

High Hopes for High Needs Programme

# Impact Report 2023



# Contents



Foreword	03
High Needs Delivery Advisory Board	06
Delivering impact in SEND	08
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping local leaders to set an inclusive ambition for SEND</li> <li>• Improving SEND advice to schools</li> <li>• Ensuring children can access the right support at the right time</li> <li>• Embedding strengths-based practice in SEND services</li> <li>• Improving the parent &amp; carer experience</li> <li>• Improving SEN Transport and increasing young people's skills</li> <li>• Supporting sustainability and resilience</li> </ul>	
Working with the programme	18

## Foreword

The High Needs Delivery Advisory Board was established to keep the focus of this programme squarely on the frontline difference it is making with and for families and professionals. It is important to all of us involved that we know the work is improving experiences and outcomes and, when we have learning, to share that openly with the sector.

As Chair of the Board I am therefore delighted to share what I hope will be the first of many annual impact reports. High Needs systems are complex and, for any one individual, there are very few levers of control. Successfully introducing and embedding change requires high levels of collaboration – working at the ‘edges’ of different teams, services and agencies, and always with families.

In short it is difficult! However this report shows that, with the right approach, it is possible. On behalf of the Board I would like to thank the many families, professionals and leaders involved.

My commitment in turn is to ensure the focus on learning and impact only grows.



**JENNY COLES**  
 Chair, IMPOWER High Needs  
 Delivery Advisory Board







## Executive Summary

All children deserve an inclusive education that prepares them for their future.

In 2022-23, the High Hopes for High Needs programme, steered by the Delivery Advisory Board, worked with six local areas to improve SEND services for 80,000 children & young people.

This work helped local leaders and stakeholders to set an inclusive ambition, design and introduce new ways of working to improve the experience of families, and create a more resilient SEND system.

### This included:

- The establishment of four local SEND Advice Lines to support schools to identify and meet children’s needs earlier. This has prevented exclusions and directly increased the confidence of school staff.

- The introduction and roll out of the Valuing SEND tool to four new areas and 800 new educational settings, helping those settings to better understand what their pupils need and to prevent the escalation of those needs.
- Supporting practitioners to develop and embed strengths-based practice, strengthening decision-making and communication with families and schools. This has improved the experience of families, increased the confidence of professionals, and reduced rates of appeal.

This report shares the impact of this work over the course of the year to March 2023 with the hope that this learning will assist others in the sector committed to similar aims.

To share your learning or enquire about joining the programme, please contact Jenny Coles, Chair of the Advisory Board via [enquiries@impower.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@impower.co.uk).



### KEY FINDINGS FROM THIS REPORT

- How establishing four **local SEND Advice Lines** to support schools to identify and meet children’s needs earlier has prevented exclusions and directly increased the confidence of school staff.
- How rolling out the **Valuing SEND tool** into four new areas and 800 new settings has helped schools to better understand their children with SEND and prevented the escalation of needs.
- How supporting local authorities to embed **strengths-based practice** improves their decision-making processes and strengthens their communication with schools and families. This in turn improves a child and young person’s experience, increases staff confidence, and reduces rates of appeal.

# The High Needs Delivery Advisory Board

**The Board was set up to:**

- Enable joint working and skills sharing across local areas experiencing similar issues
- Provide a reflection, innovation and problem-solving forum for leaders
- Keep a focus on the delivery of frontline changes which improve the lived experience of families
- Share learning and insight on 'what works' with the wider sector



**Jenny Coles**  
High Needs Delivery  
Advisory Board Chair



**Dame Christine Lenehan**  
Director, Council for  
Disabled Children



**Heather Sandy**  
Executive Director of  
Childrens Services,  
Lincolnshire County  
Council



**Martin Gray**  
Directory of  
Children's Services,  
Stockton-on-Tees  
Council



**Pauline Melvin-Anderson OBE**  
Director of Learning,  
Inclusion & Skills,  
Derby County Council



**Coralie Cross**  
Parent Carer  
representative and  
chair, Lincolnshire  
Parent Carer Forum



**Jo Fisher**  
Executive Director of  
Children's Services,  
Hertfordshire County  
Council



**Lorraine Mulroney**  
National Specialist  
SEND Advisor, NHS  
England



**Carol Kelsey**  
Independent  
Parent carer



**Louise Aynsley**  
Chief Financial  
Officer, Suffolk  
County Council



**Tina Emery**  
Co-chair, National  
Network of Parent  
Carer Forum



**Alastair Thompson**  
Programme  
Director, IMPOWER  
Consulting



**Geoff Hinkins**  
Delivery Director,  
IMPOWER  
Consulting



**Sandra Ositelu**  
Senior Manager,  
IMPOWER  
Consulting

Other publications from the Board this year include the Co-production Toolkit which sets out a framework for and examples of how different stakeholders can work together to deliver positive change.





# High Hopes for High Needs

PROGRAMME LEARNING SUMMARY | 2022/23

All children deserve an inclusive education that prepares them for their future. In 2022-23, the High Hopes for High Needs programme worked with six local areas to improve SEND services for **80,000 children & young people**.<sup>1</sup>

This report shares the impact achieved this year.



# Helping local leaders to set an inclusive ambition for SEND

SEND services are full of passionate people, working together in a complex and challenging environment to try to improve support for children. But sometimes there is no common vision for what different stakeholders want to achieve or a shared and focused plan for achieving it.

Currently, in most local areas, requests for statutory support are rising and the financial challenge is growing. This is increasing the pressure on local systems. But in a healthy system, better outcomes often cost less.

Identifying needs and supporting children early, improving inclusive practice in educational settings and supporting more children in their communities is both the right thing for children and is more financially sustainable.

This year, the programme supported system leaders in three areas to create an inclusive ambition for SEND and understand the sustainability of this plan.

This has included support to:

- Structure and set up SEND Transformation Programmes
- Skills transfer to support SEND Transformation Teams
- Make better use of data and insights to drive leadership in SEND
- Connecting local leaders to the programme's Delivery Advisory Board and shared learning networks

“In July 2022 we were struggling to see the wood from the trees. We now can and we have a clear vision and plan to deliver.”

Inclusion Senior Management Team - Suffolk County Council

“[the support] has been a real fundamental help in shifting our thinking and... raising the profile of SEND corporately.”

Senior Leadership Team, Hertfordshire County Council

# Improving SEND advice to schools

The work through this programme shows that there is often lots of useful advice, support and services in local areas, but it can be hard to find and is often unused.

Rising requests for support has led services towards 'gate keeping' their 'specialist' resources. This means that schools and families can't access support until it's too late – and opportunities to understand and meet

need earlier are missed for over six in every ten families.

This year, the programme has supported the launch and embedding of **four local SEND / Inclusion Advice Lines**, joining the two already established, supporting faster access to advice to help schools to see and meet children's needs better and earlier, and where possible, prevent needs from escalating.

“The service is incredibly valuable... [it] allowed me to properly discuss the issue, and collaboratively think about what the best next step for a child is. It has improved my knowledge of what is available.”

School, Suffolk

“I'm new to the area, from working in another county. I've been blown away with all of the support in place, including the Advice Line.”

School, Hertfordshire

## SUFFOLK



- An Inclusion Advice Line was established in 2022. In the first term after its launch **142 calls were received** from schools and self-evaluation after each call indicates:<sup>2</sup>
- **96%** of calls helped to build SENCO (school) confidence.
- **91%** of calls helped to meet the child's needs earlier.
- In **72%** of calls, the call helped to prevent escalation of the child's needs, ultimately improving outcomes.

## DERBY



- In its first full school year, this Advice Line supported **90% of local schools** and received over 550 contacts.
- Call numbers have increased over time, from both primary and secondary settings.
- Their queries have shifted too, with a greater number now focused on early intervention and the graduated response.
- **98%** of callers reported finding the Advice Line helpful.<sup>3</sup>

## CASE STUDY | DERBY



- A school called the Advice Line this year about a Year 4 child.
- This child had started to become aggressive with school staff. The school didn't know how to support them and were worried it may escalate and lead to exclusion.
- The Advice Line, staffed with skilled professionals, helped them to explore the trauma that the child had experienced and to better understand their behaviour.
- They also helped them to organise a visit with a specialist from another school, who helped the school to consider additional support they could put in place to meet the child's needs.
- This helped to connect the school to a fantastic local resource – something which doesn't always happen organically – and reduced the risk of exclusion for this child, improving their immediate experience and their overall life chances.<sup>4</sup>





# Ensuring children can access the right support at the right time

Valuing SEND was co-designed by a range of parent carers and practitioners from three local areas. It is a tool and approach which helps everyone to better understand children's needs, the strategies that work at home, and ensure the right support is accessed at the right time.

It does this by helping schools to explore children's emerging needs early, monitoring their needs and progress over time, and helping to plan their support at key points of transition,

for example when moving to secondary school. It also helps schools to identify their own strengths and improve their overall 'readiness' to support children with SEND.

This year, the programme supported **four local areas** to roll out Valuing SEND to their educational settings, joining the two local areas already using it in full. That's **800 new settings**, and the many children attending them.<sup>6</sup>

As well as being transformative for education providers, Valuing SEND can support local authorities to better understand how ready those providers are as a whole to meet SEND needs, and strategically target and tailor their support based on evidence.

This year, the programme has supported a range of professionals beyond teachers to embed Valuing SEND in their practice, including:

- Educational Psychologists
- Specialist Advisory Teachers
- Statutory SEND Caseworkers

“I really loved Valuing SEND. It has really helped me to think about my child's support needs and also the areas I need help with”  
Parent and carer - Derby

“Valuing SEND is simple yet so powerful. It generates fantastic conversations from one sheet of paper”  
Headteacher - Hertfordshire

“Using Valuing SEND is effective. I hope we keep using it in more collaborative meetings with schools.” SEND Team, Somerset Council

“We are proud of the journey we have been on to become more inclusive. Our Valuing SEND score helps us celebrate that.” School, Somerset

“I really liked how Valuing SEND works and is laid out. It will be very beneficial in schools for early intervention and targeted support.” Parent carer, Hertfordshire

“Valuing SEND information will really help us to identify groups of schools with particular development needs and target support for them.” Specialist Advisory Teacher, Somerset Council

## DERBY



- **100% of schools** were trained and supported to use Valuing SEND.
- This will help these schools to better understand how ready they are to support children with SEND and identify ways in which they could improve.
- **40+ schools** actively used the tool between December 2022 and March 2023, helping to better understand the needs of 97 children and ensure they have the right support in place.<sup>6</sup>

## HERTFORDSHIRE

- **347** schools were trained in Valuing SEND, **65%** of the total.
- These schools have now started to use the tool in practice.
- This is following a successful pilot in which **82%** of participating schools said that Valuing SEND had helped them to develop a better understanding of what support the child needed.<sup>9</sup>

## SOMERSET



- **249** schools were trained in Valuing SEND, that's **96%**.
- These schools are now starting their whole school SEND evaluation, which will help the Council to ensure they are providing the support that schools really need.
- This is following two successful pilots with 40+ schools, in which **90%** of the schools who engaged in the evaluation said they want to use Valuing SEND in future.<sup>8</sup>

## HERTFORDSHIRE | EARLY YEARS



- This year, the Valuing SEND Early Years tool was trialled in **14 Early Years settings** in Hertfordshire, supporting 16 children with SEND.
- After using Valuing SEND, SENCOs reported improved confidence in knowing what they need to do to meet children's SEND needs.

“I genuinely believe that Valuing SEND will be a game changer and lead to positive outcomes for children.”  
Nursery, Hertfordshire

“This is an excellent tool for schools to work collaboratively with families.”  
Nursery, Hertfordshire

## CASE STUDY | HERTFORDSHIRE



- Valuing SEND can help to identify a child's needs early and ensure the right support is put in place, including in Early Years.
- Valuing SEND helped to confirm the child's emerging Social, Emotional & Mental Health needs and helped his nursery and future primary school to plan his transition, including visual timetables, photos and visits, ensuring consistent strategies to manage his behaviour on arrival, using his skills in Cognition to help him understand the feelings of others. This supported the child to continue onto a mainstream school with his peers.<sup>10</sup>

## Embedding strengths-based practice in SEND services

Local SEND systems are complex and processes that are designed with the best intentions can sometimes leave families in the dark, with some feeling as if they are “just a number”.

The programme has focused on supporting local practitioners to embed child-centred and strengths-based practice to improve outcomes for children and the experience of families.

“The changes give a clear consistency and structure to panels and supports us to make better decisions. I love them.”  
Panel Chair - Suffolk

“I am absolutely confident the decisions we are making for children are more inclusive.” Panel Coordinator - Suffolk

### SUFFOLK



- SEND Panels are used to ensure open and transparent decision making around education, health and care needs as part of the statutory processes.
- One local area focused on strengthening these panels, improving outcomes for children and professional satisfaction. This included:
  - Increasing attendance from different professionals to ensure decisions are taken with the right expertise.
  - Improving planning before the meeting to ensure that the right decisions can be taken without delay.
  - Capturing clearer information about what decision has been taken and why, to improve the clarity and communication of next steps for families and schools.

### SOMERSET



- The programme supported the Statutory SEND Team to reset their practice ambitions and self-assess where they currently are against these. This was followed by bespoke training to support them to make this shift in their practice a reality.
- **96%** of staff found the team self-assessment helpful.
- **91%** feel they now know more about strengths-based and relational practice.
- **100%** feel this will improve outcomes for children and improve communication with families.<sup>11</sup>

### CASE STUDY | SOMERSET



- Moving between primary and secondary school is often a stressful time for children and their families.
- Planning can feel like it starts too late and parents and carers are not always clear on how their child will be supported.
- Secondary schools also sometimes feel they are lacking information about the children who might join them, preventing their ability to plan early.
- In one area, a collaborative approach of earlier joint planning meetings was tested with secondary schools, SEND Teams and Advisory Teachers.
- For this child, this meeting allowed the secondary school to better understand their needs early and think more creatively about how to meet them.
- This led to the child being offered a place at their local mainstream school, meeting theirs and their parents’ wishes.
- The secondary school said this would have been far less likely without the collaborative and supportive approach.<sup>12</sup>

## Improving the parent and carer experience

Parents and carers want what is best for their child but by the time they reach Education, Health and Care processes and engage with SEND Teams, they can feel they have exhausted all options, and often feel frustrated

The programme has worked alongside parents

and carers to understand what they want to change in their local SEND system and then help that local area to realise that vision.

It’s never an overnight solution but the programme is committed to improving the experience of children and families.

“The engagement has been parent and carer friendly and informative. They have respected and listened to all views and created space for the network to engage.”  
Parent Carer Forum, Cornwall

### TRIALLING WAY FORWARD MEETINGS

### SUFFOLK



- In one area, the programme supported a ‘Way Forward’ trial – a collaborative meeting with professionals, parents and carers and schools, when a decision is taken that a child does not need an Education, Health and Care needs assessment.
- This meeting was designed because a ‘no to assess’ decision can often feel like a cliff edge, with no further support or discussion offered about a child.
- This trial received positive feedback from parents and carers and schools. For this group, appeal rates reduced by 22%.<sup>13</sup>

“The meeting was very useful and has given me new strategies to use at home.”  
Parent Carer, Suffolk

“Please can more ‘Way Forward’ meetings happen after a ‘no to assess’ decision. It was really helpful.” School, Suffolk





## Improving SEN Transport and increasing young people's skills

Transport is an important part of the SEND system, helping children with SEND to get to school safely.

However sometimes planning is delayed, resulting in long and illogical journeys, and often it fails to help young people to develop the skills they need to live more independently as an adult.

This year, the programme supported one local area to set an ambition for SEN Transport. This included working with parents and carers to understand their hopes and aspirations for their children.

Together, parents and carers, local professionals and IMPOWER then co-designed a set of trials for improving SEN Transport, following a 'test and learn' model. These included:

- Increasing access to independent travel training
- Improving access to personal budgets
- Increasing transport planning at key points of transition for children, for example when moving between schools

89% of parents and carers want their children to be as independent as possible but 45% felt that the system was not supporting their child to develop independence skills.<sup>14</sup>



## Supporting sustainability and resilience

Meeting children's needs early often improves outcomes. This is because by putting the right support in place for children at the right time, they are more likely to thrive, their needs are less likely to escalate further, and sometimes, can even reduce.

Through a combination of the approaches outlined above, four local areas are better able to see and meet needs earlier and, in some cases, prevent the need for more specialist intervention. In addition to improving outcomes, this has helped them to improve the sustainability of their SEND services and ensure that they are able to make best use of their resources to collectively meet the needs of all children with SEND in their local area.

Time and again parents and carers tell leaders that early intervention is a priority, and these areas are shifting focus and resources towards more responsive and co-ordinated help focussed on a better understanding of children.

Parents and carers and schools have more often been more confident that needs are seen and action is being taken and felt less need to resort to the statutory process. Less escalation means improved life chances, more capacity for early help, and more ability to support young people whose needs require specialist support.

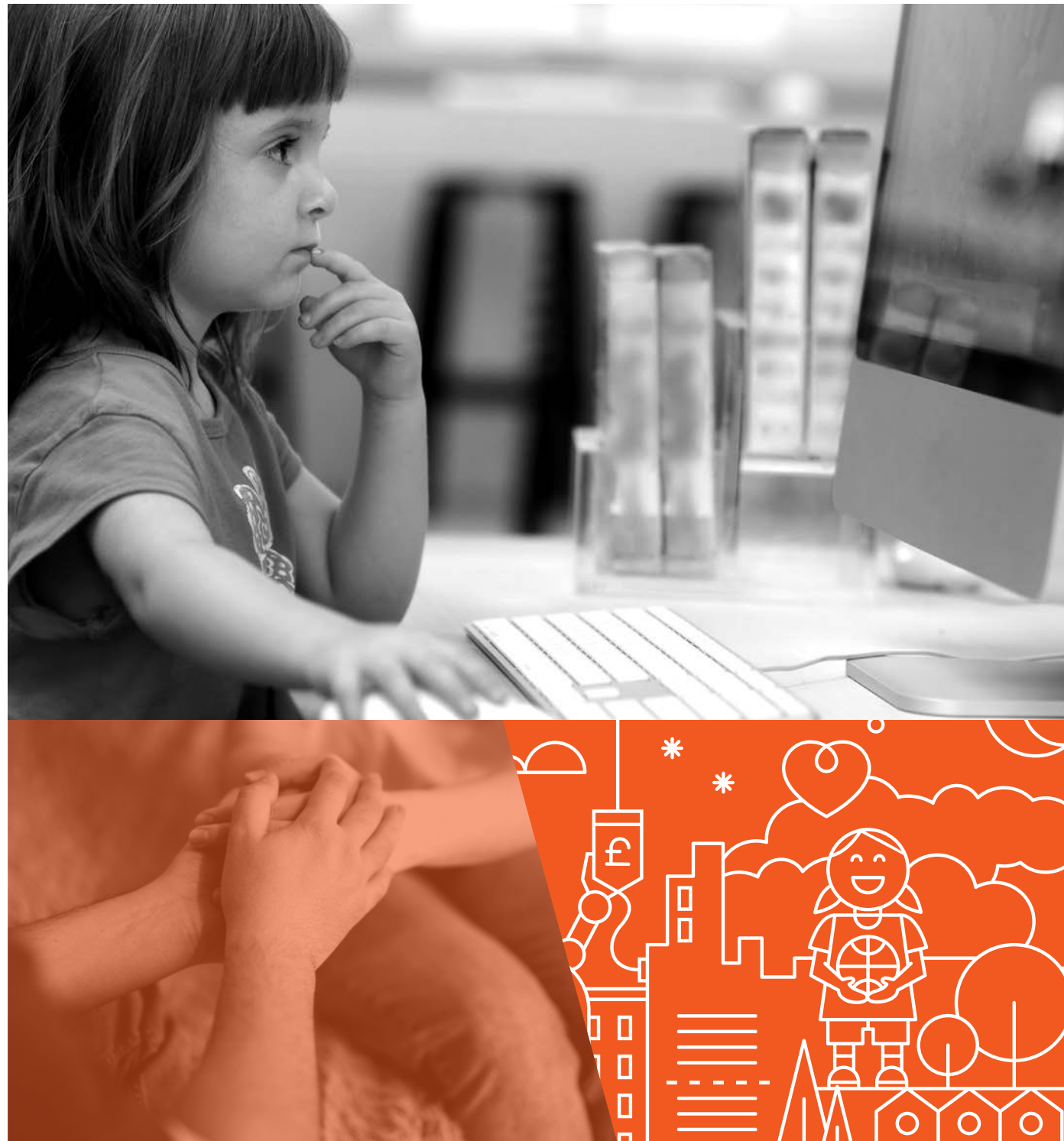
For these areas, better outcomes are the key to fairness and sustainability.

This report was compiled by Alastair Thompson and Chloe Williams, IMPOWER Consulting 2023. For more information, or to share you learning, please contact Programme Director, Al Thompson: [enquiries@impower.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@impower.co.uk)



## Joining the programme

To start a conversation about joining the High Hopes for High Needs programme contact **Alastair Thompson** - athompson@impower.co.uk.



## FOOTNOTES

- 1. 80,000 lives.** This figure has been calculated by combining the number of children with EHCPs and SEN Support in the areas in which we delivered change work in the financial year 2022-23. This excludes local areas in which we delivered exclusively diagnostic services and/or conducted first stage trials. Both EHCPs and SEN Support have been included because much of our work focuses on working with schools around early intervention and therefore reaches beyond those children with EHCPs. 80,000 has been rounded down from 81,083, which is the combined figure for the four local authorities in which we delivered significant change work (Hertfordshire, Suffolk, Somerset and Derby). This figure has been obtained using the 2022 SEN2 data return.
- 2. Suffolk SEND Advice Line.** On the 5 September 2022, the Suffolk SEND Advice Line (known in Suffolk as the Inclusion Support Line) was launched. In the first term (period 05.09.22 to 16.12.22), the Advice Line received 142 calls from schools. After each call, the call handler was asked to reflect on the outcomes achieved during the call. This self-assessment by the Advisors having fed into all calls since September, was used to generate the statistics you can see in the report e.g. 72% of calls helped to prevent the escalation of the child's needs.
- 3. Derby – Advice Line.** The Derby Advice Line (known locally as Derby SAL) was launched in September 2021. In its first full school year, running September 2021 to July 2022, the Advice Line received 550 contacts from 97 schools – that's 90% of the schools in Derby. The setting type of each calling school was recorded, and the number of calls from primary and secondary schools increased over the first year, from 12 in September 2021 to 41 in July 2022 and 3 in September 2021 to 22 in July 2022 respectively. Between September 2021 and July 2022, the % callers calling for 'support with the graduated response' (e.g. early intervention) increased from 2% to 9%. Callers were surveyed to ask if the call had helped them. 321 responded to the request for feedback (of 550 callers). 319 (98%) of these said they had found the call helpful.
- 4. Derby – Advice Line case study.** This case study comes from the Derby SEND Advice Line, which has been fully operationally since September 2021. This case study was from a call that took place in its first full school year in operation (September 2021 – July 2022) and was produced in discussion with the Derby SAL call handlers. This case study has been expressly signed off by the senior responsible officer from the local authority as a true representation of the work.
- 5. Number of schools trained in Valuing SEND this year.** 800 new settings trained in Valuing SEND this year is a rounded representation of the figure 828, which is the number of schools who registered for training on the Valuing SEND tool in the financial year 2022-23. This includes those schools from the four areas which chose to roll out Valuing SEND in full (Somerset 249, Hertfordshire 280, Suffolk 175 (part completion by March 2023) and Derby 108). This does not include the figures from local areas who trialled the tool this year, including West Sussex and Cornwall, nor those who registered in previous years.
- 6. Derby Valuing SEND.** Between May 2021 and January 2023, 108 schools were trained in Valuing SEND – that's 100% of Derby schools. 40+ schools accessed the tool in December 2022-March 2023, and between them they completed 97 child profiles using the Valuing SEND tool. This information (number of schools who have accessed the tool, number of child profiles completed) can be accessed via the Valuing SEND tool. It does not include information on personally identifiable information.
- 7. Somerset Valuing SEND trial.** Between January and March 2023, 209 schools registered for training on Valuing SEND, adding to the 40 schools trained during the pilot processes. This totals 249 schools – 95.7% of Somerset schools (rounded to 96%). Before this, two pilots took place with 40 schools in total, one in April to July 2022 and one in September to December 2022. At the end of these pilots, schools were asked via an 'exit interview' whether they would like to use Valuing SEND again in future. 14 schools (of 40) took part in this evaluation method, and of these 14 schools, 13 said that they would like to use it again. This is 92.9% of those who participated, rounded down to 90%.
- 8. Hertfordshire Valuing SEND pilot.** The Hertfordshire Valuing SEND pilot took place between April and July 2022. Schools were asked for feedback after this pilot and 82% (9 of the 11) schools that took part said that Valuing SEND had helped them to develop a better understanding of what support the child needed.
- 9. Hertfordshire – Valuing SEND Early Years case study.** This case study comes from the Hertfordshire Early Years trial that took place between October and December 2022. This case study was produced in discussion with the Headteacher and SENCO. This case study has been expressly signed off by the senior responsible officer from the local authority as a true representation of the work.
- 10. Somerset practice improvement.** SEND Team members were asked to complete a feedback survey at the end of the practice improvement support provided. The results of this survey were used to generate the statistics you see in the report. 100% of those staff that attended the final workshop session completed the feedback survey.
- 11. Somerset phase transfer case study.** This case study comes from the phase transfer pilot work completed with Somerset in August-December 2023, in which 33 children were supported using the Valuing SEND tool. This case study has been expressly signed off by the senior responsible officer from the local authority as a true representation of the work.
- 12. Suffolk Way Forward meetings.** This pilot took place between 05.09.22 and 16.12.22. Appeals data was recorded by Suffolk County Council staff via their internal mechanisms and the September-November 2022 cohort was compared to the September-November 2021 cohort to identify the difference that the pilot had made. This resulted in finding shared in the report.
- 13. Cornwall SEN Transport.** IMPOWER supported Cornwall to identify opportunities to improve SEN Transport between May and October 2022. As a part of this work, they surveyed parent carers between June and July 2022. 267 responses were received. Included within these responses were the findings outlined in this report.
- 14. Quotes.** All quotes have been expressly approved by relevant client teams, either directly by the quoted individual where identifiable, or via the senior responsible officer for the client organisation where non-identifiable, drawing from the evaluation of our work with them.

# IMPOWER

---

Relationships start  
with a conversation.

✕ @IMPOWERconsult

**in** IMPOWER consulting

T: (0)20 7017 8030

E: [enquiries@IMPOWER.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@IMPOWER.co.uk)

W: [IMPOWER.co.uk](http://IMPOWER.co.uk)

To explore a range of our case studies and read  
our latest blogs why not visit [impower.co.uk](http://impower.co.uk)

Correct at time of publishing: July 2023