

# Make a difference!

**Become a volunteer  
Independent Parental Supporter  
with**

Special Educational Needs  
and Disability Information,  
Advice & Support Service

**sendiass**  
OXFORDSHIRE

**For more details about  
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## What does a volunteer Independent Parental Supporter (IPS) do?

The role of a volunteer Independent Parental Supporter (IPS) is to support parents of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in a variety of ways.

An IPS may help parents who have just learnt that their child is having difficulties at school to understand the ways children with additional needs can be supported in their school. They might attend meetings with parents and help them get their views across. An IPS might help with explaining official documents or talk things through before a meeting and help a parent prioritise what they want to say. They might take notes at a meeting and spend time after a meeting, checking that a parent understands what has been agreed and what the next steps are.

## Who are the Independent Parental Supporters?

The volunteer IPS in Oxfordshire come from a range of backgrounds.

Some are retired educational professionals, for instance, SENCOs, Headteacher, specialist teachers. Some are parents who have been through the system with their own child and gained a good deal of experience and expertise, others are parents who have felt well supported by their own IPS and want to offer the same to other parents.

Some do not have an educational background, they may have been involved in other fields, like social care or health. No-one needs to be an expert, just have an interest in SEN and be willing to learn.

## What makes a good IPS?

To be a good IPS you need to be someone who:

- is a good listener
- will respect **confidentiality**
- is good at explaining things
- is supportive
- can be trusted
- is **impartial** and does not take sides
- does not bring their own agenda to the role
- will be around for some time
- is good at seeing things through
- has no potential conflict of interest
- can be easily contacted
- can respect a parent's decision (even if your advice isn't followed)

Independent Parental Supporters might be working with parents at what can be a difficult time. They may hear some sensitive issues relating to the child and family. The IPS needs to be able to help in stressful situations.

## **What training is provided?**

SENDIASS Oxfordshire runs a training programme for Independent Parental Supporters about once a term. These are usually only 4 or 5 sessions long and cover basics such as good communication skills, confidentiality, impartiality, local policy and practice and the legal framework for supporting children and young people with SEND. Volunteers find the sessions useful and enjoyable and feel able to start their role once the training is completed. The volunteers sign an agreement with SENDIASS Oxfordshire and are then covered by SENDIASS Oxfordshire's insurance policy for their work as volunteers.

## **Who supports the Independent Parental Supporters ?**

There are regular monthly support meetings when the volunteer IPSs have lunch together and get the opportunity to listen to an interesting speaker on relevant topics or to chat informally. This is also a way of ensuring the volunteers are kept up to date with developments in the field of special educational needs and disabilities as well as helping them feel supported in their valuable role.

Without the excellent volunteer IPS that are available, SENDIASS Oxfordshire would not be able to provide as good a service to the parents of children with SEND in Oxfordshire so the SENDIASS team are always happy to advise and support the volunteer IPS.

SENDIASS Oxfordshire's volunteer Independent Parental Supporters enjoy their role and parents and carers really appreciate the difference they make.

If you would like more information on becoming a volunteer in this rewarding role, contact SENDIASS Oxfordshire on 01865 810516 or e-mail [sendiass@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:sendiass@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

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### **Confidentiality Code:**

Everything you tell us will be treated in strict confidence. We will not disclose our records to, or discuss the case with, a third party outside SENDIASS Oxfordshire without your consent, except if we suspect a child is at risk.