



Senedd Cymru Equalities and Social Justice Committee spotlight inquiry to help provide a better understanding of the extent of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) amongst young people who have offended, or are at risk of offending in Wales

Executive summary

Thank you for the opportunity to give written and oral evidence as part of the committee's inquiry to help provide a better understanding of the extent of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) amongst young people who have offended, or are at risk of offending in Wales.

Neath Port Talbot Youth Justice Service (Early Intervention and Prevention) provides this written evidence on behalf of YOT Managers Cymru (YMC) and all the Youth Justice Services across Wales. Our response focuses on the four main areas within the terms of reference and also makes a series of recommendations for committee consideration.

Key recommendations

- 1) Speech and language therapists (SLTs) should be included within every Youth Justice Service (YJS) across Wales. This would support multi-agency working and multi-disciplinary team development of the appropriate interventions to support young people with their communication and language skills.
- 2) Those who enter the youth justice system often do so from settings where there is a heightened risk of young people having communication needs, which may not have been previously identified. Early identification is essential to reducing the risk of offending amongst this cohort of young people. Alongside the work of YJS', there needs to be a clear focus on identifying and supporting speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) amongst other agencies most in contact with those young people most at risk of offending.
- 3) The Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales (welsh Government, 2020) highlights the significance of diversion. Communication support should be embedded as a core requirement with these teams across Wales.

Speech and Language Provision within Neath Port Talbot Youth Justice Service (Early Intervention and Prevention)

Neath Port Talbot Youth Justice Service has had speech and language input since 2012; however, the provision has developed significantly over the years, moving from one of consultation and advice, through to a single service assessment and delivery model, to the regional speech and language

provision that is in place today between NPT YJS, Swansea Youth Justice Service and Hillside Secure Children's Home (STC).

2012:

NPT YJS received 4 hours a week, Speech and Language Therapy input funded by Afasic Cymru. This service was provided outside of core hours, where the speech and language therapist had no direct contact with young people and the role was one of consultation for the team.

2013:

NPT YJS recognised the need for speech and language input based on the data available through the consultation role. NPT YJS commissioned speech and language services direct from the NHS. The provision consisted of two full days (0.4FTE Band 6) initially where the role focused on assessment and then signposting and referral out of YJS as there was little to no scope to provide direct intervention. At some point within the year, the provision was increased to three full days (0.6FTE Band 6) allowing for targeted interventions to those with high level support needs. Training of staff to include screening for Speech, language and communication difficulties within their assessments and interactions with young people formed part of the speech and language therapy role as did supporting staff to assist those young people with lower level needs through suggested strategies. Training has remained a focus of the role moving forward.

2014:

Neath Port Talbot Youth Justice Service amalgamated with Swansea and Bridgend Youth Justice Services to form Western Bay Youth Justice Service. As a result of this amalgamation, the speech and language therapy input was increased to 1 FTE post, with the provision comprising of 0.6FTE Band 6 from NPT plus an additional 0.4FTE Band 6 from Bridgend Youth Justice Service. Due to the size of the service that the speech and language role was required to serve, the provision reverted back to undertaking assessments only and signposting and referring young people outside of YJS for ongoing support.

2019:

In April 2019, Western Bay Youth Justice Service disaggregated. Neath Port Talbot Youth Justice Service returned to a standalone service and retained the 3 day (0.6FTE Band 6) speech and language provision. The service returned to undertaking assessments and targeted interventions to those with high level support needs alongside supporting staff within the team to intervene with those with low level needs through implementing support strategies.

2021:

In order to offer greater flexibility within our service and Hillside SCH and to support the provision of speech and language services within Swansea Youth Justice Service, a Service Level Agreement (SLA) was entered into with Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) services, Swansea Bay University Health Board.

This agreement was entered into in August 2021, which provides 1.8 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) to both Youth Justice Services and the Secure Children's Home within the Swansea Bay area. The input is divided in the following way:

- 1 (FTE) Highly Specialist Speech and Language Therapist (Band 7)
- 0.8 (FTE) Speech and Language Therapist (Band 5 Preceptorship)

- Neath Port Talbot Youth Justice Service (3.5 days a week)
- Swansea Youth Justice Service (3.5 days a week)
- Hillside Secure Children's Home (2 days a week)

This provision supports assessment, intervention, signposting and referral as well as staff training across all three basis. It allows for greater flexibility across all three services to allow a provision to continue in the event of sickness, annual leave etc.

Additionally, both SLTs also work within the NPT Speech and Language Youth Club and this supports the referral into this service ensuring consistency of worker for young people open to YJS.

Add to the evidence base on the prevalence and impact of speech, language and communication needs among young people involved in the youth justice system in Wales

Speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are more prevalent in the offending population than in the general population (Talbot, 2010). It is currently reported that 6% of children in the general population have SLCN in the absence of other developmental problems (Law et al., 2013). The incidence increases to 31% in areas of lower socio-economic status (Enderby & Pickstone, 2005). Moreover, for young people in the youth justice system, it is even higher at 74% (Crew & Ellis, 2008). Recently published Youth Justice Board experimental statistics found that 71% of young offenders have speech, language and communication needs on self-reported measures (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/youth-justice-statistics-2019-to-2020>).

These difficulties are often undiagnosed, with Bryan and colleagues (2007) reporting only 5% of young people had their SLCN identified prior to their entry to the Youth Justice System (YJS). It is important to note that these language difficulties are not accounted for by low nonverbal IQ skills (Snow & Powell, 2008).

Research by Bryan and colleagues further documents that 66-90% of young people who have offended have low language skills, with 46-67% of these being in the poor or very poor range. If these problems are not addressed early on then these will significantly impact upon their functioning. Young people with speech, language and communication needs are clearly at a disadvantage, if they lack the requisite skills to fully comprehend what is happening or to express themselves clearly. There is a growing body of research that documents implications for young people with speech, language and communications needs in terms of their contact with the criminal justice system and more broadly in relation to educational attainment and social, emotional and behaviour difficulties.

Implications of SLCN on young people in the CJS:

The implications for a young person with SLCN within the CJS can be profound. Within the CJS, young people with SLCN are faced with situations in which they require the ability to understand and retain complex information in stressful circumstances. They need to understand the processes they are subject to as well as communicate and interact proficiently with a wide range of individuals.

To access the CJS a person needs to be able to listen, understand and process conversation as well as formulate ideas and experiences into words (Humber & Snow, 2001). Thus, language and communication difficulties impact on a person's ability to fully participate in the CJS. For example, young people with SLCN frequently lack the ability to provide narrative information in a logical and sequential manner (Humber & Snow, 2001). This skill is paramount in police interviews and court processes. Crew and Ellis (2008) reason that if a young person misunderstands police or court

procedures they may make uninformed choices which may lead to inappropriate admission or sentencing.

Often people with SLCN do not know how to alter their type of communication to be used with friends versus that used with the magistrate. These difficulties can also make young people more vulnerable because their engagement style may be misinterpreted as boredom, being rude and general lack of co-operation when, in fact, the opposite may be true (Snow & Powell, 2004). This is significant as 80% of magistrates surveyed said that the attitude and demeanour of a young person influences their sentencing decision to some or a great extent (Audit Commission, 2004).

Additionally, young people with SLCN may not understand the terms of their sentence and what is required of them in their court order. The CJS contains within it many complex processes and technical language, for example words like 'breach', 'remorse' and 'conditional'. These words are difficult for many of us to understand, let alone people with SLCN.

Young people are often provided with interventions as part of their court order which can include education, counselling and those related to their offending behaviour (e.g. weapons awareness, substance misuse). The verbal context of such programmes often disadvantage young people with SLCN, making information and support difficult to access. It also means that the programmes are less likely to be successfully contributing to re-offending. Evidence shows that around 40% of young people who have offended find it difficult or are unable to benefit from and access verbally mediated interventions (Bryan 2004; Bryan et al., 2007).

Educational attainment:

Language skills are correlated with educational attainment. In the early school years adequate language skills are required for the development of literacy skills as learning how to read is fundamentally a linguistic task (Catts & Hogan, 2003). Consequently, children who enter school with language difficulties are at risk of literacy difficulties (Snow, 2009). Literacy skills are inescapably important for academic success across the entire school curriculum (Dockrell, Lindsay & Palikara, 2011). In terms of prevalence, it is reported by the YJB (2013) that that 29% of young people in the CJS have difficulty with literacy and numeracy skills and 46% are under-achieving at school.

Academic success promotes the likelihood that the young person will progress to further education or training post-school, thus in turn emerge with marketable employment skills. Over 80% of individuals not in education, employment or training have SLCN (Lanz, 2009). Thus, research has shown that the presence of early language learning difficulties affects subsequent employment outcomes (Law et al., 2009).

Social, emotional and behaviour difficulties:

SLCN not only affects academic and employment outcomes but also a person's social interaction skills. They can affect a person's ability to accurately process a face to face interaction including verbal as well as non-verbal content (e.g. tone of voice, facial expressions). Lack of these skills may result in the incorrect social inference being made which can in turn result in responses that are impulsive and ill-considered.

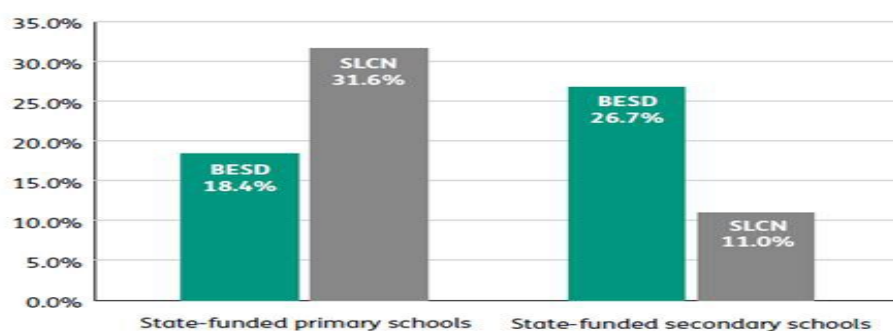
Language plays a key role in creating and maintaining relationships. It is used to demonstrate status, cohesion, trust, and entitlement to knowledge (Eckert, 2005). Due to a lack of these skills adolescents with SLCN are vulnerable to problems with peer and family relationships as well as coping with the

demands of school (Whitmire, 2000). In turn, difficulties with peer interaction creates vulnerability for association with people already involved in crime (Quinton et al., 1993). This is in line with Patton (1998) who reports that rejection from family and peer groups is thought to underpin gang cultures.

The effect of social isolation can also lead to anxiety and depression which can affect a young person's mental health. It has been shown that during the school years that loneliness and peer rejection may contribute to adverse mental health outcomes (Fujiki et al., 1999). A longitudinal study shows that one third of people with SLCN will develop mental health problems if un-treated, with criminal involvement in over half of cases (Clegg et al., 2005).

Research shows young people who have been excluded from school are over-represented in the criminal justice system and also demonstrates a clear link between behavioural difficulties, communications needs and school exclusions. Individuals with difficulties understanding and using language are at risk of developing behavioural issues. This can be due to frustration at being unable to understand the language they are exposed to and express themselves, particularly if their difficulties are unidentified. Consequently, communication problems are often interpreted as behavioural problems (Humber & Snow, 2001). A study found that children are typically referred to clinical services with a label derived from the adults' perceptions of their primary concern (i.e. behaviour difficulties) rather than at-risk for unidentified language impairment (Cohen et al., 1998). This often leads to inappropriate management of the case. For example, behavioural difficulties can result in exclusion; over 60% of children facing school exclusion are reported to have SLCN (Clegg et al., 2009). Furthermore, Murray (2012) document that 88% of boys and 74% of girls in custody have previously been excluded from school. Building on this, Murray (2012) documented that 36% of boys and 41% of girls said they were 14 years of younger when they were last in education.

Many Children and Young People with SLCN do not have their needs accurately identified or supported at secondary school. Associated Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BEDS) or literacy difficulties may be most visible and be identified as a priority. The transition from Primary to Secondary school can be a potentially difficult time for all children and young people academically, organisationally and socially. SLCN may only come to light in secondary school due to increasing social and academic demands. Not surprisingly, because of their difficulties children with SLCN can find this a particular stressful time. The move from primary to secondary school means different vocabulary, subjects, curriculum, teachers, teaching styles and organisation. This can be challenging for all pupils. Shifting from one teaching style to the next, understanding technical terminology, making links between different subject areas and managing less structured social 'free' time are all dependent on pupils having effective, flexible language and communication skills



Overall, longitudinal studies have shown that young people with SLCN are a significant risk factor for offending (Brownlie et al., 2004; Snart et al., 2003). Furthermore, research has shown a positive correlation between the severity of an offence and the presence of an oral language impairment (Snow & Powell, 2012).

Supporting local data that adds to the evidence base:

Data from within Wales adds to the evidence base in terms of prevalence and impact of speech, language and communication needs among young people involved in the youth justice system in Wales.

A recent report from the Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner (2020) discussed the correlation between vulnerability, criminality and exploitation of a group of young people in Newport. Of the 13 children in the cohort, almost all of the children were found to have SLCN, and the majority of children referred to the YJS had SLCN to some degree. The report also identified that many children's SLCN goes undiagnosed prior to the YJS' screening process.

Data of over a number of years within Neath Port Talbot YJS also adds to the evidence base. For the last three financial years, the percentage of young people coming through Neath Port Talbot Youth Justice Service showing some degree of Speech, Language and Communication need has been above 70%. In the years, prior to this, the percentage has fluctuated between 59% and 61%. The increased identification rate is likely attributed to increased Speech and Language Therapy services within the team, an increase in staff knowledge and identification of Speech Language and Communication difficulties supported by in-house training and improved screening supported by consistency in the tool used across both screening assessments and Asset Plus assessments. Likely to contribute to the increased identification rate is the automatic speech and language therapy assessment for all young people coming through to the service who are in Year 6 and 7 as well as those who are 17 years and over.

Across 2019/20 and 2021/22, 72% of young people coming through Neath Port Talbot Youth Justice Service showing some degree of Speech, Language and Communication need. Of the young people referred for speech and language therapy assessment in the year 2021/22, none had previously been referred for NHS speech and language therapy services.

Since the 1st April 2022, 79% (93% males & 7% females) of young people open to Neath Port Talbot YJS are showing signs of some degree of Speech, Language, and Communication need identified from screening checklists completed within the team. Of the 28 young people referred for a speech and language therapy assessment, only 2(7%) were previously seen for speech and language therapy when they were much younger. One was seen due to difficulties with speech production and the other due to difficulties with social communication. Of the young people referred, the Speech and Language Therapists made six recommendations for further referrals and assessment into possible Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

The age range of the young people seen for assessment was 10-16, with 13 being the highest age group. In relation to assessment outcomes, when looking at understanding vocabulary assessment age difference, the majority of young people assessed showed a deficit, with some young people evidencing that their understanding vocabulary age was 8 years below that of their chronological age. Similarly, looking at formulating sentences all young people assessed showed a deficit, with some young people evidencing that they assessed age was 10 years below that of their chronological age.

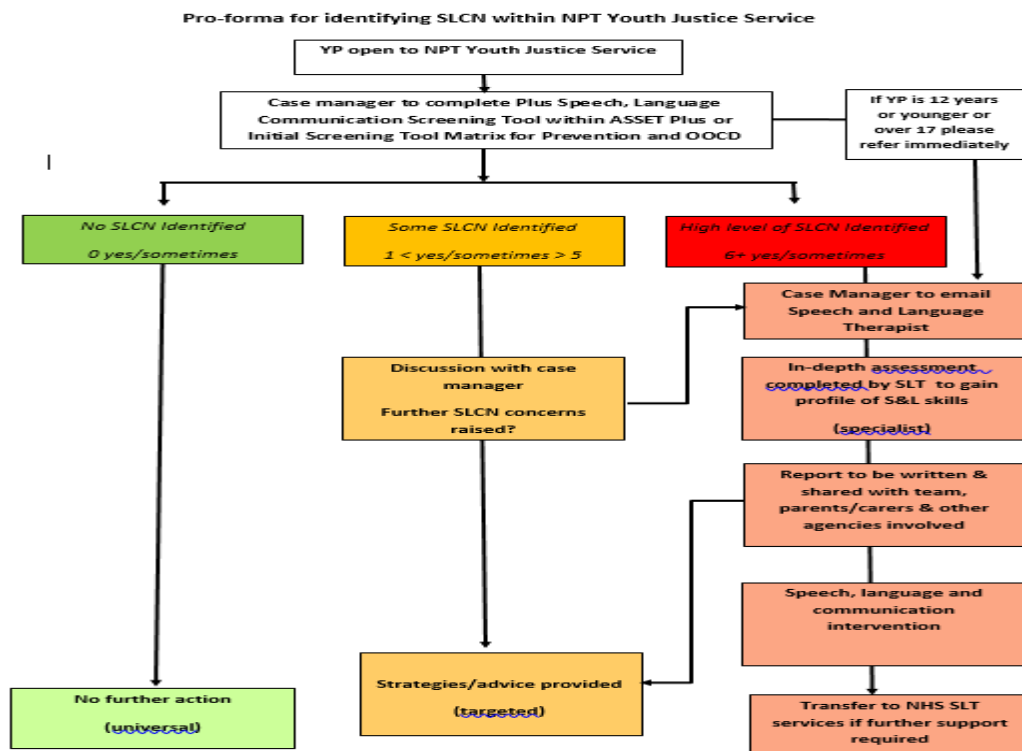
Additionally, 33% had difficulties at Level 3 Retelling e.g. tell a story or event accurately and 22% had difficulties in Level 4 Justifying e.g. solve a problem or justify a decision made. These communication difficulties will have a great impact upon every process within the legal and judicial system as there are huge demands placed on language throughout the justice system and these difficulties affect a person's ability to fully participate at every stage of the Youth Justice System.

Where Speech, Language and Communication needs are not identified and supported, this can lead to frustration and result in disruptive, aggressive, and even violent behaviour across a number of settings. In custodial settings, this behaviour can lead to physical interventions to manage this behaviour, segregation, and isolation for the person who are struggling to comply with prison regime that relies heavily on the spoken and written language. Speaking and listening skills are essential for young people to cope with the demands of the prison regime. This includes compliance with day-to-day procedures and routines (following instructions and orders, understanding routines); taking part in offender treatment or rehabilitation programmes (which are often 'talking' based and the verbal context of these programmes can disadvantage people with speech, language and communication needs); participating in education, training programmes or re-settlement activities and accessing healthcare advice and treatment (which relies on understanding and relaying information verbally and in writing).

Many of these young people have grown up with experience of multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) including deprivation and poverty, trauma, neglect, abuse, and many are care experienced or looked after children. The incidence of young people who are looked after in the Youth Justice System is also higher when compared to the general population. For example, 33% of boys and 61% of girls in custody have been looked after (Kennedy, 2012). A recent research paper by Clegg et al (2021) documented that the prevalence of SLCN in looked after young people was high, with 90% of care leavers having below average language ability, and 60% meeting the criteria for having Developmental Language Disorder (DLD – a likely lifelong condition where young people have problems understanding and/or using spoken language). Clegg et al (2021) reported that none of these young people had previously been diagnosed with SLCNs. Other studies have revealed similar findings. A study by McCool and Stevens (2011) published in the International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders found high levels of communication impairment amongst children and young people in residential care. Much of it was severe and pervasive, and largely previously unidentified. Furthermore, 'No Wrong Door', the service for looked after children in North Yorkshire, found 62% of its looked after children had communication needs. Only two of the children had previously seen a speech and language therapist (SLT) (RCSLT NI Ministerial Briefing, 2021).

Consider the effectiveness of existing policies and interventions to support young people in the youth justice system with communication difficulties, including how young people are identified and assessed for speech, language and communication needs

Within Neath Port Talbot and Swansea Youth Justice Services, there is a clear process that is embedded within the team to support the identification, assessment and intervention support offered to young people in respect of Speech, Language and Communication Needs. The flowchart below sets out this process and is embedded within a SLCN referral guide that forms part of the staff induction process and the wider delivery of speech, language and communication training rolled across both services.



The screening for SLCN is undertaken by social workers as part of their wider assessment in respect of all young people who come into contact with our service. For some young people (including all young people subject to statutory interventions), this will involve the completion of the speech and language tool embedded within the YJB Asset Plus assessment and for others (open via prevention and Out of Court Disposals), this will involve the completion of the speech and language tool embedded within the NPT screening tool as an example. It is the same tool embedded across both assessment documents that supports consistency in practice. If the screening indicates there is a need i.e. 6 SLCNs identified, then the young person is referred for a speech and language assessment by the SLTs. However, there is discretion built within this following discussion with the SLTs for anyone else to receive assessment, including assessment at a different point in time should SLCNs become more evident at the worker gets to know the young person.

Across NPT and Swansea Youth Justice Services, there is an automatic offer of assessment for all young people age 12 and under entering the YJS; this is a preventative measure to help understand what is going on for a young person and also has the added benefit of offering support as young people transition from primary to secondary provision navigating their first year in an unfamiliar and larger educational setting. Additionally, at the other end of the age spectrum, all 17 year olds and over are also offered an automatic assessment; again this is a preventative measure to establish if there are any undiagnosed speech and language difficulties that have not been previously identified prior to their transition into adulthood.

Prior to completing the assessment, the SLTs will build in time to get to know the young person and build a rapport; practice that is in line with trauma informed practice. This could be done via one session or several sessions dependent on the needs of the young person. Some assessments will be fast tracked if they are required to support the production of a Pre-sentence Report and sentencing of a young person by the Courts.

Following assessment, the SLTs will produce a report that is shared with the young person, their parent, the YJS staff working with the young person, and all other professional agencies working with

that young person. The SLTs will go into schools and go through the report and support them to implement strategies to help the young person. A young person easy read report is produced to support the young person and parent in understanding the outcomes of the assessment. Direct intervention is provided by the SLTs where required and/or strategies are given to other professionals who can support the young people directly. This support can include addressing narrative skills, vocabulary skills, time concepts, using strategies and/or social communication skills. Such intervention has been shown to be effective, for example in Ealing a two-year project found that young people with moderate communication difficulties within the YJS benefited significantly from six sessions of therapy, with progress reported in almost all the areas tested (Coles & Murray, 2021).

The reports are also shared with the Courts to support engagement with young people via this forum and also are shared with the police to support an understanding of a young person's SLCN prior to interview so this can be taken into and accounted for when planning for and undertaking interviews. An example of this, is where the SLT have provided the report to a district judge sitting on the trail of a young person and spent time going through the report with them to aid their understanding of how things could be implement to improve the young person's understanding i.e. how questions are put to them. The SLT supported the young person through the trial. However, young people not previously known to YJS do not benefit from this provision at either the police station or Court. Under these circumstances, SLCN that go undetected could result in young people misunderstanding police and court processes, in turn making uninformed choices, which may lead to inappropriate admission or sentencing (Crew & Ellis, 2008). Screening for SLCN is needed at earliest opportunity within the CJS i.e. prior to their interview at the police station.

Within Neath Port Talbot YJS, a plan of intervention with a young person does not commence until a speech and language assessment is completed and we know the young person's levels as this supports the team in knowing at what level to pitch the intervene and how best to intervene. Within the service, we have a large number of hands on alternative interventions do not rely on the young person engaging in written programmes that also result in accreditations for young people; these include the K9 programme, Equine Assisted Learning, Hairdressing and Bike Maintenance etc.

Part of the role of the SLTs within the team, is to support the adaptation of written resources to ensure that they are more accessible to young people i.e. simplify an intervention and/or make it more visual. Talking Mats is a speech and language lead resource to give young people more of a voice in their assessment and plans; this is currently being used by the SLTs within Swansea Bay and training is due to take place imminently to roll out this resource to the wider teams.

Written information is also provided to young people within a YJS, for example court orders, appointment letters, information posters around the YJS and leaflets. As highlighted earlier, youth people in contact with the YJS generally have poor literacy skills. As such, some of this written material can be inaccessible to the young people with SLCN and literacy difficulties. SLTs can provide support by providing modifications to existing written material. This may include changing wording and including visual supports. Access to written information links to the Youth Justice Board Full Joint Inspection criteria (Point 4.4.2) which states that 'Resources for interventions, written and other forms of communication, are suitable for the diverse needs of children and young people'. Within NPT YJS, the SLTs have simplified paperwork as well as provided a resource that supports young people to understand the vocabulary that is associated with legal and criminal justice processes.

The SLTs also support the induction of new staff members and provide wider team training to raise awareness of SLCN and its impact on behaviour and support identification of SLCNs of young people

in contact with the service. This has been supported by the development of an in-house training programme as well as the requirement of the team to complete the Box training developed by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. It is a free eLearning package designed for the justice system across the UK to help support people with SLCN but is equally relevant to those working in youth-offending teams, probation officers, prison staff, the police and other professionals in the courts system; including judges, barristers, and solicitors.

The benefits of SLTs within YJS are well documented within research. Gregory and Bryan (2011) showed that by adding SLTs to Youth Justice Services enabled 75% of young people with SLCN to improve on standardised testing. Moreover, a survey carried out in 2014 by The Communication Trust, found that Youth Justice Service staff reported that SLT provision had most changed the service they offer. The Charlie Taylor Review (2016) also highlighted the positive contribution made by SLTs in YJS' given the prevalence of SLCN in the population of young people who have offended.

However, despite this, the provision of SLTs is not available across all YJS' in Wales. Neath Port Talbot and Swansea YJS' have the most SLT capacity with 0.7WTE in each team. Outside of this, some YJS' have reduced capacity (0.2 WTE or 0.4WTE) whilst the majority of YJS' have no provision in place. If there is no SLT in the YJS, then nothing is done with the SLT screening tool completed within the Asset Plus assessment and the validity of the screening is compromised if staff undertaking the screening have not had adequate training. Furthermore, the SLCN screening is only mandatory for those on statutory court orders, those entering YJS through other avenues may not have this screening completed dependent on the systems in place within the team but the above points are then consequently valid.

Additionally, when considering the secure estate, the two Secure Children's Homes (SCH) that serve Wales have SLT capacity; these are namely Hillside SCH and Vinney Green SCH. However, it is unclear what the provision is within the Young Offenders Institutions (YOIs); however, it is known that there is no current provision within YOI Parc. As already highlighted in part 1 of the evidence, young people with undiagnosed SLCN may struggle to comply with prison regime as it relies heavily on the spoken and written language. SLT throughout the secure estate would ensure that if a young person came in on report for example, they can be assessed on entry and receive the right support throughout their period of remand, through to sentence.

Help further understanding of what other interventions are needed to support young people in the youth justice system with their communication and language skills

Consideration needs to be given for the requirement of Speech and Language Therapists to be based in all Youth Justice Services across Wales. Assessment is the key factor in determining whether there is an underlying SLCN, the extent of that need and the strategies that need to be put in place through the design and development of treatment plans which address SLCN goals and provide measurable outcomes. Assessments are carried out by a Speech and Language Therapist (Band 5 upwards); however, potentially capacity for intervention delivery could be increased, through the provision of a Band 4 Speech and Language Assistant. The role of speech and language services within YJS' would be as follows if embedded:

- SLCN assessment
- Consultation and advice for the wider YJS, in terms of planning ensuring that adaptations are made to ensure that the young person benefits fully from the support on offer

- Ensure that all written information relating to a young person's contact with the YJS is accessible to them i.e. licence conditions, reports, contracts, leaflets
- To provide training to the wider YJS to ensure that the team is supported to understand the communication needs of young people, adjust their own interactions to make communication more accessible and be able to screen for SLCN within the wider assessment process.

Outside of this, there is need for SLT support at each stage of a young person's contact with the YJS:

- During initial contact at the police station in respect of SLCN screening.
- During Court processes via intermediaries.
- On entry into the custodial estate to assess on entry and help with transition to a new environment, building routine, navigating the process.
- During support or sentence to identify skills and needs, articulate these to stakeholders to enable support, address needs via speech and language therapy that is embedded with trauma informed practice and multi-disciplinary working.
- There is also a need for the development of clear pathways for young people who have been assessed by SLT within YJS and consequently, require an intervention. At present there is no real service within the NHS for them to go into and if there was a service, it would not be suitable as the emphasis is on in-reach rather than outreach support and this does not work for our hard to reach young people as they struggle to go to appointments. Additionally within schools, there is no service unless a young person is in an SEBD provision or if you can get speech and language needs included within a young person's Individual Development Plan (IDP) as this would mean they get transferred over to a Local Authority Therapist. Consideration for inclusion can only happen at an IDP review and is not always approved.

Increase awareness of the prevalence and nature of young people's communication needs amongst professionals and policy makers including, Welsh Government, Health Boards, youth justice practitioners, police officers, magistrates and teachers

There is a need to raise awareness of SLCN with partner agencies and stakeholders who come into contact with young people at risk of offending, given the high prevalence of SLCN in young people in the YJS as shown by both local NPT data and wider research data. Partner agencies that need to be included in training rolled out should include at a minimum, schools (particularly secondary schools), police, magistrates, staff based within the custodial estate, frontline social workers and those in contact with children who are in care i.e. foster carers, residential staff. With regards to the latter group of professionals, if these were trained, there is the potential to handover intervention to support staff who have daily contact with young people in their settings.

NPT YJS have previously rolled out training to magistrates within the Swansea Bay area; however, time constraints on both ends has meant this training has not been delivered in more recent years. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapy have developed the Box training and Mind Your Words training that is currently being completed by internal staff within NPT YJS and this is something that is accessible to other agencies and stakeholders. NPT YJS have recently met with the Local Authority training co-ordinator to share the Box and Mind Your Words training so this can be included within the training portfolio of courses available to the social services workforce.

In terms of reaching certain professionals, there could be greater focus given to inclusion within qualifications including teacher training, social work training, probation training, police induction, and magistrate's induction. This then could be built in as a requirement in terms of refresher training

mush the same as safeguarding training and form part of a professionals Continuous Professional Development (CPD), which for example within social work supports continued registration.

NPT YJS have applied for the Communication Access accreditation, which will allow us as a service to display a badge so those coming into contact with our service know that we are communication friendly and can communicate with young people with a range of speech, language and communication needs.

NPT YJS have a consultation event planned to engage with young people to establish their views on the speech and language services that they currently access within the YJS to drive forward improvements in service delivery. Consideration could be given to including a wider scale consultation to support the voice of young people involved in the Youth Justice System to be factored in as a part of this inquiry, if this is not already factored into the plan.

Please see below case study examples of the beneficial impact of SLCN input for young people open to NPT YJS.

Case Study 1 (historic):

13 years old male. Presented as disengaged and very immature for his age.

He attended a school for YP with SEBD but was at the brink of exclusion due to his behaviour towards other YP within the school. He was removed from the school setting and received 1:1 tuition in a different venue, away from the school for 1 hour a day.

He had been known to the YJS for 8 months for criminal damage and actual bodily harm. Had no previous SLT involvement.

The SLT worked with this YP within the school setting. Assessment results indicated significant difficulties with his receptive and expressive language (age equivalent less than 7 years of age) which both impacted significantly on his social skills. The SLT report was shared with school and strategies were suggested on ways of working with him. School staff found having age equivalent results helpful in the way they communicated with him and in the way they set and differentiated work.

From the outset of his Order, he was seen for SLT once weekly within school for intervention support. Sessions worked on vocabulary and social skills. He engaged extremely well during these sessions.

This supported his integration back into school for full mornings, 5 times a week, with a view of going back full time in the weeks that followed. The young person's relationships with others within the school setting improved and there were no ongoing behavioural issues following reintegration. He also changed his friendship group outside of school, which considerably reduced his risks of re-offending, harm to others and vulnerability.

Case Study 2 (historic):

16 Year old male, presented as having poor eye contact - dis-engaged and aggressive.

When the young person started his order with the YJS, he was not in education, employment or Training (NEET). Throughout his schooling there were incidents of disruptive behaviour, poor attendance and exclusions resulting in low attainment.

He enrolled at College but found the academic work difficult. He consequently began an Engagement Training Programme where he was excluded for violent behaviour. Prior to YJS, there had been no previous SLT involvement.

He had been known to the team for 5 years both in a preventative and statutory capacity; he has committed a number of offences, including burglary, criminal damage and actual bodily harm.

A Speech and Language Therapy assessment indicated that he had significant receptive language difficulties, which approximated to the functional level of an 8 year old child. He had difficulties understanding spoken English, i.e. instructions, information and conversation. Although his expressive language score was within average limits, he required extra time to formulate sentences and answer questions.

If he did not understand what was asked of him, he would respond aggressively as he did not have the confidence to ask for clarification. Likewise, if he was pushed for a quick response or if he felt as if he was rushed to answer a question he would also respond aggressively. This is the likely cause of why different education and training placements broke down.

The Speech and Language Therapist developed a Communication Plan for staff working with him. This Communication Plan raised the YJS staffs' awareness of his specific needs and guidance on communicating and sharing information with him in the most effective way possible. Due to his communication difficulties, the usual types of anger management work which is used with other YP supervised by the team was not deemed appropriate. Instead, he was given a tailored anger management programme, which took his speech and language needs into account.

In a previous report provided to Court, he was assessed as posing a high risk of re-offending, a medium risk of serious harm to others and a low risk of vulnerability. However, a court report 4 months later stated that if he were to continue to engage with the YJS intervention plan, the risks would reduce in all categories.

The bench that sentenced him were anxious regarding his motivation and ability to comply with his order and a prison sentence was considered. However, at 28 weeks into his order when this case study was written, the young person had not re-offended.

Case Study 3 (historic):

13 years old male. Presented as very quiet, very little eye contact, not initiating conversation. He had no previous YJS involvement. He received a 12 month Referral Order where he was first identified as having possible speech and language difficulties.

He attended a unit for young people with learning difficulties within a mainstream secondary school out of county. Due to being schooled out of county, he had no friendship groups in his local community and was very isolated.

Speech and Language assessment results indicated difficulties with his receptive language and his social skills. He was seen weekly for speech and language therapy within the YJS throughout the length of his Order and work was done targeting vocabulary, time concepts, memory and social skills. The SLT report was shared with school and his carers both of whom were very supportive and provided the young person with the extra support he needed in school and at home.

His understanding of vocabulary was reassessed. He increased his age equivalent for the understanding of vocabulary by 2 years 3 months (from 9 years 9 months to 12 years). His age equivalent on the familiar sequences increased by 3 years 2 months.

A Communication Self-Assessment was carried out with the Young Person at the beginning and at the end of his intervention. He stated that he felt that he understood what people said to him more and that if he wasn't sure, he had the confidence to ask. He stated that he felt a lot more confident than he did at the beginning of his order (His carer had also noted this and a significant improvement in his use of eye contact). He felt that he had learnt how to initiate conversation with people and felt a bit more comfortable about doing this but said that he found it difficult to carry on conversation from there and making and maintaining friendships. As an exit strategy, he was referred to a youth club specifically for young people with speech, language and communication difficulties where he continued to make good progress with his language and communication difficulties and was able to join in and socialise with a new friendship group in his area.

Case Study 4 (current):

A was referred to the YJ speech and language therapy service by his case manager following some areas of concerns being highlighted in the SLCN screening. The case manager had already gathered background information which also supported the referral.

Background

A lives at home with his mum, dad, and younger brother. A was adopted by his parents at 9 months old. He is aware that he is adopted but is not aware of the background behind this.

Parent's state that A has always been 'different' but the issues with his behaviour seemed normal until adolescence. A would become angry at the smallest events and would damage property in the home. A also began displaying challenging behaviour at school. Parents sought help from CAMHS but this has taken two years, until they were able to get support. A is now taking prescribed medication to help with his low mood. Prior to starting the medication A had, become withdrawn. He disengaged from all social activities.

A does not have any close friends and will do anything to try to make and keep friends. There have been a number of incidents over the last two years where A will attempt to make friends with a negative peer group. He is unable to read social clues and perceives them making fun of him, or using him, as friendship. This makes A incredibly vulnerable.

A has stated that whenever he builds a relationship with a professional and trusts them they leave him. This has had a negative impact on A in the past and erodes his willingness to work with professionals.

When A first came through to the YJS he was on a reduced time table (mornings only) in a mainstream comprehensive this is due to him having difficulty managing non-structured times. The school had A recorded as having speech, language and communication difficulty, however he had not been referred for any assessment around this. He had been referred by school for an ADHD assessment for which he was on the waiting list for.

A was seen by myself in school for a speech and language therapy assessment.

Assessment Findings

A enjoys communicating and interacting with others. However his communication is one sided. He will initiate conversations about his own interest but will not extend this to the interest of his communication partner. He does not take listener needs, knowledge and interest into account. He responds well to humour and enjoys having a joke. A used some eye contact during the session but stated that he does not always like to look at people.

A's understanding and use of language fell within average limits for his age. He has an age appropriate auditory memory and vocabulary. He is able to formulate sentences well but can give too much information at times. This was also noticed during 1:1 conversations. He worked well in a 1:1 situation; however, his attention and performance may be affected by distractions in other settings.

When talking to A and assessing his social use of language, it was evident that A had difficulties interpreting other people interactions. In the classroom, if not looking at the speaker or using facial expression to help him, A may misinterpret jokes, sarcasm and other verbal or non-verbal ambiguity. A had difficulties stating what somebody may be thinking or how somebody may be feeling. He also had difficulties in the area of problem solving and consequential thinking.

Next Steps

A speech and language assessment report was written and shared with A, his parents, school and other professionals working with him. Due to the social use of language difficulties highlighted in the report the Neurodevelopmental Disorder Team assessed A for ASD as well as ADHD. A later received a diagnosis for ASD, ADHD and ODD.

Following his speech and language assessment, A was also referred to the speech and language youth club to help develop his social skills in a friendly and safe environment. He attends weekly. He has built positive relationships with staff and peers.

A continued to struggle in school due to his impulsivity and behaviour. A was permanently excluded from his mainstream school and transitioned to a PRU.

A now attends a PRU full-time. There have not been any incidents in school or concerns around his behaviour since starting. He engages well in all subjects and is able to complete more practical and physical activities as part of his timetable such as boxing and mechanics.

A has not reoffended in the last 9 months.

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