



# The Ambassador Volunteer Project

## Annual Report 2023

(March 2022- March 2023)



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

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## Project aim:

[The Ambassador Volunteer Programme - Devon Information Advice and Support \(devonias.org.uk\)](https://devonias.org.uk)

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)

- 47 Ambassador volunteers across Devon by March 2023. [AV map](#)
- 9000(approx.) families are connected throughout Devon in the Ambassador Volunteer Network based on the responses received.
- An additional potentially 60000 reached through social media connections and followers of all the linked groups. Some AVs have a wide reach.
- Approximately 37 social media groups (many closed groups) are also connected.
- 14 parent carer support groups directly linked.
- 2 new linked groups number of parent carer support groups directly linked through the network remains the same at this point. (Appendix 1: Group List)
- 18 Action for Children Link Ambassadors
- 7 trained Parental Mind Link Ambassadors

## 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:

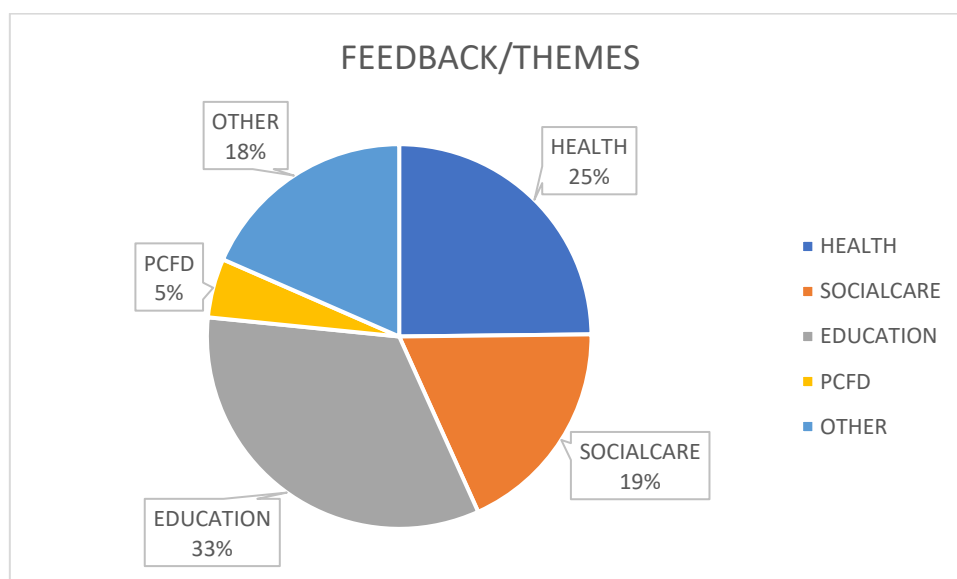
### Connection between PCFD and Volunteers:

- 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.
- What's app used to share themes and trends between AV's and AVC then onto PCFD.
- Whats app also being used to share information, signposting and new opportunities to support PCFD events.
- What's app group between AVC and PCFD and Dias lead to ensure themes and trends shared quickly.

### Feedback from AV's has been used to:

- Support the development of DiAS resources and informed DiAS website development.
- Support the development of DiAS CYP resource development.
- AVs met with head of service to inform Disabled Children's policy.
- AVs volunteered their time to review new EHCP Hub website development.
- AV's feedback and attended Devon County Council SEND events and meetings with service leads to discuss participation and ways forward for SEND services in Devon.
- AVs supported the Devon Autism Strategy events.
- Short break events were attended by AVs in their areas.

### Feedback and Themes:



Feedback often covered more than one area. Other relates to groups and often feedback or Av peer opportunities. (See Appendix 2)

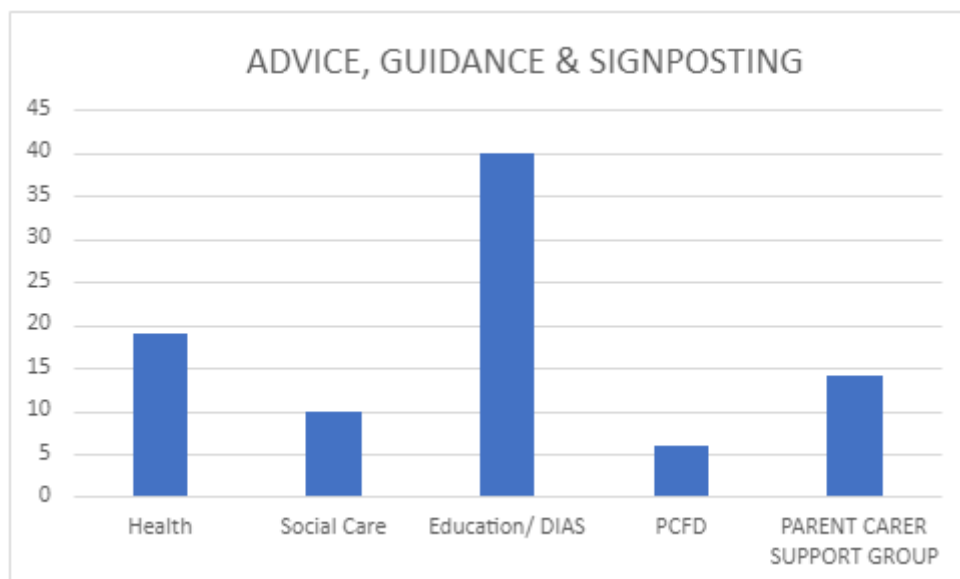
### Information out:

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.
- Support provided by coordinator to support AVs in groups and parent carers in their network (see below)

### Parent Carer support/signposting:

- 57 specific advice slots delivered by AV Coordinator for parent carers/ AVs as part of the programme across April 2022-March 2023 (985 minutes of support).
- 56% IASS level 1 support.
- 43% IASS level 2 support



(Advice, Guidance and Signposting sometimes covered more than one area.)

## Celebrations:

- Two AVs were nominated for BBC make a difference award. A North Devon AV was a winner!
- Side by Side group were able to restart sessions in North Devon being held in two different new venues out in the community.
- Parental minds started groups in Sidmouth and Exeter.
- An AV in mid has started an online support group for autistic girls.
- AV in North has worked in partnership to develop a Healthfest for parents and their families to link into services.
- An AV now sits on the Devon Integrated Care board; raising awareness of the needs of parent carers of children with SEND with a mental health focus.
- A new group in Cranbrook was developed in partnership with Community Nurse and is held alternatively in two key school sites in Cranbrook.
- Our first AV baby was born at the end of last year!

## Training:

Overall, we have delivered 30 training sessions overall to parent carers and professionals supporting parent carers almost 300 attendees. Post covid we moved to termly online sessions for the three main DiAS led information sessions.

Three bespoke sessions were created working with specific needs of parent carers.

- PCFD worked with a group of parents to identify specific matters in their area and a session was developed to meet their needs. 12 parents attended.

Feedback:

*"I am so happy I came to the session; I feel like I know so much more about what to expect, how to approach meetings with the school and how to access support. I can't thank you enough for putting it on."*

*"Learning about formal, legal requirements alongside informal support available and other parents' experiences."*

- Parents and professionals in North Devon. 18 parents attended including SEN school staff, SEN governors and parents and carers of children with SEND.
- THE AVC developed and delivered parent representative training for the PCFD steering group.

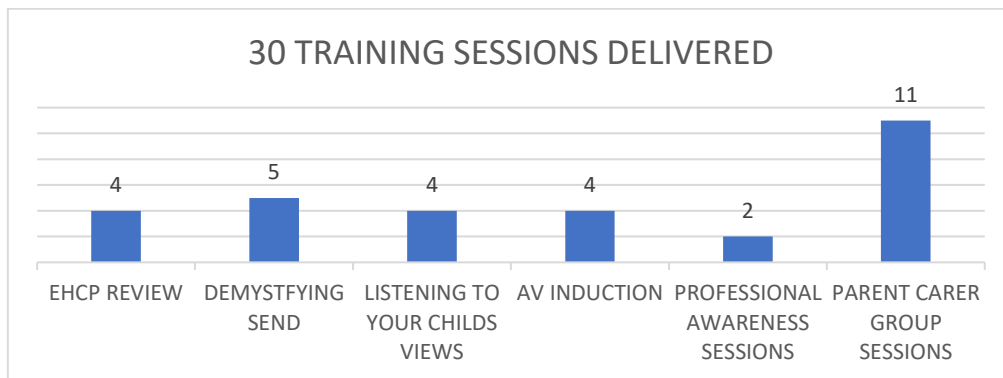
## Parent information sessions:

Demystifying SEND parent carer training sessions- Signposting to SEND services in Devon and the Parent Carer Forum Devon. 5 sessions delivered.

EHCP Review Mythbusting -Breaking through some of the misconceptions around the Education, Health, and Care Plan review processes. 4 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. 4 sessions delivered.

Parent Carer group sessions- face to face sessions support parent carer groups with bespoke sessions. 11 sessions delivered.



## Training feedback:

*"It confirmed to me that we are going along the right lines and that we are not missing out on anything that could further help my son. Learning about the graduated approach was a boon, as I learnt where my son falls within this model and helped me to understand the approach his school are now taking as a result. Thank you - clarity is everything."*

*"Learning things that I didn't know which arm me with information, so I feel more positive about interacting with school. "*

*"Being advised of where support can come from and where information is on the internet and locally. Not feeling quite so alone and confused by it all now."*

*"I wish I was given this information at the start of our journey... I've been through all of this the hard way unfortunately... I still believe there is an expectation that parents should know the system... I believe parents should have professional help from co-ordinators who talk to each other about each individual child's needs... from the time it is noticed that their child needs intervention. Many parents are exhausted with their own fight to help their child at home also & the last thing they need is to become the person who has to chase everyone up & tell them what the other said as they haven't talked to each other. Perhaps a step-by-step form would be useful for the parent at the early stage. I didn't know about DIAS for a very long time... I believe by having a co-ordinator it's in the best interest for the child & the parents... Some parents are not able to battle on or understand how to go about what to do next to help their child so therefore the child is being failed."*

*"The many options discussed all through the session - some courses give you one or two ideas, but you were great at expanding and giving lots of variations to points you were putting forward, making it easier to imagine tailoring it to our child without feeling overwhelming."*

*"Thank you for the session - it was a useful reminder of how important their views are, for example I hadn't considered him attending any review meetings, but actually as he gets older, I think he should attend at least part of the meetings."*

## Impact/ Outcomes- Survey Findings:

In December 2022 we created a questionnaire to collect impact statements and evidence of the reach of the project. 15 Ambassador Volunteers responded. Survey showed:

- Volunteers are spread across Devon with highest proportion in the Mid (Cranbrook area) and similar in the North and 3 new Volunteers in the South/ West which balances with the East now giving a better coverage of the county.
- 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 because of volunteering and the training and support offered.
- 40% feel they have connected with PCFD through the programme.
- 67% have shared PCFD information and posts.
- 67% have shared themes and feedback through the Av coordinator through to the PCFD.
- As in previous years this survey shows that volunteers join to give back and support other parent carers in their journey. (See comments below)

*“The last decade for our family has been incredibly challenging. During the early part of our ‘SEND journey’ I wasted a lot of time being made to jump through unhelpful ‘hoops’ and was not listened to or supported by the systems or professionals who were supposed to be there to do just that. I have felt incredibly isolated over the years and have been lucky recently to make two very close friends who have been through similar experiences and who just ‘get it’. I know how it feels to feel very alone and lost within an overwhelming system and would like to help to support other parents if I can. Ideally I would like to complete the SENDCo course return to a Professional Role in a school, but with my son out of school, that is just not going to be possible for the foreseeable future, so I am hoping that perhaps doing some volunteer work for DIAS will at least make me feel a greater sense of purpose and give me an opportunity to use some of the experiences I’ve had to impact others in a positive way.”*

*“I’ve had so much help from so many people to get where I am now with my son, it’s time to see if I can help.”*

## Why did you become an AV?

I became an AV to help people. I help with a local support group for SEN.

To share information with others and empower them.

To continue to link effectively with supporting services and be able to feedback the experiences of families in a way it could be listened to "higher up". Contribute to more evidence of what is working well and what is challenging for families.

Help others whom may be in a position which I was in.

Full Time carer, so have experienced what people going through, so would like to help them, so they don't have to go through the struggle I went through and let them know there is help and support, and light at the end of the tunnel.

I would like to learn the different types of support out there for vulnerable people and families. Personal experience, wanted to help others.

Being an AV means that you are part of a network of SEND parents, many of whom are also professionals, and this really helps you feel connected and informed about what is going on Devon wide for SEND.



Having experienced difficulties personally and received support, I wanted to give something back.

To gain a further understanding of systems and resources available and then to help others.

To meet people where they are in a non-judgmental and helpful way.

Our journey was very difficult, and I don't want others to face the same challenges. DIAS massively helped us and I want to pass this on to others.

I wanted to reach parents that are not aware of the support and information available to help to them and that could help them and their families through this journey.

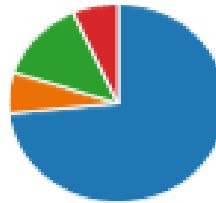
## How have things changed for you by being an AV?

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	11
No	1
Not Sure	2
Too soon to tell	1

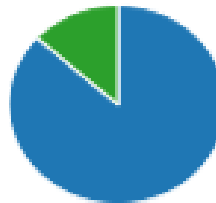


16. The opportunity to attend shared training and courses has been helpful.

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

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



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

I have sign posted to Dias. Parent have said they got in touch, and it has helped.

Have also sign posted to normal magic, which has helped a parent get help with child's anxiety.

I support parent carers every day in my role and am always signposting into DIAS too. As a parent of children with different support needs, it can be lonely. Empowering another parent through knowledge, confidence and support can make a difference.

Signposted to social media groups and support groups.

To see the parent after I supported them, say thank you for understanding and great to speak to someone who truly understands what being a carer is like .it made me feel great that I have supported them, and made a difference to them.

Helped parents to apply for DLA, and to see how it helped them get the support and help they needed, I made me feel good that I've helped make their lives easier, I also felt worthwhile, and useful

I support many families either in a group situation or 1:1 who have neurodivergent children. Recently a family who has been fighting for a suitable specialist placement for her child, was awarded a place at Copper Academy. Whenever one of my families gets alternative provision or suitable specialist

placements, it feels amazing to know that they now have the chance to recover, reach their potential and thrive. It's a great feeling.

I have helped to share information with the parents and carers of our 120 pupils with special needs, which has helped to empower them and made a positive difference to their lives. This is extremely rewarding.

Signposted to specific groups.

It's great to have a network of knowledgeable people to ask to advise in order to help others

It's extremely rewarding to support parents in distress to help them unpack their worries and deal with things one by one.

Very rewarding, knowing that you have changed their lives and walking with them step by step.

Helped a parent who needed someone to talk to, who understands what they are going through. Just being support through the downs and ups.

Numerous occasions through my YouTube and fb group. It's so nice to see others in a position where they're thanking me for the help and knowing it's made a difference

## Next Steps:

- Develop opportunities for Ambassador Volunteers. Through training and a variety of opportunities supporting PCFD with their key works and projects.
- Data collection and reporting: 2023 focus will be to data collect of; Referrals for AV peer support. Referrals directly from DiAS Enquiry line system.
- Case studies: Monitoring peer support and developing mechanisms to report impact AV's make to other SEND parents SEND journey.
- Expand network: AV link Ambassadors to be better utilised to connect into vulnerable groups of parent carers of SEND.

This last quote is from a new Ambassador Volunteer after attending the AV induction and hearing the update by the co-chairs of the parent carer forum.

*"Something I wanted to share from the training yesterday was that in the 15 years that I've been passionate and actively involved with SEND support I've never bothered with the Parent Carer Forum before because I didn't think it served any purpose apart from the cathartic effect of offloading. Having heard yesterday that the feedback is actually listened to by appropriate agencies and has led to change, I feel totally different about the forum. I feel empowered to know that I can feedback my experiences (both positive and negative) and affect change. I feel we're really blessed to have this opportunity and I am now eager to get involved and to explain the forum to other people. Similarly, I've never bothered attending any of the big virtual events like next week's OFSTED meetings because I've never known/understood that my opinion would be heard or that even my presence would make a difference. I now plan to attend one of the meetings and have told a dozen other people, why it's worth taking the time to attend. Most of my close SEND Mums felt the way I did about the forum."*



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