



Speaking out for young people with speech, language and communication needs within the justice pathway

LOCKED UP AND LOCKED OUT - COMMUNICATION IS THE KEY

A report of the conference hosted by the **Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists** on 19 November 2009 to raise awareness of the communication needs of offenders within the justice system in Wales



Speech and language therapists have a vital role in tackling the speech language and communication needs of people at risk of entering the justice system



The Welsh Assembly Government is fully committed to the reduction and prevention of youth crime in Wales. We are also committed to following a rights-based approach in all our work with children and young people. The most effective way to prevent youth offending and to secure the well being of children and young people in Wales is to stop them entering the youth justice system in the first place. Where young people do enter the youth justice system, our priority is to ensure they do not re-offend.

This excellent report highlights the importance of tackling the speech, language and communication difficulties faced by so many young people in Wales. Furthermore, the report clearly demonstrates that speech, language and communication needs leave many young people both locked up and locked out. As a trained barrister, I am fully aware of the impact that these difficulties can have on a young person's ability to engage with and understand the world around them, including the justice system itself.

The more we are able to address the communication needs of young people within the justice system, the better those young people can be supported to access the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and their human rights through language-based interventions, such as education and drug-rehabilitation. Addressing

communication needs early and effectively helps young people deal with the triggers of anti-social behaviour and reduces the likelihood of re-offending.

There is cause for optimism. The case studies and examples contained within this report, clearly demonstrate that through innovation and partnership working, cost-effective services that make a real difference to the lives of young people can be delivered. My government will continue to work closely with the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists and other partners, to promote pilot working in this area. It is a priority of my government to ensure fewer young people are locked up and that no young person should be locked out of opportunity because of their communication difficulties. The excellent campaigning and research carried out by the RCSLT on these vital issues will continue to inform my government's approach as we seek to ensure that all children and young people in Wales are given the best start possible.

I commend this thought-provoking report to all those who share our commitment to improving the lives of Wales' young people.

About the RCSLT

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) is the professional body for speech and language therapists (SLTs), students and support workers working in the UK. The RCSLT has around 14,800 members, including more than 400 working in Wales. We promote excellence in practice and influence health, education, social care and justice policies. Speech and language therapists work with approximately 2.5 million young people and adults who have speech, language and communication needs across the UK. They work directly with children, young people and adults, as well as supporting other professionals in working with speech, language and communication needs.



Speech and language therapists work with clinicians and health and education professionals in a variety of settings including primary, secondary and community care environments, schools and youth offender institutions. Speech and language therapists are funded to work in the justice system in England; however, a recent RCSLT survey shows there is no integrated service provision at all in Wales.

Speech, language and communication needs

Young offenders may have a range of communication difficulties including:

- Problems in understanding and using language to communicate.
- Specific developmental syndromes, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, Asperger syndrome, and autistic spectrum disorders.
- Communication difficulties associated with mental illness.
- Speech problems (dyspraxia, sound disorder or delay).
- Hearing impairment.
- Dysfluency (often called stammering or stuttering).

Young offenders with communication problems can have difficulty:

- Expressing themselves through speaking, writing or non-verbal communication.
- Understanding spoken or written words, body language and facial expressions.
- Listening to what is being said to them.
- Remembering information.
- Expressing feelings and emotions in an appropriate way - eg they may use violence instead of words to express themselves.
- Relating to others in socially acceptable ways.

Speech and language therapy helps offenders to:

- Improve non-verbal communication skills expressed in, eg. body language.
- Develop language skills for daily life.
- Take part in a conversation.
- Develop their vocabulary and the way they put sentences together.
- Use techniques to express their feelings and emotions.
- Deal with triggers that spark anti-social behaviour.
- Find ways to overcome drug-related short-term memory problems.
- Deal with authority figures, eg coping at interview.
- Understand and be understood by prison staff.
- Cope better with the social challenges faced in institutional life.



Outcomes and recommendations

The Wales Justice Coalition is calling on the Home Office and Ministry of Justice to:

- Address the lack of current speech and language therapy service provision within the Wales Justice System.
- Produce an action plan to ensure the adequate provision of speech and language therapy integrated throughout the justice pathway.
- Fund or undertake research to provide evidence for the benefits of speech and language therapy in the justice system and its impact on reducing offending.
- Develop and commission a comprehensive service model for the Wales Justice System based on best practice.

The Coalition will work with the Welsh Assembly Government to:

- Provide communication skills training for all staff working within the justice system to support young people with speech, language and communication needs. This training must meet local needs and be developed in collaboration with SLTs.
- Develop a communication skills training pilot in the justice setting.

The Coalition is calling on the Youth Justice Board and other agencies to:

- Establish a communication screening process to identify those with speech, language and communication needs.
- Ensure young people within the justice system with communication needs have their speech and language skills assessed appropriately.

The Coalition is also calling on the NHS to identify the requirements for workforce planning for the NHS.

On 19 November 2009...

Carwyn Jones, First Minister for Wales officially opened **'Locked Up and Locked Out: Communication is the key'**, an exclusive conference held in South Wales. This conference brought together keynote speakers and more than 50 professionals involved in the planning, provision and delivery of services for offenders and those at risk of offending with communication difficulties. The event aimed to:

Raise awareness amongst key stakeholders of the communication needs of those at risk of offending and offenders in Wales.

Consider the opportunities and challenges presented by young people with speech, language and communication difficulties within the criminal justice system.

Recognise the link between speech and language difficulties and offending and re-offending behaviour.

Identify how speech and language therapy can help to meet the needs of young people.

Inform stakeholders of best practice in the delivery of speech and language therapy in order to establish an integrated service across Wales.

The policy environment

Recent reports, such as the National Assembly for Wales Communities and Culture Committee report 'Youth justice: the experience of Welsh children in the secure estate' (2010) and the Prison Reform Trust's 'No One Knows' (2010) highlight a lack of provision in Wales for young and adult offenders who have speech language and communication needs.

In February 2010, the Communities and Culture Committee recommended the Welsh Government enable pilot work to be done in Wales on the potential benefits of speech and language therapy for juvenile offenders both in custody and on release. The Welsh Assembly Government accepted this recommendation in their formal response in May 2010 and stated they would work with partners to explore the potential benefits of speech and language therapy for children and young people who have offended.



The evidence

Young people with speech, language and communication needs along the justice pathway

- More than 60% of young people in contact with youth offending teams have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) (Bryan et al, 2007; Bryan et al, 2004).
- A 2003 survey at Polmont Young Offender's Institution found 70% of young men had significant communication problems (Scottish Prison Service, 2003).
- Between 46-67% of young people have poor or very poor skills (Bryan, Freer and Furlong, 2007).

The impact of speech, language and communication needs

- A study of unemployed men found more than 88% were described as language impaired (Elliott, 2009). Studies also suggest a young man who has not been in education, employment or training is five times more likely get involved in criminal activity (NEET Workstream, 2005).
- The association between speech and language disorders and behaviour difficulties is well established (Humber and Snow, 2001). There is very strong international evidence that speech, language and communication difficulties are labelled as 'behaviour problems'.
- Young people may be misdiagnosed as having a conduct disorder (Lanz, 2009) or mental health problems, when in fact they have undiagnosed SLCN.
- There is a strong correlation between poor education skills, particularly literacy skills and criminal behaviour (Snow and Powell, 2004). Low education and speech and language and literacy difficulties are risk factors for offending (Tomblin, 2000).
- Up to a third of children with untreated speech and language difficulties will develop subsequent mental health problems, with resulting criminal involvement in some cases (Clegg, Hollis and Rutter, 1999).

Preventing offending and re-offending

- Early speech and language therapy intervention helps reduce the risk of young people developing behavioural problems and subsequent offending behaviour.
- Improving the literacy, communication and social skills of offenders prevents further offending (Venard et al, 1997; Snow and Powell, 2004).
- Speech and language therapy intervention can also prevent and reduce re-offending rates by improving oral communication skills (Crace, 2006).
- Improving communication ability helps individuals to access education and a wider range of rehabilitation programmes.



Inability to access rehabilitation and treatment programmes

– Around 40% of young offenders find it difficult to benefit verbally-mediated interventions, such as anger management and drug rehabilitation courses (Bryan 2004).

– The government has provided an estimated £130m for prison education to improve literacy skills and provide anger management and drug rehabilitation courses. Nearly two-thirds of young offenders are unable to access these programmes because of their poor language skills (Ryan, 2002).

– There is a mismatch between the literacy demands of programmes and skills level of offenders – particularly significant with respect to speaking and listening skills (Home Office Findings 233, 2009). A young offender needs GCSE level English, A-C to access education and treatment programmes. A third of offenders have speaking and listening skills below level 1 of the National Curriculum and so are unable to access these programmes. (Davies et al, 2004).

“What the conference speakers said:”

ROB HEATON-JONES

Head of Commissioning, NOMS Cymru:

“The RCSLT conference helped bring together stakeholders within community services, youth justice and criminal justice in Wales to discuss concerns and share best practice. This opened a range of perspectives about the importance of understanding an individual’s communication needs in different settings. To help people with communication difficulties to fully engage with us to change their offending behaviour, we will need to think how we can change and improve the way we listen and communicate with them.”



DR RACHEL IREDALE

Faculty of Health Sport and Science, University of Glamorgan:

“As a magistrate, I can see how important it is to ensure that defendants with speech and language disorders are treated fairly during court proceedings. It is vital they are supported in understanding the court process and are able to engage with it. As a researcher, I can see that improving the communication skills of offenders by providing targeted speech and language therapy could significantly reduce the risk of re-offending.”



STEVE MORGAN

Senior Manager Community Integration and ETE, HMP & YOI Parc:

“From experience gained working at the ‘sharp end’ of offending behaviour I found it invaluable to be invited to a forum where I could make colleagues aware of real problems that staff face daily when presented with a range of communication problems and difficulties. There is a clear need to adopt a multi-functional/agency approach when dealing with very young offenders due to the fact there are massive cultural differences in the way that people behave in this modern age and adjustments need to be made to meet these differences. Speech and language therapy is a core to addressing these changes.”



NICOLA BAILEY WOOD

Speech and Language Therapist, Professional Lead, Aneurin Bevan Health Board:

“Nicky’s [a client] speech and language difficulties have had a profound impact on his life. They have made it difficult for him to engage with education and it is harder for him now to engage with SLT services. His needs are complex and constant. Nicky would love to join the army – his mum’s ambition is to keep him out of prison.”



“What delegates said:”

1. Barriers facing young people with communication needs

- There is a lack of speech and language therapy service for the secondary school population.
- Young people are unaware of their own communication difficulties.
- The presence of communication problems in association with mental illness leads to perceptions of 'being difficult'.
- There is a paucity of Welsh-medium intervention services for offenders.
- There are no YOI or prison places for women and girls in Wales and only a limited number of places for girls in local authority secure children's homes in Wales.
- There is a lack of coordination between services; lack of an integrated service to young people.
- There is a lack of understanding and knowledge from professionals who work with young people.
- Staff receive little, if any, training on the impact of communication difficulties.

2. How to improve support to offenders with communication needs

- Coordinate information needs around the individual with clear referral pathways.
- Raise awareness of speech, language and communication needs with staff and young people.
- Target support to allow early identification of young people with SLCN.
- Involve speech and language therapists at the pre-sentence stage to provide information to the court on the needs of the young person.
- Provide intermediaries to support individuals to understand and engage with the legal process and to provide their best evidence in court.
- All legal proceedings should take place with an understanding of the person's needs. All professionals should use language the individual can understand or use alternative communication methods, such as symbols to support verbal language.
- Carry out screening (and assessments) at the earliest possible stage to identify those with communication difficulties. Screening should identify risk factors, eg previous contact by the police, lack of educational achievement etc.

3. Resources and support for staff to improve engagement with young people with communication difficulties in the justice system

- Provide training to raise awareness of speech, language and communication needs among all staff who come into contact with the young people at risk of offending.
- Target specific work with youth offending team staff to develop their understanding and to help them engage with those with speech and language problems.
- Build partnerships across all agencies to improve the flow of information.
- Develop screening tools to identify those with speech, language and communication needs.
- Develop appropriate communication skills training for all frontline staff.
- Develop appropriate referral systems to ensure individuals with a high level of need are 'fast tracked' for a more detailed diagnostic assessment.

For more information on this campaign visit: www.rcslt.org

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