

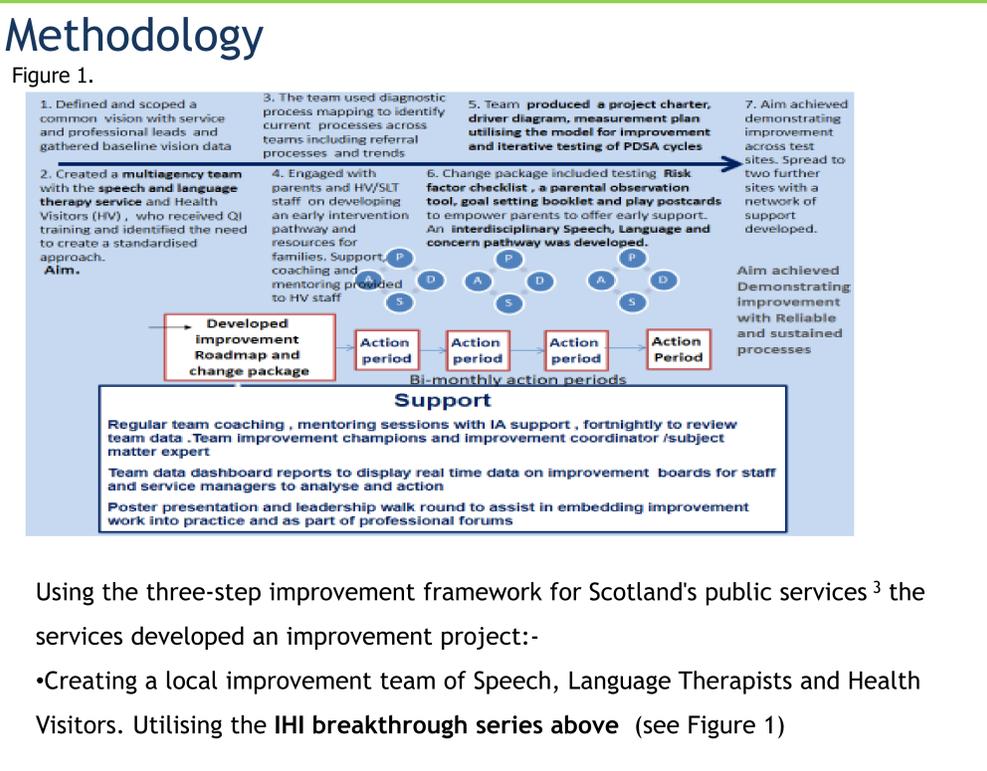
Early Intervention and Support for Speech Language and Communication Needs: A Collaborative Approach for Children under 5 years of Age

Overview

Speech language and communication needs (SLCN) are identified as the greatest developmental concern affecting children at 27 months of age across South Lanarkshire. The consequences reach into the classroom justice system, mental health services and work place. ^{1,2} Data from ISD in 19/20 provided a clear South Lanarkshire picture of the size of the problem at 27 months of age with 14.7% of children within the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) quintile 1 identified as having a SLCN in comparison with those in SIMD quintile 5 6.2%, a 8.5% gap. Over the last year COVID19 has been responsible for a pause in routine delivery of paediatric speech and language therapy services leading to a rise in waiting times and reduced access to early support for families. To prevent concerns escalating or not being addressed the health visiting services adapted practice and partnered with speech and language therapy to test an early intervention tool for children at the 13-15 month child health review.

Aim

Project Aim:-By October 2021, 20% reduction in the number of children identified at 13-15 months with a SLCN in one HV team will require initial specialist support



Using the three-step improvement framework for Scotland's public services ³ the services developed an improvement project:-

- Creating a local improvement team of Speech, Language Therapists and Health Visitors. Utilising the IHI breakthrough series above (see Figure 1)

Process Change

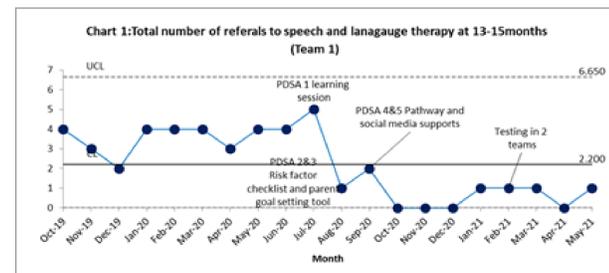
After gathering baseline information from staff we took time to understand the current system and designed and tested the **improvement change package bundle**.

The Speech and language bundle included:

- Early intervention goal setting 'SPEECH' tool for families focusing on children at 13-15 months.
- Alternative ways of families accessing early support- SLT telephone advice line, social media services, You Tube workshops, and leaflets.
- Early Intervention Pathway and package of support ensuring access to specialist services when needed.

Outcomes and Results

Chart one below shows the measure in relation to our aim demonstrating from 2019/2020 following a baseline of 4 referrals per month within the pilot site team there was a **55% reduction** (2.2 per month) in the number of children referred to specialist speech and language therapy services at 13-15 months of age. **Exceeding our Aim** the process change evidenced **12.7%** (n=13) of children (n=102) had a speech and language concern at 13-15 months and **100%** received a speech intervention with a timely review of 12 weeks.



Staff Survey

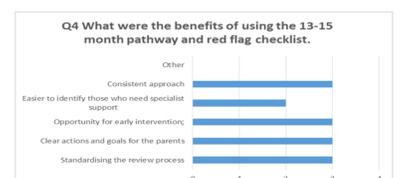
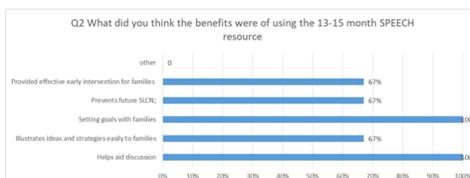


Chart 2 Source: Staff Survey

100% of respondents rated the greatest benefits of the speech resource as setting goals and aiding discussion. 67% rated the tool as providing effective early intervention for families, preventing further SLCN and illustrating ideas and strategies easily to families.

Chart 3 Source: Staff Survey

100% rated the benefits of using the pathway and red flag checklist as providing a consistent approach, opportunity for early intervention, clear actions and goals for parents and standardising the review process. 67% of HV rated it easier to identify those who need specialist support.

Parents and Staff Views

I feel more confident in how I can help to support my child's language skills at home and how to get help if I need it (parent)

The project has allowed for open communication and opportunities for sharing ideas, fostering good relationships between services. (Health Visitor)

It has helped me to set goals with the family, being clear and keeping it specific. It has improved my confidence in delivering early intervention approaches (Health Visitor)

Key Learning and Conclusions

Overall the early intervention approach and partnership working with specialist services underpinned by training and resources has supported health visitors to implement the speech parental tool into practice as part of their universal pathway contacts. Resulting in early indications of parents reporting improvement in their child's language skills and increased confidence of parents to support their child.

- Collaborative Working supported improved information sharing
- Parents reported they are more aware of children's age and stage of development demonstrating an effective co-production approach
- Speech and Language Therapy reported an improvement in the quality of almost all the RFA's received and a reduction in the number of referrals
- Short review period allowed rapid feedback and review on impact and outcome of intervention
- Digital technology utilised during COVID to provide early support for families was effective during the period of restricted visiting

Spread and Scale

The speech bundle is already being tested in 2 more teams and is evidencing improvement ready for spread and scale .

References

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2. Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. 2017. *Speech, Language and Communication. A National Asset*. Available on-line from: https://www.rcslt.org/governments/docs/speech_and_language_communication_capacity_factsheet_2016
3. *Speech, language and communication: Giving children the best possible start in life resource:* <http://slctoolforhvs.nes.digital>
4. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/three-step-improvement-framework-scotlands-public-services/>

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