

# HELLO!

## An Early Years Communication Project *Year Two*

### About the Project

This project was developed before the COVID-19 pandemic to support children who were experiencing or at risk of experiencing a speech, language and communication delay. Following the pandemic, we recognised this project was more important than ever to ensure the COVID-19 generation aren't further disadvantaged than their peers.

### About this Evaluation

This evaluation covers the second year of the project from April 2022 to March 2023. The project uses monitoring tools designed with the support of early year's speech and language professionals. It identifies the families starting points and then assesses the difference Home-Start support has made to improving the communication skills of the children as well as their parent's knowledge and understanding of how their children learn language.

### Key Statistics

Number of children supported by the project 68

Families reported an increase from 6 supporting SLC factors at the start of support to 9 at the end.

**HOME  
START**  
West Berkshire



# ENGAGING

*families*

## Our Project Aims

The original proposal highlighted the importance of good speech and language development to help children to listen, understand and communicate. It provides a strong foundation for school, helps them to learn to read and make sense of the world. This project targets funding to children at greatest risk of communication delay.

Social deprivation and intergenerational poverty can be a determining factor in the perpetuation of poverty. Vocabulary at age 5 has been found to be the best predictor of whether children were able to deviate from their peers and escape poverty in later life. West Berkshire was highlighted in the State of the Nation Report 2018-19 as amongst the worst areas for the poorest children reaching at least the expected level of development at age 5. Our aim was to reach 62 children which we have achieved with 50% coming from deprived areas and families where financial hardship was a factor. Due to the Cost-of-living crisis affecting many families, 59% of families supported by the project this year have been from deprived situations. We are grateful to our referrers who have helped to identify children who would benefit from the project.

Referrals for this project have been improved through communication with our Steering Group who have been able to take back the project requirements to their organisations.



# STEERING

*in the right direction*

Our Steering Group has supported the project to complete another successful year. The group comprises of a Speech and Language Therapist, the West Berkshire Every Child a Talker lead (Group Chair), a representative from the Health Visiting Team, a representative from the Family Hubs, our project coordinator, a volunteer and teacher and representatives of two nursery schools in deprived areas. They have been vital to ensuring the project receives appropriate referrals and delivers a high quality service.

The group identifies trends across the borough. For example, many settings have been struggling to differentiate between special educational needs, attachment issues and development delay related to COVID and they report feeling behind in their speech and language training. Professionals in the group have noticed an increase in specific speech difficulties, which are becoming apparent after the pandemic such as high use of dummies where parents have used them excessively during lockdowns.

The Steering Group are now focussing on the next stage of the project, evaluating how children transition into their first setting. Our Early Years' Project Coordinator has sought permissions from parents to discuss their transition into nursery and how much support children in the project need in their new environments.

The success of the Steering Group has undoubtedly been the commitment from all the members to improve early years' speech, language and communication.



# VOLUNTEERS

*up-skilling people*

## Community

This project has only been possible thanks to the incredible volunteers who have been part of this project.

20 volunteers have supported us through home-visiting and in the Family Learning Group. Their time, skills and experience have been essential to the children and families referred to this project.

## Training the Team

We were delighted to offer another opportunity for new volunteers to take part in the two part training in Supporting Children's Early Years Language and Communication.

18 volunteers in last year's cohort and 8 volunteers in this year's cohort took part. Many of our volunteers have existing skills as trained teachers, teaching assistants and Early Years Practitioners.



The Communication Tree is a great way to teach volunteers and parents how children need the foundations before they can communicate.

# Success

The Parent Questionnaire helps us to identify how much parents already know about communication development. To measure where children were currently falling short of their milestones related to their age, we used the Communication Trusts' Ages and Stages. These resources have been invaluable to demonstrating the impact of our project in year one and two.

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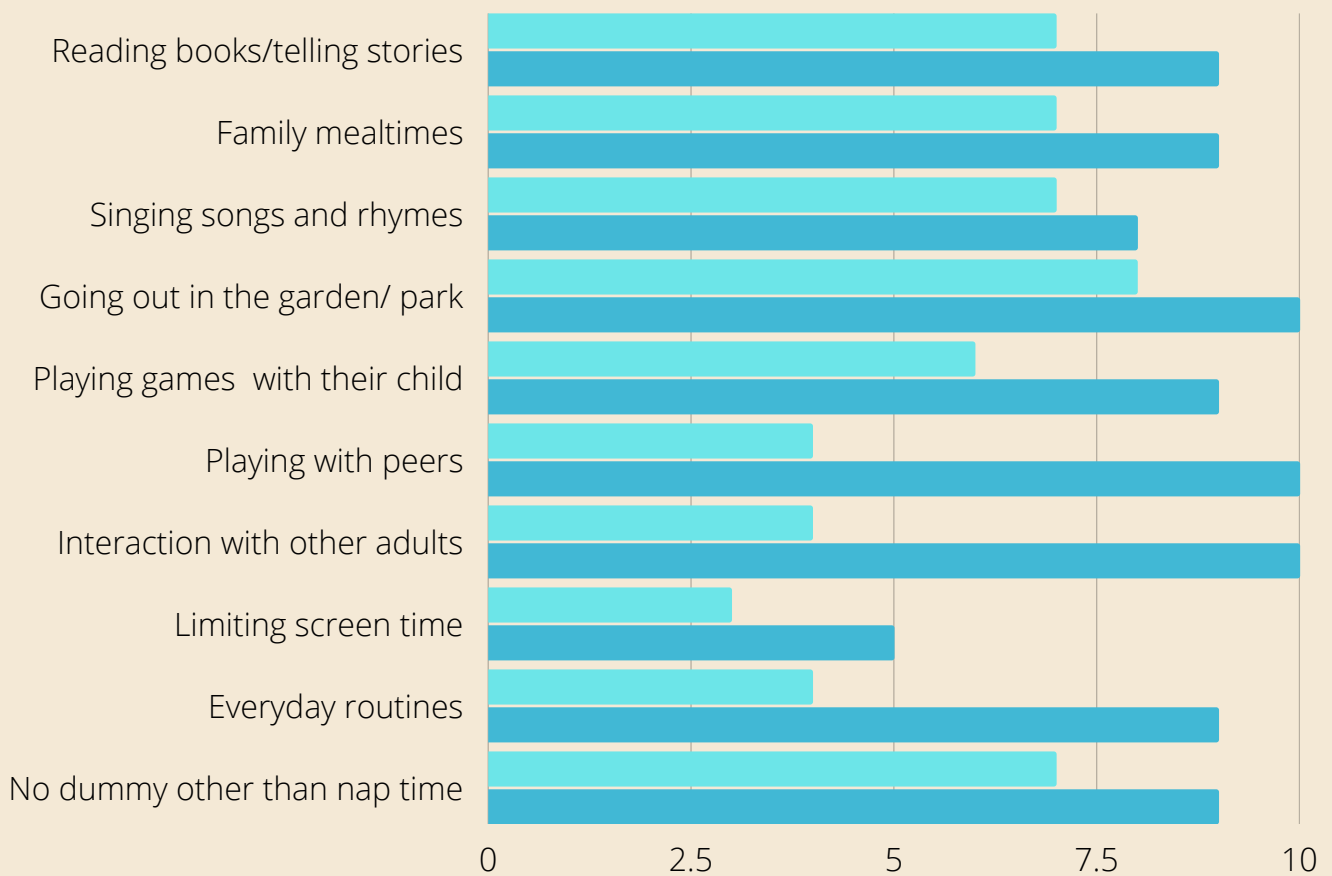


# OBJECTIVE ONE

## *communication environments*

**Children develop in communication rich environments, reaching their milestones and receive help at an earlier stage should communication difficulties arise.**

With the support of a Speech and Language Therapist and the West Berkshire Every Child a Talker team we have identified a range of factors that support children's speech, language and development and we have measured the number the family use at the initial visit and how many they use at the end. Here are the before and after results...



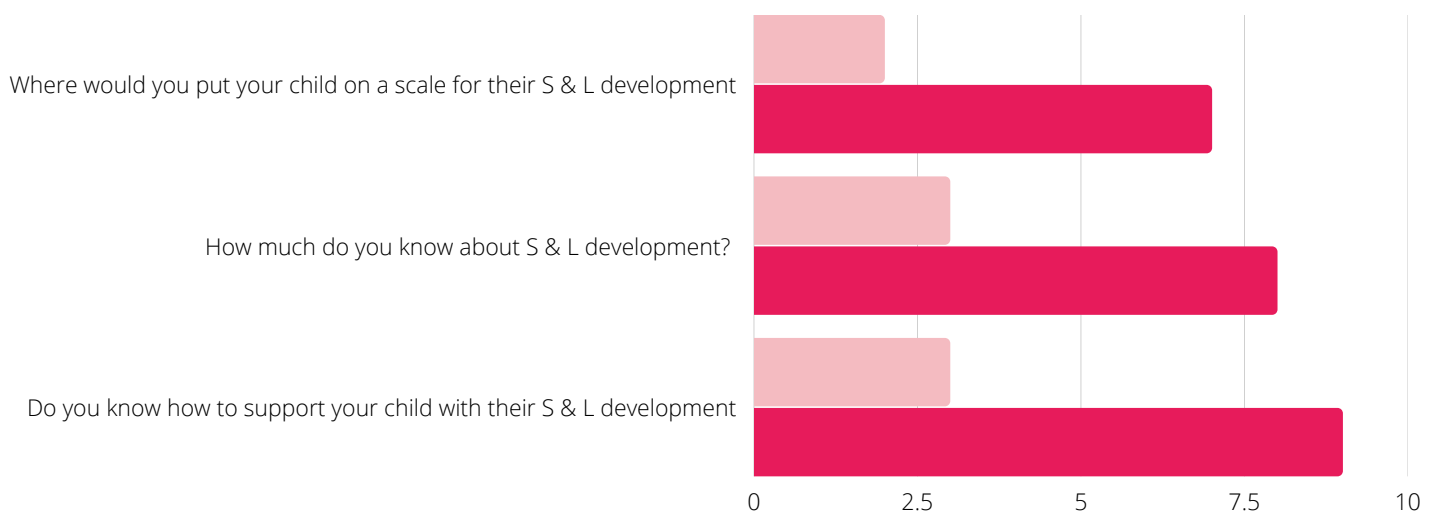
On average, families added 3 more supportive factors to the home environment creating more opportunities to promote speech and language in the home.

# OBJECTIVE TWO

## *parents knowledge*

**Parents have a greater understanding of the importance of the communication environment and how children learn to communicate.**

At initial visit we asked families where they put their child's speech and language development on a scale of 1 to 10. We also asked them how much they knew about how children learn language as well as whether they knew how to support their child. We also asked them the same questions at the end of support and here is the before and after results...



"My son progressed from less than 50 words to more than 150 with him beginning to put words together and make eye contact. We were given lots of resources and support to take home and attempt more communication skills. This was the first place I have ever taken my son without him getting upset by his surroundings, it was quiet and calm and just the perfect environment for him to finally come out of his shell to be open to learning language and new communication skills."

# OBJECTIVE THREE

*improved behaviour*

## Children will demonstrate improved behaviour with less frustration and need less support to transition to school

This has been measured on each individual child from their starting points. We asked parents at the start what frustrates their child and the majority felt their child or children were frustrated by not being understood. Playing with others and sharing or changes in environment were typically difficulties for most of the children on the project. 22% of children supported by the project are awaiting a CAMHS appointment to assess for additional needs.

In our assessment, using the ages and stages materials, children typically make a 2-point improvement in their speech and language milestones from initial visit to the end of support.

An example end assessment reads: "C2's confidence and interaction with children and adults has really improved recently and this is evident with the relationships he is building at group. He is able to move away from mum and play happily. C2's words today were elephant and animal noises. He is also doing role play. He is able to sit near and be supported to play with other children - this was not possible a few weeks ago. He would move away and cry. He is sitting on the mat for singing and joining in with the activity and bubbles."

One parent said "It has been so rewarding to see how far he has progressed in his journey, he had many firsts at these sessions such as walking up to someone, playing with another child, joining in with a song by using actions."



# A CASE STUDY

*improved behaviour*

**Jack\* and his family were referred to the Hello! project in June by a Family Support Worker at the Family Hub**

Jack's two year check with the health visitor had identified that Jack wasn't meeting his milestones in his speech and language development.

The family scored themselves as a 4 on a 10 point scale for their understanding of how support Jack's communication. At the initial visit, they had 8 supporting factors in place which was high but they felt that they didn't really engage Jack in chatting about their everyday routine.

Jack came with his mum to our Family Learning Group. By the end of support, they felt much more able to help Jack with his language development with their new knowledge and they scored themselves a 9. Jack had increased his vocabulary from 20 words to 200 words and his clarity of speech had improved so he was able to make himself understood. In April, Jack had his first nursery visit, he was confident and he ran off to play.

An observation at the start of his support was "At times he can seem to be in a world of his own and not listen." and by the end of support "He went and got his mum to also be part of the play. This is very different from the early session when he would play quietly alone and not want interaction in his world of play. Jack absolutely loved our party activities at the end of group with music, he demonstrated some great listening skills when we encouraged him to play instruments fast/slow/loud/quiet etc, "

\*names have been changed

# LEARNING

*from year two*

From the start of this project, getting the right referrals has been our greatest challenge. The Steering Group proved essential in ensuring that the aims of the project were well communicated to the families that met our criteria. This has been much less of a challenge in year two with only 22% of children moving towards a CAMHS assessment.

Quarterly Steering Group meetings have provided the focus to ensure we are on track to meet our objectives and have highlighted areas of development. In this year, we have created new resources for parents to provide the speech language and communication tips in written format for parents.

The next stage of the project has been to assess how the children we support transition into a setting. Our professionals have helped us consider the factors to measure that help to identify successful transitions.



# Thank You!

Thank you to The  
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for funding this  
project.



**LOTTERY FUNDED**

Thank you to all our incredible volunteers who give their time so generously. Thank you Tamsin Rycroft, Louise Griffiths and all the members of the Steering Group for helping us to continue to make this project a success.

