



The Ambassador Volunteer Project

Annual Report 2022

(March 2021- March 2022)



Working together to support the development of the Parent Carer Forum Devon

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Project aim:

To build a network of volunteer ambassadors for parents and carers of children with SEND who will act as points of contact in a school, group or local area to collect and disseminate information for DiAS and the Parent Carer Forum in Devon.

Intended outcomes:

- Increase awareness of the Parent Carer Forum Devon and DiAS
- Create a mechanism for connection for SEND parent carers
- Increase reach and participation for the Parent Carer Forum
- Gather feedback for the Parent Carer Forum
- Share SEND information

Project activity:

- Recruit and train ambassadors
- Provide ambassador support
- Build communication mechanisms
- Deliver parent carer information events based on feedback

Reach:

(AVC -Ambassador Volunteer Coordinator, AV Ambassador Volunteers)

- 33 Ambassador volunteers across Devon. [AV map](#)
- 9000 (approx.) families are connected throughout Devon in the Ambassador Volunteer Network based on the responses received.
- Approximately 43 social media groups (many closed groups) are also connected.
- 13 parent carer support groups directly linked.

Since 2020 there has been:

- 65% increase in recruiting Ambassador Volunteers.
- 50% increase of reach outwards to families.
- 43% increase in connection with social media groups.
- The number of parent carer support groups directly linked through the network remains the same at this point.

Information in:

There have been two focus areas for managing feedback from parent carers. Communication processes have been developed and imbedded to improve outcomes for the project and ensure feedback is effectively shared.

These focus areas were:

Connection between PCFD and Volunteers:

- Monthly catch-up meetings PCFD and AVC.
- AV team meeting lead by AVC and PCFD co-chairs attending. Forward planned sessions to allow for guests to connect with AV's and gather feedback, training opportunities and guest speakers planned, PCFD can update and connect with AVs directly.
- PCFD invited AVC to attend steering group meetings.
- What's app used to share themes and trends between AV's and AVC.
- Whats app also being used as a peer support mechanism. (See Appendix:3)
- Whats app also being used to shared information, signposting and new opportunities.
- What's app group between AVC and PCFD and Dias lead to ensure themes and trends shared quickly.
- "You said" document to collect over a longer period.
- Programme monitoring meetings held termly between DIAS and PCFD.

To inform information production and training session development.

- Feedback from AV's gathered from their networks has been used to develop the three current DiAS training sessions. A new session for parent carers aimed at supporting positive communication and working partnerships is planned for spring / summer term 2022.
- Feedback from AV's has been used to support the development of DiAS resources and informed website development.

Information out:

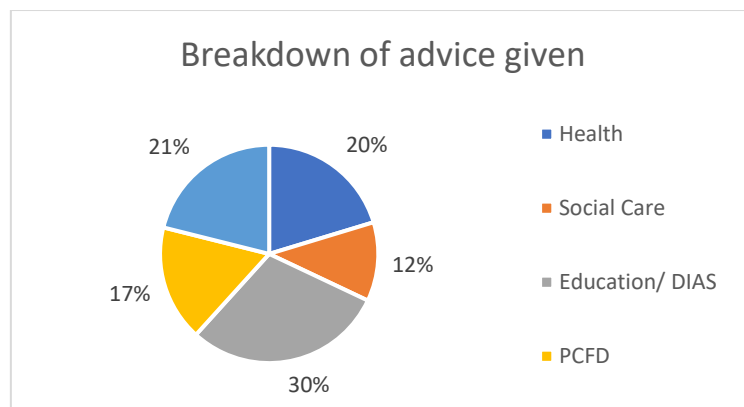
Coordinator cascades information from Parent Carer Forum, DiAS, Devon County Council services (SEND, Education, Social Care), health services and other commissioned services. Information was pushed out through What's app, emails, face to face at parent carer support groups and during the AV team meeting and training session. Examples include:

- Early Help, Children and Family Health Devon information cascaded.
- Connection to interested organisations e.g., Exeter Community Initiatives, Parent progression team, Children's Centres, Devon Carers, Young Devon during AV team meeting.
- Signpost Plus (SNIPPETS), Early Help newsletters, DiAS newsletters, Early Years and Childcare newsletters, Babcock EHE team and SENDCO support, SEND newsletter. Encouraged AVs to sign up and follow where appropriate AVC sharing SEND excerpts.

- Ambassador Volunteer What's app group is successfully linking AVs across Devon. A supportive group moderated by AVC supporting AVs to build community across the diverse and rural isolated areas of Devon. AVs are using the What's app group to provide positive peer support and connecting their networks. Asking and answering questions, soliciting opinions, or sharing training opportunities. E.g. Brain in hand technology, grants, websites and services.
- Support provided by coordinator to support AV's in groups and parent carers in their network (see below)

Parent Carer support/signposting:

- 6 parents referred on directly for AV peer support.
- 80 advice slots for parent carers/ AV's as part of the programme across April 2020-January 2022 (1580 minutes of support).



Training:

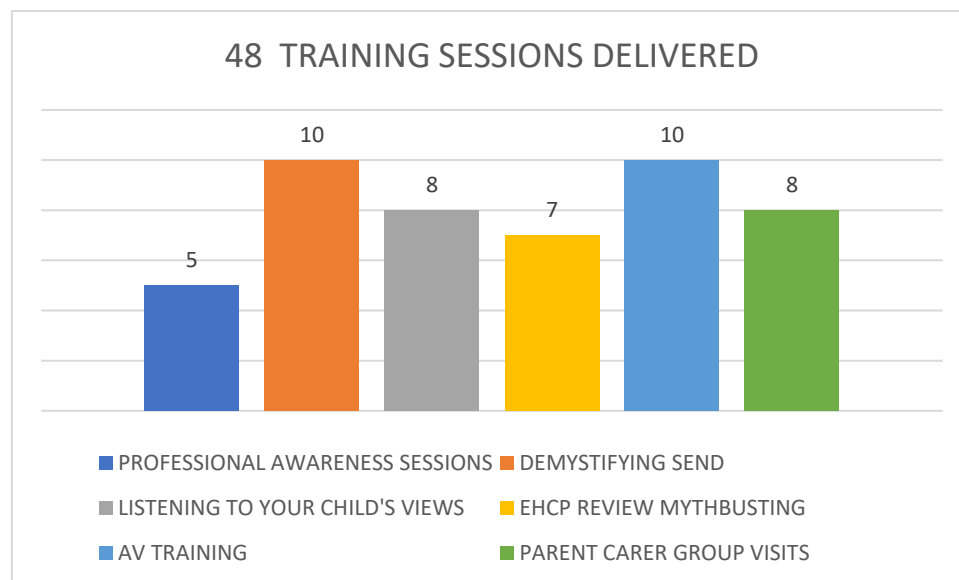
We have delivered 48 training sessions overall to parent carers and professionals supporting parent carers, over 500 attendees. (See Appendix:5)

Parent information sessions:

Demystifying SEND parent carer training sessions- Signposting to SEND services in Devon and the Parent Carer Forum Devon. 10 sessions delivered.

EHCP Review Mythbusting -Breaking through some of the misconceptions around the Education, Health and Care Plan review processes. 7 sessions delivered.

Listening to your child's views- Listening to your child's views- How to help your child express their aspirations and why this is so important. 8 sessions delivered.



Training Evaluations:

"Beautifully delivered course. I am not usually one for video calls (and avoid at all costs), but I felt so welcome and relaxed. The context was delivered brilliantly, I was engaged the whole way through as the content was delivered at the perfect pace. Hearing other people's experiences was good, and that many people have issues communicating with schools and knowing exactly what support their children are 'entitled' too. So much wonderful information that I hadn't been aware of before and lots of useful links to further research. Super."

"It has made me think about how the everyday interactions with my children can help lead into the times when I need their views for forms, reviews etc. Also a reminder that taking time helps. I feel empowered that I can get their views next time instead of looking at the review forms and the child's views sections in despair!!"

Ambassador Volunteer Impact/ Outcomes

Devon Wide: DiAS CYP worker connection through AVC to parent carer support groups and other CYP workers.
North Devon Junior school example: AV linked in, previous strained relationship but headteacher values connection, created a webpage and reconnected through AV to local parent career support group where plans are in place.
North Devon: An Av connected through her network with a local Sendco, that Sendco then contacted AVC and discussed the project and then subsequently shared and encouraged a mum from her school to train up. This mum is now an AV and has stated she wants to encourage other parents like her to connect into services as she did and she has not looked back. This AV then connected with local preschool and has started a positive relationship also in order to support further families in her area.
Devon Carers Ambassador lead introduced AVC to a proactive dad, also a Carer Ambassador, he attended SEND transformation events AVC signposted to him. He also connected to PCFD through their Facebook page. He is training as an AV in August.
Through DiAS enquiry line a family in Braunton was signposted to many services and support options. AVC used AV whats app to request local knowledge.
DiAS was supporting very quiet, private, socially isolated mum in East Devon area. Using AV whats app we connected mum to some local groups that were appropriate for her needs.
AV's planning new linked work with school in North Devon and South Molton.
SEND Champion / AV set up in one new school Newton Abbot.
Honiton group received more funding to further develop supportive sessions for families in their area, face to face and virtual.
Positive feedback around young carers support for two families in East Devon.
AV in North has worked with North Devon services and has planned a large-scale wellbeing event for July '22. North Devon Health Fest weekend 22/23 July 2022 AV's have networked together to look at supporting this event.
AV in North is looking at working with others to develop Youth engagement work in her area.
New AV lead community group in Cranbrook based at primary school has had a successful start. Supported by community connector and local GP practice Nurse it welcomes families from around the surrounding areas also families with children with SEND.
North Devon AV continues to connect regularly with local headteacher and has set up new links with a new youth group.
Parental minds Honiton is linking with University of Exeter research teams and sharing resources with other AV's. Very positive responses from AV's.

Peer support:

AV network sharing information about other services and links to those services e.g young minds, Devon Carers, CAHMS, Children and Family Health Devon.
Direct Payments: sharing experiences and up to the minute feedback. Discussions around Eligibility criteria.
Sharing local knowledge: WAVE Rangers, WAVE project, Wave Wahines, Equine therapy, family support services and groups for children and young people.
AV sharing links to informative podcasts and webinars and online support sessions and training to other Av's.

Survey Findings:

In October 2021 we created a questionnaire to collect impact statements and evidence of the reach of the project. 17 Ambassador Volunteers responded. Survey showed: Volunteers are spread across Devon with highest proportion in the East and then the North and 3 new Volunteers in the South. Almost 100% of volunteers feel they are better connected and part of a wider network. Three quarters of the volunteers feel they have learnt new skills or developed better understanding of SEND topics as a result of volunteering and the training and support offered. 65% feel they have connected with PCFD through the programme and the same % have shared PCFD information and posts. Survey shows that volunteers join in order to give back and support other parent carers in their journey. (See comments below)

Why did you become an AV? (See Appendix:2)

"I found being a parent carer with a child in mainstream education quite isolating, I wanted to help others whom may feel the same."

"Because I want to help other parents to become more confident in finding and getting support for themselves and their children."

How have things changed for you by being an AV? (See Appendix:3)

"The project has been great for me to build a support network for myself and to enable me to support others. I am learning new skills due to being part of the project and expanding my network."

"Being an Ambassador volunteer has been seen as a valuable part of my work by other organisations."

Can you give examples where you have supported a parent carer and what that meant for you as a volunteer? (See Appendix:4)

"I've help someone to fill in PIP forms and DLA forms, both successful, to see their joy in getting extra help and support, and getting money backdated, they were able to go on their 1st holiday in years with their child. And them saying how grateful they are to me and how their lives have changed for the better. It made me feel happy I could help."

"I helped a Guardian of a child with Autism apply for Carers Allowance. I have had 1;1 coffee and chats with 2 different parents from my local school who have children with additional support needs."

"There is a particular vulnerable parent who was struggling to advocate for her child who has found the info she needed through simple signposting and encouragement. I think that some parents could do with assertiveness training."

"Sometimes it's the small things: I was able to confirm to a parent that she wasn't being pushy by emailing the SENDCO to chase something which had been promised. She had been on the verge of this for a year but was lacking confidence."

Appendix 1:

2021-2022 AV OUTCOMES SURVEY

4. Where in Devon is your Ambassador Volunteer community predominately based? The postcodes are the DIAS area postcodes it is helpful for the DIAS Officers to know where support is cascaded in the community.

[More Details](#)

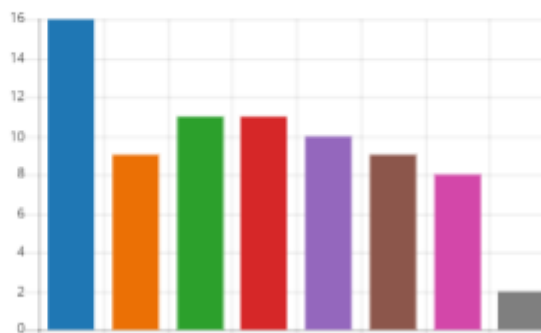
North- (EX18- EX23, EX31-EX39)	6
EAST-(EX8-EX17 & EX24)	8
SOUTH-(PL6-PL9, PL15-PL21, ...)	3
MID-(EX1-EX7, TQ14)	4
DEVON WIDE	1



11. If you have signposted to support or other information - which ones?

[More Details](#)

DIAS	16
Parent Carer Forum	9
SEND Local Offer Page	11
Early Help	11
Children and Family Health De...	10
Social media groups	9
Snippets magazine	8
Other	2



14. As an Ambassador Volunteer I feel like I am now part of a larger network.

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

yes	16
No	0
Not sure	1
Too soon to tell	0



15. As an Ambassador Volunteer I feel I have learnt new skills/ information to support me in life/ my volunteering role/ my work.

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

Yes	13
No	0
Not Sure	2
Too soon to tell	2



16. The opportunity to attend shared training and courses has been helpful.

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

Yes	15
No	0
Not Sure	0
Too soon to tell	2



22. I have connected with Parent Carer Forum Devon (PCFD) through the project.

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

Yes	11
No	6



24. I have shared PCFD information/ posts through my network.

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

Yes	11
No	2
Too soon	4



Appendix 2:

Why did you become an AV?

"I found being a parent carer with a child in mainstream education quite isolating, I wanted to help others whom may feel the same."

"Because I want to help other parents to become more confident in finding and getting support for themselves and their children."

"A desire to network with others so that we are working together and collaborating rather than overlapping/competing. And every hopeful of improving services and support for families."

"I had no knowledge of the SEND world and nowhere to turn to get support and information and I don't want other parents feeling that way."

"Gain information to share with others."

"Excellent support and info to share with families who are experiencing difficulties in their lives."

"I was personally greatly supported by DIAS for my daughter. I now work in a special needs school and share information with pupils' families."

"I like to offer the advice to others that would have helped me when i found myself on the SEN pathway."

"To increase my knowledge of SEND support available."

"I am cross that the parents who are more privileged (who have the energy/education/time) are able to effectively advocate for their children. There are others that really need all the support they can get to understand the system and navigate it."

Appendix 3:

How have things changed for you by being an AV?

"The project has been great for me to build a support network for myself and to enable me to support others. I am learning new skills due to being part of the project and expanding my network."

"This volunteer position has been so valuable to me in that it's given me a platform to support parent carers. The knowledge I have gained and continue to gain is also helping me with my BSc Psychology degree and other CPD courses."

"Being an Ambassador volunteer has been seen as a valuable part of my work by other organisations."

"Regular contact via WhatsApp and emails has been reassuring and giving me confidence to do what I do."

"Support and guidance from other on WhatsApp."

"AVC is always accessible to me whether by phone, WhatsApp or email. She is a font of knowledge and if there's rarely a question that she can't answer she will find someone that will."

"I've enjoyed being able to share my experiences with the wider network and meeting others in a similar role. AVC has been a great support, to talk things through with and remind me what's available to our parent/caregivers."

"I have been able to support others going through similar situations, in my personal and professional life."

"The Project Coordinator has always been speedy to respond and available for 1:1 session when required. The project has increased my knowledge and confidence."

"AVC always available to ask questions, training was useful, linking AVs to one another and being present within group."

"AVC is always available via WhatsApp group or text, email, it's great we have a WhatsApp group where we can support and advise each other."

Appendix 4:

Can you give examples where you have supported a parent carer and what that meant for you as a volunteer?

"A parent carer was able to get direct payments for their child and that means they now have access to respite which they did not before - the mum was incredibly grateful for the support because she didn't even know it existed before."

"Parent has got diagnosis for child and DLA."

"There's are so many times that I do it without even noticing but I am also through work passing information to our senior about new groups and suchlike in our area for parents."

"Signposting parents to the support they need through DIAS, based on my personal experience."

"It's been really helpful to link in with other AV's and be able to signpost for those out of my area."

"Parent has a boy who is very good in school, but school don't understand what is going on at home and that the child is bored in school as he is very capable. Working with the parent to get diagnosis referring to different areas. Helping parent to open up to school to ask them more and they understand. Means parent does not feel alone and she can message me anytime and I check in with her as a friend as well."

"I've help someone to fill in pip forms and dla forms, both successful, to see their joy in getting extra help and support, and getting money backdated, they were able to go on their 1st holiday in years with their child. And them saying how grateful they are to me and how their lives have changed for the better. It made me feel happy I could help."

"Parents/caregivers have been overwhelmingly grateful to learn about Dias, knowing I've directed them to a useful service makes me feel valued and pleased!"

"I now work for Mill Water School for pupils with special needs. I enjoy being able to use my experience to signpost and disseminate information that is helpful for other parents and carers. I can use my experience to share the information that I believe would most help them."

"I have signposted a parent to DIAS whom was concerned about their Childs progress within mainstream. I have signposted parent to the AV project coordinator for some local AV support."

"I helped a Guardian of a child with Autism apply for Carers Allowance. I have had 1;1 coffee and chats with 2 different parents from my local school who have children with additional support needs."

"There is a particular vulnerable parent who was struggling to advocate for her child who has found the info she needed through simple signposting and encouragement. I think that some parents could do with assertiveness training."

"Sometimes it's the small things: I was able to confirm to a parent that she wasn't being pushy by emailing the SEndCo to chase something which had been promised. She had been on the verge of this for a year but was lacking confidence. "

"Shared info. Helped them feel supported. "

Appendix 5

Training Feedback 2021-2022

Demystifying SEND

"Beautifully delivered course. I am not usually one for video calls (and avoid at all costs), but I felt so welcome and relaxed. The context was delivered brilliantly, I was engaged the whole way through as the content was delivered at the perfect pace. Hearing other people's experiences was good, and that many people have issues communicating with schools and knowing exactly what support their children are 'entitled' too. So much wonderful information that I hadn't been aware of before and lots of useful links to further research. Super."

"This is a fantastic informative course, especially for those just starting out on their SEND journey."

"Just a big thanks; this journey of coming to terms with everything is very stressful, and it's good to have your support."

"Thanks to the two facilitators. Friendly and professional, really great."

"It is important to have these face to face sessions, which help you to realise you are not alone."

Listening to your child's views

"This has given me confidence to keep going and try out some new ideas and reminded me to take time out."

"Having these sessions available on line is great. I would not have been able to attend else."

"DIAS training sessions are always excellent. I have recommended the sessions to all my SEN parent carer friends."

"Just thank you so much for your clear, objective support about the rights of my child - and being able to support them in the best way."

"The importance of capturing my child's views in their words The Q&A at the end of the session - it is so helpful to feel that you are not alone and can tap into expert advice to inform your actions."

"it was reassuring to know others are experiencing the same situation as me and I'm not alone. The training also gave me some good strategies to talk / use when communicating with my teenager."

"It has made me think about how the everyday interactions with my children can help lead into the times when I need their views for forms, reviews etc. Also, a reminder that taking time helps. I feel empowered that I can get their views next time instead of looking at the review forms and the child's views sections in despair!!"

"It made me think about how I listen to my child's view on an everyday basis as well as how I glean what he feels or wants ready for meetings or reviews. It also made me think about how to recognise and respond to his views even when they are not possible or are maybe not respectful of others."

*"Reminding me to help/encourage my child to be their own advocate, even from a young age
The knowledge that children do have a right to use their voice and give their views and they are important. Schools do tend to treat parents and children as though they have no rights, and they hold all the power. This knowledge which of course we do know deep down will be very helpful for my family as we move forward as we are very child focused and all for empowerment."*

"Presenters were very clear and knowledgeable about the content of the subject and their knowledge of resources we can tap into."

EHCP Mythbusting- What has been the most useful aspect of the session?

"Knowledgeable, approachable hosts with great links and a logical, structured approach."

"The ability to interact and ask questions as we went along. The slides you sent with all the links are brilliant and I'll keep them for when we start thinking about our annual review. It's a great session and very useful."

"Learning about process in Devon especially the hub."

"The Information, where I can surf for better communicate with LA and SENDco teachers. Warm and supportive advice."

"Learning what to expect in the review from a parent's pilot of view."

"DIAS training is always brilliant, and I really appreciate the time you put into making parents better informed."