

Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities – Engagement and Impact

Occupational therapy and autism pilot

Children and families have told us that they are dissatisfied that there is no NHS commissioned service which provides interventions/support for children with autism (who do not have a learning disability) after the age of 11 years old. This gap in service is being addressed on a wider Lancashire and south Cumbria basis and an all age learning disability and/or autism service specification is being developed.

In the interim, Morecambe Bay CCG commissioned a small pilot with the south Cumbria Occupational Therapy service to better meet the mental health and emotional wellbeing needs of children with autism aged 11 or over (who do not have a learning disability) and are at risk of hospital admission. While these children are not excluded from accessing mental health services, talking therapies are not always appropriate or effective for individuals with autism due to the difficulties they experience.

Although these children had complex needs, they benefitted from the pilot and their daily ability to carry out activities improved, their outcomes improved and families better understood their child's needs and how they could help to meet them.

Learning disability early intervention pilot

Due to resource constraints, the NHS tends to commission services that meet children's needs rather than anticipating or preventing the need from arising in the first place. Families have told us that early intervention is crucial with regards to ensuring the health and wellbeing of their children and for preventing crisis arising later on.

Morecambe Bay CCG commissioned a small, evidence based pilot in south Cumbria which was designed to help families better understand and support their young children (0-5 years old) with learning disabilities, in order to help prevent instances of behaviour that challenges when the child is older. The E-PatS (Early Positive Approaches to Support) is an evidence based programme and as part of the pilot, parent/carers were trained to co-deliver it alongside Mencap and the Learning Disability team. Families found the programme very helpful and the majority of parents reported improvements in understanding their child's behaviour, managing their child's behaviour and coping as a family.

SEND improvement joint working with Cumbria Local Authority

Following the publication of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) inspection report, Morecambe Bay CCG has been closely working with Cumbria Local Authority to ensure that families' voices are valued, understood and drive the SEND improvement programme.

A number of parent/carer representatives are now contributing to each of the six multi agency Working Groups that have been set up and are responsible for ensuring progress against the Written Statement of Action. There is also a wider Parent/Carer Reference Group which further helps to shape the SEND improvement programme and engagement strategy. These parent/carer groups have received some training from an independent advocacy groups which has helped them to maximise their engagement and contribution.

A number of questionnaires have been sent out to families who have children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) or those who are on Special Educational Needs (SEN) support to understand their views and priorities for improvement. Almost 1,000 responses have been received from parents/carers and 300 responses have been received from children and young people across Cumbria. This information is in the process of being analysed and summarised.

Two SEND engagement conferences have been planned in south Cumbria in January 2020 where parents and carers can speak with commissioners and professionals to give their views about the improvement work that is going on and how to improve services. Morecambe Bay CCG is also starting to make links with smaller parent/carer groups to have more personal and in depth conversations with families about their experience and how to improve services.

The result of all this engagement will inform service improvement via the Cumbria wide SEND improvement programme and we will be able to demonstrate the changes that have been made as a result of the feedback we have received.