

family
action

WESAIL

Providing impartial SEND advice and support to the families of Wakefield

WESAIL Impact Report 2023 - 2024

Early Support Advice
Information and
Liaison Service

Wakefield
Wesail

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“Would like to say a massive thank you... the information she provided has been really useful and was exactly what we needed.”

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Introduction

Family Action is an award-winning national charity working from the heart of local communities to support people through change, challenge and crisis. We protect children, support young people and offer direct, practical help to families. It's what we've done for over 150 years. We believe no one should be defined by their circumstances and work to provide innovative and effective services, supporting over 60,000 of the UK's most vulnerable families through a network of national programmes, financial grants and over 200 community-based services.

WESAIL are a statutory service jointly funded by Wakefield Council and Wakefield Integrated Care Board. The service is available to parents/carers of a child or a young person, who has, or may have, Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) aged 0-25 years who are living within the Wakefield District.

There is a statutory requirement for local authorities to provide impartial information and advice regarding SEND law to parents/carers through SENDIAS services and also to provide information on local services for SEND via the Local Offer. These services are provided by WESAIL and enable families to navigate the complexities of SEND services to achieve the best outcomes for their children.

The aim of our service is that parents, carers, children and young people are supported to express and understand their SEND needs enabling them to fulfil their aspirations.

What we deliver

WESAIL deliver 3 service elements to support Wakefield families.

We are staffed by a team of 6: Service Manager, Local Offer & administrator, Senior SENDIASS Officer, 3 Part-time SENDIASS Officers.

WESAIL has been delivered by Family Action for 2 years. This year has seen a continued increase in demand for the service and necessitated significant operation changes to ensure families receive the support they need, when they require it, without long waiting times. We believe the changes we have made this year have improved outcomes for our service users significantly.

WESAIL deliver 3 service elements to support Wakefield families:

- 1. Special Educational Need and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Services (SENDIASS)**
- 2. Pre and Plus Working Support**
- 3. Wakefield's Local Offer**

Duty line

The duty line is open 51 weeks a year. Callers to the duty line are encouraged to leave a message or to send an email. SENDIASS officers return contacts within the contracted time of 72 hours although many calls are responded to within 24 hours. For the majority of our enquiries, support can be given via duty. However, for some families a more detailed piece of work is required, and casework is undertaken.

Duty outputs

In 2023–24 we received 1780 initial enquiries (IE), an increase of 10% compared to 2022–23:

- 54% of contacts were by email with 46% made by phone
- 64% of enquires were completed following duty line support.
- 13% (272) required further support and were registered for further casework.
- The remaining 23% required signposting to other services or were uncontactable.
- 53% of enquiries related to education. Other reasons for calls include exclusion, assessment, EHC plans and placement provisions.
- WESAIL have supported 3 steering group sessions this year which have been consistently attended by 9 individuals, 4 of whom are parents. This represents excellent engagement from the local community compared to others across the region.
- In March 2024, Wakefield Council were subject to a SEND inspection. Officers from WESAIL presented information to the inspectors as part of this process in relation to SENDIAS and the Local Offer.
- WESAIL work in partnership with Wakefield Council and the ICB and regularly feedback thematic concerns which have been identified by our service users. This enables changes to be made in local provisions in line with the needs of the community.



**In 2023–24 we received 1780 initial enquiries (IE),
an increase of 10% compared to 2022–23**

What our services users wanted to talk to us about – a comparison with last year:

	22-23	23-24
Information on other services	18%	18%
Emotionally Based School avoidance	8%	19%
Advice on EHCP or My Support Pla	21%	17%
Support to understand my child's SEND	12%	16%
Referral to another service	9%	7%
Support for pending meeting	6%	5%
Advice on benefits and entitlements	3%	5%
Exclusion	3%	5%
Information on transitions	6%	4%
Other	5%	2%
Appeals or mediation	9%	3%

It is interesting to note the huge increase in parents/carers contacting the service to discuss Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) issues.

Anecdotal evidence from service users suggests the following reason for this increase:

- Post covid/lockdown continuation of challenges for children and young people
- Lack of appropriate and specialist places with CYP remaining in mainstream where needs are not being met appropriately.
- Staffing challenges leading to lack of appropriate reasonable adjustments
- More promotion and wider understanding of EBSA meaning it is discussed/raised more.
- Waiting times for services and diagnostic pathways

Interventions/Case Work

2023-24 has brought a new way of working for the team. Faced with ever-increasing demands and waiting times, the team developed the 123 approach (see next page).



Our new '123 service delivery approach' was initiated in August and by October there were no waiting lists and families could access the support they needed from us, when they needed it. This represents a significant improvement over the year.

The 123 Approach

If a duty officer identifies that further support is required than is possible via duty, an intervention is offered. Examples of interventions completed with families are: attendance at an Early Annual review; reintegration meetings; mediations; support to run through sections of the EHCP.

The 123 approach offers:

1. Pre and post support for meeting.

2. Virtual attendance.

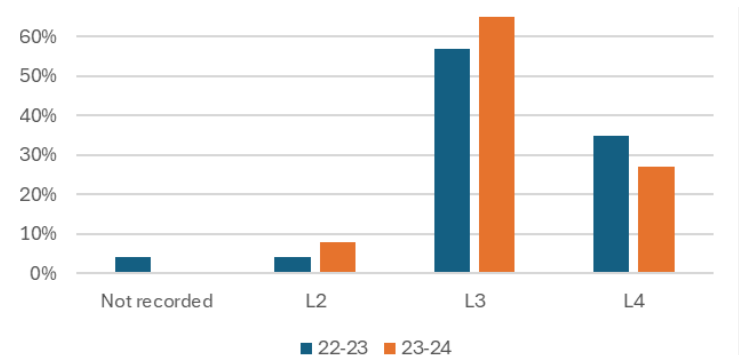
3. In person attendance to meet needs of service user.

- Goals are set for the piece of work which are identified with families.
- In a contrast to previous delivery, cases are closed when goals have been achieved. However, we recognise that families often need our support again with a new piece of work, or a continuation of the old work. Once registered, families have easy access to further support via our duty line and further interventions if required.
- We mainly provide support via email, virtually or telephone, not face to face unless this is completely necessary.
- Our main aim is to empower service users to self-advocate. Our ambition is to enable our families to feel confident to speak for themselves

Outputs

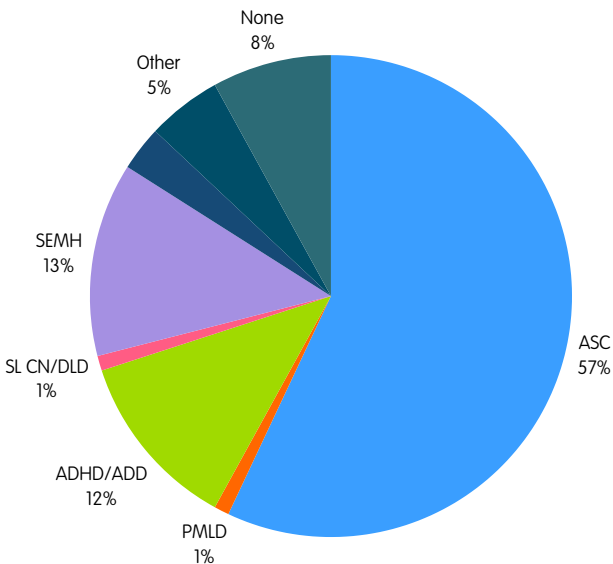
- 237 casework interventions with specific families were completed this year.
- At the end of quarter 1 (June 2023), waiting times were increasing: the longest wait was 25 weeks with 55 families waiting for support. Our new '123 service delivery approach' was initiated in August and by October there were no waiting lists and families could access the support they needed from us, when they needed it. This represents a significant improvement over the year.
- This year, 53% of our casework was with families new to WESAIL. The remaining 47% have received support from us in the past.

Case work by intervention level - comparison 2022-'23 and 2023-'24.

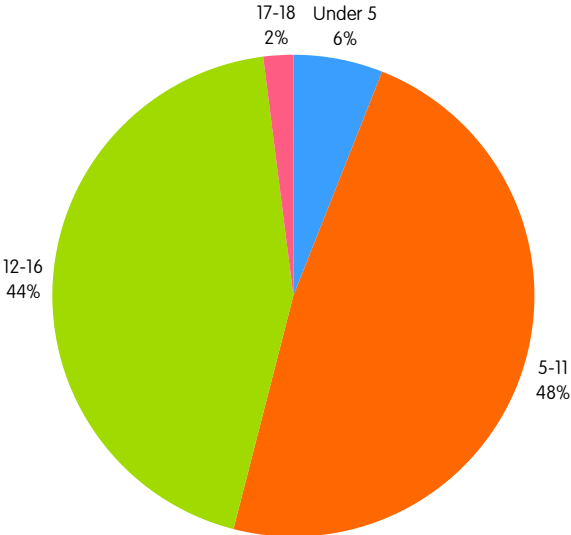


Who our Service supports

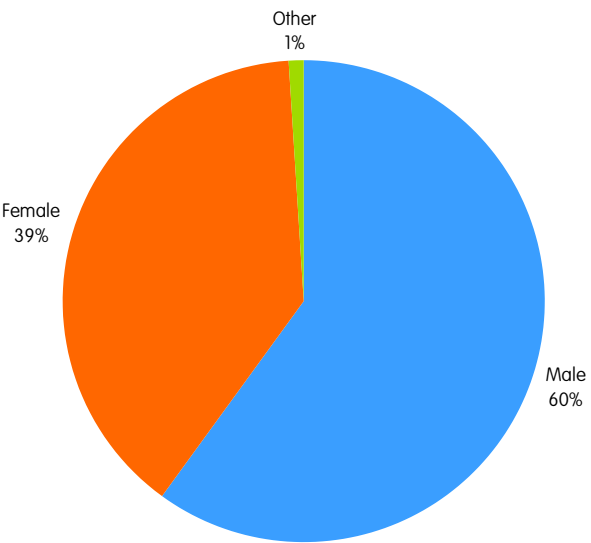
Casework CYP by main SEND



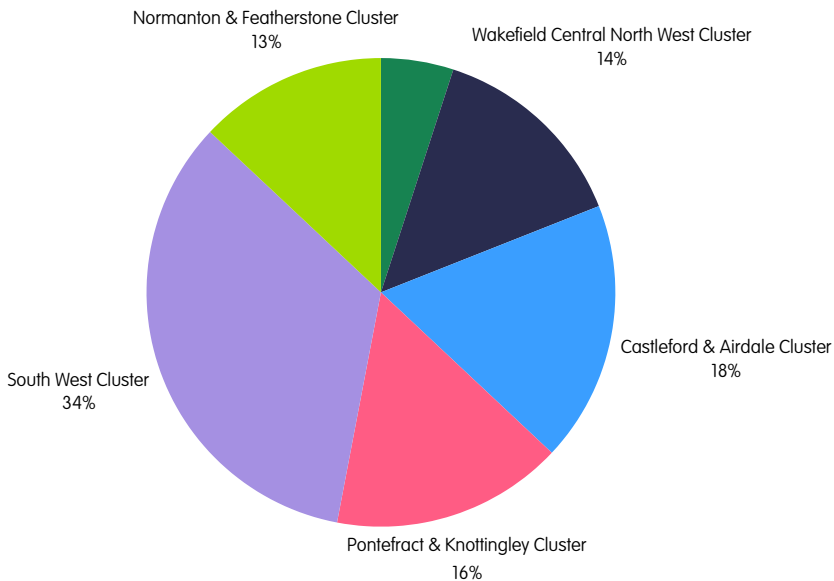
Casework CYP by age:



Casework CYP by gender



Casework families by district:



Outcomes - '23-24

Feedback on the quality of our support is always excellent. Following a duty contact, families are asked to rate support from 1-5 (1 not at all helpful, 5, very helpful).

How successful were we in helping you?	4.55
How helpful was the information, advice and support we gave you?	4.61
How timely do you think our response was to your query?	4.81

Following casework, a detailed feedback form is completed by families. **The average score across all questions is 4.93/5.**

This is an improvement on our score last year which was still good at 4.75/5.

Of particular significance are the high ratings for the following questions which remain the same as last year: 4

- I felt listened to and understood by service staff.
- The information, advice and support I received met my/our needs
- The service was impartial and fair



Quotes from Service Users/following casework/interventions:

"Thank you for all the links and the email as promised! Felt like someone really understood."

"Just to have someone listen is helpful and given me hopes for further support regarding school. There appears to be lack of understanding around the support needs of an ADHD (and dyslexic) student resulting in poor behaviour and possible risk of exclusion."

"All as been great couldn't ask for anything better"

"Would like to say a massive thank you to **, the information she provided has been really useful and was exactly what we needed."

"I just needed someone to talk to about my sons disability. ** was welcoming, warm, understanding and compassionate like talking to my mum but with a professional approach to it. I so am grateful to ** for her help at a very lonely time of our lives."

"I was hoping for advice and was amazed when ** was able to support me at a difficult meeting to review my son's EHCP. It was fantastic to have ** support"

"Kind, supportive and understanding. Reassuring to have your presence there at our mediation meeting."

"It's a fantastic service."

"By being present and supportive at a meeting I felt much able to articulate my concerns."

"We feel quite lost with everything and mental and social emotional needs seem so under supported. We are really struggling so helpful and friendly understanding staff is something that we find very very helpful."

"Just to thank * for being approachable on the phone and sending me the relevant links to access and support my child."

"By being present and supportive at a meeting I felt much able to articulate my concerns."

Pre and Plus Service

The Pre & Plus offer is provided in two formats:

- Complex Pre working cases –for Under 5's where not yet reached statutory school age
- A "Bolt-on" Plus worker offer which will add enhanced support to SENDIASS cases

Pre working tasks undertaken this year have included:

- The families of 5 preschool families with complex needs have been supported
- Attendance at sensory stay and plays
- Work has taken place to improve the Early Years section on the Local Offer website including consultation with the steering board.
- Information relating to the work of the Family HUBs was shared at the SENDIASS Steering board including the new SEND stars groups
- As a member of the Early Years Strategic board, the Service Manager prompted fellow external colleagues at the meeting on where to find information on the Local Offer website and wider, to help them in supporting the SENDAP inspection.
- We have amended and shared our WESAIL 2024 PowerPoint

Plus Working: This additional aspect to our services has enabled SENDIAS officers to complete short interventions with families which do not fall within the SENDIAS offer. Examples of work undertaken are:

- referrals to other services e.g. CAMHS, WASP, Sensory stay and plays
- work required to refresh understanding and improve confidence of a parent/carer
- support applying for grants and entitlements and understanding paperwork in a way the parent/carer is able to understand.

It has not been possible to record the numbers accessing this support this year.

A case study: Sam

Sam is the parent of Alex, a Secondary school aged young person with Autism & ADHD.

As with many parents of children with SEND, Sam struggled to know where to go for support, what steps to take and found challenges in getting a diagnosis.

Sam said they were "in a desperate place" when first in contact with WESAIL feeling "totally alone".

Sam's child did not get the EHCP they wanted but did find support, advice and information from WESAIL to be something they are "forever grateful" for. This gave them the confidence to "speak up for" their child Alex.

Alex was not wanting to go to school, finding it hard to socialise and showing signs of distress. WESAIL supported Sam and provided advice.

Following support from WESAIL, Alex is now much happier in a new setting with Sam noting a "quite remarkable" difference in how they present, including reduced anxiety

Wakefield's Local Offer

Under the SEND code of practice, every Local Authority must say what help they expect to be available in their local area to support SEND. This is gathered together in the Local Offer. Lots of different people contribute to the Local Offer from education, health care, and social care. Parents, carers, children, and young people also make important contributions. Family Action/WESAIL provide the Local Offer on behalf of Wakefield Council.

Outputs

- The total number of enquiries received via the Local Offer inbox and Facebook is 193. This is up 36% from last year. The majority of queries this year came from professionals.
- This year we have had 70,780 sessions (page views or interactions) on the Local Offer website. This is a 20% increase from last year.
- Our number of new users rose again to 61617, up 32% from last year.
- We published three newsletters this year. Articles were all based on requested topics such as Emotionally Based School Anxiety (EBSA) and children's advocacy. Coproduced information for the newsletter included SEND-friendly things to do in the Wakefield district and transition tips.

Engagement and Co-Production Events	23-24
Number of events held	59
Number of children and young people participating	6
Number of parents and carers participating	62
Number of professionals participating	172

The number of parents, carers and professionals participating this year has increased. We recognise that the number of CYP involved has decreased. For 2024 – 2025, we are planning to improve this by contacting a wider range of CYP groups and also make links with the district SENCO forum.

Outcomes

- Our 'You Said We Did', which is published each quarter, shows some positive outcomes in response to feedback. Examples include:

We would like to know how to find WASP on the Local Offer website.

We will be putting this in the Autumn Local Offer Newsletter 2023. We will also share this on Facebook. We have worked with WASP to update the WASP page on the Local Offer.

We would like to know more about Family Hubs

We have created a new page about Family Hubs on the Local Offer. We have also shared information about Family Hubs events and activities on our Facebook page.

We would like you to continue to share information about SEND-friendly activities for children and young people.

We share this information weekly on the WESAIL and Local Offer Facebook page. We will continue to share SEND-friendly activities in future newsletters.

-
- Through our work with the Local Offer Strategic Group, we have improved accessibility of the Local Offer website. This has included making key information clearer, moving accessibility options and producing a series of videos on how to use the accessibility functions on the website.
 - Our partnership work with various teams within Wakefield Council has led to the Things To Do section on the Local Offer being fully updated, with many new services added. Feedback has been positive when we have shared these SEND-friendly activities through our Facebook page and newsletter.

Positive feedback we have received includes:

"The website is much better, and the work done has improved it. The school's search is a lot better, and filters improved. Feels that it is good to have consistency across settings information." Re: Refreshed LO website

"I think this is really informative – it would actually be great for me to know what is going on, and be aware of new services etc so that's really helpful." Re: Summer Local offer Newsletter

"Thank you for replying and thank you for adding it to your social media, that would be perfect." Re: Supporting a service with sharing information



Future Service Development

- We have an ambition to build on the success of the 123 approach ensuring that Wakefield families get quality support from our specialist team in a timeframe which makes sense to them.
- Consistently including the child/young person's voice in our interventions.
- Increase the number of coproduction opportunities with children and young people.
- Work with key partners to update service listings on the Local Offer.
- Develop how information is presented for search results on the Local Offer, in collaboration with key partners.

Demand on WESAIL has continued to grow this year, very much reflecting the national picture. We are proud that we have reacted at pace to this challenge and developed a new operational approach which meet the needs of parents/ carers and CYP.

WESAIL: 'A prompt, efficient service that provides fabulous and fair impartial advice' says a service user.

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www.wakefield.mylocaloffer.org.uk

A case study: Ula

Ula is the parent of Farwah a young person with ADHD. Farwah experienced trauma as part of an incident in their setting where attempts to manage their behaviour worsened their situation. Farwah has not felt able to return to the setting following this incident.

Ula knew about WESAIL as they have had a lot of support in the past and felt comfortable coming back to us during this very difficult time. Ula was also able to self-advocate with our support.

Ula wanted advice in order for Farwah to get back into education and have "reasonable adjustments and understanding of needs" in place.

WESAIL were able to provide support via duty and utilised emails to support when best for Ula to communicate with us. Ula was very thankful that we were able to support them in meetings with the education setting and to raise the issue of unlawful processes in relation to Farwah's EHCP.

Ula has a long journey ahead in finding the right setting for Farwah but is "grateful" for WESAIL support and wanted to say "Thanks again" safe in the knowledge that they can return to us at any stage for further advice.

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