

# SENDIAS Annual Report

April 2023 and March 2024



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Doncaster SENDIAS service provides free, impartial and confidential information, advice and support about education, health and social care for children, young people and their parents/carers on matters relating to special educational needs and/or disability (SEND). The primary aim of the service is to promote independence and self-advocacy for children, young people and parents/carers.

This annual report gives an overview of Doncaster SENDIAS service between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. This will include data around the families we have supported as well as feedback received from our service users.

## About the service

The SEND Code of Practice 2015 outlines the expectations of Doncaster SENDIAS. We adhere to National Minimum Standards for SENDIAS services. The Minimum Standards are developed by the Information, Advice and Support Services (IASS) Network in partnership with the Department for Education.

### Staff Resource

The team consists of:

- Team manager (0.8 FTE)
- Two full-time officers
- One part-time officer (who works 30 hours per week during the term-time – this post is currently temporary funded until March 2025 using funding from the ICB)

All staff are legally trained to IPSEA Level 3, which is accredited legal training.

### Who can use the service?

- Any parent or carer of a child or young person up to age 25 with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- Children and young people with SEND
- Professionals who are working with families who have children or young people with SEND

### What do we do?

Doncaster SENDIAS helps children, young people and families:

- by providing information, which enables our service users to make informed decisions
- feel confident to express their views and participate in decisions
- understand legal processes, such as Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessments and timescales.

- understand local policy including the graduated approach and the planning which educational setting carry out to support children and young people with special educational needs (often referred to as assess, plan do review)
- complete practical tasks, such as dealing with paperwork, preparing for and attending meetings, writing letters and understanding reports.
- develop good working relationships with staff at nursery, school or college, or with other professionals.
- when complaints or disagreements arise including, supporting with the process of mediation and SEND tribunals.

### **How can we be contacted?**

We have a telephone helpline, which is staffed daily during office hours with a 24-hour answerphone service. We are also contactable through email, online self-referral form or social media. Service users can also speak to us when we attend events in the local community.

The service operates 51 weeks a year, during normal office hours. However, we are highly flexible in our contact time as we often have working parents/ carers who wish to contact the service, before 9am or after 5.30pm. In such circumstances, we schedule a telephone appointment to call them at their most convenient time, which can be outside of normal office hours.

We also work from the Doncaster Civic Office, which is in the center of Doncaster, one day each week. This allows us to be more accessible to families, who may need support because they struggle to access the internet and/or those who need a little additional support due to language barriers or their own learning disabilities.

### **Social Media**

We use Facebook to communicate with families and share key messages. Families occasionally message us directly through Facebook for support, but overall, the preference to access the service is by telephone. As of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, we have had 2,063-page followers and an increase of 19% (338 followers) from the previous year.

### **SENDIAS Website**

The SENDIAS website is hosted as part of Doncaster Council. We update the website frequently and signpost parents to the Local Offer as part of everyday discussions. In the reporting period April 23 and March 24 our website had 9,635 pageviews which is a 72% increase on the previous year.

### **Joint Commissioning and Governance Arrangement**

Doncaster SENDIAS is an in-house service which is commissioned and funded by the City Council with an additional contribution from the Integrated Care Board (ICB) with whom we have a joint commissioning arrangement for the period April 24 to March 25.

The service work closely with the local Parent Carer Forum (Doncaster Parents Voice) who act as independent chair for our steering group.

## Intervention Levels

To manage our work effectively we implement a set of service intervention levels, which reflect our case recording and levels of support. The vast majority of calls we receive into the helpline are Level 1 and Level 2 cases which take less than 3 hours of officer time to reach a successful outcome.

Level 1 (Helpline Calls)	Service User Need	Support	Outcome
<b>Information</b>	Information on specific advice about education health and social care sent systems and processes.	Provision of information which could be via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• helpline</li> <li>• e-mail</li> <li>• website</li> </ul>	Parent/YP is empowered to independently manage their situation and make informed decisions

Time for individual contact up to 20 minutes on the helpline and a maximum of one hour for email responses which might include research.

Level 2 (Helpline Calls)	Service User Need	Support	Outcome
<b>Information and tailored advice</b>	Information on <b>specific</b> advice about education health and social care sent systems and processes.	Provision of information which could be via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phone call</li> <li>• Virtual meetings</li> <li>• Exchange of emails</li> </ul> Discussions around more complex/ high level information	Parent/YP is empowered to independently manage their situation and make informed decisions.  The services provided tailored advice and support.

Time for individual contact up to 40 minutes on the helpline and a maximum of 2 hour for email responses which might include research etc. Cases are low level need/ low complexity.

\*Some level 2 cases, while not particularly complex, may take a long time to reach a conclusion. In such instances, we record our intervention as ongoing case work.

<b>Level 3 (Case Work)</b>	<b>Service User Need</b>	<b>Support</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>Support</b>	<p>Information, advice and support about education, health and social care send systems and process is. Inclusive of initial concern up to appeals.</p> <p>The needs of individual service users and/ or the complexity of their/ their children's circumstances significantly impacts on their ability to independently navigate the system.</p> <p>They are a child or young person who need/ wanting information, advice or support separate from that given to their parent/ carer</p>	<p>Support can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocation of a caseworker</li> <li>• Liaising with other education health and social care agencies</li> <li>• Attendance at face to face and virtual meetings</li> <li>• Attendance at multi agency meetings</li> <li>• Support with writing letters, filling in forms, giving views, and preparing appeals</li> </ul>	<p>Parents, child or young person feels have been supported to navigate the system.</p> <p>Parent child or young person feels that they have been able to make informed decisions, exercise their rights and express their views.</p>

Support which takes officers time more than three hours and has moderate levels of need and complexity.

\*Longer term case work is always necessary.

<b>Level 4 (Case Work)</b>	<b>Service User Need</b>	<b>Support</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>Intensive Support</b>	<p>Information, advice and support about education, health and social care SEND systems and processes. Inclusive of initial concerns up to appeals.</p> <p>The needs of individual service users/ or the complexity of their children's circumstances may mean that they are not able to independently navigate the system and/ or access justice.</p> <p>They are a child or young person who need advocacy/ representation separate from or instead of their parents, this includes children/young people who are looked after.</p>	<p>Can include all of the support detailed in Level 3 but may also involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On-going intensive casework/ advocacy.</li> </ul>	<p>Parents, child or young person feels have been supported to navigate the system.</p> <p>Parent child or young person feels that they have been able to make informed decisions, exercise their rights and express their views.</p>

The case requires ongoing support there is a high level of lead and high levels of complexity.

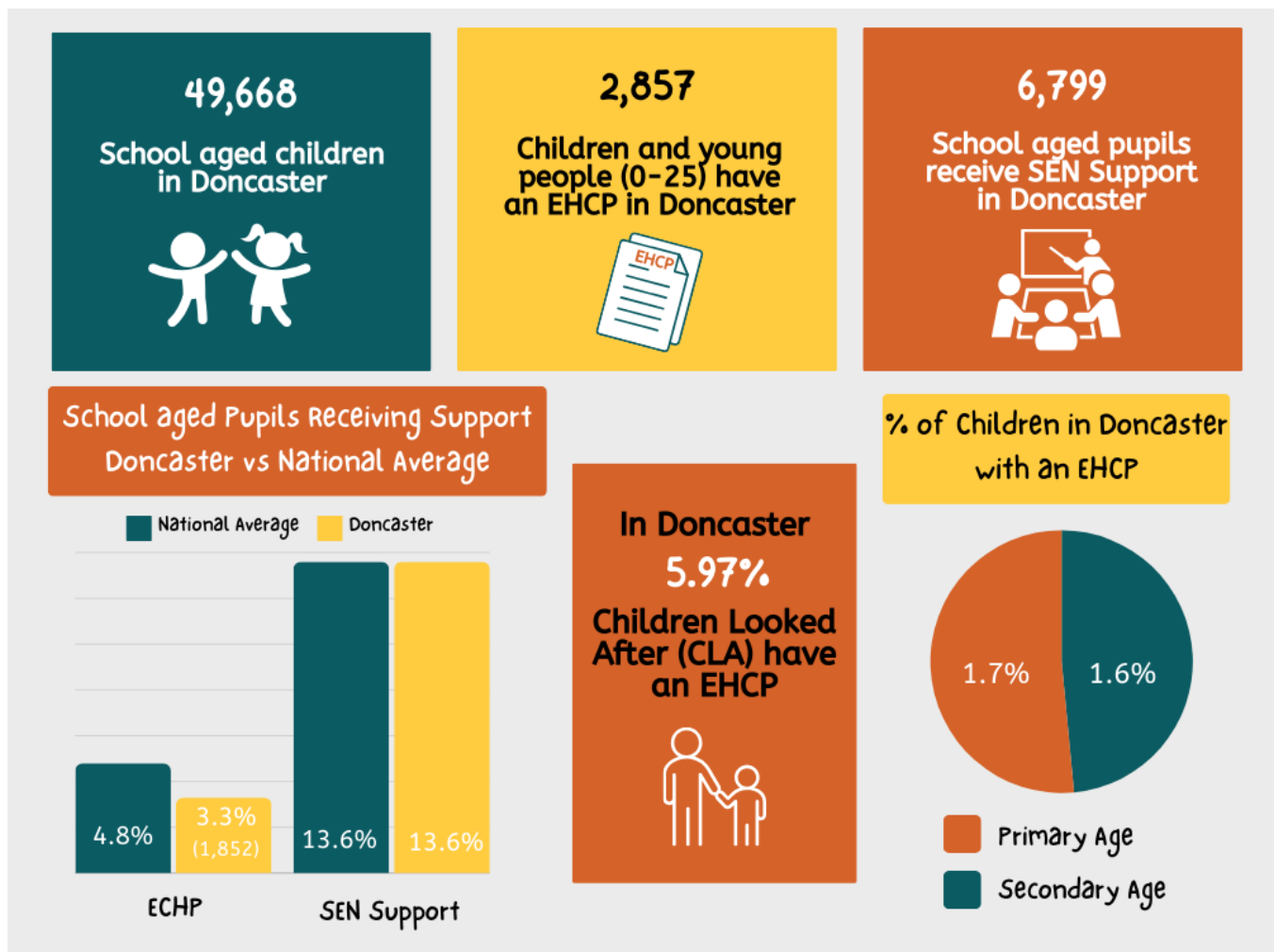
\*Longer term case work is always necessary.

## Headline Data

### City of Doncaster Council SEND Headline Data

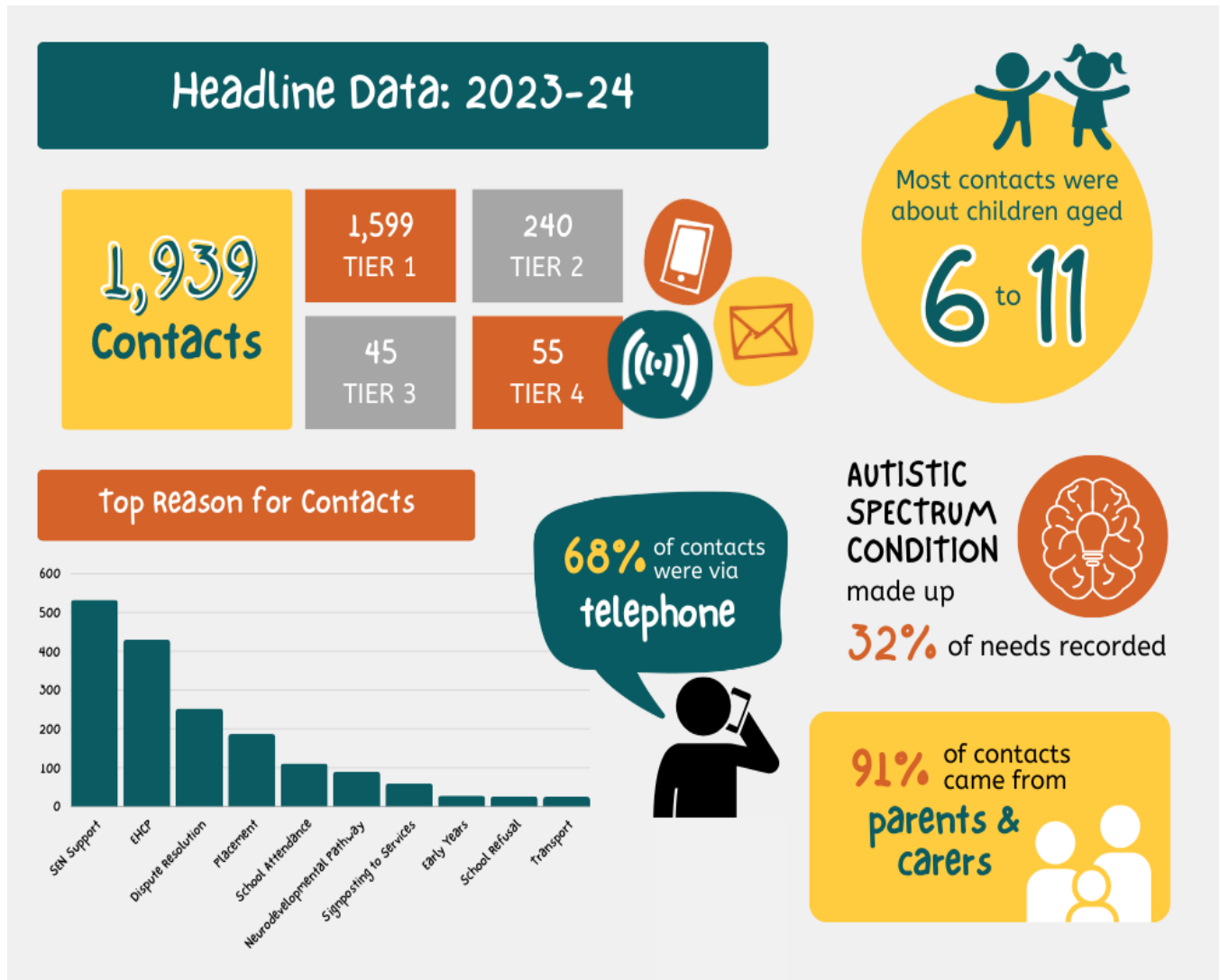
Doncaster, like most local areas, has seen the number of Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) requests increase, along with the volume of families requesting specialist settings for their children and young people.

However, the number of EHCPs maintained by Doncaster local authority is slightly lower than the national average (1.5% less).





# SENDIAS Headline Data 2023-24



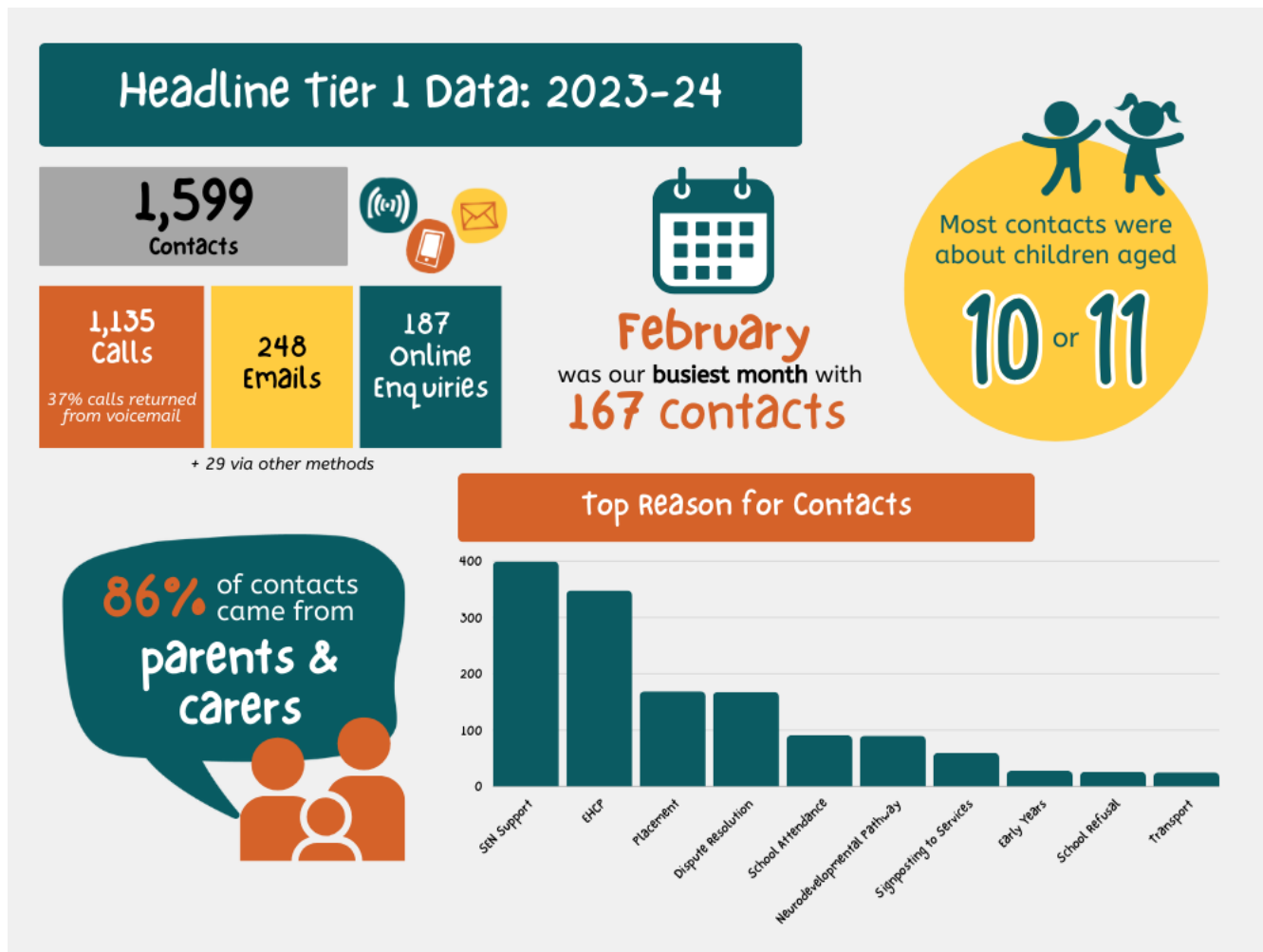
Demand for the service has remained high throughout this reporting period, with numbers of new service users higher than in previous years. We have received 1,939 new referrals (contacts), which is a 14% increase on the last reporting year.

Our data tells us that services users prefer to contact us directly by telephone, which results in a high number of calls coming into the service with a significant number going through to the voicemail facility due to officers being actively engaged with other service users. We have worked hard to ensure that our response times to all requests for support continued to be actioned within 48 hours since parents. However, in order to maintain this level of service, we have had to make some adjustments, such as attending fewer face-to-face meetings with parents. This was a difficult decision to make, but anecdotally our service users tell us that they prefer to benefit from receiving timely tailored information, advice and support by us being more available on the helpline. To mitigate risk, we offer all families pre-meeting support and help them to plan and ensure that they have tools and resources to ensure that their voices are heard. We also, ensure that families who need support because of English as a second language or their own learning difficulties or disabilities are supported (where possible) in meetings by a SENDIAS officer. When we are attending meetings with families we have requested attendance virtually to reduce travel time but still have the family access our support.

Over the last 12 months the main reason parents have contacted the service is to obtain information, advice and support in relation to SEN support in schools and Education, Health and Care plans (EHCP). However, the reason for requesting support is often multifaceted and caller's needs are becoming more complex.

The service received most calls from parents of children in primary schools, which we believe is due to the outreach work we complete and the fact that parents want to secure support for children as early as possible in their educational journey.

## SENDIAS Helpline Data (Tier 1 Calls)

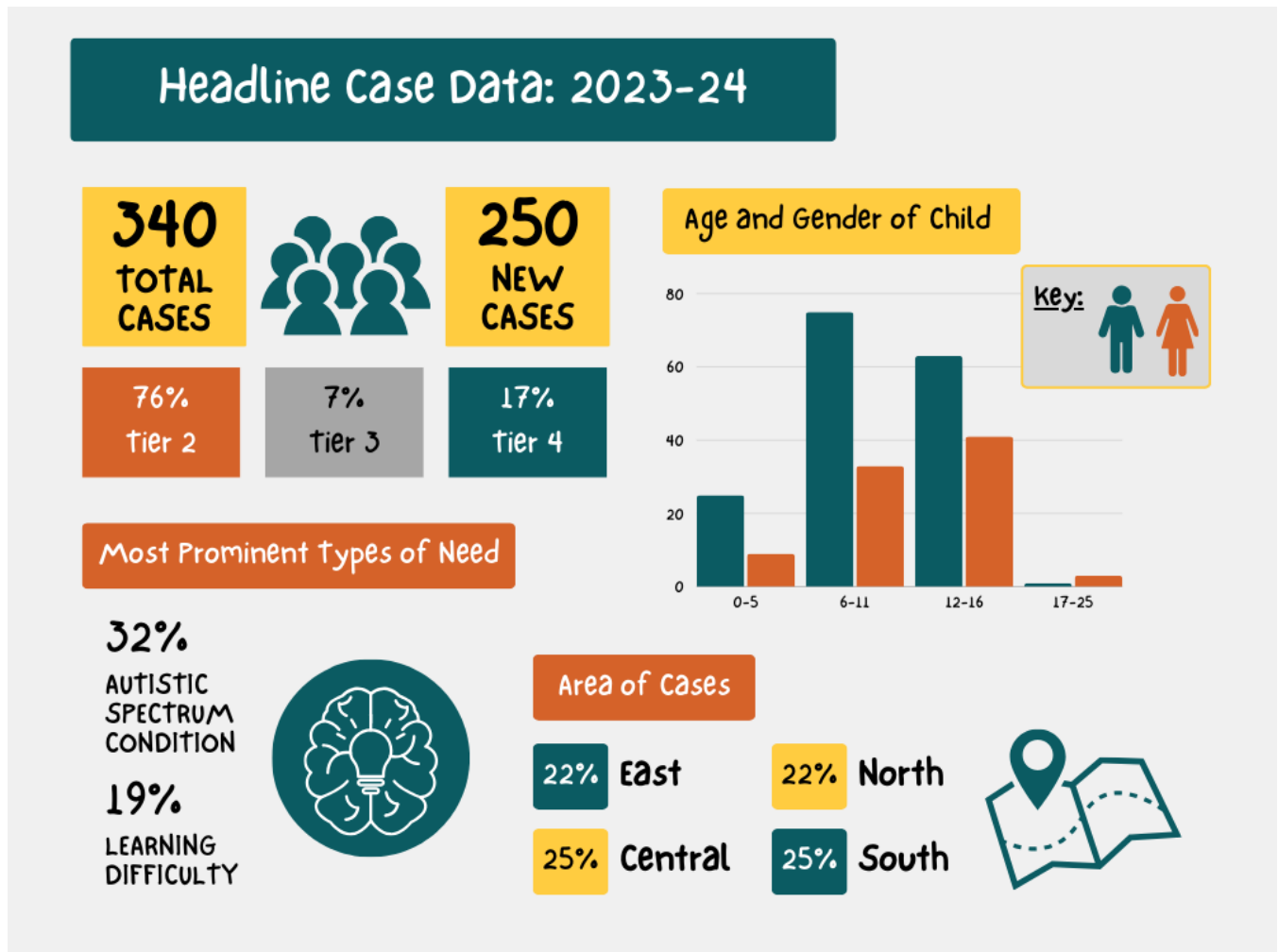


### Helpline Data Summary

Our helpline calls have also been mostly been in connection with SEN Support and EHCP's. However, the ages of the children service discussed was mostly 10 or 11 year olds. Anecdotally, we feel that this is connected to anxieties around the transition to from primary to secondary school. We intend to provide additional resources and training for parent to address this issue over the next 12 months.

Our busiest month was February, which correlates with the Local Authority naming which secondary school placements for children with an EHCP. It is this time of year when we also start to see and increase in requests for tribunal support.

## SENDIAS Headline Case Data



### Case Data Summary (Tier 2, 3 and 4 Work)

We worked on a total of 340 cases; we opened 250 new cases and continued to work on 90 which were carried forward from the previous reporting period. Most casework was completed with primary aged children 43% closely followed by referrals for children at secondary school 42%. The remaining referrals were for children aged 0-5 year, 14% and young people aged 17-25 years, 2%.

The case work completed is fairly evenly spread across Doncaster, which is reassuring that knowledge of the SENDIAS service is city wide. As in previous years, more families call us to talk about boys than girls, especially in the primary years - we suspect that this mirrors SEND research showing that girls tend to be diagnosed with SEND at a later stage than boys.

Considering this, the service will look at useful information to share with families around identifying needs in girls to support early identification.

\*NB As previously mentioned case work normally starts at T3 intervention level, but this year we have seen a higher number of Tier 2 cases needing to be logged due to the length of time it has taken to reach a conclusion and the levels of support required by families.

**Dispute Resolution**

**Mediation**

We have given advice and support to 96 service users in relation to the mediation process; we spend a significant amount of time helping parents to prepare for mediation, but we attend less than 10% of mediation sessions due to service capacity. Additionally, the majority of our services users recognise the mediation process as a ‘safe’ environment facilitated by trained mediators, and therefore they tell us that they are happy with the support received to prepare. That said, we will always attend tribunal with parents who for whatever reason need support more than normally required.

**Tribunal**

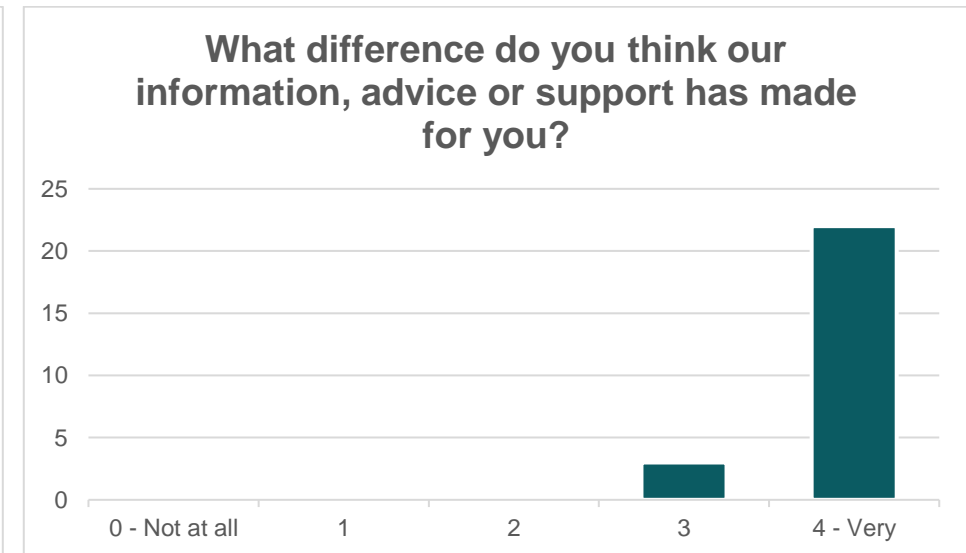
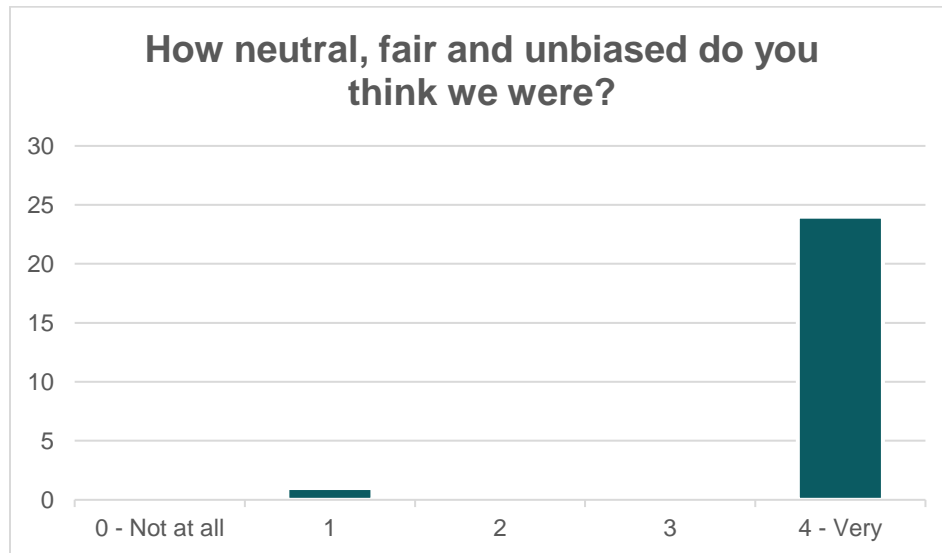
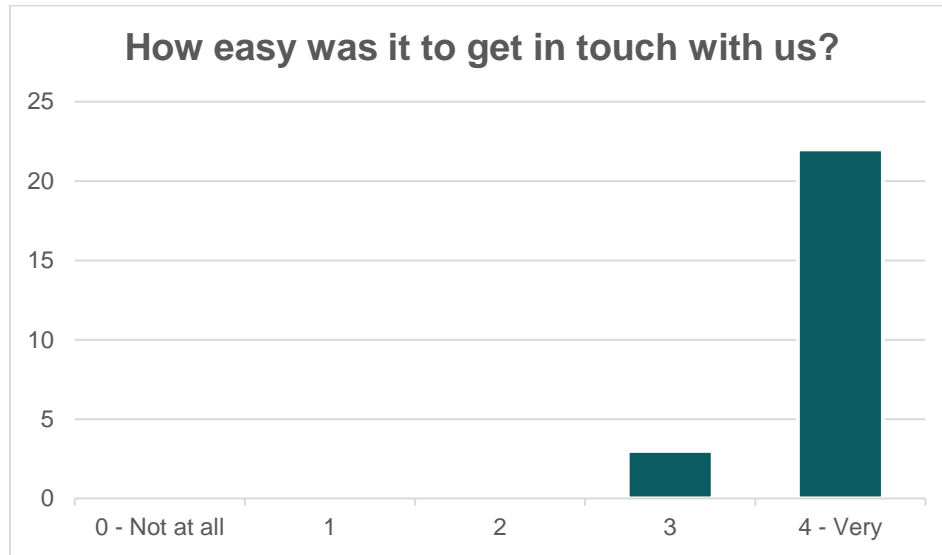
This year we have seen a huge increase in parents requesting information about tribunals. We have received 116 calls from families exploring the idea of attending at tribunal as opposed to 17 calls in the previous reporting period.

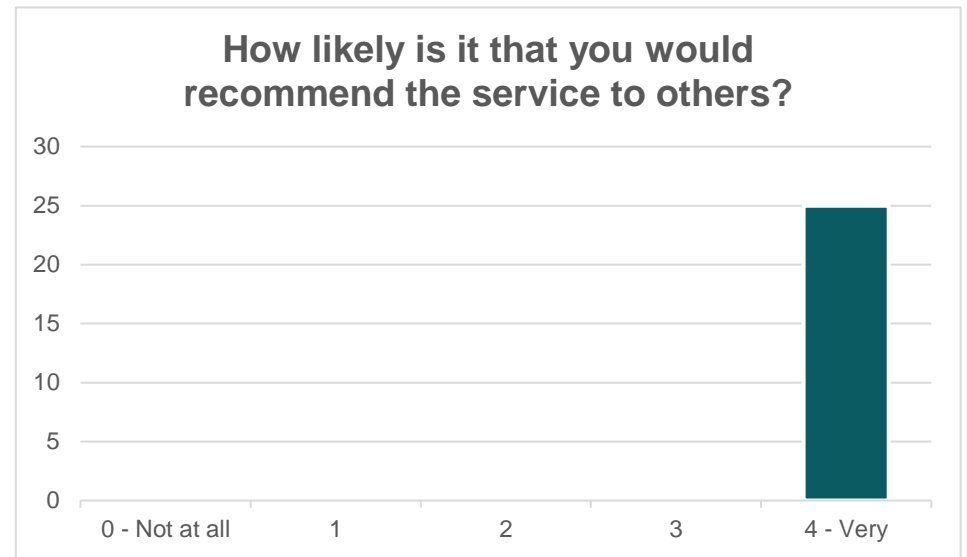
Of the 116 calls received, we have supported 66 families to initiate tribunal proceedings and have worked successfully with the local authority to secure an appropriate resolve without the need to attend tribunal for 37 of these.

Data Collected	Number of cases
Callers to the helpline requesting information about the tribunal process (no action after the first call)	50
Tribunal Cases Supported by SENDIAS	66
Number of Tribunal cases resolved before hearing date	37
Tribunal Hearings attended with Parents	6
Cases ongoing with pending hearing date	20
Cases that parents withdrew	3

## SENDIAS Feedback

We ask our parents/carers and young people to complete an online feedback form which is entirely voluntary and can be submitted anonymously. Throughout the April 2023 to March 2024 reporting period, 92% of responses were provided by parents/carers and the remaining 8% of responses were provided by young children and young people aged 16 and under.





In addition to these questions, we also ask service users “Did Doncaster SENDIAS:”

Did the Doncaster SENDIAS:	Yes	No
Return your calls/emails promptly?	100%	0%
Keep in touch?	100%	0%
Explain why decisions were made and what was happening?	100%	0%
Listen to your views?	100%	0%
Treat you with respect?	100%	0%
Explain who they were and what their role was?	100%	0%
Provide a confidential service?	100%	0%
Give you information and advice that met your needs?	100%	0%

## Comments and Feedback

In addition to answering the questions above, parents/carers and young people are also given the opportunity to provide comments about the service they have received on our feedback form. We also regularly receive emails from parents/carers...

*Thank you for enabling mine and my child's voices to be heard. For helping us to understand our rights. I'm so very grateful.*

*Very satisfied with the help of my advisor above and beyond.*

*It's a brilliant service.*

*Amazing service. I wouldn't of got where I am today with my son's new placement and his EHCP sorted if it wasn't for the help and advice from this service.*

**What did our families say?**

*Thank you so much for your help and guidance.*

*I have worked with SENDIAS multiple times now and they are absolutely amazing. I honestly can not praise or thank them enough.*

*I was very happy with the service and support provided. I learnt a lot about the plan we were doing and I understood more how it is going to impact my child.*

*Thank you for everything.*

*Absolutely amazing service I've had with Carol. Did everything she could to help noting was too much for her.*

*Very impressed*



## Comments From Parents Who Have Used the Service

Below are some comments we have received from service users over the past year.

My daughter was recognised with developmental delay back in 2022 and her school felt she would benefit with a SEN plan which was great. As she moved up a year group she was struggling academically, so school did a referral for an EHCP. The LA refused to assess her, the school suggested for me to contact SENDIAS, that's where I had the pleasure of speaking with SENDIAS .

From that day she has supported me with documents, forms, meetings and preparing for tribunal hearing. The support I have received through the last 2 years has been amazing, I couldn't have done it without her, she has been patient and comforting. As for a result, my daughter did receive her EHCP without the need to go to Tribunal hearing and I couldn't be happier. Now she is doing really well in school. So from the bottom of my heart, thank you.

- Parent

*I contacted Sendias when I realised that I was struggling to get the support my child needed. His school setting at the time wasn't meeting his needs. I needed guidance and support that I couldn't find anywhere else.*

*I was met by a friendly and understanding network of support. Constant support and reassurance that was the back bone of our tribunal application and wonderful outcome. Almost 2 years in the making but definitely worth it.*

*The end result was better than we ever hoped for, my son was placed in a fantastic setting and started to receive the education he craved and deserved. Since starting the school he has overcome so many difficulties, they've not gone away but they are being supported and navigated in a wholly compassionate way. The journey was a million percent worth it. Eternally thankful.*

- Parent

We contacted SENDIAS as we were not getting help at all from school. We, myself and my mum, kept raising concerns with school regarding my child's development, whenever we spoke with them about our concerns we felt we were being ignored or told that my child was doing well. My mum got in touch with SENDIAS as we felt no one else was helping and we needed to get the ball rolling for my child to get support from school.

Our SENDIAS Officer helped us by sign posting us to services that can support our situation as well as attending meeting with me and mum to get support in place. The officer knew what the school should have been doing for my son and get support in place for my son. I was unsure on the different processes that school and other services could follow but the officer explained this to me and my mum so we knew what should be happening and what to expect from these processes.

Without SENDIAS we wouldn't be where we are now. Currently we are going through the process of applying for an EHCP and there is a robust SEN Support plan in place now to support my son who is still struggling in school but finding it a lot better than before.

Thank you for your help, we couldn't have done this without you.

- Parent

## Successes

- We have increased the hours of one of our officers to support service delivery
- We have started implementing drop-in sessions for parents who struggle accessing technology
- We have delivered tribunal training to parents starting the process of appeals
- We have arranged and started accessing annual coffee mornings within school settings to support parents directly within sessions and make service users aware of our service.

## Informing Local Policy and Practice

SENDIAS attends some local meetings where we represent the views of parents/carers and share our anonymised data to inform decision making. We are part of the following groups:

- Community Pediatrics Strategy Group
- CYP Mental Health Steering Group
- Developing Better Value SEND Improvement Planning (Engine room)
- Local Offer Steering Group
- Doncaster Parents Voice and LA Sharing Group

- Early Help Practice and Performance Sub-Group
- EHC Portal planning and implementation group

We are also active participants in the development of a new parent toolkit/handbook, which will be used to supplement the local offer website. It's design and primary feature will be to provide a basic overview of the support that is available for children and young people in education.

## Partnership with the Local Parent Carer Forum

We have a positive relationship with our local parent carer forum, Doncaster Parent's Voice. We have a service level agreement in place and frequently work together to develop training, share information and support.

Throughout 2023–2024, we supported Doncaster Parent's Voice within different training sessions and attended some of their parent coffee mornings to provide information and advice directly to parents within these sessions.

## SENDIAS Priorities for 2024-25

- Increase our community presence by attending more face-to-face community sessions
- Provide more training opportunities for parents both virtual and face to face
- Improve marketing to encourage more young people to access the service
- Improve our range of resources for parents
- Secure a permanent contract for our part-time officer who is currently on fixed term contract, due to end in November 2023, funded by IASS
- Provide more information, advice and support in relation to transition
- Look at useful information to share with families around identifying needs in girls to support early identification.
- To identify the services that signpost to SENDIAS to understand which services may require more information on how SENDIAS can support parents and young people.

## Work With Young People

We have engaged with 110 young people directly through outreach work and bespoke case work, which parents generally initiate.

One of our priorities for 2024-25 is to improve our reach and ensure that more young people are aware of the service and how they can contact us. We acknowledge the barriers some young people have in accessing SENDIAS and therefore we will utilise outreach sessions in an attempt to bridge this difficulty moving forward.

We also intend to secure Child Friendly Status; we have started this work in partnership with our Young Advisors.