

SENDIAS Volunteers

- what they do and how they can help you



The West Sussex SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIAS) has a small number of trained volunteers who can support parent carers who have a child with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Our volunteers may be parents themselves, or they may have experience of working in schools or with families who have children with special educational needs, or they may just be interested individuals who empathise with parents of children with SEND or the child themselves.



Please note: 'child' = 'child or young person'

How can SENDIAS volunteers help parents?

Volunteers may be able to help in a variety of different ways.

They can support you to:

- write letters/reports if you are unable to do so yourself with information and advice alone (e.g. for child's annual review, or as part of the EHC Needs Assessment process).
- find the right services and support through the Local Offer.
- understand complex processes (e.g the timetable for an EHC Needs Assessment).
- prepare for school meetings and if possible, attend meetings with you.

They can support in a practical way by:

- Listening to what you have to say
- Taking unofficial notes in meetings so you can concentrate on what is being said and focus on putting views across.



What SENDIAS Volunteers will not do

As with SENDIAS staff, volunteers will not make professional judgements about you or your child or make decisions for you. Volunteers are there to support you with a specific piece of work that has been identified and allocated to them. They cannot help you with on-going issues unless a new task is allocated to them by a SENDIAS Adviser.

They will not work directly with professionals. If it is decided that support to communicate with professionals may be needed then, with your permission, they will inform the SENDIAS Adviser for your area.

The volunteer role is to assist you with specific issues concerning you, or your child's SEND. They are not able to get involved in other ways, though they can refer back to the SENDIAS Adviser for your area, who will endeavour to help you with further advice or locate other sources of support if needed.

Our volunteers undertake induction training; however they do not have the same level of training related to SEND rights and responsibilities as our SENDIAS Advisers. Therefore, if any advice around other issues or next step options are needed, the volunteer would inform the Adviser for your area who may then contact you

How do I get a volunteer to support me?

When contacting our service (contact details at the bottom of factsheet), a member of the SENDIAS Service will respond by your preferred contact method. This would generally be the contact method you have used to communicate with us (telephone or email).

A volunteer would be allocated if we feel you need extra support to take the pathway you have chosen. This could be because you have additional needs and would need help to do this, English may not be your first language, or the complexity of the subject would overwhelm you. This support will be for a certain piece of work if that is what is agreed.

Our level of support is based on those with the greatest need. Sometimes this is not obvious, so we may need to ask questions to help us to make this decision.

If it is agreed support is needed, we ask for at least two weeks' notice if you would like support at a meeting or to complete a task that has a deadline. We will try to locate a suitable volunteer for you and let you know if we have been successful. We will then arrange for the volunteer to contact you to introduce themselves and make arrangements.

As we only have a small number of volunteers it may not always be possible for us to match you up with a volunteer, but we will do our best and in the event this is not possible we will discuss alternatives with you.

If you do receive support from a volunteer we have a written agreement, that you both sign, that sets out how the volunteer will be able to support you.

Are you interested in becoming a volunteer?

If you are over 18 and ideally have experience of special educational needs either personally or professionally, want to work with parents carers, and you have time you can spare (however minimal), we would love to hear from you. Full training is given and expenses can be claimed.

Hear from one of our volunteers about how she has found the experience:

"I have found that supporting parents is both interesting and rewarding. It is a humbling experience to support people who have often struggled with many aspects of bringing up and educating a child with SEND, empowering them to have a voice and express themselves in a manner that enables them to be heard and the needs of their child to be understood!"
– Helen, SENDIAS volunteer

If you are interested in the role or would like to speak with someone about this opportunity, please contact the SEND Information, Advice and Support Service on 0330 222 8555 or email: send.ias@westsussex.gov.uk for more information.

Service Statement

The role of the SENDIAS service is to ensure all parents, children and young people have access to impartial information, advice and support so they can make informed decisions related to their situation. Any information that is shared with the service is in confidence unless permission has been obtained to share this with any individuals, services and agencies that may be able to help in the circumstances. For more detail, view our [policies and privacy notice](#) on our website.

How to contact us: Tel: 0330 222 8555 / Email: send.ias@westsussex.gov.uk or cyp.sendias@westsussex.gov.uk (up to age 25) / Website: www.westsussexsendias.org

To view factsheet online and access all links: <https://tinyurl.com/btwbxzep>

or scan QR code:

