

John Bercow MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Bercow

I am writing in response to the interim report on the review of services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

NCH agrees with the five key themes that you have identified for children and young people with SCLN. As an organisation working with the most vulnerable and marginalised children and young people we have aligned our services to meet their needs and are therefore able to present working examples of our services that may be useful to you.

We understand that you have already looked at the evidence from children and young people themselves, their families and providers of services. We do however observe from your interim report that you believe there is little outcomes-based evidence regarding what is and is not working for those children and young people with SLCN. To help inform this area of the review, we have collated evidence from our services working with children and young people with SCLN's

I enclose a document highlighting some practiced examples of: early identification and intervention, services delivered from universal and specialist settings, joint delivery of services, and services for vulnerable groups. All of our examples include the outcomes we have achieved within our different services.

For further information or to arrange a visit to any of the projects we have identified please contact Emma Scowcroft, Policy Officer at [emma.scowcroft@nch.org.uk](mailto:emma.scowcroft@nch.org.uk) or on 0207 704 7000

Yours sincerely

Clare Tickell  
Chief Executive of NCH, the children's charity

## NCH services meeting the Speech, Language and Communication needs of children and young people

### **Early Identification** – reducing referrals to mainstream Speech and Language Therapists

#### **NCH Furness Children’s Centres, Barrow In Furness, Cumbria. (Walney, Ormsgill, Greengate, Newbarns)** – Identifying SCLN in Early Years

NCH believes that Children’s and Family Centres are a key part of community-based networks to support children and families with a wide range of needs, including those who need intensive support at particular times in their lives. These centres are ideally positioned to identify the needs of individual children and to target support where it is needed.

NCH run four Furness Children’s centres where they have implemented a number of specific strategies to support children and young people with Speech, Communication and Language needs.

NCH Furness Children’s Centres deliver the Sure Start Speech and Language Measure with parents/carers of two year old children. This measure has been a valuable tool in providing evidence of improved language skills in the local two year old population. The figures below are taken from annual reports which show contrasting figures dating from 2000, highlighting the impact our intervention is making.

	Average word count	% children putting 2 words together
2000	18	74%
2007	26	94%

The Sure Start Speech and Language Measures are completed by Speech and Language project workers in the family home and provide excellent opportunities for early identification of Speech, language or communication difficulties. These visits enable us to signpost families to appropriate Children’s Centre provision (activities, courses etc.) and onward referral to the community Speech and Language Team if necessary.

We know that visiting families in their homes means children and parents are in familiar surroundings which reduce anxiety. Any activities are then more realistic and can be continued by the family when the speech therapist leaves.

#### **Outcomes**

Via our identification programme we have found that referrals to mainstream Speech and Language Therapists have been reduced and are being made earlier. Fewer referrals are being delayed until children first start school.

### **Early Intervention** – increasing outcomes later on in life

#### **NCH Furness Children’s Centres, Barrow In Furness, Cumbria. (Walney, Ormsgill, Greengate, Newbarns)** – Intervention strategies for Early Years

No one disputes the importance of investing in early year's provision and its link to outcomes later on in life. NCH is well placed through its children centres to deliver early support to children and their families. At NCH we continuously assess our practice to ensure we provide a flexible, responsive service to those children and families who need it the most.

NCH run four Furness Children's Centres where they have implemented a number of specific strategies to support children and young people with Speech, Communication and Language needs.

### **Early Years support**

NCH Furness Children's Centres use Open College - accredited parent/carer and child courses 'Chatterbox' and 'Making it Matter' which have specific, language related learning outcomes.

'Making it Matter' also enables us to collect and observe qualitative video evidence at the beginning and end of the course. These are delivered cyclically in one of the four Children's Centres.

### **Outcomes**

NCH has developed an outcomes focused planning framework for its services with a series of common indicators organised against national outcomes for children relevant to all four nations. The purpose of this framework is to ensure that services have a way of understanding what differences are made to the lives of children NCH works with.

As an organisation we are in the process of collating data across the various outcome measures.

At NCH Furness Children's Centres our practice has always been outcomes driven. As a team our core outcomes for all activities are identified as:

- Increased confidence of parent/carer;
- Greater awareness of how they (parent/carer) communicate;
- More realistic expectations of their child's language and behaviour;
- Changes in children's communication and behaviour;
- Families enjoying time together.

Our participant reports indicate that these outcomes are being met.

***'My child now plays better with other children-he's talking a lot better'***

***'He has learned new words'***

***'I notice his communication more'***

***'I have learned to take the time to play and listen'***

### **Supporting children at home through the Portage Home Visiting Service**

NCH run the Furness Children's Centres where they have implemented a number of specific strategies to support children and young people with Speech, Communication and Language needs.

In Barrow (Local Authority) we operate a Portage Home Visiting Service - a home-visiting educational service for pre-school children with additional support needs and their families after a need was identified for more support in the home. Portage staff are employed by NCH and work out of Furness children's centres

The Children's Centre's Speech and Language Therapist and Portage staff also work together delivering signing training to a group of carers of young children identified as having complex needs, including SLCN. (NCH Furness Children's Centres - Greengate Children's Centre)

We know from delivering these services that parents and children use signing to communicate outside of the group. Anxiety and frustration of parents and children are reduced. Parents feel more confident and have a greater awareness of their children's attempts to communicate.

### **Workforce development**

Speech and Language therapists have been seconded to NCH receiving accredited ELKLAN training to train others. This is done with the support of the Children's Centre Speech and Language Therapist.

We deliver a range of 'ELKLAN' courses across the Early Years sector to Early Years practitioners-teachers, learning support assistants, Portage workers etc.

We have also developed a network for trained workers to meet and share good practice. The support group was instigated by the seconded therapists, but it is hoped that the members of the group will eventually facilitate the group themselves and the therapists will deliver any identified additional training.

The impact/outcomes of this training model are;

- A decrease in the number of inappropriate referrals to Community SLT.
- A willingness and capability to deliver appropriate support in partnership with community SLT.
- Changes in classroom based practice resulting in a supportive communicative environment for all children.

Feedback from the training include:

The training is: '**Perfect for my role as a nursery teacher, it gave me insight into communication skills**'

**'Engagement with children and their families/carers is more effective since doing this course'**

**'I am more confident in my ability to promote the communication skills of children with Speech and language difficulties'**

**'I feel more able to share relevant information and collaborate with other agencies regarding a child's communication difficulties.'**

## **SCLN Services delivered from universal settings – meeting the needs of the local community, removing the stigma of targeted services**

**NCH's Kates Hill and Sledmere Children's Centre – Promoting SCLN in Children's Centres and reaching out to minority ethnic parents and children**

NCH Children's Centres are an accessible way to support the whole families' needs, from universal provision to targeted interventions. We understand that universal provision reduces stigma about services and should be valued both in itself and as a way to increase take up in target groups.

We aim to ensure that our services should engage parents in positive ways that are accessible and none stigmatising.

NCH's Kates Hill and Sledmere Children's Centre, which is located in a very ethnically diverse community, found that a significant number of children spoke little or no English when they started school. This meant that starting school was a very traumatic time for the children. In addition, the

Centre knew that many of their parents were also struggling with a second language. Many of the families were very isolated and were having difficulty accessing even basic services such as the local doctor or finding out what services were available to them.

To address this, the NCH team launched the Early Start English for Speakers of Other Languages Programme at the Centre, helping both the children and their parents learn English and boost their confidence in social situations. Sixteen parents and their children attended the first course, all of whom came to us by word of mouth. Using local networks, the Centre also asked for help to identify families who would benefit the most from the course

Over the 10-week course, the confidence of the parents grew and this was crucial for their child's development.

Many of the parents are going on to full ESOL courses, while others are staying on with their children for 'play and stay' sessions at the centre. By combining English with a focus on their children, this course enabled the team to reach families they had never been able to reach

Due to the high numbers of children who have additional Speech, Communication and Language needs NCH's Kates Hill and Sledmere Children's Centre have identified specific Speech, Communication and Language Outcomes that will meet the needs of the children they are working with.

A Speech and Language Therapist's post has now been funded through the PCT, working across three Children's Centres to undertake an evaluation of the impact of the services and outcomes for children.

The Speech and Language Therapist together with the Children's Centre Teacher are responsible for the joint planning of the early year's provision, to ensure that communication is at the heart of these activities. Training for the children's centre staff team and other local professionals on promoting speech and language development and early identification of speech and language difficulties was delivered by the speech and language therapist with input from the Children's Centre Teacher.

The Speech and Language Therapist has now set up protocols with the mainstream team to refer back to her any children who do not attend their appointments so that follow up work can be undertaken to support access to the specialist service.

## **Outcomes**

NCH has developed an outcomes focused planning framework for its services with a series of common indicators organised against national outcomes for children relevant to all four nations. The purpose of this framework is to ensure that services have a way of understanding what differences are made to the lives of children NCH works with.

The outcomes that the Children's Centres team are now working towards from a speech communication and language perspective include the following:

### **Be Healthy**

- The staff team and other professional's capacity to support children's development is enhanced.
- Children attend essential appointments

### **Enjoying and Achieving**

- Children being ready to learn when they start school.
- Children are provided with language rich play opportunities play linked to learning and development following a specific curriculum in line with the EYFS.
- Opportunities identified to support parents/carers understanding of their child's development.
- Children's emotional wellbeing supported.
- The implementation of a speech and language plan in order to raise the communication skills in the catchment area.

- Children provided with activities that encourage talking and listening using play and toy resources, music activities and story telling.
- Early identification and intervention in the wider children's centre area.
- Links and partnership working with local schools developed.
- Targeted support or referral to Specialist Services for children in need.
- Children are not excluded from services due to ethnicity and heritage, bilingual needs are met.

#### **Make a Positive Contribution**

- Children's social skills improve.
- Children's communication skills improve.

## **SCLN Services delivered from universal settings - empowering parents to support their children**

### **NCH Ashington Children's Centre – Empowering parents/ carers to support speech and language development at home**

At NCH we continuously assess our practice to ensure we provide a flexible, responsive service to those children and families who need it the most. We know that it is important to support the child and the family around the child, with this in mind a number of our support activities take place in the family home.

This provides positive outcomes and allows our work to be embedded into family life as well as recognising that parents play the key role in supporting their child's development.

NCH Ashington Children's Centre working in partnership with Northumberland Care Trust Speech and Language Therapy Department have a language Development Worker whose main role is to offer individual outreach support to families who have children with, or at risk of speech and language delay/ disorder.

A block of language development work typically consists of 6-8 weekly home visits. The aim of the visits is to share and demonstrate practical ideas, activities and strategies to empower Parents/ Carers to support speech and language development at home. The Language development workers will also signpost families to other groups and services that may be helpful.

The development worker has a dual role is supporting the child and their family whilst addressing the child's speech, language and communication needs. To do this the development worker:

- Emphasises to parent the importance of play and how play can assist their child's development.
- Teaches both parents and the child how to play, removing all distractions to focus on one to one play time.
- Demonstrating simple games that can assist their child's development.
- Helping the parent to focus on the things their child can do as opposed to the things they can't do.

There is evidence that the LDW worked with families prior to or instead of the child seeing a SLT professional thus reducing the number of children needing to attend clinics or be assessed'

Feedback from families show the value they place on the service::

***"It was very helpful to have new ideas and activities and to be shown and supported to carry them out"***

***"It gave me fresh ideas to try, which was very useful. I also think that we received lots of support & encouragement, which is so important for us to stay motivated and optimistic"***

***“I felt the service offered by the LDW was excellent, very helpful and accommodating. My child thoroughly enjoyed the visits and looked forwards to them. It was very relaxed and not a daunting experience”***

## **Services delivered from specialist settings – adapting services to meet the needs of individual children**

### **NCH Penhurst School, Chipping Norton – specialist provision tailored to meet individual needs**

Penhurst School is a residential school which caters for the needs of 24 profoundly and multiply disabled children and young adults. The needs of this client group can only be fully met in an environment where each individual is highly respected and their communications (even when non-verbal) are recognised and responded to. To achieve this requires true team-work from all staff, whether care staff, education staff, therapists, support workers or management.

A recent Ofsted inspection awarded the school “*outstanding*” in every category, with particular praise for the ‘Total Communication Environment’ and the use of technology. The inspector commented: “*The promotion of students’ communication skills is exemplary. The emphasis given to finding a way for each student to communicate, whether through using switches, pictures, Objects of Reference, signing or gesture, effectively unlocks a door that enables them to learn and develop.*”

Communication outcomes for the profoundly disabled students at Penhurst are measured using the SCOPE PMLD Communication Curriculum Assessment, which combines information from key members of staff and the Speech and Language Therapist to compile a thorough and qualitative assessment of functional communication. The assessment is graded according to educational P levels.

Below is a brief case study of one young person at Penhurst:

Jenny is an 18 year-old who has Retts Syndrome, which results in her having difficulties with communication (both understanding and use of language), mobility, learning, and self care. She is dependent on others for all aspects of her daily living. Jenny is unable to speak and she finds it difficult to initiate movements. These difficulties mean it is hard for her to communicate her choices and thoughts. She often displays behaviour which suggests she feels frustrated and anxious. It had been recognised for some time that Jenny enjoys and follows many activities. Her eye gaze when offered a choice of two items was sometimes an indicator of her preferences, but it had not previously been possible to develop this into a definite system of communication.

A DfES-funded project at NCH Penhurst School enabled the Speech and Language Therapist to establish a ‘Total Communication Environment’. Staff were trained to use objects of reference, sensory cues, signing and simple speech to supplement their communication, and to create a consistent and clear environment to enable the school’s profoundly disabled client group to make sense of their day and have their communications recognised and valued. The therapy team gained an Occupational Therapist specialising in ICT, which, together with a large injection of funds, enabled the introduction of new ICT equipment into the school.

Staff training in Retts Syndrome was identified as a need, and so several staff attended the annual Retts Syndrome Conference. In addition, the Speech and Language Therapist invited a local mother of a girl with Retts Syndrome to speak to both residential and education staff. This inspired staff and provided a spur to enable Jenny to increase her communication skills.

Choose and Tell software was used as a basis for choice-making, Jenny being required to make a choice from two options to tell a story which was then played back to her on the computer. Over time, Jenny demonstrated that she was able to control her eye pointing in a purposeful way to indicate her choices. As the sessions progressed, it became clear that if this method was used consistently, then it could provide a reliable way for Jenny to communicate her choices and give information, thereby having some say about the course of each day. Staff working with Jenny were trained in the use of her new communication method, to enable generalisation of skills to the wider environment.

The outcome for Jenny is that she now has a simple system for communicating her basic choices and giving information that is constantly available for her to use in all environments. This represents an important step forward in her functional communication, this outcome being demonstrated by assessment, where not only was much more observable communication at level P3(i) noted, but also Jenny's new-found skills had moved her into level P3(ii).

Jenny enjoys her opportunities to communicate, and consequently is becoming less frustrated.

The above account illustrates that, when working with profoundly and multiply disabled children and young adults, it is a struggle to make even the most basic of steps forward in their communication skills unless all staff connected with that person are putting in place the necessary resources to enable success. The actual "therapy" involved in Jenny's case was straightforward, and would have been ineffective without the empowerment of the staff teams supporting her, through training, provision of resources, and the creation of effective communicative opportunities.

## **Services for vulnerable groups – Adaptable delivery in multi agency environment.**

### **Foster Care NCH Wessex Community Project – Working with vulnerable groups responding to specific needs**

Since 1998 Foster Care NCH Wessex Community Projects has been providing mainstream, Remand and Post Custody fostering for working with vulnerable and alienated children aged 10 -17.

Many of the young people referred to Wessex specifically have the inadequate speech, communication and language skills which can lead to poor educational achievement and behavioural and emotional problems. At Wessex we understand the frustrations that young people face if they are unable to communicate properly. Therefore our specially trained foster carers model the effective communication skills which can benefit the young people's relationship with others, increase their self esteem and their ability to set realistic goals for a more positive future.

Success has been achieved in reducing substance misuse and re-establishing positive links with family and community as well as in accessing education, training and employment. This is achieved by working closely with Youth Offending Teams, Children's and ETE Services and other involved agencies through joint planning and review meetings.

Family placements with NCH therefore, can give young people the opportunity to become actively engaged in education, training or employment, separate from their peer group and to broaden their social opportunities leading ultimately to profound changes in behaviour.

Since 2006 NCH has also undertaken to run two of the three pilots for Intensive Fostering with funding through the Youth Justice Board. Post conviction – pre sentence, young people are offered a fostering placement, as an alternative to a custodial sentence. This then involves the young people in an intense behaviour modification programme which ensures that they have structure and boundaries, sanction and rewards to shape their behaviour. Speech communication and language issues are not the main priority of this work but as we are working with the 'whole child' for many it is an issue which must be addressed. This intensive programme includes work with birth families to support the changes young people are making by improved relationship management so their return home can be successfully achieved.

Wessex staff and carers are about to embark on a programme of training from “I Can” the speech, language and communication specialists to enhance their ability to informally assess communication skills. Where necessary I Can will then offer more formal assessment and a specialised programme.