

## Early Talk for York Project summary

### What are we trying to achieve?

Based on the strong evidence base that communication and language outcomes at age five are one of the most important predictors of future life chances<sup>1</sup>, we aim to improve outcomes in these domains of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (EYFSP) – the statutory assessment point at age five – over the next 3-5 years in the three primary schools defined within the project by significantly closing the gap between disadvantaged children and their peers.

Current attainment in Communication and Language strands of the EYFSP - 2 year averages

City of York non-disadvantaged 88.15%

City of York disadvantaged 71.3%

Project School group non-disadvantaged 82.2%

Project School group disadvantaged 58.75%

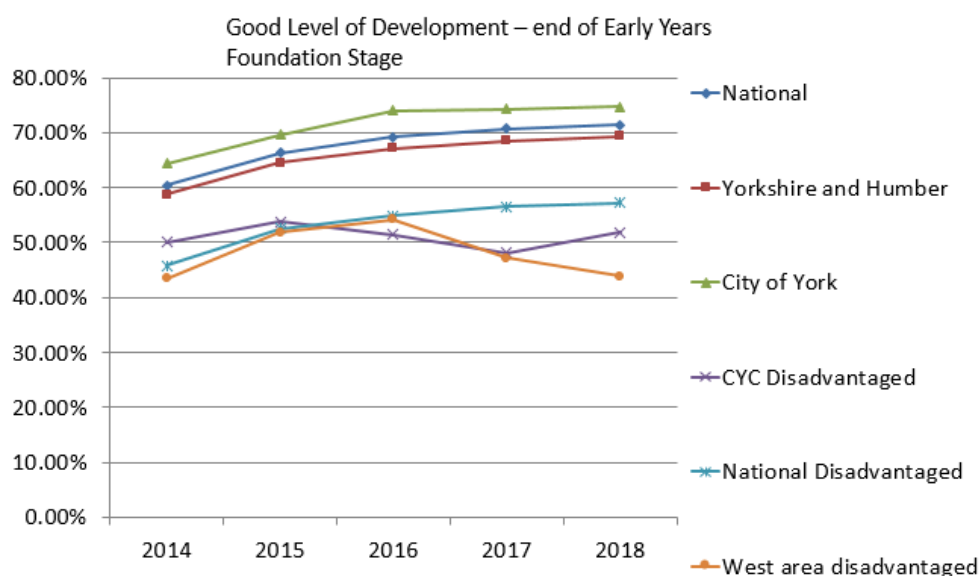
### Why does this area need our collective attention?

York's attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their non-disadvantaged peers has been persistently one of the highest gaps in the country from age five, with outcomes for their non-disadvantaged peers else being consistently above national averages.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Law, J et al, (2017) "Early Language Development: Needs, provision, and intervention for preschool children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds", A Report for the Education Endowment Foundation

<sup>2</sup> DfE (2017) "Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential; A plan for improving social mobility through education"



We know that professionals who work with children and their families self-report a lack of training, knowledge and skills in both identifying problems and supporting children and their families with speech, language and communication development.<sup>3</sup> This includes, but is not limited to, midwives, health visitors and early years practitioners. We know that the Private, Voluntary and Independent sector (PVI) organisations that serve communities with greater levels of disadvantage find it even harder to recruit, train and retain the very best staff. We also know that areas with higher levels of disadvantage are likely to have greater proportions of children who have a speech, language and communication difficulty of some kind.<sup>4</sup>

Prevalence estimates of speech, language and communication difficulties vary depending on postcode between 7% and 50%.<sup>1</sup> Currently on the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) register, we have approximately 3% of the population identified as having Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) as their primary need. This is some way off the lower end of prevalence estimates and suggests that identification is also a problem. We also know that a significant proportion of children in secondary schools on the SEND register with a moderate learning difficulty or Social Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) as their primary need started their time on the SEND register with SLCN as their primary need with 're-classification'

<sup>3</sup> The Communication Trust (2017) "Professional development in speech, language and communication: Findings from a national survey"

<sup>4</sup> Locke, E., Ginsborg, J., and Peers, I. (2002) "Development and Disadvantage: implications for early years." *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*. 27 (1). P.3 -15

often happening around the transition point between primary and secondary school.<sup>5</sup>

So the potential impact from this project could be felt through the system as children build strong foundations through the first five years of their educational careers.

### **What are we actually doing?**

The project 'Early Talk for York' is based around the intake into three primary schools to the west of the city aims to improve outcomes in speech, language and communication at age five. The project is a collaboration between partners across CYC, schools, early years settings and health, and aims to build capacity in the local area to support children and their families 0-5. Key strands of work this year include the deployment of a speech and language therapist to work specifically in the project area, specialist training for early years practitioners, focused work from the family learning team and an online and physical marketing campaign to raise awareness of early childhood development. The project is designed to be 'proof of concept' with evaluation being conducted by Huntington Research School supported by local universities. Year 1 of the project has received funding from Schools Forum and we have successfully received a grant of match funding from the charitable organisation SHINE for three years of the Family Learning strand within the project. We are talking to the CCG about contributing to the joint commissioning of the Speech and Language Therapist role. No other funding has yet been secured. We could approach the Education Endowment Foundation for further financial assistance, but only when we have more evidence that what we are doing is having a positive impact.

Although we will have an outcomes framework that looks for early signs of success, a significant and consistent shift in outcomes at age five will realistically be seen over a 3-5 year period. The learning from this project will be shared across the city with potential for roll-out to other areas in due course.

### **Why have we made these choices?**

**Elklan training:** an evidence based and evaluated programme which will upskill the Early Years workforce in identification and early intervention in

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<sup>5</sup> Gascoigne, M and Gross, J (2017) *Talking About a Generation current policy, evidence and practice for speech, language and communication*

SLCN.<sup>6</sup> There is consistent evidence that a highly skilled workforce delivering effective provision makes the biggest difference to outcomes for disadvantaged children.<sup>7</sup> This is being supported by CYC Early Years team.

**Wellcomm Toolkit:** a standardised assessment tool to help practitioners make accurate assessments of children's SLCN avoiding the 'norm shifting' effect which comes when working in areas of high disadvantage and will help with identification and therefore early intervention.<sup>8</sup>

**Speech and Language Therapist** – specialist support designed to upskill professionals in high quality universal practice, build capacity in the area on early intervention but particularly around children with higher needs by responding to specific needs as they arise. Also to facilitate a dialogue between users and the therapy team about the effectiveness of the pathway to referral.

**Community Learning Champions** – using an evidence based approach to build capacity in the community where adult learning meets the needs of learners and is accessible and attractive to the most vulnerable families.<sup>9</sup> Based on evidence that the home learning environment can have a significant impact on outcomes at age.<sup>10</sup>

**NSPCC Look Say Sing Play** – an evidence based and evaluated universal approach to communicating with the wider community about the importance of early childhood education and its potential benefits. This can be built upon by services in the way that they interact directly with families.<sup>11</sup>

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### **Progress update November 2019**

**Elklan training** is well under way (6/10 sessions completed) with 10% of the workforce in each of the settings involved being trained to Level 3. At this stage there is no reason to believe that we will not achieve a 100% success

<sup>6</sup> Clegg, J and Rohde, C (2017) "Evaluation of the Elklan Talking Matters Programme", University of Sheffield

<sup>7</sup> Education Endowment Foundation (2019) "The EEF Guide to Pupil Premium"

<sup>8</sup> Ainscow et al (2012) "An Evaluation of The Communication Trust's Talk of the Town' Project." Centre for Equity in Education, University of Manchester

<sup>9</sup> NIACE (2013) "Family Learning Works: The Enquiry into Family Learning in England and Wales"

<sup>10</sup> Kiernan, Kathleen E. and Mensah, Fiona K.(2011) "Poverty, family resources and children's early educational attainment: the mediating role of parenting", *British Educational Research Journal*, 37: 2, 317-336,

<sup>11</sup> Ball, R et al (2019) "Sharing the science of child brain development: Describing key concepts around neuroscience using metaphors", *International Journal of Birth and Parent Education* Vol 6 Issue 3 p20 - 32

rate with the qualification which would enable all settings to move on to the next step of a Level 4 qualification which skills practitioners to disseminate good practice across their setting, evaluate this and ultimately achieve the 'Communication Friendly Setting' accreditation. The training is being very well received by those involved and is starting to impact on practice. We have also been able to involve colleagues from the Healthy Child Service in this training to influence practice there too.

**Wellcomm Toolkit** is available for all involved in the project to use to help assess speech, communication and language skills and take appropriate action in response. Expertise in the use of the toolkit is developing in the area and this is being shared across organisations. Some organisations have used the toolkit to complete universal screening for all of their cohort whilst others are only using it for the children that they are concerned about. Where this has been used in this way, we are receiving early feedback that this has produced results that have surprised practitioners and made them more aware of the under-identification issue which we suspected exists (based on theoretical modelling). This is demonstrating the value of using a standardised assessment tool for assessment rather than practitioner judgement alone which can be skewed by 'norm shifting'.

**Speech and Language Therapist –** the speech and language therapist (SALT) started with us on 9<sup>th</sup> September. The slight delay caused by the length of time it took to complete contractual arrangements and information sharing agreements associated with this. She is involved in all of the Eklan training and will lead on the Level 4 cascading training planned to start in spring term. She has already made visits to all settings involved in the project and has made multiple visits to several. Settings reports that she is a welcome addition to the project and are already utilising her skills and expertise to support them with practice development as well as with regards to specific concerns about individual children. A 'professional advice line' has been established making her accessible to all involved in the project and the process of arranging drop in sessions for children and their parents, via an appointment only system, is being trialled over the next 5 weeks. There is an expectation that any child about whom a setting has concerns and wishes the speech and language therapist to provide advice and support around will have been assessed using the Wellcomm Toolkit prior to the request. The Vale of York Clinical Commissioning Group are particularly interested in this strand of

work and have made an agreement in principle to fund 6 months of the 18 month contract for the SALT.

**Community Learning Champions** – this aspect is well underway with recruitment to the roles of ‘Community Learning Champions’ happening across the project area. Members of the Family Learning team have spent time in each of the three schools in the first instance to get a better understanding of the needs of the community to help inform and shape the provision available in the local area. We are pleased to have secured match funding from SHINE organisation for this strand of work who are really interested in learning from this project to inform their work across the north aimed at engaging adults with supporting their children’s learning.

**NSPCC Look Say Sing Play** - this has now received the necessary senior sponsorship across the various organisations who will play a key part in bringing this campaign to the city. A working party has been established and meets in early December to make detailed plans about how we launch this. A particular success of this strand of work is that our partners in the NHS, particularly midwives, are enthused about being involved in this and can see how this would support them in further contributions to the speech, language and communication agenda.

### **Wider benefits**

An arm of this work has always been intended to help partner organisations working in this area on these issues to scrutinise what we currently do, how effective this is and where there are opportunities for improvement. Some examples of where this is already happening;

- The deployment of the speech and language therapist (SALT) is an example of co-commissioning across the Local Authority, York Hospital and Vale of York Clinical Commissioning Group. The deployment of a SALT who is an employee of the hospital is allowing conversations about the ways in which therapy services interact with others and there are already some identified areas that could be changed
- There have been positive and constructive conversations around the ways in which early years providers and the Healthy Child Service currently interact. There is a recognition that are several ways in which this can be improved and the small scale of the project area allows for this to be trialled so learning can be shared more widely.

Abbreviations

CCG –Vale of York Clinical Commissioning Group

CYC – City of York Council

EYFSP - Early Years Foundation Stage Profile

NHS –National Health Service

PVI - Private, Voluntary and Independent sector

SALT - Speech and Language Therapist

SEND - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

SLCN - Speech Language and Communication Needs

SEMH - Social Emotional Mental Health