



Help Kids Talk – a community-wide initiative that aims to give every child the best start in life by prioritising speech, language and communication development



Sarah Ratcliffe and Alison Ferris, Speech and Language Therapists, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

[sarah.ratcliffe@setrust.hscni.net](mailto:sarah.ratcliffe@setrust.hscni.net)

## Description

Help Kids Talk is a project within Early Intervention Lisburn (EIL) which is led by the Resurgam Community Development Trust (lead partners are the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT) Speech and Language Therapy Team and Early Intervention Lisburn).

The Help Kids Talk vision is that “everyone will work together to help kids talk”.

The project is a community-wide initiative and aims to ensure everyone who has any responsibility for a child prioritises speech, language and communication development whether you are a parent, grandparent, childminder or work in an organisation that provides services for children.

By prioritising early intervention and speech, language and communication, there will be a positive impact across all areas of a child’s life including: educational attainment, mental health and wellbeing, social relationships and employability later in life.

## Context

Help Kids Talk aims to give every child the best chance in life by prioritising speech, language and communication development.

The purpose of Help Kids Talk is to:

- help children and young people to be the best they can be
- make it everyone’s responsibility
- make a difference together

Main priorities are:

- Highlighting options of support
- Working together

- Learning for all
- Improving the quality of services

Help Kids Talk was co-designed following the extensive research report ‘the Best for Every Child’ (Courtney, 2012) which highlighted the issues children and young people faced growing up in Lisburn. At that time, 74% of young people were leaving the post primary sector (excluding Wallace and Friends) without 5+ GCSEs (including English and Maths). In 2013, a prevalence study carried out by the SEHSCT Speech and Language Therapy team indicated that 32% of children entering primary one in 9 schools in Lisburn had a mild to severe speech, language, and communication problem, of which, 74% were boys from disadvantaged areas (Jordan & Coulter, 2016).

## Method

There are 4 main strands to Help Kids Talk:

1. 12 key messages were developed to support speech, language and communication. The ‘message of the month’ is circulated via email and social media as guidance to parents, caregivers and those working with children.
2. Basic Awareness Training was developed and is delivered on a monthly basis online. This aims to raise awareness of the importance of speech, language and communication for everyone who has any responsibility for a child. In the Basic Awareness, the 12 key messages are linked with Kate Cairns Associates five to thrive building blocks to highlight the connection between infant mental health, brain development and communication development. Further training is in the process of being co-designed and co-produced.
3. The ICAN (Speech and Language UK) programme, ‘Early Talk Boost’ is available in 11 playgroups and nurseries in Lisburn. It improves children’s attention and listening and their understanding of words and sentences. It also improves speaking and communication.
4. The ICAN programme, ‘Talk Boost’ is available in 14 primary schools in Lisburn. It can boost children’s ability in conversations, sentences, storytelling and social interaction by an average of 9 - 18 months.

Help Kids Talk is a partnership led jointly by the SEHSCT Speech and Language Therapy team and Early Intervention Lisburn. It is based on the successful ‘Stoke Speaks Out’ model of delivery which was set up in Stoke-on-Trent to help the high number of children with speech difficulties, by training parents, carers and families. After a seven year journey, the project was officially launched in March 2020. It is currently funded by Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council.

The steering group is comprised of representatives from community, voluntary, statutory and private sectors including: Public Health Agency, SEHSCT, Northern Ireland Childminding Association, Libraries Northern Ireland, Barnardo’s, Sure Start and staff from the local schools and nurseries.

There are connections with parents and carers through 37 partners (early years’ settings, playgroups, nurseries, and primary schools), social media, training, and a parent representative group.

Throughout the planning, implementation and development of Help Kids Talk, there has been a strong emphasis on co-design and co-production. The steering group and the parent representative group members have provided valuable insight and experience to inform the decision-making

process. This co-production has strengthened the project and ensures we are achieving our overall vision of everyone working together to provide better outcomes for our children and young people.

The project collates data on:

- social media engagement and growth – this is collated on a monthly basis through Twitter, Instagram and Facebook analytics so we can measure what posts are relevant for our audience and measure the reach of the project through social media platforms
- number of people attending Basic Awareness training and the difference it has made – this is collated using a registration form, a training database and an online survey
- number of children and number of settings who have completed targeted programmes (Early Talk Boost and Talk Boost) and the difference it has made – this is collated through an ICAN and Help Kids Talk report at the end of every academic year

Measuring outcomes at population level for early intervention is difficult however there is a commitment from partners across all sectors to provide sustainable support to ensure our children and young people have the best chance in life.

## Outcomes

### Social media

Help Kids Talk has over 3000 followers across Twitter, Instagram and Facebook (**79% increase** since August 2020)

Social media feedback:

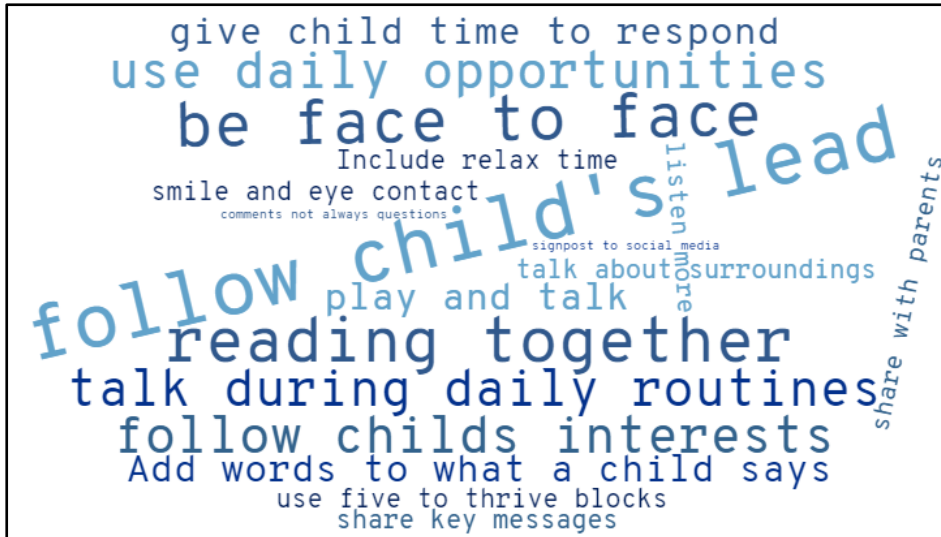
- *“I love reading all the insta posts as at 16mths my son was literally saying nothing so I felt myself reading all your posts about speech and development and was able to relate to a lot of them...he is now stringing sentences together!”*

### Basic Awareness Training

**725 individuals** have attended Basic Awareness training since January 2020. Before training, **48%** participants rated themselves as mostly confident/confident supporting speech, language, and communication, this figure rose to **80%** after training.

Feedback following Basic Awareness training:

- *“I cannot thank you enough for creating that course last night. You were so engaging and everything I learned I have been implementing already at home and in playgroup”*
- *“I can now show these slides to hubby to show him I haven't completely lost it when I sing about her nappy as we change it”*
- *“This presentation highlights the importance of constant chat with wee ones and encourages everyone to develop talking skills”*



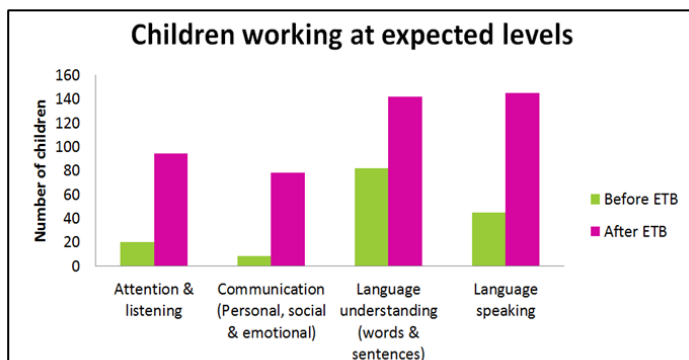
**Word cloud showing strategies participants will use to support speech, language and communication skills following Basic Awareness.**

**Targeted programmes**

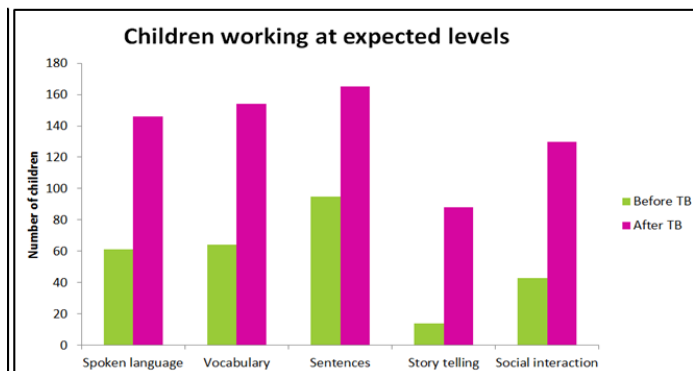
Just under **400 children** have received targeted support to support their speech, language, and communication. The graphs\* below show the impact this has made for those children (\*based on 203 children who have completed Early Talkboost and 179 children who have completed Talkboost from September 2016 to July 2021; this includes some pilot work pre-launch).

Help Kids Talk partners are supported to embed speech, language and communication support into their core work. In doing this, we create sustainable support for children’s communication development. The link between infant mental health and speech, language and communication is a priority within the project. Creating better opportunities for bonding, attachment and communication leads to long term positive impacts for children’s mental health and wellbeing.

**Early Talk Boost**



# Talk Boost



Investment in the provision of training and resources to our partners ensures children receive intervention as early as possible and reduces potential future education or healthcare costs. For example, a child in one of our local nurseries was identified as a candidate for special educational needs (SEN) provision. His speech, language and communication skills were supported by nursery staff, he completed Early Talk Boost and was given a place in a mainstream primary school. In primary school, he continued to receive support for his speech, language and communication and completed Talkboost. As a result, the child has remained within mainstream education and has not required a place within SEN provision.

## Key learning points

Help Kids Talk developed a bottom-up approach by bringing together partners from across community, voluntary, statutory and private sectors to collectively plan and make shared decisions to improve outcomes for children and young people.

This partnership-working has moved organisations from working in silos to working together and will provide long-lasting benefits to those living within our local communities.

Sustainability has been a driving force right from the beginning of the project and all training and support provided is looked at through the implementation within core provision.

Further aims have been identified, eg the development of a project like Help Kids Talk to help and support all children in need including ethnic minorities and children with a disability such as autism, learning difficulties.

## References and useful links

Courtney, R. (2012) *The Best For Every Child Report*

Jordan, J.A. & Coulter, L. (2016) Individual Differences in

Speech and Language Ability Profiles in Areas of High Deprivation. *Child Care in Practice*. Available from: doi: 10.1080/13575279.2016.1188759

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