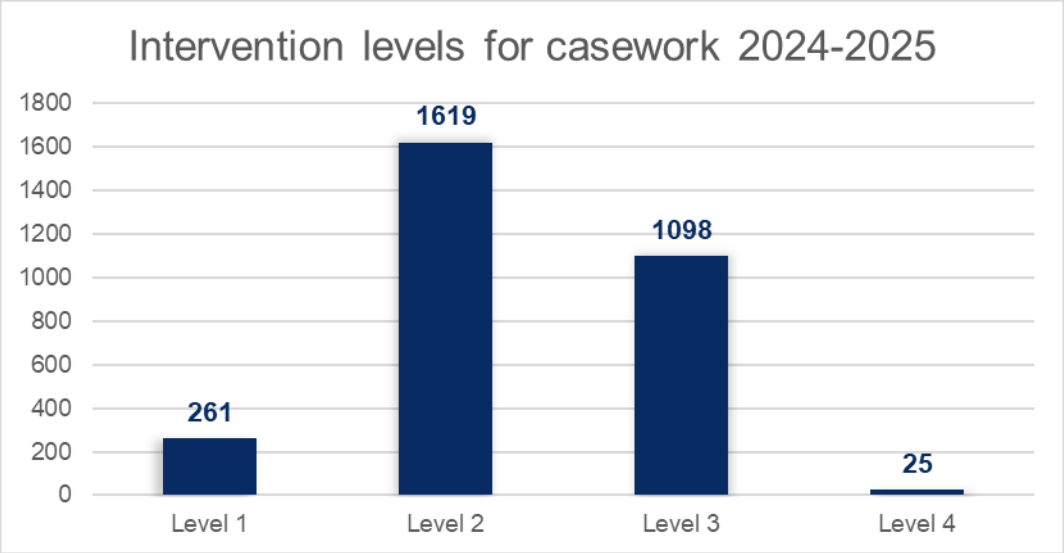
The service provides information, advice and support relating to education, health and social care. The chart below shows which category the case was relating to, with the majority being a combination of education, health and social care matters. This demonstrates how closely linked the three sectors are and how different needs can impact on all areas of a child's life.

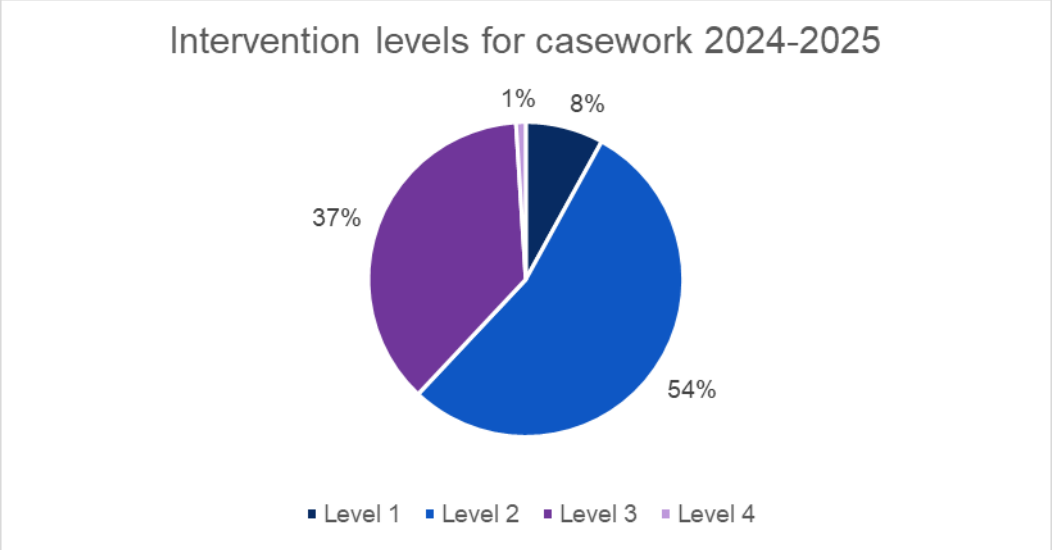


SENDIASS record the complexity of casework using intervention levels set by the Council for Disabled Children (CDC). This helps us to monitor the complexity of casework and the level of support needed, as this can vary massively. The intervention levels are detailed below.

Level 1	Information	Information and advice about education, health and social care SEND system and processes. Inclusive of initial concern up to appeals.
Level 2	Information and tailored advice	Service user is able to express their needs and those of their child. They need more tailored information and/or advice specific to their individual need or circumstance than is available at Level 1.
Level 3	Support	The needs of the individual service users and/or the complexity of their/their children's circumstances significantly impacts their ability to independently navigate the system. They are a child or a young person who need/want information, advice or support separate from that given to their parent/carer.
Level 4	Intensive support	The needs of the individual service users and/or the complexity of their/their children's circumstances means they are not able to independently navigate the system and/or access justice. They are a child or a young person who need advocacy/representation separate from or instead of their parent, this includes CYP who are looked after, those who are in residential schools and those in YOIs. Can include all of the support detailed in level 3 but must also involve: • Representation for parent, child or young person at meetings, appeals, mediation and CETRs • Ongoing and intensive casework/advocacy that includes representation.

The charts below show the intervention levels for the casework the service dealt with this year.





What we are seeing each year is an increase in the amount of time and support needed for casework. 1123 cases required intervention at level 3 and above. This demonstrates the level of demand that is put on the service.

SENDIASS Online

The service has a stand-alone website. www.newcastlesendiass.co.uk. This year we have worked to update the information on the website in an accessible way. We have added additional videos and made easy to follow documents to explain the service and various SEND processes.

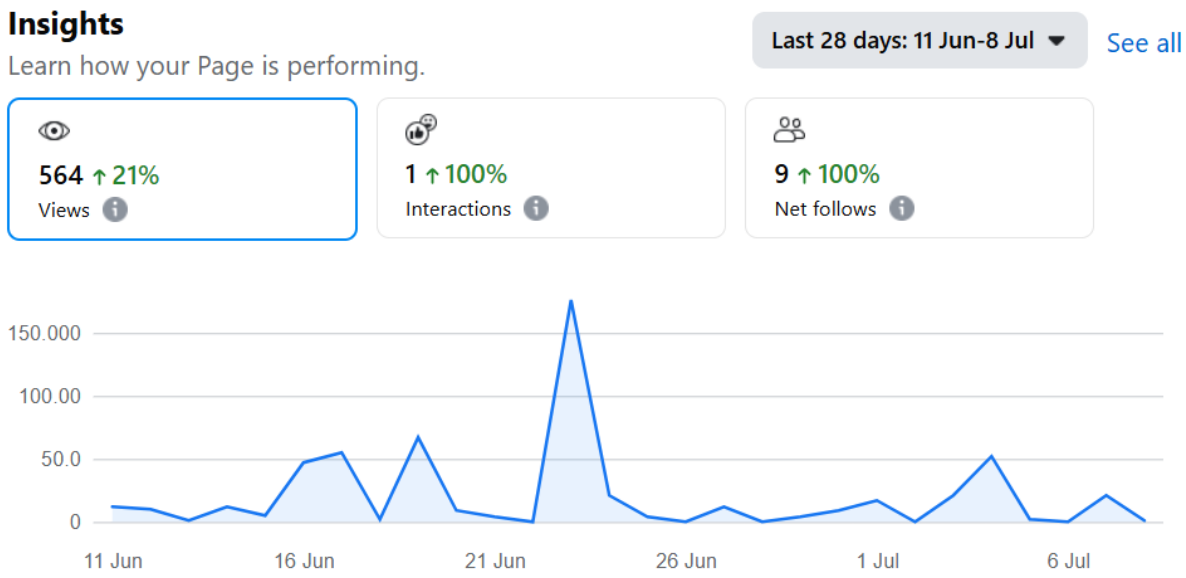
Newcastle City Council have employed 2 youth voice trainees, Lucy and Daniel. We have been working with the voice trainees to look at our website and the content for children and young people. Lucy and Daniel were able to provide us with some really helpful feedback which we have used to make improvements to our accessibility.

"*We have looked at your website. We want to provide some feedback to you and let you know what we are thinking. Firstly, the videos you picked for "What it's like to be me" are good the voiceover from the narrator was clear and you could understand what they were saying. The video stayed relevant it talked about what it was stated about in the heading. They were very useful showing what the video was about and the way the information was being dispatched in a visual way. It was accessible for all ages, the way the video was represented meant they were easy enough for all ages to understand. In the videos the images were illustrated well and so were the visuals too, this is because you selected good videos which made us think of that. The colours in the videos worked well they did not clash and were very easy to read and see, there was no struggle.*

In the young person's section. The information that was displayed was represented in a way which was easy to understand such as bullet points as you were not bombarding us with information. I liked how the sections in this part of the website are colour coded. It makes it easier to understand where each section is located."

The National Minimum standards specify that SENDIASS must have a social media presence. Newcastle SENDIASS has a Facebook page www.facebook.com/NewcastleSENDIASS.

The data below is taken from the Facebook page professional dashboard which shows that in the last 28 days our posts have reached 564 people. This has increased from this time last year and means the service is sharing information with a wider audience. The page now has 475 followers.



The service creates information videos which are shared via our Youtube channel. www.Youtube.com/@newcastlesendiass4608. We want to add to our video catalogue, and recognise that it is an accessible way for people to get information.

Service development plan

The below table details the objectives that SENDIASS has set to achieve over the academic year 2024-2025. The objectives are all set against one of the national minimum standards.

Area of work/minimum standard	Objective	Expected outcome	Evidence	Time to be completed by
1.2 The IASS is designed and commissioned with children, young people and parents, and has the capacity and resources to meet these Minimum Standards and local need.	To adapt service delivery to increase capacity in line with growing demand. To look at service delivery for hard to reach groups	SENDIASS will be able to meet local need. SENDIASS will provide an accessible service for all.	SENDIASS will respond to all enquiries within 48 hours. SENDIASS will see an increase in case numbers based in hard to reach communities/areas of the city.	Outreach service set up and running by July 2025
3.6 The IASS offers training to local education, health and social care professionals, parents, young people and children to increase knowledge of SEND law, guidance, local policy, issues and participation.	To deliver training sessions to professionals and to parents and carers.	SENDIASS will reach out to teams across education, health and social care to deliver training sessions based on their remit and SEND processes. Training sessions will be held for parents and carers on SEND related topics. A range of information videos will be produced and posted on the website and	Professionals will be better informed and able to support parents, carers, children and young people in matters relating to SEND. Parents and carers will be better informed about their rights and the SEND processes.	Training sessions to be delivered across the year A catalogue of videos will be created and posted to the website by July 2025

		social media channels.		
3.1 The IASS provides; Impartial information, advice and support (IAS) on the full range of education, health and social care as defined in the SEND Code of Practice to the following service users – a) children b) young people c) parents This support is offered in a range of ways which includes face to face, a telephone helpline, email, website and social media.	To recruit volunteers to be able to provide the level of support people need, including face to face support to complete paperwork.	People who struggle with literacy skills will be able to complete the paperwork for SEND processes, and will understand all written correspondence.	Parents and carers will be able to engage with processes fully and submit their views.	Volunteers recruited and trained by July 2025

Service developments and progress

1.2 – Amber

The service is fully staffed and is able to meet local demand, returning all enquiries within 24 hours. The officer for children and young people is providing an accessible service in education settings across the city. As a service our priority is to adapt what we do to be more accessible to minority communities. Our vision is to set up outreach clinics in community hubs. This year we have made progress towards this outcome; we have joined up with the asylum and refugee team to attend welcome sessions where we can meet families from minority communities and ensure they have access to the service. We will carry this priority into the next academic year as we strive to have a fully inclusive and accessible service.

3.6 – Amber

This year we have delivered training seminars to parents and carers and teams of professionals across education, health and social care. We have seen a reduction in the number of low-level enquiries which we attribute to the knowledge and upskilling of all of the frontline teams.

Our priority continues to be to produce a catalogue of video resources. We did not manage to complete this outcome this year, however we have carried it forward as a priority for the next academic year. Our feedback tells us that video resources are accessible to a wide audience and a preferred method of accessing information. Producing a range of videos would also help to manage the demand on the service.

3.1 – Green
SENDIASS set up partnerships with Barnardo's and the parent carer forum to provide volunteer support to the service for parents who need help to write their views onto forms. It has been difficult coordinating the volunteers and relying on their availability. We have had limited success using the volunteer services to help with the demand on the service so will continue to grow and develop this offer over the next year.

Case studies

Working with a school to provide an accessible service for children

Case study 1	Supporting a child to understand his school-based anxiety and identifying strategies that help to try and increase his attendance.

Introduction

This case involved a child who was experiencing emotionally based school non-attendance (EBSNA). The Welfare and attendance officer at his mainstream middle school had identified him as a child who might benefit from my support.

I met with him as part of my one-to-one clinic in school where he talked about the various barriers to his education and extreme anxiety around attending school. He described himself as being unable to walk himself into school independently, he was displaying challenging behaviours at the start of the school day and was often unable to attend at all.

Background

Staff were concerned at the extreme anxiety around attending school which caused the child physical symptoms including nausea, vomiting, crying and begging mum to not make him go to school. Parent had explained to school that the child's ongoing anxiety around attending school has an impact upon her and causes her anxiety too. She describes "a battle" every morning to get him to school and finds his level of distress upsetting resulting in mum taking him home. Throughout the day staff report him feeling nauseous and often tearful. He can take a considerable amount of time to settle as he becomes upset at experiencing the feeling of nausea.

The child feels as if school staff do not believe him and are unsupportive.

Aims and objectives

The aims were to create a safe environment for the child to feel comfortable in without distraction from peers and staff. To develop a positive relationship and

allow the child to speak freely without judgement or correction of verbal language used.

My aim is to allow the child to feel in control of the discussions and fully aware that they were confidential unless they requested any information to be shared.

My aim is to ensure that children are actively included in decisions about them and their support needs. I want to empower children with SEND to have a voice, to know their rights and to help them navigate the SEND processes.

To open up the communication between the child and the school to help rebuild the relationship. When information was shared with the child's consent to the SENCO, I would ensure the discussion was in the child's words. I would also follow up with an email to ensure the discussion was shared and the key points the child has asked to be passed on had been conveyed clearly.

I aim to increase the school's understanding of SEND processes, how they can make sure the voice of the child is heard and how they can work to empower and include children with SEND.

Approach

I first met the child as part of my one-to-one clinic in school. He then chose to access the clinic on a weekly basis.

The child was given the opportunity to express his likes and dislikes in school.

He discussed how his anxiety affected him, even when getting ready in the morning, the build up of these feelings made him nauseous.

I was made aware that the school had put strategies in place to help the child regulate and prepare for the school day ahead. He was offered a place in breakfast club which is a quieter option to him entering school with all the other students. He accepted this place, but mum reports a struggle to drop him off at breakfast club in the mornings where he would refuse to attend and cry. Some days he was able to attend whilst on others mum gave in and took him home rather than cause him any more upset. School also offered a place in hush club which is a club available at break time and lunch time which provided a quiet space to play or draw rather than playing out in the playground which he found over stimulating.

In our first conversation the child told me that his best friend was no longer attending school or leaving the home, so he was unable to socialise with him inside or outside school.

The following week, I used the learning resource Learning Environment-Part 2 to help identify issues relating to attending school which showed that he is comfortable with learning tasks and the school environment/expectations but struggled preparing for school.

At the start of the 24/25 academic year school shared concerns with me about his continued anxiety getting to school in the morning. I spoke about this with him and he did not agree and felt like progress had been made. He expressed that he still has “wobbles” coming into school in the morning but was learning to overcome them and weekly check-ins with me were helpful.

In November he was finding school more difficult to attend and had started to experience symptoms of nausea but felt that this was ignored by school which made him very distressed. To support, we explored different interventions that could help to distract him, relating to basketball which was one of his interests. He also identified that loud noises and singing in drama were potential triggers.

Through our continued discussions, he was able to express that he experienced the same feelings of nausea and crying when leaving home to attend basketball training. Although this was something he enjoyed he struggled to leave the family home to attend and participate in the training. He expressed that if school could allow him quiet time to regulate between lessons (colouring-in therapy) he feels he may be able to overcome the worst of his anxiety.

He informed me that he had much older siblings who no longer lived at home and had families of their own, because of this he wasn’t able to see them as often as he would like and was missing them. He asked that I share this with school as he didn’t feel comfortable broaching the subject with mum.

In the new year due to his love of sports, school arranged a daily, morning intervention for him to attend instead of morning registration. A temporary partial timetable was suggested which would increase attendance a little each week until he was accessing school full time.

Following this, each week when I reviewed support with the child he expressed that things were getting better. He started to walk into school unsupported, continued interventions and started to communicate and visit with his best friend again. He was happy to return to school full time at the end of his partial timetable and informed me that he was not having “wobbles” anymore.

By Easter my sessions reduced to fortnightly and on each occasion positive progress had been made towards his engagement in school. He was regularly attending interventions and basketball. He was walking into school independently and was playing with friends in the playground. He still felt that our fortnightly meetings were beneficial to him but acknowledged he was over the worst. He had also inspired his friend to try to re-engage with school.

Challenge

The child masked some of his difficulties when speaking with me and took a little time to build up the trust to speak freely.

Finding an intervention that the child would engage in, took time to unpick likes and dislikes.

It was felt that the absence of the child's best friend due to EBSNA had contributed to his anxiety and learned behaviours.

Successes

By acting on the child's behalf and expressing his views in his words and allowing him the opportunity to discuss his views in a confidential session allowed the child to feel in control of the discussion and targeted support.

School was grateful for receiving the child's views in a clear format to provide a measured response and implement support where the child felt it was needed.

School commented that, "He really has come on leaps and bounds and he has transformed in regard to his self-confidence."

The child felt well supported by the service and listened to.

The child's attendance in the 23/24 academic year was 88% but had increased to 91% by 19/05/25 with only 2 days absence since Christmas 2024.

Conclusion

School continues to host a weekly SENDIASS clinic for students. School reports they continue to see positive results from the service, and it has opened up the lines of communication between children who are struggling and school staff. The school clinic enabled SENDIASS to provide an accessible service to children with SEND. The relationship between the service and the school helped all to learn from the process and adapt their processes to be more child centered. Children feel empowered and have become actively involved in decisions relating to their support needs.

By supporting the child to identify barriers to learning school were able to offer support and interventions that worked for him, which in turn increased attendance.

School has a better relationship with the child, he feels heard and understood.

Supporting a parent with preparing for adulthood at annual review

Case study 2	The parents contacted SENDIASS after being told during annual review meeting that their 18-year-old daughter (for this case study I will call her Jenny) would need to find another setting for the next academic year and could no longer remain for the third year in school as had been expected. At this stage, there had been no meaningful exploration of Jenny's Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) outcomes, and her Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) appeared out of date and no longer fit for purpose. Jenny's parents were concerned that the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) may be ceased prematurely and approached SENDIASS for advice on how to move forward.

Introduction

The case involved Jenny, an 18 year old young person attending a maintained special school. Parents had expected their daughter to remain at the school until the end of Year 14. There had not been exploration of Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) aspirations, needs, outcomes or provision and parents were concerned that the EHCP was no longer fit for purpose.

Both parents and school wanted advice on how to move forward.

Background

Jenny has a diagnosis of Down's Syndrome and a Learning Disability. Her EHCP had
changed very little since primary school and no longer reflected the aspirations or needs of a young adult preparing to leave formal education. Although there had been some discussion around transition, there was no clear assessment of Jenny's goals, barriers to progression, or the support needed to achieve them.

Critically, her plan lacked the "golden thread" described in the SEND Code of Practice – the clear connection between Jenny's aspirations (Section A), her identified needs (Section B), the outcomes she was working towards (Section E), and the provision required to achieve them (Section F). Without this thread, the

EHCP risked being a bureaucratic exercise rather than a meaningful tool to support Jenny's transition into adulthood.

SENDIASS met with the parents and agreed to attend a meeting with the school to explore the concerns. The school was supportive but admitted they lacked understanding of what was required of them and how to contribute effectively to the EHCP. They were also unclear about why EHCPs were being ceased earlier than expected and worried this might affect Jenny.

Both the parents and the school asked SENDIASS to help them ensure Jenny's aspirations were reflected in a meaningful and legally compliant plan.

Aims and objectives

Initially, the aim was to empower Jenny's parents to work collaboratively with the school and Local Authority to develop a clear post-16 pathway, with EHCP outcomes aligned to Jenny's long-term goals.

As discussions progressed, it became evident that Jenny's case was not isolated and other families across the city were in similar situations. SENDIASS therefore extended its objective to develop a Preparing for Adulthood toolkit to help schools and families better understand how to explore outcomes across the four key areas:

- Employment and the world of work
- Independent living
- Community inclusion (avoiding social isolation)
- Health and wellbeing

The toolkit included:

- A 'My Life at 25' proforma to help capture young people's aspirations (Section A
- and E)
- A set of sample questions to help identify needs and barriers (Section B)
- A model plan to illustrate how aspirations, needs and outcomes should be
- meaningfully linked through the golden thread

Approach

Following the initial annual review, Jenny's parents contacted SENDIASS feeling confused and anxious. We offered a virtual meeting to go through Jenny's EHCP and discuss their concerns. It quickly became clear that there had been only superficial exploration of Preparing for Adulthood, and the EHCP lacked clarity and purpose. SENDIASS approached these conversations with care, mindful that the situation was deeply emotional for the family and required sensitivity and reassurance.

We highlighted the absence of the golden thread in Jenny's plan: her aspirations were not informing her identified needs, and the outcomes set were vague and school-based (e.g. "continue to engage in learning") rather than focused on adult

life. Provision still referred to support from staff experienced in working with young children.

Working collaboratively with the family, SENCO and LA caseworker, SENDIASS supported the development of an Amended EHCP that joined these elements together. With parental consent, we guided the SENCO in identifying relevant PfA needs and outcomes; and provided a sample plan to illustrate how to create a legally compliant, aspirational document.

Challenge

The school, parents and caseworker acknowledged that some of the areas of need relating to Lucy and adulthood had not been explored. Until this point, the focus of annual reviews had been on the positives of Jenny's progress and her needs as a young adult had been overlooked or minimised. The parents recognised that a candid exploration of the impact of her intellectual disability on transitioning to the adult world was necessary, albeit upsetting at times.

One of the more sensitive challenges involved identifying needs relating to adult life, such as relationships and reproductive health. These were areas some professionals felt uncomfortable discussing, but they were crucial to address because Jenny had clearly expressed a wish to have a romantic relationship and get married in the future.

It was also clear that her intellectual disability meant that she would need skilled support to be able to develop the skills to manage this with minimal support and maintain her dignity and safety.

SENDIASS was mindful of the parents' emotions and worked with sensitivity to approach these topics with confidence and compassion. We worked hard to ensure the parents felt heard and supported throughout.

Successes

Jenny's Amended EHCP now includes specific and aspirational outcomes directly linked to her long-term goals. The golden thread is now evident throughout the plan, making it a robust and meaningful document that holds the education provider to account.

The toolkit developed during this process was shared with the school to train staff and
improve their understanding of PfA. As a result:

- Staff and parents had a clearer understanding of what "My Life at 25" might look like for Jenny.
- Key barriers to independence and adulthood were identified and recorded.
- EHCP outcomes were meaningful and relevant to Jenny as an individual.
- The next education setting (college) will have clear outcomes to work towards.

The Local Authority subsequently invited SENDIASS to deliver training for SEND Caseworkers on writing person-centred, legally compliant EHCPs — demonstrating the
wider systemic impact of the work.

Conclusion

At the heart of this case was a young woman whose views and aspirations were finally
reflected in a plan tailored to her. Her parents felt supported throughout a difficult and
uncertain period and are now confident in working with the college and Local Authority to ensure Jenny continues to receive the right support.

The parents felt fully supported by SENDIASS during a difficult transition year for their daughter. They reported that they were more confident that going forward, they will be able to work with the college and LA to ensure that Lucy's views are heard and that she will have the required support she needs to make the successful transition to adulthood.

By restoring the golden thread to Jenny's EHCP, SENDIASS helped reframe the plan as a tool for genuine progress – not simply a paper exercise.

Facilitating Trust in Transition: A case study about a parent navigating the process of an EHCP transfer to Newcastle LA.

Case study 3

This case study explores the role of SENDIASS in supporting a parent navigating the process of transferring her child's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) to Newcastle Local Authority (LA). The family's relocation presented challenges, including outdated and incomplete information from the former LA, upcoming age phase transfer to secondary school and mistrust and miscommunication between parent and Newcastle LA, which threatened to disrupt the child's access to appropriate support.

As a SENDIASS officer, impartial information, advice, and support was provided to empower the parent with clear, accurate information about the legal transfer process, her rights, and the responsibilities of the local authorities involved. Through empathetic listening and consistent support, trust was gradually rebuilt between the parent and professionals. Facilitating constructive communication helped bridge misunderstandings and fostered collaborative dialogue, ensuring the child's needs remained central.

Key successes included the timely and lawful transfer of the EHCP, the parent's increased knowledge about her daughter's EHCP and improved relationships with the receiving local authority. This case study highlights the importance of impartiality when advocating for families during transitions, promoting transparency, and safeguarding the child's educational continuity.

Introduction

This case study examines the support provided by SENDIASS to a parent relocating with her Year 5 child who has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). It focuses on navigating the transfer of the EHCP to Newcastle Local Authority—a process complicated by the communication breakdown between the family and professionals. The study highlights how impartial advice, clear communication, and advocacy helped build trust, empower the parent, and ensure the child's needs remained at the center of decision-making. It also reflects on the

challenges faced, successes achieved, and lessons learned throughout the transition.

Background

The family's move into Newcastle Local Authority necessitated a transfer of the child's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). An age-phase transfer review of the EHCP had been started in the previous LA but not completed. The plan was not a true reflection of the child's needs and Newcastle LA were working with outdated and incomplete information.

When parent first contacted SENDIASS, communication with Newcastle LA had become emotionally charged and she described feeling unheard and overwhelmed during this transition process. She had assumed that her daughter would be placed in a 'specialist Autism unit' like her previous setting but this hadn't happened. Issues around communication on both sides and inconsistent information led to a deep mistrust of professionals. This breakdown in trust was preventing collaborative working, delaying provision, and increasing the emotional distress of both the parent and child.

Parent needed access to impartial, unbiased support to enable her to make informed decisions and understand her rights.

Aims and objectives

- To rebuild trust and enable constructive communication between the family and professionals. Act as a neutral bridge to facilitate respectful communication.
- Help the parent feel heard, included, and confident in expressing their views, wishes, and feelings.
- To empower the parent with clear, impartial information and advice to enable her to make informed decisions regarding her child's EHCP transition and the upcoming age phase transfer to secondary school. education.
- Ensure all processes related to the EHCP transfer and age phase transfer are carried out lawfully and transparently, advocating for fairness and timeliness.

<u>Approach</u>

I needed to build trust through empathy and consistency. I acknowledged the parent's anxieties and past negative experiences without judgement and provided a consistent point of contact, ensuring the parent felt heard, respected, and not alone in navigating the system.

I offered accessible, jargon-free explanations of the EHCP transfer process. This included helping the parent understand the reason that her daughter was placed in a mainstream school without an Additional Resource Provision (ARP). I explained that the LA has a duty to provide all the special educational provision specified in Section F of the EHCP. Due to outdated information and an incomplete EHCP, there wasn't evidence at this stage that reflected the need for a specialist provision.

I helped bridge communication gaps between the parent and professionals, offering support before, during, and after meetings. When tensions were high, I supported respectful dialogue by reframing concerns, clarifying misunderstandings, and keeping the focus on her daughter's needs. I supported the parent to develop her own voice, helping her prepare for meetings, frame their concerns, and express their views clearly and confidently.

Throughout the case, I maintained professional boundaries, reflected regularly on my role and impact, and sought to learn from the challenges and successes. I remained solution-focused, even when systems were strained, and sought to improve practice by modelling respectful, informed engagement.

Challenges

Parental mistrust and emotional distress

- The parent was highly anxious, frustrated and disillusioned due to negative experiences with professionals. This made it difficult to build rapport, manage expectations and encourage collaboration with the new local authority. Active listening, empathy, and a consistent, calm approach helped build trust over time.

Conflicting information from professionals

- The family had received inconsistent advice from different local authorities, schools, and professionals. This led to confusion and undermined confidence in the system — increasing reliance on impartial guidance. My role was crucial in fact-checking, clarifying legal entitlements, and correcting misconceptions.

Outdated and incomplete information from previous Local Authority.

- The child was expected to join a mainstream year 6 class which parent felt was unsuitable, this caused delays in her starting school. With parent's permission I proactively liaised with the Newcastle school and LA. A plan was put in place for her daughter to start school with support and for the EHCP to be updated ASAP. signposted escalation routes and helped the parent frame queries and complaints constructively.

Pressure to take sides or advocate directly

- The parent felt mistreated and expected me to "fight their corner." This could have blurred the lines between impartial support and direct advocacy. I reinforced my role as impartial while supporting the parent to self-advocate effectively.

Complex Family Needs Beyond EHCP

- Family have a complex background with social and emotional factors which may influence the parent's ability to engage. These wider needs slowed progress as broader multi-agency support was required. The family were signposted to Early help and were allocated a Family Partner.

Successes

Rebuilding trust with the parent

- The parent felt listened to, respected, and more confident navigating the system. Trust in professionals is beginning to rebuild, parent feels less isolated and more empowered to engage constructively.

Accurate information replaces misinformation

- The parent understands their rights and what to expect from the new LA. This reduces anxiety and enables informed decision-making.

Improved communication between the parent and Local Authority

- Through facilitation, the parent was able to engage in respectful, productive dialogue. Misunderstandings were clarified, and the LA became more responsive to the family's needs and concerns.

When asked about her experience with SENDIASS, parent described it as:

'life changing for the better, if it wasn't for you, it wouldn't have been possible. Without you, my daughter would have been going to a mainstream school which would have been a disaster.'

Conclusion

What was achieved?

- SENDIASS provided balanced, non-judgmental information and guidance, even when the parent was emotional or mistrustful. This created a safe, reliable space for the parent to seek help, enabling trust to form and encouraging engagement with professionals.
- SENDIASS broke down the legal EHCP transfer and age phase transfer processes, explaining roles, timelines, and rights, and corrected misinformation. This reduced confusion and anxiety, helped the parent make informed choices, and allowed professionals to work from the same understanding.
- SENDIASS supported the parent to prepare for meetings, express their views clearly, and participate confidently in decision-making. This support shifted from dependency to empowerment, ensuring the parent's voice was central in the process.
- SENDIASS helped reframe concerns, diffuse tension, and ensure respectful dialogue between the parent and professionals. This helped create a more collaborative atmosphere, which was critical when previous communication had broken down.

- By continuously bringing the focus back to the child's needs, wellbeing, and rights, SENDIASS ensured that all actions were aligned with the child's best interests.
- By ensuring interactions between school and LA staff were professional and constructive tone this helped to avoid defensiveness, encouraged openness, and allowed SENDIASS to act as a credible, solution-focused intermediary.

Potential Future Benefits

- The parent is now more informed and empowered to self-advocate in future situations (e.g. EHCP reviews, school transitions, or disagreements).
- Improved educational stability for her daughter.
- A more open, respectful relationship has been established between the parent and professionals in the new LA. Future engagement (e.g. reviews, provision discussions) is more likely.

Lessons Learned

- Building Trust Takes Time, Consistency, and Compassion.
- Parents sometimes view impartiality as "not being on their side." It's essential to communicate the value of impartiality and how it empowers them to make their own informed choices.
- Misinformation can escalate conflict — accurate information can defuse it.
- In emotionally charged situations, there's a risk of being pulled into advocacy for the parent rather than empowering them. Staying impartial, while still being supportive protects the integrity of the SENDIASS role and strengthens long-term trust on both sides.

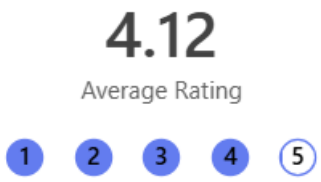
Service feedback

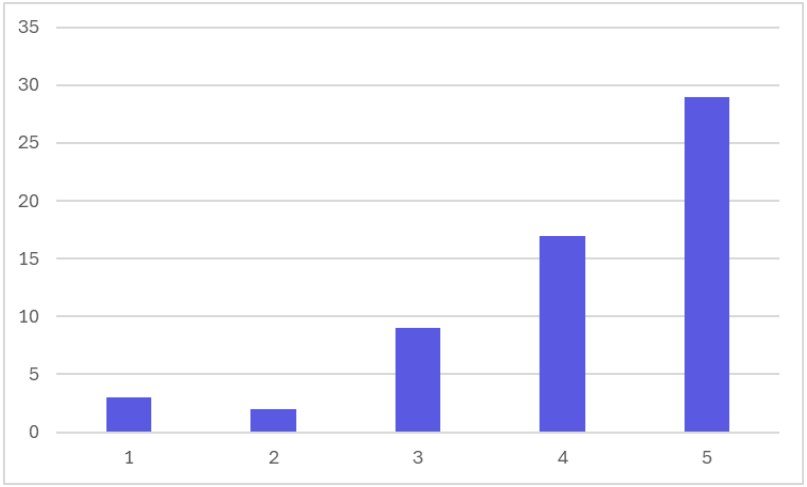
The Council for Disabled Children (CDC) set questions for all SENDIAS Services to use to gather feedback about the service. Below are the questions we asked, and the responses gathered. We have kept the feedback separate for parents and carers, children and young people as the way in which they access the service and the level of support they receive differs. The feedback questions were sent out via email to everyone who has accessed the service this year, the below charts are from all of the responses we received.

1. How easy was it to get in touch with Newcastle SENDIASS?

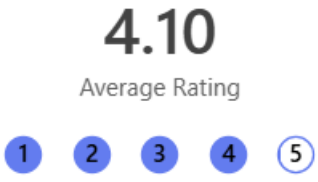
1 - not very easy at all, to 5 - very easy

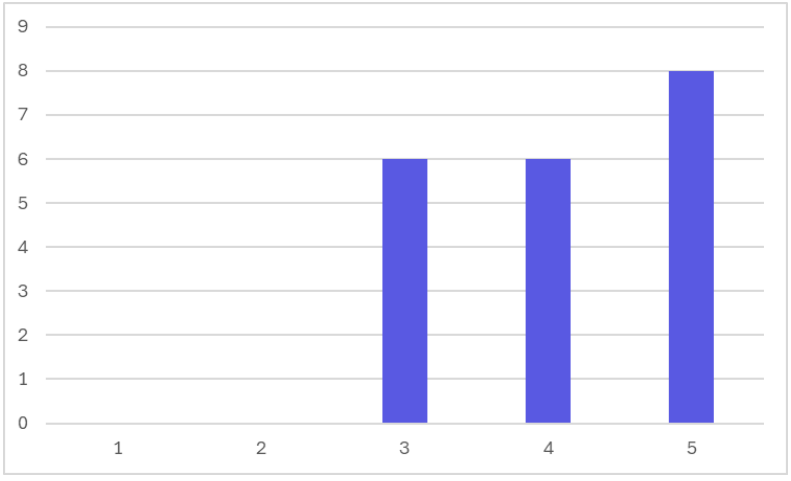
Parents and carers





Children and young people





2. How helpful was the information, advice and support that we gave you?

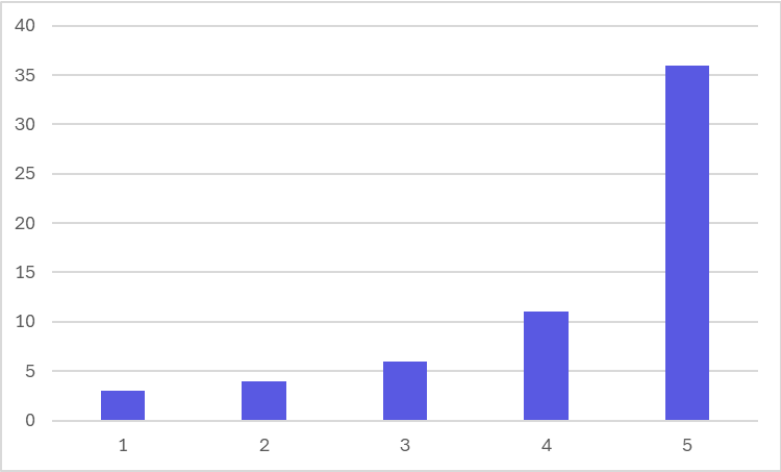
1 - not very helpful, to 5 - very helpful

Parents and carers

4.22

Average Rating

1 2 3 4 5

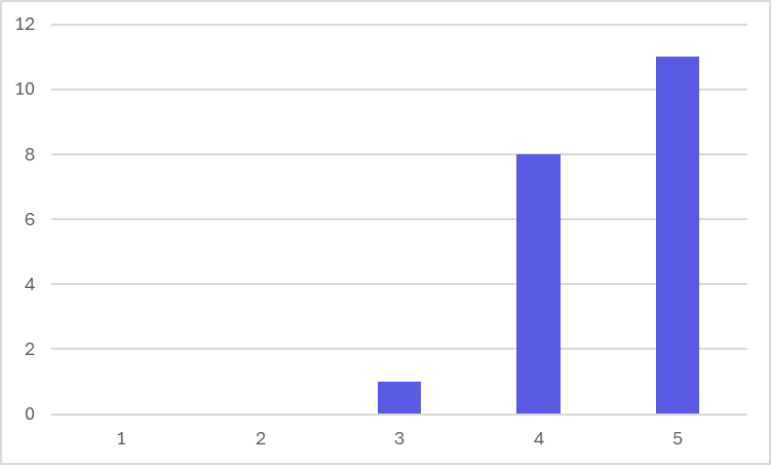


Children and young people

4.50

Average Rating

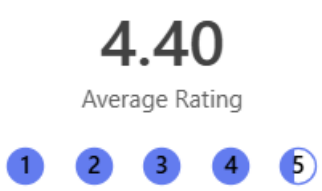
1 2 3 4 5

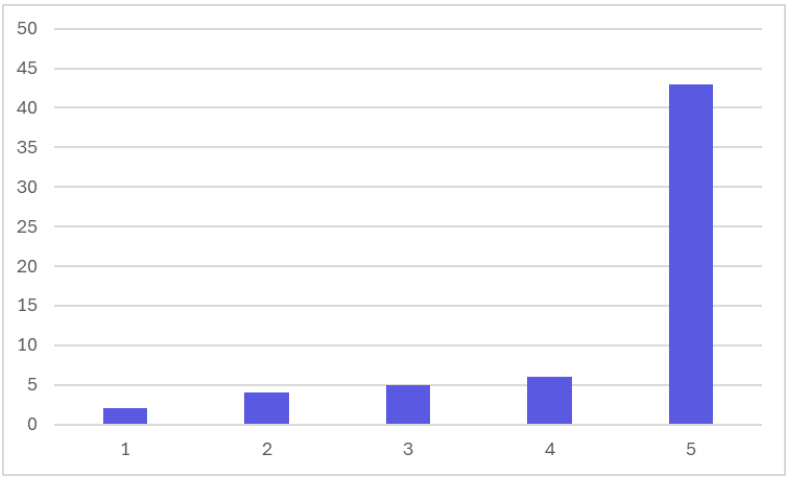


3. How neutral, fair and unbiased?

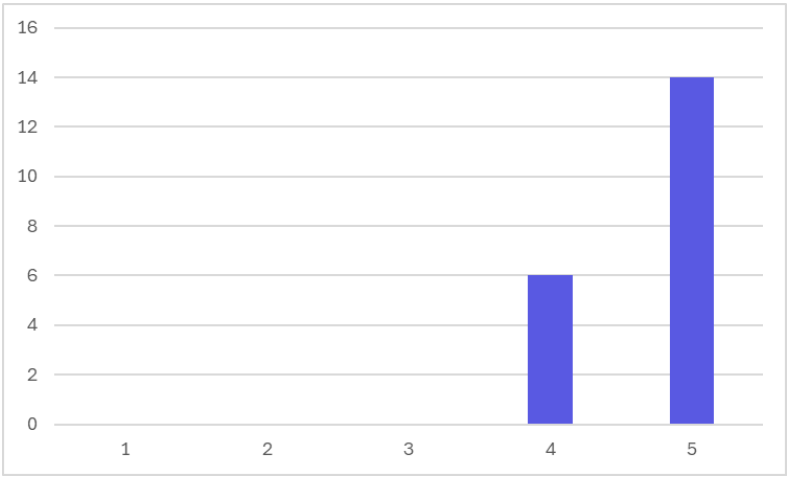
1 - not very neutral, to 5 - very neutral

Parents and carers





Children and young people



4. What difference do you think SENDIASS has made for you?

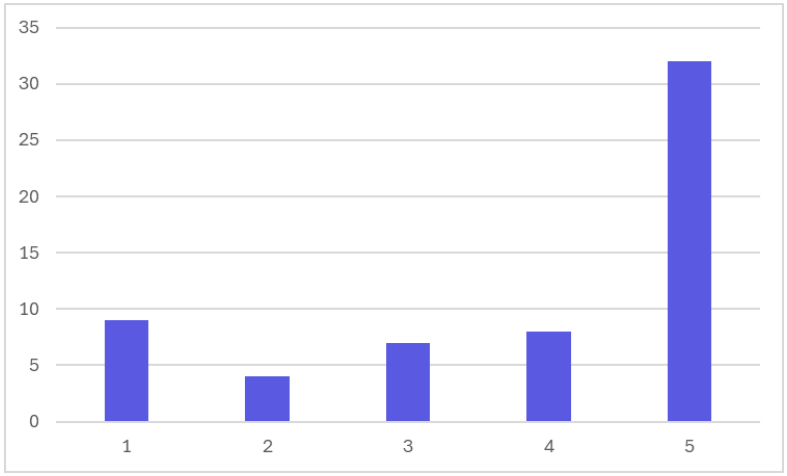
1 - no difference, to 5 - a great deal of difference

Parents and carers

3.83

Average Rating

1 2 3 4 5

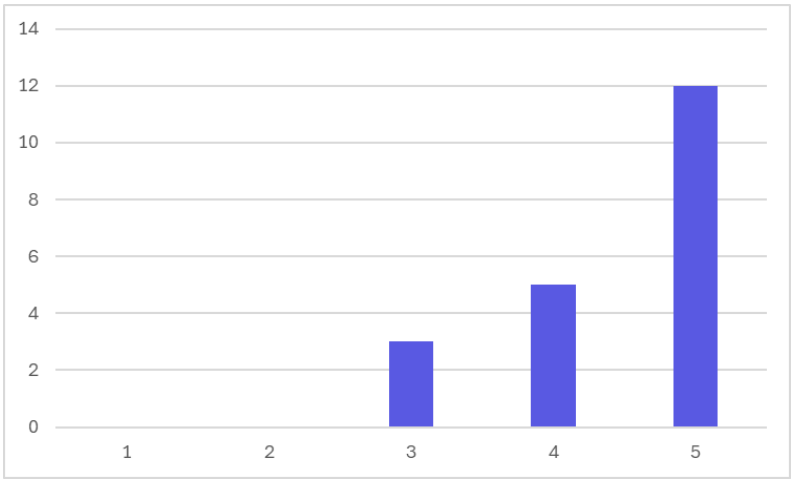


Children and young people

4.45

Average Rating

1 2 3 4 5



5. Overall how satisfied were you with the service we gave?

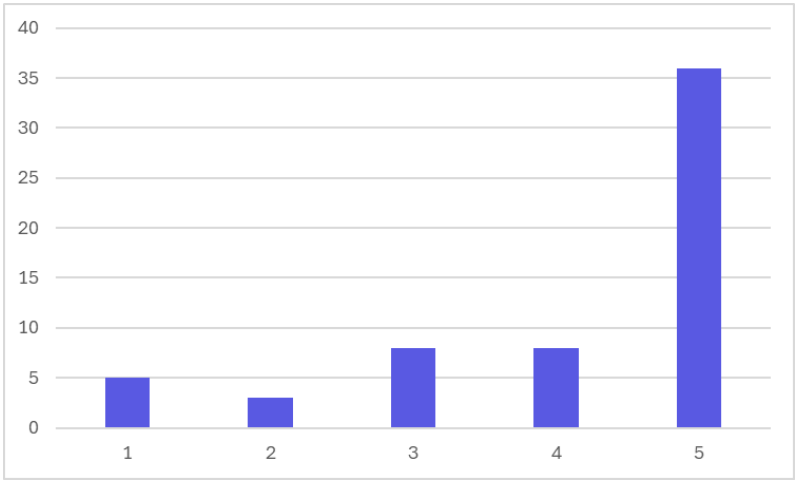
1 - not very satisfied, to 5 - very satisfied

Parents and carers

4.12

Average Rating

1 2 3 4 5

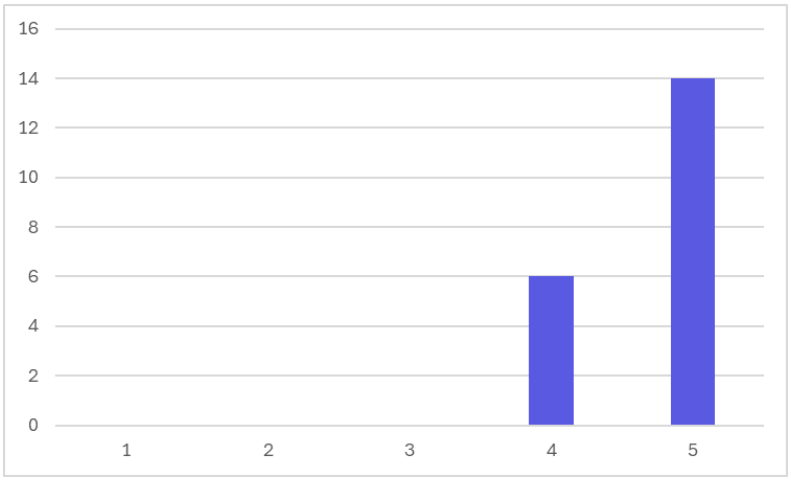


Children and young people

4.70

Average Rating

1 2 3 4 5



6. How likely is it that you would recommend our service to others?

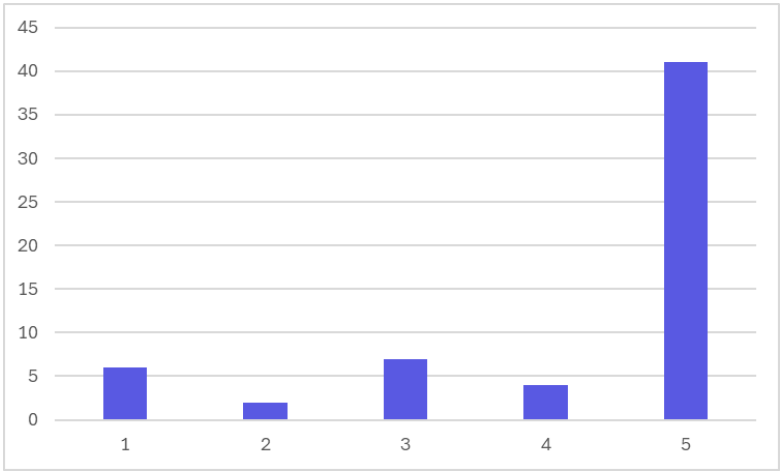
1 - not very likely, to 5 - very likely

Parents and carers

4.20

Average Rating

1 2 3 4 5

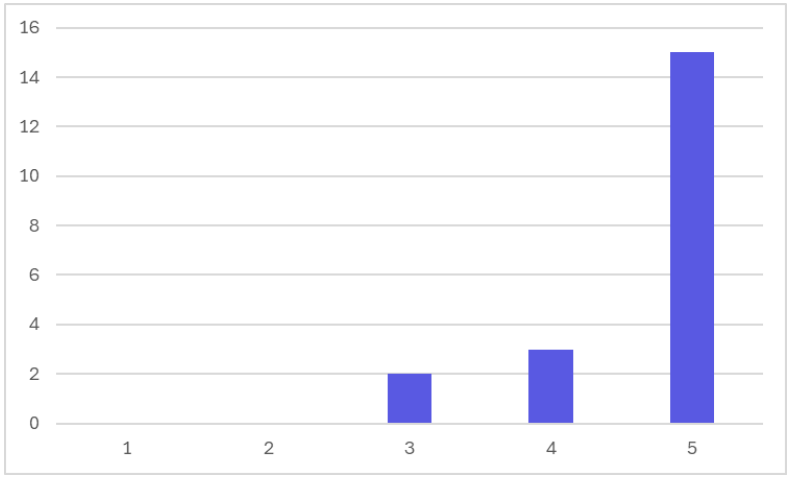


Children and young people

4.65

Average Rating

1 2 3 4 5



What is interesting from the feedback scores is that while the average score for parents and carers for the difference we made was 3.83, the average score for if

they would recommend the service to others was 4.2. This is also reflected on a national level. The reason we are seeing this we believe is due to the current state of SEND provision. There is a lack of specialist places and often people come to SENDIASS for help to secure a place. We can support parents through the process and how to challenge decisions via the tribunal, but ultimately, we are not responsible for decisions or able to change them which is why parents feel that their situation is unchanged. For children and young people, they had an average score of 4.45 for the difference we made. This shows us that children and young people seeking advice and support from the service saw a real difference. Our feedback shows us that a lot of the children who have accessed the service feel for the first time that they have been listened to and understood.

As a service people come to us when they are incredibly frustrated, often upset and angry. We listen to people and offer them information and advice, but we cannot fix their situation. Despite this the service is highly regarded by those who use it and we continue to receive great feedback.

What people have to say about the service…

"Excellent. Would use again. 10/10"

Child

"What is an awful processes and stressful time for families SENDIASS was phenomenal throughout they were informative, unbiased, trustworthy and professional. I really will never forget how they were, I felt supported. They are so knowledgeable."

Parent

"Really nice and gives amazing support."

Young person

"Really helpful service that gave me advise when I didn't know where else to turn. They were extremely knowledgeable and were able to guide me on which areas of the EHCP were reasonable and which areas I could push back on for more detail."

Parent

"It was really great and helped me. Best people ever!"

Child

"I got good recommendations on things to try and felt like I could speak my mind when talking"

Young person

"SENDIASS Have made a massive difference in our lives. I find myself recommending SEDNIASS on the daily to any parent/carers struggling.

Brilliant service with excellent information and advice. They really know their stuff."

Parent

"Sendiass has been a god send to my son and I over the years, they always get back in touch really quickly. A wealth of knowledge

Compassionate (many times I have phoned very upset and distressed). They have attended school meetings, helped with putting strategies in place. I honestly don't know what I would do without them.

Brilliant service. It's been a lifesaver."

Parent

"Great help to understand how schools can and should make reasonable adjustments for children with additional needs this was a massive help for my child"

Parent

Future Developments

Service Capacity and sustainability

The demand for SENDIASS is growing year on year so for sustainability we have to look for different approaches. Over the last year the service has joined up with Barnardo's and the Parent carer forum with a view to offer volunteer support when parents need help recording their views onto forms. We have established good working relationships with both agencies and planned for how this support can be utilised to support the service. Over the next year it is a priority to take this development to the next level, so the service is able to offer the level of support that our clients need. It is so important to us that all parents and carers feel that they are included in decisions about their children and have the means and ability to express their views.

Accessibility

SENDIASS continues to have the priority to set up outreach clinics for non – English speaking families and hard to reach communities. Over the last year we have made connections with different teams providing support for asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants and plan to join an event for our hard-to-reach communities over the summer. Over the next academic year we want to increase our reach into minority communities and develop the service to be fully accessible and inclusive.

Information and training

SENDIASS have attended different team's meetings and run training seminars over the last year. This upskills the workforce in other service, which helps them to provide the correct information to a much wider audience without placing additional demand on the service. We will continue to provide this as part of our service offer as we have seen a reduction in low level casework and signposting requests demonstrating this approach helps manage the increasing demand. For the next year our priority is to develop and build a catalogue of information videos. The hope is that it will make all of the information accessible to all, whilst also helping with the demand as individuals will be able to access information without needing to contact the phone line.

Newcastle SENDIASS

0191 211 6255

SENDIASSadmin@Newcastle.gov.uk

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