

All change...

Susan Lyon and Louise Hess discuss the transformation of their service to school age children in Great Yarmouth

In 2000, the Great Yarmouth PCT Speech and Language Therapy service decided to alter its method of provision to school age children.

Before the change children were seen at local clinics, many failed to attend their appointments and if they did attend it meant missing a morning or afternoon of school.

Therapy sessions were divorced from the children's daily life and activities, therapists and teachers rarely met and so could not coordinate or complement each other's work with children.

After the change children are now seen in school for assessment and therapy. SLTs liaise with school staff in school and targets – linked to the curriculum – are set for children after liaison with school staff and parents. Suggested activities for each target can be carried out within school or at home. Many of these are linked to *Language Builders* a very practical resource published by Elklan.

We provide direct intervention for children through the use of trained speech and language therapy assistants (SLTAs) who travel from school to school.

The school or home can record progress on target sheets with clear guidelines offered by the department. We offer training to all schools on speech and language development and supporting speech and language difficulties within the classroom.

Charities such as ICAN and AFASIC, who are involved in the support of children of all ages with communication difficulties, recognise this way of working as successful.

Training is offered to all schools every term and to parents and includes:

- Overviews to mainstream schools about the speech and language therapy service, usually for an hour at staff meetings
- A session, usually as part of a professional development day to whole school staff on speech and language development, and how to understand and implement targets recommended by our service
- 'One off' sessions on specific areas, eg

writing social stories, developing phonological awareness or adapting the complexity of questions and instructions used within the classroom

- Four sessions on supporting children with speech sound difficulties
- Workshops for parents, eg on developing listening skills or promoting language development

Since September 2002 we have used Elklan training materials, accredited by the Open College Network. SLTs trained as Elklan tutors deliver a number of courses.

A 10-week course, *Supporting children with speech and language difficulties in the classroom* is for teaching assistants and learning support assistants (although teachers have also attended this).

Staff attend a training session for two hours each week followed by practical activities carried out in school to support their learning.

Each learner receives a copy of *Language Builders* and can complete a portfolio to earn nationally recognised credits through the Open College Network.

A two-day overview of the 10-week course is for special educational needs coordinators,

head teachers, educational psychologists, advisory and class teachers.

On the five-week course, *Supporting verbal children with ASD in the classroom*, staff attend for two-and-a-half hours each week and follow this with practical activities as in the 10-week course.

All the advice the department provides for statements of special educational needs now includes recommendations for school staff to attend Elklan training.

In 2005, with this model of service provision well established, we decided to track the progress of children.

We assessed 135 children due for a review or initial visit during July 2005 and gave each appropriate targets, to include developing receptive language, expressive language, phonology and social skills.

The target sheets use a scale of 0 to 2 where 0 = no progress, 1 = target achieved only with prompts, 2 = target achieved independently.

We reviewed the children within the next year, either on request or at the latest by the end of June 2006.

At the end of June 2006 we examined their case notes to record:

- Presenting difficulty
- Whether school staff had attended training
- Whether the child had received support from an SLTA from our department within school
- Whether the school had a designated TA/LSA who had attended training to support children on our caseload
- Whether school staff met with the SLT at the review appointment to discuss progress and targets

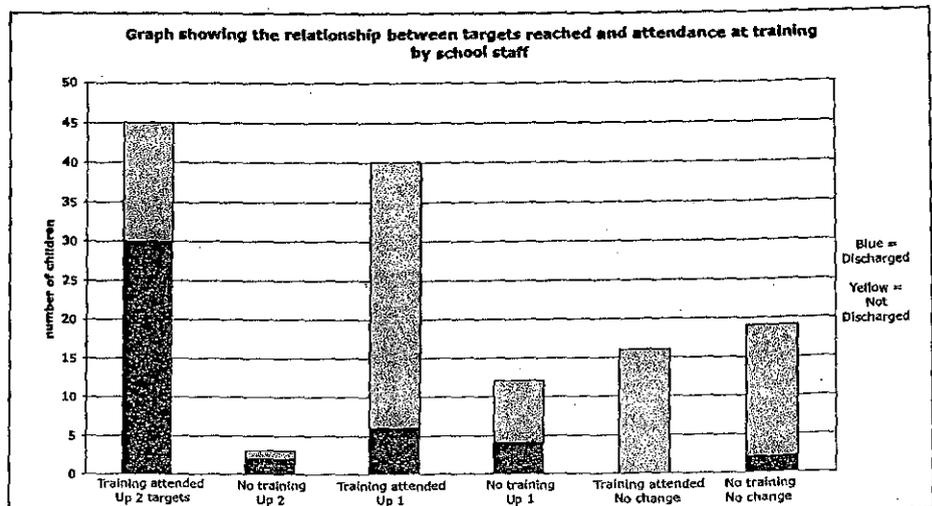


Figure one: relationship between targets reached and attendance at training by school staff

- Whether they were actively involved in completing target sheets as explained during training sessions

Of the 135 children, 48 (35%) had reached the targets set and/or were discharged because treatment was complete and no further intervention was needed. Fifty-two (38%) had achieved scores of 1 on their target sheets – that is targets were achieved only with prompts. One hundred (74%) had therefore made progress and 35 had made no progress.

We looked more closely at the 35% of children who were discharged or who had reached their targets with no prompting. Of these:

- 45 (94%) had school staff who had attended our training. Figure one shows training of school staff is a significant factor in children achieving their targets/being discharged as treatment complete
- 23 (48%) had received support in school from a SLTA from our department
- 32 (67%) had a designated trained LSA/TA supporting them in school
- 41 (85%) had schools who liaised with an SLT at review. Figure two shows this positive correlation
- 38 (80%) had schools who completed target sheets. Figure three again shows this positive correlation.
- 38 (79%) had speech problems as their presenting difficulty. Of the remainder, 2 (4%) had language, 5 (10%) had speech and language and 3 (6%) had social communication as presenting difficulties

Of the 35 children who made no progress, 19 of the children's schools had not attended training; 26 had not received direct intervention from an SLTA; 23 did not designate an LSA/TA to carry out programmes; 21 did not liaise with an SLT at review and only four of the schools had completed target sheets.

Evidence from the progress made by this group of children with speech, language and communication difficulties suggests they do best when schools:

- Attend training
- Designate a TA/LSA has attended our training to support them
- Follow the targets set and complete the target sheets provided by our department
- Liaise with the SLT when she/he visits
- Staff are actively involved in target setting

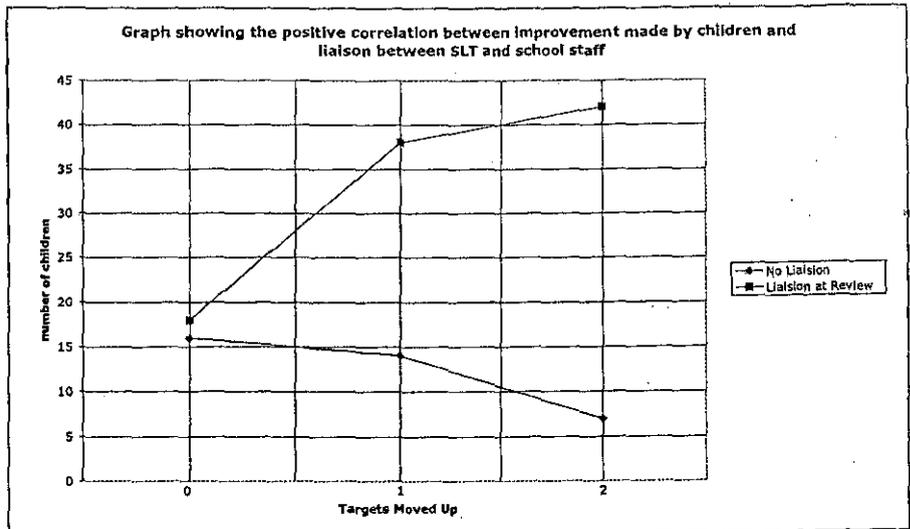


Figure two: correlation between children's improvement and liaison between SLT and school staff

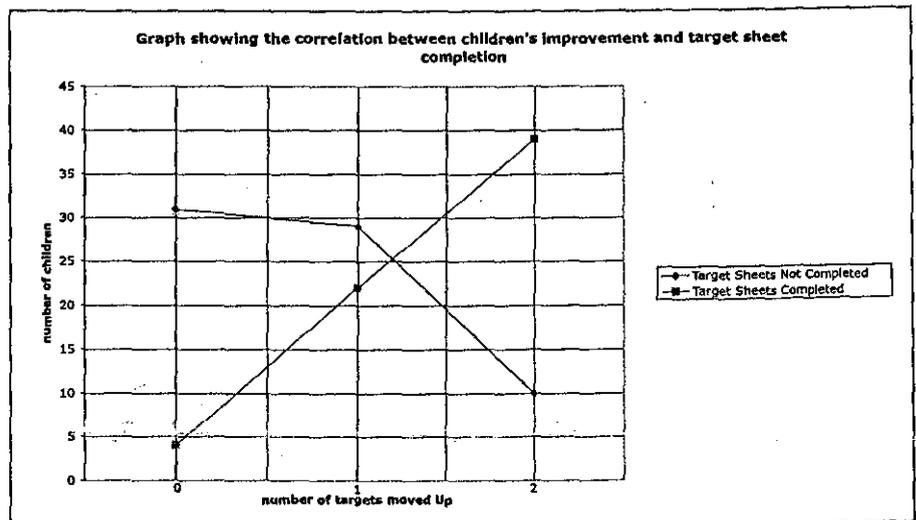


Figure three: the correlation between children's improvement and target sheet completion

As a team we can report feeling more positive about the service we provide to school age children, their families and their schools. This is confirmed not only by the progress children are making, but also by the feedback at the end of every course and workshop.

School staff report increased knowledge of interdisciplinary roles; increased knowledge of the types of communication difficulty; increased confidence in supporting children with these difficulties within the classroom; and feeling valued and motivated following active involvement in target setting.

A questionnaire completed by 64 Elklan tutors (McLachan and Elks, 2007) strongly suggests Elklan training courses are 'beneficial in terms of improved collaboration and information sharing between speech and language therapy services and education staff'.

As a team we agree unreservedly, but we are also excited by the real progress children

are making when they are in a 'language friendly' environment.

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References:

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