 

 **Service Outline for the West Sussex Independent Support Service**

1. **What is Independent Support?**

The Independent Supporter service, run by Amaze in West Sussex, has been commissioned by the Department for Education. The Independent Supporters will provide support for families who have a child or young person with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) as they go through the process of a statutory assessment. This may or may not result in an Education Health, Care (EHC) plan being produced at the end.

The Independent Support (IS) service is available for both a young person with Special Educational Needs (SEN) aged 16-25 and parents/carers of children with SEN.

The role of the Independent Supporter is:-

* To work with the parent/carer or young person throughout the EHC assessment and planning process;
	+ either working with parents/carers or the young person while their Statement of SEN is transferred to an EHC plan;
	+ or working with parents/carers whose child is being assessed for an EHC plan for the first time
	+ and/or young people (and their parents/carers) who are coming up to school leaving age and would have had a Learning Disability Assessment under the old system;
* Help parents/carers and young people contribute their views and make choices or give preferences at key points in the process;
* Provide information for parents/carers and young people on Personal Budgets;
* Signpost parents/carers and young people to local information especially the Local Offer and the Information, Advice and Support Services provided by the Parent Partnership Service), when the issue is outside the remit of the Independent Supporter.
1. **Who needs Independent Support?**

The aim is to support those families who may not otherwise be able to fully and confidently engage in this process.

Independent Supporters are recruited locally and have completed nationally accredited training including legal training on the new Children and Families Act 2014 and SEND Code of Practice.

 West Sussex has approximately 3,500 statements. There will be a large number of families going through the process of transferring these statements into EHC plans in the next two years alongside those families who are new to the process.

1. **Levels of Independent Support Service**

The Independent Supporter service will not be able to support all these families and if demand exceeds our capacity at any given time we will offer different levels of service depending on the family’s circumstances.

Making a decision about the service we offer an individual parent/carer or young person involves a number of considerations. The Independent Support team in West Sussex will aim to be transparent and open with families about how they make these decisions.

The Independent Supporter service can be offered at different levels and our supporters will routinely assess the level of service we can offer which could be:

* Support over the phone or by email
* Face to face meetings with a parent/carer or young person.

All parents/carers will be able to receive more detailed information, advice and support (IAS) via the Parent Partnership Service in West Sussex where trained advisers will provide details over the phone about the new SEND reforms including the new EHCP process and other matters which a family might want to know about e.g. the Local Offer and Personal Budgets.

In determining the level of service we can offer a parent/carer or young person consideration will be given to issues affecting the family, the impact on the child /young person and the family, empowerment of families for the future, access to other sources of support, and the effectiveness of our input. These criteria are outlined in more detail in the Amaze Level of Service Policy.

1. **Making a referral to the Independent Supporter service?**

The IS service is an “opt in” service; we work with families at their request and will consider whether any parent/carer or young person asking for Independent Support will benefit from the service. Families can make referrals by phoning 07483 111658 or, if they prefer to make initial contact in writing, by emailing independentsupportWSx@amazebrighton.org.uk .

In order to provide support to those families in most need of an Independent Supporter we will also be taking referrals from the SEN case worker team and school SENCOs who may know the family and their circumstances well. Other practitioners involved with the family such as their social worker or educational psychologist may identify a need for additional support for the family as they go through the new process and we will also consider referrals from them.

If it is decided that a family might benefit from a referral to the Independent Support Service we would encourage them to make contact directly to the Independent Support Service so they can speak to one of the IS team. Alternatively they may prefer for a practitioner working with them to complete a referral form for example because:

* It avoids a barrier to the parent/carer or young person taking up our service e.g. English is an additional language or they are anxious about contacting new services.
* It gives the parent a more effective and supported experience because they have just explained their situation to the referring practitioner and should not have to repeat it immediately to the IS service.

All referrals will be considered on an individual basis to ensure that they will benefit from the service we are able to offer. With the permission of the parent/carer or young person it may be necessary to contact other practitioners working with the family at this time to ensure that Independent Support is the most appropriate service to provide the family with support.

Referrals should be sent to independentsupportWSx@amazebrighton.org.uk and these will be prioritised on the basis of need and time frame within the assessment process. The information we receive will help us to allocate the IS worker from the team whose expertise will enable them to best support the individual family. Completing the referral form available on the Amaze website (amazebrighton.org.uk) as fully as possible will help us make the right allocation.

1. **Understanding more about the IS service**
2. **New Plans**

As a family goes through the 20 week assessment process the involvement of the Independent Supporter will vary from week to week. The level of involvement that the Independent Supporter will be able to offer the family will depend on the individual needs of the family. Some may need brief phone advice and others will need ongoing one to one support over the 20 weeks but we have identified key points when we are likely to need to offer support.

During the first 6 weeks when the Local Authority is deciding whether or not to go ahead with the statutory assessment, the IS worker will contact the family (usually by phone) to identify the level of support they may require should the assessment proceed. This is an opportunity to introduce the family to the Local Offer on the council website and to other services and courses.

If it is decided that a child or young person is not eligible for a plan then we will transfer the case to the IAS service, if necessary, where support can be offered to the family.

If it is decided to go ahead with the statutory assessment the Independent Supporter will contact the parents/carers and/or the young person to explain the statutory process and what they can expect at each stage. They will help the family prepare by going through the paper work and most importantly helping them work on their contribution (i.e. for sections A and B of the plan). They will also help the family or young person identify some aspirations and outcomes for the young person and explain more about the option of a personal budget.

Working in partnership with the SEN Caseworker, the Independent Supporter may help facilitate the communication of other agencies involved with the family to ensure that all the relevant information is gathered to be included in the plan. If a meeting is held at week 14, the Independent Supporter will support the parent/carer or young person understand the purpose of the meeting and participate fully. When the Local Authority issues the draft plan, the Independent Supporter will help the parent/carer or young person respond to this and work with them to identify any changes they wish to see made to the draft plan. It is at this time that the parent/carer or young person can name the school or college they wish the child or young person to attend and the Independent Supporter can support them in this process.

The Independent Supporter will remain as the named contact throughout the 20 weeks and will refer the family on to the IAS if it is felt that the family will require ongoing support following the 20 weeks.

1. **Transfer plans**

Not all families that the Independent Supporter works with will be new families into the system. Independent Supporters can also support families whose children are transferring from having a Statement of Special Educational needs to a new EHC plan.

West Sussex County Council has produced a Proposed Transfer Sequence for Statements and LDAs. It states that children and young people with a Statement of SEN who are currently Pre School, Reception or Years 2, 6, 11 and 14 will have their statements transferred over to a new plan during the first academic year from September 2014. Any plans that were written as part of the pathfinder pilot are not ‘statutory’ (or legally binding) under the new regulations and will also need to be transferred to a new plan format during that first year.

If there are several families going through this transfer process in one school then we can offer an Independent Supporter to meet them as a group at the school. The IS will be able to explain the new process, help families understand what happens at each stage; introduce the Local Offer and signpost other services such as the IAS Service.

As with new EHC plans, the level of support that a parent/carer or young person needs with a transfer will vary but we have identified key points when support may be needed. The transfer from a statement will involve a transfer review which will usually happen at the time of the child or young person’s annual review. The Independent Supporter will arrange to meet with the family before this to explain the process, help them write their contribution (i.e. for sections A and B), help them to think of outcomes and explain the option of the personal budget to them. Working in partnership with the SEN Case Worker, the Independent Supporter will help facilitate the communication of other agencies involved with the family to ensure that all the relevant information is gathered to be included in the plan.

If the family wishes the Independent Supporter to be present at the annual review meeting we will attend where possible if this forms a useful part of an active process of casework.

Following the transfer review the Independent Supporter will help the family review the draft plan and help them suggest any changes they may want to be made. If the plan is issued at the time of transfer between schools or college the Independent Supporter may support the family or young person in naming the school for the child or young person.

The Independent Supporter will remain as the named contact throughout the transfer process and will refer them to the IAS if it is felt that the family will require ongoing support following the transfer.

1. **Evaluation and reporting on the Independent Support service**

There is a schedule for reporting on the Independent Support service by Amaze to the DfE via CDC. This includes outputs such as

* number of Independent Supporters recruited and trained
* number of referrals received
* number of parents/carers and young people who have been provided with support
* numbers of EHC plans developed and completed with Independent Support involvement

It also includes evidence of collaboration with other stakeholders; promotion of the service and the appropriate supervision and monitoring of staff to ensure a high quality service. Amaze will be collecting feedback from all service users and other stakeholders, and will evaluate the outcomes achieved by the Independent Support service.

1. **Key Definitions**

**EHCP** Education, Health, Care Plan replacing the traditional statement will focus more on outcomes and be more holistic and person centred.

**Child** any person aged between 0 and 16

**Young Person** a person who is between the ages of 16 and 25

**CWO** Case Work Officer works for the Local Authority and coordinates the statutory assessment process in the council.

**IASS** Information, Advice and Support Service formerly the Parent Partnership Service. This now will provide information about issues concerning education, health and social care for both parents and young people up to the age of 25.