



Communication Accessibility – Reducing the Barriers



Executive Summary

Communication barriers exist that prevent vulnerable families accessing the help and support that is needed. This may be through difficulties comprehending spoken language, expressing themselves or poor literacy levels. Many of these difficulties are hidden or have not been identified previously.

This project took a 3-pronged approach to reduce these barriers by:

1. Providing staff with training and support in using a tool called **Talking Mats**¹. 48 practitioners completed their foundation training.
2. Enabling staff to simplify language and produce '**easy read**' reports and information that are written in a way that CYP&F can understand. 3 tiers of training were developed with 72 members of staff completing silver level.
3. **Assessing parents** who have unidentified **communication needs** and identify strategies that can be put in place to enable them to access the supports on offer.

This innovative project ran between May 2022 and May 2023 and was led by Janie Scott, Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) in Perth and Kinross.

This project delivered the following outcomes:

- Raised the profile of communication needs within this population
- Provided practical tools for practitioners to use with vulnerable families which in turn improve outcomes.
- Developed two electronic document management systems (EDMS) to support ongoing work.

¹ www.talkingmats.com

Planning and Delivering

The key issue addressed has been communication accessibility and providing solutions to allow key services to be accessed. This project feeds into all areas of the Tayside Plan for Children, Young People and Families 2021 - 2023. This project places the work of Speech and Language Therapy within a rights-based model following the UNCRC. It enables others to hear the views of children (article 12) and support the right to a family life (article 8). Within the context of 'The Promise' it provides the 'scaffolding' needed to ensure that the voice of the young person and their family are heard. It has enabled practitioners to understand the communication needs of parents and how to support them.

The project was delivered to a variety of teams and practitioners within Services for Children, Young People and Families, through face to face training, teams consultations and ongoing access to resources on 2 electronic document management sites (Talking Mats and Inclusive Communication).

Direct face to face Speech and Language Therapy assessments for parents took place with Janie Scott, Speech and Language Therapist.

A working group was set up for the 'easy read' project to allow staff who are using the tools and resources to influence how this element of the project developed.

Innovation and Leading Practice

This was an innovative project as this role was sitting within Services for Children, Young People and Families rather than sitting separately in the NHS. There are very few SLTs that work in this way across Scotland. The SLT worker had access to all the IT services within PKC so was able to create the electronic document management sites which has future-proofed access to easy read and talking mats resources.

Many vulnerable families do not have the necessary literacy skills to read reports that are written about them. The SLT has supported staff to create a suite of easy read templates on the following topics; safety plans, child protection reports, reports for looked after child reviews, young person planning meeting, child's plan meetings.

The talking mats training supported the development of innovative resources that makes it easier for CYP&F to talk about challenging topics eg adoption, fostering, online safety, caring for a baby, school life, children's hearing, contraception.

This work created a service where the SLT is approachable and many people who have come to the training come back for support and advice.

Results and Impacts

Easy Read

Success Criteria

"For 50 staff in Services for Children, Young People & Families to have access to training, support and resources, on a digital platform, to enable them to provide easy read information for the families that they work with, by the end of April 2023."

Four levels of training were developed:

1. Bronze Level This is a 20-minute awareness level training on accessible information². Permission to the EDMS Inclusive Communication site is granted once this has been watched.
2. Silver Level This is a face to face 2-hour training to:
 - Develop skills in simplifying language
 - Explore the new EDMS site 'inclusive communication'
 - Develop technical skills in producing an easy read document.Certificates are presented to participants after this training.
3. Gold Level The participants submit 2 easy read documents that have been created after the training. Feedback is then given, and a certificate issued.
4. Train the trainer allowing other gold level participants to deliver training.

Measures of knowledge and skills, before and after training were documented with significant positive improvement in confidence and a full impact report was written. The aim was to train 50 participants but the demand was so high that 72 participants were trained over 12 face to face sessions. Three participants completed their gold award and 3 more have submitted evidence after the project ended.

² [Accessible Information](#)

Talking Mats

Evidence of Impact was gathered throughout the year and a full impact report was circulated.

The feedback supported research findings that the quality and quantity of what is said increases and that the young person's voice is heard. Some of the feedback is:

'It allows me to explore topics that could otherwise be difficult for young people to engage in.'

'I use talking mats with birth children in families I am assessing for adoption. It is a useful tool to help gather their thoughts about the prospect of a new child joining their family.'

'Young people have been able to share their views on the strengths and challenges their family are facing. They have also been able to share what changes they would like to happen.'

Parent Communication Assessments

Operational guidance was written for this role and an impact report with feedback from Social Workers was gained. Here is some of the feedback:

'The sessions Janie offered allowed the parent a space to consider and reflect on their communication. It offered insight into some of the strengths and difficulties that exist for the parent which in turn will inform how I communicate and present information.'

'He was being seen as a disengaged parent. The Parenting Capacity Assessment and SLT assessment showed that this was not the case and with the intervention appropriate to his learning need, we demonstrated that he had deep feelings and commitment to the child. This child was heading for permanent foster care and was able to go back home.'

Conclusion

The three strands of this project have enabled staff to become empowered practitioners in meeting the needs of families with communication needs and hearing the voice of children and young people.