

What the volunteers say

What inspired you to volunteer for Reading IASS?

I have experience working with children and families with SEN in an education setting and wanted to use that to support parents more directly.

Cathy

My experience has taught me that not everyone has the same access to services. The reasons may be complex but they should not be because a person feels shy to ask questions, is confused by the answers or is put off by form filling and procedures. I felt I had time to provide that support and I had space in my life to watch, listen and learn something new.

Hazel

What do you get from being an IASS volunteer?

I enjoy meeting people and I feel it is a privilege to share the stories of families who want the very best for their children.

Hazel

A huge amount of satisfaction in knowing that I am giving a voice to those who may otherwise be unrepresented or struggle to be heard.

Cathy

How does IASS volunteering fit in with the rest of your life?

Because I love volunteering for IASS I have dedicated a morning to the work and I plan other life bits around that! However, when I haven't been able to move appointments I have been able to be flexible with the work I take on.

Cathy

I find volunteering with IASS fits well with other commitments. Sometimes there may be two meetings in a week, other times I might not have a request for a couple of months. Meetings are likely to last an hour. I like to have a telephone conversation with the parent beforehand just to introduce myself. After the meeting I type up my notes and send through to the case manager.

Hazel

How does the role stretch and challenge you?

Everyone will find their personal challenges in the role. I focus very hard on keeping the needs of the child and the family uppermost in my mind and on providing for them the support and information required. I may have all sorts of personal opinions but IASS does not take sides so I remind myself all the time to keep an open mind and to provide support that will enable the young person and their family to make the best possible decisions for themselves.

Hazel

The role challenges me to remain impartial and non judgmental to people's situations. It encourages me to think holistically about a child's needs and how to represent the impact of these on the family in an accessible way.

Cathy

Has it developed you in any other ways?

Being able to hear positive feedback from parents and know that the paperwork I have helped to prepare has been effective in securing support has helped develop the confidence I have in my professionalism and knowledge.

Cathy

What would you say to someone who is thinking of taking on the role?

Hazel

During my working life and as a retired person I have volunteered with a number of organisations. I have found my time with IASS to be very satisfying and rewarding. I really enjoy it. I believe this is because the role is clearly defined; the handbook for volunteers is accessible and direct and the training was comprehensive. I "shadowed" a member of staff during a range of cases and when it was time to "go it alone" I felt confident. Not all organisations are as sensitive to the needs of a volunteer as IASS and this can lead to confusion about the role. I can always talk through any problems with my mentor.

If you are drawn to working with IASS you are in very safe hands. You will have the support to be the best you can and this in turn will give the best possible service to service users.

It is an excellent way to make a positive contribution to supporting children and families with SEND.

Cathy

What skills and qualities do you think are needed for this role?

I think a volunteer needs to be open minded and personable so that the parents feel comfortable talking about very challenging and often highly personal elements in their lives. The role demands someone who can listen actively to be able to capture the nuances of what is being said and affirm that with the parents.

Cathy