

# Speech and Language Provision at

## Wakefield Youth Offending Team

The national evidence suggests that within youth justice, children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) are over represented (Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, 2017). In Wakefield we have recently collated our own data and found that 78% of children who were on statutory court orders (Oct 2019-March 20) had moderate to severe needs. This can present as difficulties in understanding and processing information, learning and using new vocabulary, difficulties staying on topic, understanding non-verbal communication and difficulties with emotional literacy. The implications of SLCN can be profound, impacting upon educational attainment, employability, social interaction, emotional and behavioural difficulties (NICE, 2016). Trauma victims can overinterpret/misinterpret mildly difficult or innocuous social cues as being significantly threatening and may find understanding other people's perspectives difficult (UK Trauma Council, 2020; Snow & Powell, 2011; Brownlie et al, 2004). Social communication difficulties can impact upon peer relationships and although the adolescent brain is already primed to value peer experiences above all else, for those who have SLCN, it can lead to an even more heightened need for peer acceptance leaving them vulnerable to peer pressure/exploitation (Baldry et al, 2011; Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 2000).

At Wakefield YOT we offer speech and language assessment to the children we work with. We offer Communicate which is a programme to support with literacy and language. We have also devised specific interventions around learning how to tell the time.

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## What we are doing

YP had been referred as a much younger child but discharged unseen due to non- attendance. 9 attempts to assess her in the form of home visits/ health centre appointments made with YP before able to assess eventually over 2 sessions. Had built up a rapport from telephone interactions. Excuses made each time to avoid the assessment possibly due to fear of failure. Language assessments indicate severe difficulties with both understanding and use of language, vocabulary knowledge and use and with understanding the concept of Time. This affected her willingness to access education due to feeling confused much of the time. Liaison with school staff regarding her specific difficulties and how to implement strategies to support her in school have influenced her behaviour and school attendance. She is also accessing the Communicate programme, which is improving her language skills and her trust in professionals. She is now able to consider opportunities for her once she leaves school. Her emotional regulation has improved and her emotional literacy skills have developed. She is able to recognise when she is feeling upset and is able to remove herself from a situation rather than become confrontational. She will continue on this programme as she is making excellent progress.

- No further offences since beginning programme – able to regulate emotions better
- School attendance currently 52 percent from non-attendance
- Improvement in language skills in terms of spoken language shown by improvement of baseline assessments
- Adaptations by school staff made to curriculum and greater awareness of language difficulties impacting on behaviour and compliance
- Missing episodes reduced
- Reduced attendance at A&E
- Trusting relationship with Communicate worker- will discuss her feelings
- Able to consider her “future” and has aspirations for a career

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