



# COMMUNITY COMMUNICATION CHAMPIONS IN NORWICH:

## An Evaluation

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SCHOOL OF  
EDUCATION AND  
LIFELONG LEARNING

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# Executive Summary

## Context

Research shows that all aspects of communicative development in the preschool years (0-5) influence language learning and consequently academic success (Law et al, 2017). Literacy skills, mental health and employability are all affected in the long-term (Law, Rush, Shoon, and Parsons, 2009). The development of speech, language and communication skills is heavily influenced by the quality of input from carers (Rowe 2012), and the home learning environment (Melhuish and Gardiner 2017, Foundation Years Trust et al. 2018, Blandon, 2006).

In 2016, Norwich was ranked 323rd out of 324 districts within the Social mobility index (Social Mobility Commission 2016) which compared the chances that a child eligible for free school meals (FSM) will do well at school and get a good job. The Department for Education set up the Norwich Opportunity Area to drive forward improvements. The first priority of the Norwich Opportunity Area (NOA) was to improve early speech, language, listening and communication (Department for Education 2017a).

## Community Communication Champions

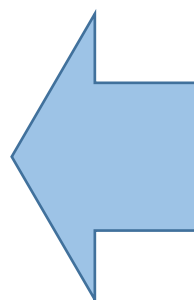
Four Community Communication Champions (CCCs) posts were established by the NOA (2019-2020), to pilot a range of approaches in four target neighbourhoods over a period of eighteen months. The CCCs role was to:

- reach out to families who would benefit most from their input;
- help raise awareness of the importance of children’s speech, language and communication development;
- organise ‘experiences’ and provide coaching and support to families within the four target neighbourhoods in Norwich;
- identify and encourage families to attend a group Home Learning Programme (HLP);
- link up with local resources to stimulate language development in early years.

## Researchers

**Researchers from the University of East Anglia were commissioned to:**

- evidence the impact of the CCC roles
- understand the impact of different activities or approaches against value for money
- understand “what works” and raise awareness of effective strategies



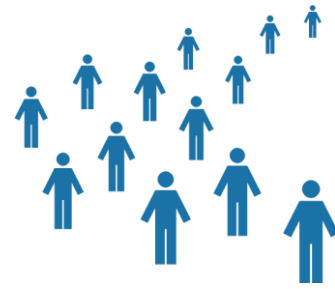
This evaluation documents and considers

**10 initiatives,**

which engaged **374 families,**

**203 workers** and

**105 social media users.**



It reviews how these initiatives removed potential barriers of engagement and supported families in improving their interactions with children in their home learning environment.

## Methodology

The research considers both qualitative and quantitative data from participants including the Community Communication Champions, Staff from NOA schools and settings, parents and the NOA Priority One Project Manager.

During the project and evaluation timescale, researchers: attended events organised by the CCCs; met and collected evidence from participants; studied current pertinent literature; analysed the qualitative and quantitative data.

A number of factors limited the scope and capacity of this evaluation, including the relatively short duration of the project and the evolving nature of the CCC role. In March 2020, as the project entered its third out of four phases, England went into national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The report acknowledges changes that were made to the project delivery during that time.

## Learning from Literature

*Children's language development:* Young children's speech, language and communication skills development requires quality interactions from parents in their home learning environment.

*Emotional factors; influence on learning and language acquisition:* Practitioners need to understand the bidirectional links between emotional capacities and communication skills; recognising the influence they have on the global development and learning of young children.

*Disadvantaged families: hard to reach or how to reach?* Parents may need support in how to interact with children; professionals may need help in how to reach parents.

*Improving the home learning environment:* Parents may face capability, opportunity and/or motivation barriers; practitioners need to identify, understand and look at ways to overcome them.





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## Impact of specific initiatives

Case studies of these initiatives are presented throughout the report.

Time taken to develop the range and content of the initiatives meant that not all were in place and working effectively within a suitable time-scale. Furthermore, some were only just getting underway as the CCC contracts were coming to an end.

The short term nature of the project meant that sustained change and progress for children and families over time could not be monitored in this evaluation.

Investment in terms of funding, skills training for the CCCs, CCC workload allocation and time spent with parents or professionals was variable across the initiatives. Numerous factors outside of these investment variables also contributed to the outcomes.

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*Large scale Continued Professional Development* - CCCs supported 193 participants with a professional development conference using 3% of budget funds. Participants felt inspired to change or develop their practice in both their direct work with children and the way they worked with families.

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*Cascading training* – A two and half day training programme delivered to 10 Home-Start Norfolk volunteers enabled strategies and support to be delivered via home visits. Discussions and initial assessments were made with a further 65 workers from different local groups to begin this training. Other local organisations and groups have also been identified for future training.

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*Schools and Community Settings offer* – Incentives developed towards the end of the project successfully engaged 15 schools and settings in the target areas, overcoming professional barriers to engagement. Schools and settings will be reporting on their own case studies of supporting parents.

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*Drop-ins* - Libraries and schools were used to make introductions with parents. 3% of contacts CCCs made with families came from library drop-ins; 6% of contacts came from school drop-ins.

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*Home learning programme (HLP)* – 88 families were supported through group based sessions, which resulted in improved interactions and boosted the children’s language development. With the inclusion of ‘Springboard boxes’, a gift of early learning resources, the HLP drew on the largest proportion of the budget (18%) outside of the CCCs salaries.

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*One-to-one work with families* – Tailored and universal messages were delivered face-to-face, via email or over the phone. The proportion of CCC workload dedicated to one-to-one initiatives increased from 22% before Covid-19 to a total of 47% during the national lockdown.

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*Community events led by the CCC* – Story-walks, Story-sack workshops and Lunches in the Library were organised at an average of £9 per participant, enabling ongoing support to known families as well as introductions to new families.

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*Community/volunteer group support*–reached parents in a safe venue, delivering universal messages through play based activities, identifying parents who need further support and upskilling leaders.

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*Social media* - CCCs reached 964 people over 28 days with content from its main Facebook page, at its peak, but struggled to engage families to utilise the closed group facilities.

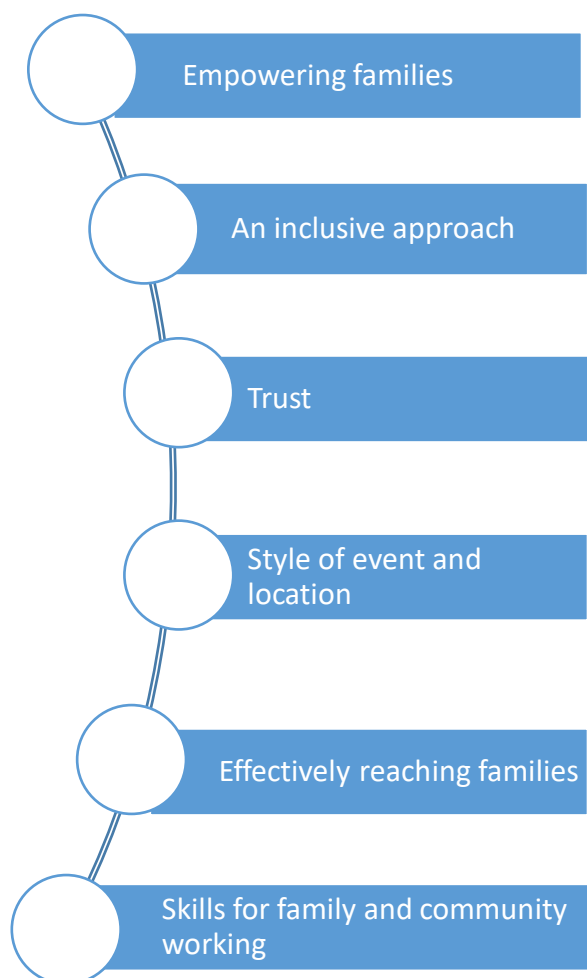
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*Online information materials* – CCCs were developing content, in the final phases of the project, to feed into the collaborative ‘Talk and Play Everyday’ project.

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## Emergent themes

Researchers identified six important themes from the data, which support understanding of what works in overcoming the potential barriers for families to engage with support initiatives:



**Building relationships was at the heart** of the project and the key to success in each initiative.

A focus on wider relationship building and informal parent-parent peer support was important.

Some of the CCC work with local support groups was valuable in the context of supporting parents' needs first, to enable parents to be in the best possible position to support their child.

Where they were most effective, CCCs built up a good knowledge of these particular communities, understood the needs of those who lived there and the resources that they could be employ.

CCCs were responsive to changing priorities, responsibilities and circumstances. They were also mindful of the pressures, barriers and difficulties families faced; responding with sensitivity and patience.

Sessions and events needed to feel safe and supportive for parents to engage.

Confidence, empathy, adaptability and a reflective nature are interpersonal skills that benefit early years practitioners working within the community.

Barriers to working most effectively and making maximum impact included the temporary nature of the CCC role, a lack of training in some knowledge areas, and the short-term nature of the project.

## Recommendations

Researchers recommend that local policy makers and strategic directors place the following principle-based recommendations at the heart of any plan moving forward in this area:

### 1. A balanced strategic approach

- To ensure sustained and meaningful change, a fixed strategic approach would be beneficial. Time and focus are crucial elements of this.

### 2. Train local partners

- Parent ambassadors and cascading of training to community groups working with families in the local geographical area is a cost-effective and far-reaching approach that ensures added value impact.

### 3. Empower families

- Transferring knowledge, responsibility and capacity to families offers most scope for longer-term legacy in the community.

### 4. Effectively reach families

- A focus on building trustworthy relationships is crucial for developing a strong platform to extend parents' support for their children's learning. Regularity of contact and a 'presence' in the community, either physically or virtually, is key.

### 5. Invest in existing services and use existing resources

- It is vital to make best use of partnership possibilities, including wider best practice in the local area and the wealth of resources that already exist in the public domain.

### 6. Focus on emotional readiness in parents and carers

- Supporting parents' capacity, opportunity and motivation must sit alongside the primary focus of developing children's communication skills.

## Conclusion

Researchers found that CCCs built relationships with families and professionals, both within and beyond their target wards. They improved interactions with children and community work with families, through universal and targeted initiatives, by understanding and addressing potential barriers for parents and professionals. CCCs worked with others to reach and engage families; adapting their strategies to the needs of the parents and their children.

Key priorities for decision makers, as detailed in the recommendations, lie in investing in local expertise, resources and training, as well as identifying who will champion this cause at all levels going forward.

# Part 1. Introduction

## 1:1 The national focus

“The most fundamental life skill for children is the ability to communicate. It directly impacts on their ability to learn, to develop friendships and on their life chances. As a nation, we have yet to grasp the significance of this and as a result, hundreds of thousands of children and their families are suffering needlessly.” (Bercow, 2018, p4).

In 2008, John Bercow MP published a report on provision for children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), with forty recommendations that brought SLCN, and indeed all SLC development in children, into the national focus. Considerable good came from the review, such as the development and legacy of the The Communication Trust ‘What Works’ website of evidence-based interventions, the 2011 National Year of Communication that raised awareness of need, and more widely, the inclusion of language and communication as one of the three prime areas in the Early Years Foundation Stage (Department for Education, 2012). Yet the narrative of speech, language and communication provision and support across England over the last ten or so years has continued to be one of shifting foci and changing landscapes. Positive steps forwards have been offset by less positive moves, such as the removal of speaking and listening as a standalone area in the 2014 National Curriculum, upheaval in local services and substantial cuts in funding to children’s centres, resulting in closures and significantly reduced services. Jean Gross, former Communication Champion for Children (2010 – 2011) chaired the ‘Bercow: Ten Years On’ review, to gain an understanding of what had been gained and lost since the original review. Ten Years On (Bercow 2018) concluded that services for children and young people with SLCN remained in crisis, with services inaccessible, waiting lists too long, and ‘high variability and a lack of equity across the country’ still strongly evident.

Over time, concern about rising SLCN was strengthened by correlating evidence of the significance that social disadvantage has on children’s life chances. MP Frank Field’s 2010 report, ‘The Foundation Years: Preventing poor children from becoming poor adults,’ explored the nature and extent of poverty in the UK and its effects on children. It proposed that children’s life chances are most predicated on their development in the first five years of life and, furthermore, that the most effective and cost-effective way to support families is in those crucial early years. In summarising the effect of the home learning environment on children’s life chances, Field noted, “What parents do is the most important factor in children’s development. Services need to be better at engaging parents and building on their strengths.” (Field, 2010, p.54) Asmussen et al. (2016) added to this, specifically highlighting the significance that social disadvantage consistently has on gaps in children’s cognitive and language development.

Understanding of the links between early childhood factors and life chances continued to grow over subsequent years, so it is unsurprising that the Department of Education (DfE) took heed. Within the context of the mounting body of research on the critical nature of

speech, language and communication development to children's overall life chances, as well as the impact of social disadvantage to this, the national social mobility plan of 2017 was launched, aiming to support children and young people to reach their full potential. "Closing the word gap in the Early Years" was identified as the plan's first 'Ambition,' (DfE, 2017b). Within that is the recognition of the challenge of actively promoting approaches for parents to support their children's early language development in the home environment.

This challenge has continued to remain high profile, particularly as an area of scrutiny in the 2018 'Life Chances Enquiry'. The subsequent report (Education Select Committee, 2019) records evidence from a wide range of experts identifying the quality of the home learning environment (HLE) and parental engagement as 'vital for children's life chances'.

The Social Mobility Commission's report (2019) welcomed the focus on improving the home learning environment through various projects. However, it also highlighted that, "the closing of hundreds of children's centres and the scaling back of hundreds more" has not helped in the challenge to support the hardest to reach parents and families. The report clearly shows the consistent difference in attainment of children who do or do not receive free school meals at school, supporting the argument that it is children from the poorest families who need most support in raising their development.

## **1:2 The local response**

In October 2016, the government developed the Opportunity Area programme as part of a wider plan to increase social mobility. Norwich was identified as one of twelve local authority district areas that would receive additional funding (between 2017 and 2020) because of the social, economic and cultural challenges faced in the area (Department for Education 2017d). These twelve areas were identified as in most need of support across a wide range of issues, and addressing deep-rooted issues to enable better life chances for children and young people was a key part of the strategy. Government funded but 'locally led', the Norwich Opportunity Area (NOA) has an independent partnership board, bringing local and national leaders and stakeholders together, to oversee the work across four priority areas (Department for Education 2017a).

Norwich's local Opportunity Area partnership board commissioned a local consultation and gathered data from partners and from parents in Norwich that fed into a list of the local priorities. Norwich's Priority 1 focused on improving children's speech, language, listening and communication (Department for Education 2017a). The data had shown that children living in Norwich, particularly those in receipt of Free School Meals, are amongst the lowest scoring of all local authority districts in England for their Communication and Language Early Learning goal at the age of 5 years old (Social Mobility Commission 2017). Local partners confirmed that pupils too often have poor communication, social and emotional skills at school entry and that there is more to do to engage parents. The data from parents identified that they would welcome advice on how to support their children's speech, language and communication skills, and that they would like support in seeking help and the referral route

for speech therapy. Alongside that, parents reported a lack of speech and language support groups across the area.

Priority 1's target relates to speech, language, listening and communication and was, by 2021, to improve the proportion of children achieving a good level of development such that Norwich moves to the top half for all local authority districts in England.

To achieve that, two major programmes were developed by the NOA to support early speech, language and communication development (Priority 1) in Norwich:

- 1) The **Communication Champions Network** is a training programme and network for Early Years specialists across Norwich schools, nurseries and other early years settings. The Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is delivered by the Communication Trust. The training aims to equip staff to address early speech and language needs, and to cascade training to all staff in that setting to offer a universal approach. Those settings signed up to the programme can also access half-termly network meetings, led by four local school/setting Communication Champion Hubs.
- 2) The **Community Communication Champions** project was set up to complement the in-school provision, offering parents support with their child's early language development to ensure that when children start school they are able to access learning quickly.

### 1:3 The Community Communication Champions project

This evaluation focuses on the work of Norwich's Community Communication Champions (CCCs), between July 2019 and May 2020. A team of four CCCs were employed directly by Norfolk County Council to work with families who have a child aged 0-5 in four socially disadvantaged wards of Norwich. The aim was to pilot a range of strategies to identify children in need of early speech, language or communication support and to engage parents/carers in understanding and establishing quality interactions with their children in their home environments.

The programme was established in January 2019; three CCCs were in post by spring 2019, with the fourth commencing in July 2019. All came with a range of prior experiences, and all completed the Communication Trust's Communication Champion training to Level 3.

Whilst all CCCs started this project with a background of working within Education, not all had prior experience of working to any great extent with families from a similar target demographic. The CCCs received training on communication, coaching and working safely with children, which was the main focus of the project (as documented in Appendix 1). Additional training to cover other responsibilities within the project, such as marketing, event planning or managing social media was not provided.

The original concept for the role of the CCCs was for them to work outside of existing structures, piloting a range of innovative and creative approaches, to engage those parents who were least likely to access or to positively engage with support. Whilst the key aims of the CCCs have remained fixed, their wider role and approach has aimed to be fluid and responsive to needs as they arise. From the start, their role has always included, yet was not confined to:

- Reaching out to families who would benefit most from their input, and/or those least likely to engage with support, to help raise awareness of the importance of children's speech, language and communication development and to provide coaching and support to families.
- Identifying, encouraging and accompanying families to attend a group Home Learning Programme (HLP) in their local area.
- Developing a resource incentive to encourage families to attend the HLP (The Springboard box).
- Organising 'experiences' within target neighbourhoods and linking with local resources and support to stimulate language development in early years.
- Encouraging parents to act as ambassadors to friends and families.
- Creating a sharing platform on social media.

Beyond these original proposals, CCCs have also:

- Organised conferences for the Communication Champions network.
- Networked and linked up with community and volunteer workers and groups.
- Developed offers for schools and settings to engage with the project.
- Developed and delivered an offer to cascade Communication Champion training to setting leaders, community and volunteer workers.
- Organised online communication champion training for remote delivery.
- Developed materials for a 'Talk and Play' project

An overview of the original proposal for the CCC project and the developments of these through each phase is placed in Appendix 1.

The CCCs have worked alongside the Communication Champions who provide a universal approach to speech, language and communication support within schools, nurseries and early years settings. Within the variety of initiatives, the CCCs role included delivery of this universal approach whilst also identifying and supporting those who require targeted support. Specialist support for SCLN was not part of the remit of the CCCs.

For the purpose of this evaluation the timescale for the project has been split into four phases.

Eighteen month project timescale			
<b>Phase 1</b> <b>Spring/ summer</b> <b>2019</b>	<b>Phase 2</b> <b>Autumn/Winter</b> <b>2019</b>	<b>Phase 3</b> <b>Spring 2020</b>	<b>Phase 4</b> <b>Summer 2020</b>
Approx. January 2019 – August 2019	Approx. September 2019 – Dec 2019	Approx. January 2020 – March 2020	Approx. March – May 2020
(Project set- up Jan 2019 3 CCCs recruited March 1 recruited July)	(First phase of data collection and interim report delivered)	(Covid-19 affects project delivery. National lockdown 23 <sup>th</sup> March 2020)	( May 2020 CCCs informed of end to their contracts and project cessation in August 2020 confirmed)

Figure 1: CCC project timescale

## 1:4 Target families

For the purposes of this report, the terms ‘families’ and ‘parents’, are used to refer to any and all caregivers for those children who needed or were given support.

The original remit for the CCCs included “making introductions with parents least likely to engage with support.” Whilst there is wider recognition that SLCN can arise in all families, their work was intended to have an impact on “hard to reach” and/or “disadvantaged” families predominantly. The four wards in Norwich in which the CCCs worked, were identified by the Norwich County Council based on their data on the levels of deprivation. These were derived from an analysis of a range of statistical data across aspects such as income, education, employment, health, living environment, and crime. According to Norfolk Insight ward reports (Norfolk County Council, 2020), for example, the average percentage of children living in low-income households in Norfolk is currently 15%. Within the target four wards for the CCC project, the percentage of children living in low-income households is considerably higher and in one case double the Norfolk average: in ward one it is 28%; in ward two it is 19%; in ward three it is 30% and in ward four it is 26%.

It must be noted, however, that there is little clarity in the initial CCC documentation to establish the more specific detail of this remit, aside from the allocation of their work to wards of social deprivation. There are challenges related to the terminology, and therefore the clarity of the scope of interventions. A more detailed discussion of the nature of supporting ‘disadvantaged’ families is included in Part 4.



## Part 2. About this evaluation

### 2:1 What does this evaluation aim to do?

The wider evaluation aim, as initially agreed by all partners in the project, was to evaluate the success of the range of approaches and interventions delivered by the CCC project. This was broken down into the following specific outcomes for this evaluation report:

- i) evidence the impact of the CCC roles;
- ii) understand the impact of different interventions against value for money (to include understanding the value of social media networks and peer ambassadors for parents);
- iii) understand “what works” and raise awareness of effective strategies to improve speech, language and communication needs with “hard to reach” and/or “disadvantaged” parents.

The nature of the CCC project was very changeable and this made some elements of the above criteria difficult to navigate effectively. At the time of writing the final evaluation report, it was evident that the development of peer ambassadors had not been pursued to any extent that could be evaluated. It is not, therefore, an element of this final evaluation.

The target audience for the evaluation report includes partners of the NOA, enabling stakeholders to identify the impact of specific interventions or ‘initiatives’ as we have termed them here, and to use this understanding to plan for continued sustainable activity. The hope is that in the short term, deeper shared understanding of how to support families and the barriers and challenges they face in accessing initiatives will be strengthened. Furthermore, in the long term, successful initiatives for addressing deficits in early years speech, language and communication in similar contexts can be shared more widely across Norfolk and beyond.

### 2:2 Limitations of this evaluation

A number of factors limited the scope and capacity of this project evaluation:

- All initiatives or strategies that have been piloted by the CCCs have been done so over a relatively short period. This has limited our capacity to evaluate the longer-term impact of the project. Thus, the focus of this report remains on the short-term outcomes and the *potential* longer-term impact of strategies and approaches.
- All initiatives and strategies have been piloted in small specific geographical locations. Whilst the results may be transferable, it must be noted that some approaches will be location and family specific and less successful on transfer.
- The nature of the CCC role was always evolving, with regular adaptations being made to the foci and range of initiatives being used. Some aspects were necessarily fluid, yet

others were complex to negotiate for the purposes of this evaluation. This made the nature of data collection challenging at times.

- Access to wider participants was fraught with ethical and time limitations (see Part 3 below). Thus, a large proportion of data was provided by the CCCs themselves, and included the use of reflective notes. Whilst the gathering of data for this evaluation was given workload allocation, according to the original proposal (see Appendix 1), it was complicated by fluctuating emphases as the project progressed, and therefore provision of this data was inconsistent at times.
- During the data collection period for this evaluation, England was put in lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This had wide-ranging consequences for the immediate delivery of the project, as well as the final and main phase of data collection. (For further detail, see Part 3 below)
- Gaining specific data for impact case studies of individual children and families was also problematic (see Ethical Considerations, Part 3 below), especially when factoring in difficulties arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Case studies within this report therefore arise in the majority from CCC reflective notes and quantitative data sets, and we note that the parent and partner voice is less evident amongst the data and subsequent analysis.
- As data collection occurred prior to the end of the CCC project, statistical information regarding costs incurred or numbers of parents or practitioners involved was correct at the time of writing, but may not reflect the total numbers or costs at the end of the CCC project in August 2020.

## 2:3 Commissioning of Evaluation

The School of Education and Lifelong Learning, at the University of East Anglia, was commissioned by the Norwich Opportunity Area to act as a 'critical friend', evaluate the Norwich Opportunity Area Community Communication Champion project and to produce this report.

The research and evaluation was undertaken by:

Eleanor Milligan, Lecturer in Education, School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia

Teresa Smith, Lecturer in Education, School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia

Helen Trelford, Lecturer in Education, School of Education and Lifelong Learning, University of East Anglia

## Part 3. Evaluation methodology

### 3:1 Methodology

This report uses a mixed methods approach, considering both qualitative and quantitative data. In using this approach, the evaluation intends to expand and strengthen the conclusions by exploring different perspectives, illustrating outcomes and capturing complex personal viewpoint data from participants to enhance understanding about what aspects of the project have and have not worked.

The methodology included:

Approach	Project timescale Phase 1 Spring/summer 2019, Phase 2 Autumn/winter 2019, Phase 3 Spring 2020, Phase 4 Summer 2020	Objectives
1. Inception meeting and project setup	Phase 1	Establish role of researchers and rationale, objectives and outcomes for the evaluation
2. Research literature	All phases	Understand the evaluation tools and existing evidence, their strengths and weaknesses, and how they might be used in this evaluation.
3. Evaluator visits to HLP courses Drop in	Phase 2 and Phase 3	Develop understanding of settings. Gain parental feedback Engage in reflective discussion with CCC
4. CCC reflective notes	All phases	Develop understanding of process, rationale and logics as well as CCCs reflections on strengths, challenges and potential.
5. Semi-structured interviews	Phases 2 and 3	Gain deeper understanding and detail of specific projects or areas of work.
6. Gather quantitative data from CCC team	Phases 1-3	Statistical data evidencing the range of initiatives undertaken.
7. Questionnaires	Phase 3	Feedback from professionals who have worked with the CCCs or attended the Conference. Feedback from parents attending CCC sessions.
8. Interim (formative) report production	Phase 2	Report on interventions in place at that time. Offer recommendations to feed into further project improvement/development
9. Critical Friend	All phases	Offer ongoing support and challenge to CCCs
10. Analysis and report writing	Phases 2 and 4	Analyse the datasets and prepare the final report.

Figure 2: Evaluation Methods

Providers of data for this research included the Community Communication Champions themselves, Communication Champions from NOA schools and settings, as well as the Priority One Project Manager for the NOA. They also held the gatekeeper role for providing access and data on families and partners linked with their work.

As the evaluation proceeded, a few changes were made to the methodology to reflect the needs of the services and the level of access to partners and project participants.

In March 2020, as the project entered Phase 3, England went into national lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, bringing about swift changes to the work of the CCC project and some minor changes and limitations to the data collection approach for this report (for example, interviews were conducted online instead of face to face).

Whilst the main aims of the evaluation remained the same, it was agreed that adapted ways of working with families during COVID-19, were considered relevant to some aspects of this report and would therefore be included where appropriate to do so.

### **3:2 Ethical considerations**

Data collection methods were chosen to reflect the limited time of the CCCs, and specific consideration was given to the needs of the families and the age of the children involved in the project. The process and methods used in this evaluation adhered to UEA ethics guidelines. All names used for project partners and participants in this report are pseudonyms.

From the earliest stages of the evaluation project, researchers were mindful that the findings of the report might hold direct consequences for the ongoing role of the CCCs and that the report might influence decisions made about the sustainability plan for the target areas moving forwards. Professionalism and impartiality were therefore of importance. Furthermore, during the final data collection period (phase 4), the CCCs were informed of the cessation of their contracts, and the evaluators remained mindful of the emotional impact that this would have had on the CCCs and their continued undertaking of the role.

There are small sets of limited parental feedback data (such as evaluation forms from the HLP and comments about the Springboard box) and a small feedback dataset collected directly by researchers from two of the four groups of parents attending the second cycle of the HLP. The direct views of parent and child participants were very limited beyond these for a number of ethics related reasons:

- The collection of parental feedback from the HLP was unable to be replicated with the remaining two groups of parents, as the presence of the researcher was felt to be potentially too overwhelming for the families participating. It was also felt that other means of conducting effective research with the parent and child participants of the project would take a disproportionate amount of evaluation resource, and would yield no further valid data than that able to be gathered elsewhere.

- The very young age of the children who participated in the project, meant that they were unable to understand and communicate their perceptions of the impact of the provision.
- Collecting parental feedback on the HLP involved the use of unstructured, informal and conversational-style interviews with parents in the HLP setting. The use of more formal interview techniques had the potential to negatively impact on families' routines, emotional wellbeing and behaviour, and thus was discounted as an appropriate method. This was particularly important to note as the families participating were 'hard to reach' and may have had particularly complex family situations, difficulties and/or barriers. The Covid-19 lockdown would have also brought additional pressures and stresses for those families.



## Part 4: Learning from the literature

This section identifies some of the existing knowledge and conceptual ideas in the areas of young children's speech, communication and language development and community working. We locate this project in relation to others in the field and identify information that may be relevant to this evaluation going forward.

### 4:1 Children's language development

There is a large body of research detailing the impact of poor language skills on educational progress and attainment. Hernandez (2011) for example showed how vocabulary at age 3, drives language and reading skills at age 9-10, which strongly predicts high school graduation. Law et al. (2017) drew together much of this research to show that all aspects of communicative development in the preschool years (0-5) affect language learning and consequently academic success.

It therefore also follows, and has been shown, that children who start school with poor language skills not only struggle with literacy skills through to adulthood, but that this impacts on their mental health and employability (Law, Rush, Shoon and Parsons 2009).

Building on this, it has been established that the development of language skills and growth in a child's vocabulary prior to starting school, is dependent not merely on the quantity of input, but more importantly the quality of that input from the carers around them taking turns in conversation and meaningfully interacting with them (Axford et. al 2015, Rowe 2012, Zimmerman et al., 2009, Weisleder & Fernald 2013).

The importance and impact, therefore, of the home learning environment, of parent child interactions and parental interest in their child's education during these formative years cannot be understated for its profound influence on children's cognitive language and socio-emotional development (Melhuish and Gardiner 2018, Foundation Years Trust et al. 2018, Blandon 2006).

### 4:2 Emotional factors: influence on learning

The link between children's emotions and other aspects of their learning is increasingly recognised. Authors of earlier studies, such as Laevers (1994), in the 'Experiential Education' project, and Pascal and Bertram (1997) pose that a child's emotional wellbeing is a key factor when judging their potential to be an effective learner, and this notion has continued to strengthen in more recent years. Dowling (2014) proposes, "we cannot function properly if we are unhappy, upset or angry. Our behaviour and thinking are heavily influenced by our feelings." (Dowling, 2014, p93).

Indeed, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework in England (Department for Education, 2017c) notably includes both Personal, Social and Emotional development and Communication and Language development as two of the three prime areas. The significance of children's personal, social and emotional development is interwoven into the characteristics of effective learning which emphasise how children learn, and the document 'Social and Emotional Aspects of Development' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008) highlights emotional development as one of the three building blocks for future success in life. Such high status within the early years curriculum affirms the centrality of personal, social and emotional development to all other areas of learning. This emotional development is complex and rapid in young children. Dowling (2014) highlights the tremendous development of children's experiences and expressions of feelings during their early years. Whilst most basic emotions are in place by the age of two, it is clear that the process of emotional development begins long before then (Dowling, 2014) so the possible influence of this on early language development is important to note.

Of particular import to early years and pre-school approaches to "school-readiness", Young also writes:

"Nursery/school-readiness depends upon much more than early literacy and numeracy – in particular, social competencies, self-regulatory skills, practical or 'daily living' skills are all pivotal for children's success in the first few years of nursery leading to school - and so need to be included in an intervention which seeks to improve nursery/school readiness. Interventions therefore need to consider not only how to build up children's specific competencies but also how to foster positive attitudes to learning and to new challenges..." (Young, 2015, p.10)

#### **4:3 Emotional factors: influence on language development**

"The ability to communicate is an essential life skill for all children and young people in the twenty-first century. It is at the core of all social interaction. With effective communication skills, children can engage and thrive. Without them, children will struggle to learn, achieve, make friends and interact with the world around them." (Bercow, 2008, p.3)

Most commonly, the research concludes in the first instance that a delay in children's communication and language appears to put them at risk of "low educational attainment, of behavioural problems, of emotional and psychological difficulties, of poorer employment prospects, of challenges to mental health." (Bercow, 2008, p.14), as well as more widely, poor social competence and social withdrawal (Denham et al., 1990; Rescorla, Ross and McClure, 2007). The All Party Parliamentary Group on Speech and Language Difficulties' 2013 report also discusses longer-term negative impact, relating a child's level of communication ability to literacy, school performance and employment prospects, as well as emotional wellbeing and behaviour. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Speech and Language Difficulties' 2013 report also discusses longer-term negative impact, relating a child's level of

communication ability to literacy, school performance and employment prospects, as well as emotional wellbeing and behaviour.

Yet further research explores the bidirectional links between emotions and communication. Bloom and Beckwith (1989) proposed that the rate of a child's language development is strongly influenced by the child's emotional state, and that situations of great anxiety or excitement might impair language development, especially if they are prolonged. Language development seems to be more advanced when a child has good attention control and more positive emotions (Dixon and Smith, 2000) and Cross (2004) emphasises that emotional and behavioural difficulties "matter because emotional and language development are intertwined. Communication problems can impair someone's ability to interact, manage their behaviour, learn and think." (Cross, 2004, p.9)

There has also been more specific research into the links between emotional difficulties and SLCN. A DfE Better Communication Research Programme (BCRP) report in 2012 (Dockrell et al.) refers to the substantial research evidence that children with SLCN are more likely than other children to develop behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). It points out, however, that the relationship between SLCN and BESD is complex and any links must be considered alongside other complex issues such as social deprivation and family dynamics. It emphasises the need to distinguish between different kinds of SLCN and between different kinds of BESD and to consider the many other factors that influence both language and behaviour.

When considering the way forward in terms of provision for Special Educational Needs and Disability, the All Party Parliamentary report (2013) also highlights that "provision for pupils with SLCN should reflect their likely need for support to develop peer relationships and prosocial skills and their increased risk of emotional problems," and "that monitoring of these pupils should reflect these domains as well as language and attainment." (All Party Parliamentary Group, 2013, p.5.) Trentacosta and Izard's 2007 review emphasises the powerful role of emotions on children's cognitive mastery and highlighted the potential benefits of early emotion-centred prevention programs to prevent future academic difficulties. Goswami (2015) also more recently emphasised the need to teach children about regulating emotions from an early age. A salient note if we want children to benefit from their full academic potential.

Despite such complexities around emotions and language, the research indicates that the approaches that practitioners take to support children in developing language and communication skills cannot be disentangled from the need to develop children's emotional capacities alongside.

#### **4:4 Disadvantaged families: hard to reach or how to reach?**

The work of the CCCs was intended to engage families and parents "who are least likely to access or to positively engage". Those families are sometimes referred to as "hard to reach" or "disadvantaged". However, there are many reasons why families may choose not to



engage with services or professionals, and there are many challenges that they may face, so this term is problematic if not unpicked and a multi-layered understanding arrived at.

Disadvantage can broadly be defined as a range of circumstances or difficulties that impinge negatively on life chances. It may encompass economic poverty and low income, but a more complex conceptualisation of the term might also include social isolation, relative deprivation and barriers to participating fully in society. “Hard to reach” may include those families with chaotic lifestyles, those who lack confidence and/or understanding of how to engage, or those who feel intimidated by a service due to no or negative previous experiences. Some families may have practical barriers, such as disability, poor health or English not as their first language.

Furthermore, the negative connotations of the term “hard to reach” make it one to be used with caution. Day’s research into how schools engage parents who are labelled as “hard to reach” describes it as “potentially discriminating, amorphous and unhelpful” (Day 2013, p.37). As an alternative, Day suggests that we reframe it from ‘hard to reach’ to ‘how to reach’, shifting from the deficit view of parents to the more pro-active approach required by the institution. The Foundation Years Trust et. al (2018) echo this sentiment suggesting, “All parents are interested in their children doing well, but they often lack confidence and knowledge about how to help.” (Foundation Years Trust et. al 2018, p.3)

In this evaluation, we acknowledge that there are broad-scope statistics that identify a higher prevalence of SLCN in ‘disadvantaged families/areas’ and this explains the rationale for targeting the four wards as they CCC project did. Yet we also need to note that SLCN cannot be exclusively linked to social disadvantage. In her recent interview for the Early Years Online Summit, Gross (2020) talks about ‘cash-rich, time-poor families’ and the questions raised about different family approaches in a technologically-driven world. The Provider Influence on the Early Home Learning Environment (EHLE) report (Hunt et al, 2011) also draws upon evidence that family income and parental education are lesser factors on children’s achievement than parental involvement in home learning, and the authors of the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) study conclude: “what parents do is more important than who parents are” (Sylva et. al 2004, p.57)

## **4:5 Improving the home learning environment**

“There is considerable evidence for the influence of both the home environment and the quality of the parent/child relationship on the child’s cognitive and socio-emotional outcomes” (Melhuish and Gardiner 2018 p71.)

In their Study of Early Education and Development, Melhuish and Gardiner (2018) establish very clear links between the verbal development outcomes of children and the factors that determine the quality of the home learning environment (HLE): namely levels of parent’s psychological distress, household order, boundary setting, children’s demands for attention and warmth with the parent/child relationship. Studies such as these raise the focus on

supporting parents developing key skills and recognise the interrelated nature of the family dynamics on the developmental outcomes of the child.

Building on this, the Department for Education (2018) identified ways that families can be supported in improving their home learning environment and explores the main barriers to this. Under the broader categories of parental capability, motivation and opportunity, those working in the sector need to be aware of potential barriers existing for parents through factors such as:

Potential barriers faced by parents			
Capability	Opportunity	Motivation	
Awareness	Time	Networks of support	Recognition of responsibility
Knowledge	Living areas	Cultural expectations	Previous or current role models
Embarrassment	Access	Priorities	Influence of social media
Skills	Resources	Belief in capability	Prior/current experiences within education
Health			Recognition of importance

*Figure 3: Potential barriers for parents*

Arnold (2017) shows through her ‘Parents’ Involvement in Their Children’s Learning’ (PICL) project how these barriers impact on engagement and through case studies, the origins of these barriers. Arnold shows that through recognition and understanding of the barriers parents face, educators can seek to adapt their organisation and approaches to accommodate the needs of a wider range of families.

## Part 5: Impact of specific initiatives

In this section, we analyse the quantitative datasets for specific initiatives. Qualitative insights are used alongside to further illustrate the data and provide valid narratives from participants.

### 5:1 The range of initiatives

The CCC team and its manager recognised the need for a range of approaches. This aligns with Tait and Prodger's (2017) writing about parental engagement, which explains that parents are not a homogenous group and that what works to engage some, will not necessarily work for all others. Therefore, there is a need for a spread of initiatives to support the whole community. Tait and Prodger (2017) also look at the differences in the staff strengths and points out; that whilst some may have strengths working one-to-one, others may have more confidence in leading group activities, for example. This is something that the CCC team clearly identified after phase 1, and which resulted in the re-organisation of the staff team responsibilities and areas of work.

Whilst the original proposal and objectives for the CCC project (see Appendix 1) centred on working directly with parents, the initiatives actually fell in to two separate areas:

1. Initiatives to support professionals/volunteers who work with parents or families;
2. Initiatives to support parents and families with their children.

Parenting, family life education, support or prevention programmes are often designed for a universal, selective or indicated audience, reflecting differences in the approach of each intervention, and stemming back to Gordon's (1983) typology of levels of prevention. As efforts and approaches become more intensive, this is often associated with higher costs, resources, time and effort. More recently, the Early Intervention Foundation has adopted these categories within their evaluative work, and highlights that early intervention works best when targeted, on a selective or indicated basis. To align our discussions, we will categorise the initiatives used by the CCCs in this way:

- **Universal:** an approach offered to all families, focused largely on prevention of SLCN and focused on positive parenting practices
- **Selective:** approaches that are targeted towards groups of families/practitioners working with families, with higher-than-average risk of children developing SLCN
- **Indicated:** approaches offered to individual families/practitioners working with families, where SLCN have already been identified by other professionals/practitioners or the CCCs themselves.

Initiative	Initiative type	Initiative level
4:1 Conference	Professional offer CPD Large group	Selective
4:2 Cascaded training	Professional offer CPD Group based CCC project promotion Target family recruitment	Selective and indicated
4:3 Schools and settings offer	Professional offer Incentivised financially Self-administered CCC project promotion Target family recruitment	Selective
4:4 Drop in	Parent and Child CCC project promotion Child screening (Library only) Target family recruitment	Selective
4:5 Home Learning Programme (HLP)	Group based Live modelling Parent and Child CCC project promotion	Indicated (by screening of child language development and assessing parental needs)
4:6 One-to-one	Parent or parent and child Media based or face to face Individually delivered Self-administered	Indicated
4:7 Community event	Parent and child Group based Live modelling CCC project promotion Target family recruitment	Selective (Story-walk, Get Me Out The Four Walls group, Lunch in the Library)  Indicated (Story sack workshop)
4:8 Community group attendance	CCC project promotion Target family recruitment	Selective
4:9 Social media	Parent Media based Self-administered CCC project promotion	Universal
4:10 Online Information materials	Media Based Parent Self-administered	Universal

Figure 4: Categories of CCC initiatives

The predominance of targeted initiatives reflects the objective for the CCCs to work in their target geographical areas. However, as Figure 4 demonstrates, some initiatives were planned to be accessed universally, thanks to the media platform on which they have been sited.

Of the range of initiatives that were developed and adapted in the target wards, recruitment for the Home Learning Programme (HLP) across all four wards had even focus from each of the CCCs and specific targets were given for the number of parents who should be recruited for this initiative. In contrast, other initiatives were distinctly more localised, were not given specific target numbers for recruitment and proved more popular or more productive according to the local facilities, the particular strengths of the CCC leading the event or engagement with partners in those areas. As you will see from Figure 5 below Story-walks, for example, only occurred in one ward, led by one CCC.

## 5:2 Engagement with initiatives

There were also differing levels of engagement that the CCCs had with families through these initiatives. Thirty-seven families attended the Lunch in the Library events, however none of these families had ongoing contact or support from the CCCs, whereas families attending the HLP had at least 6 occasions to meet up with and gain support from the CCCs.

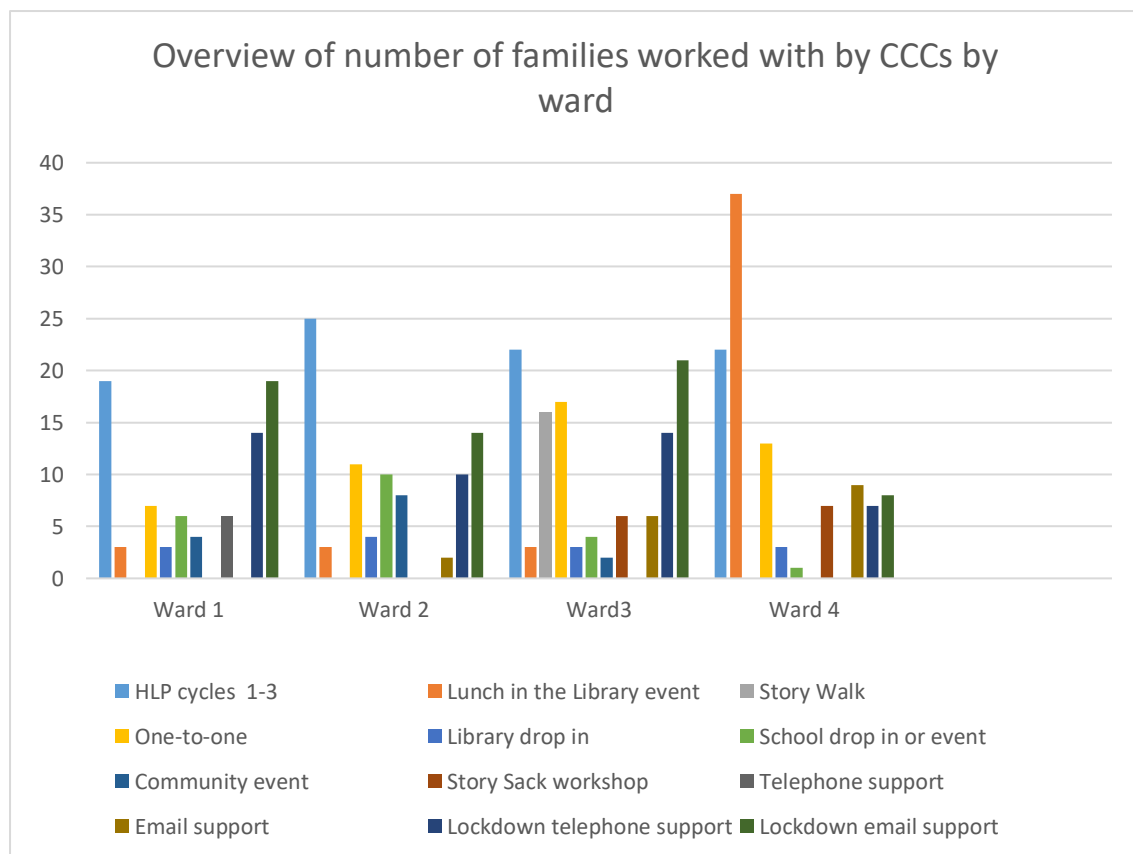


Figure 5: Number of parents/families engaged with CCC initiatives by geographical area

CCCs were also able to reach out to larger groups through initiatives that engaged people across and beyond the specified wards, to include other wards in the Norwich Opportunity Area.

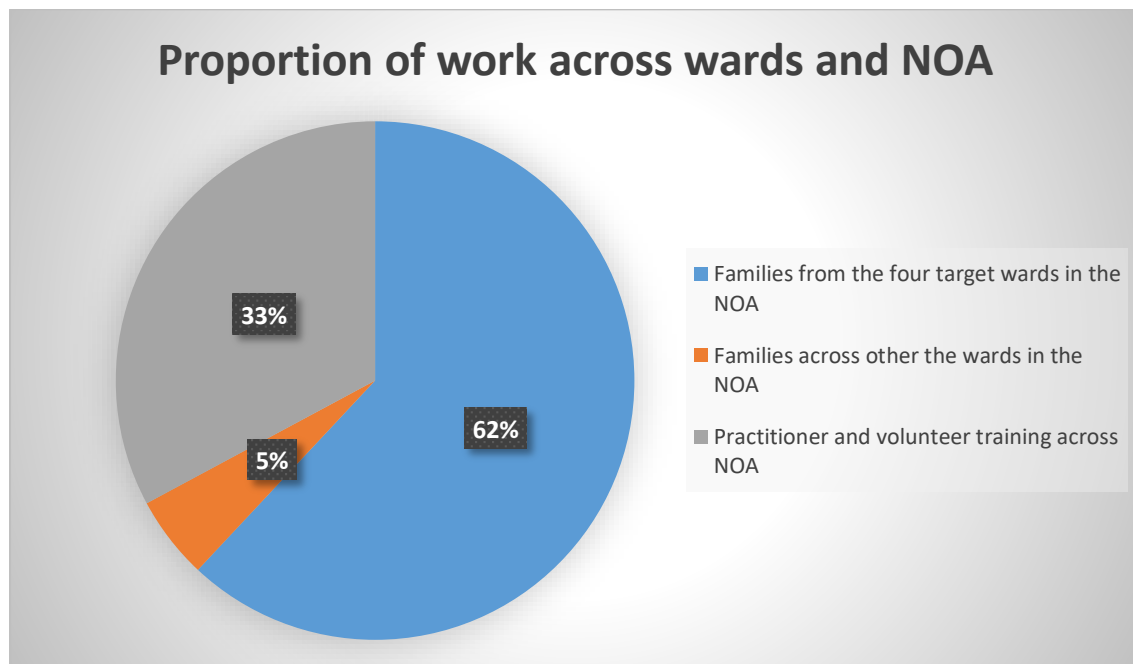


Figure 6: Proportions of CCC work with families, practitioners and volunteers by geographical area

Whilst the focus was to work with families within the four target wards, it is clear that the reach and impact of the CCCs work went well beyond that. A third of the people they had contact with, were practitioners working within Early Years Settings who directly support and work with a multitude of families across Norwich.

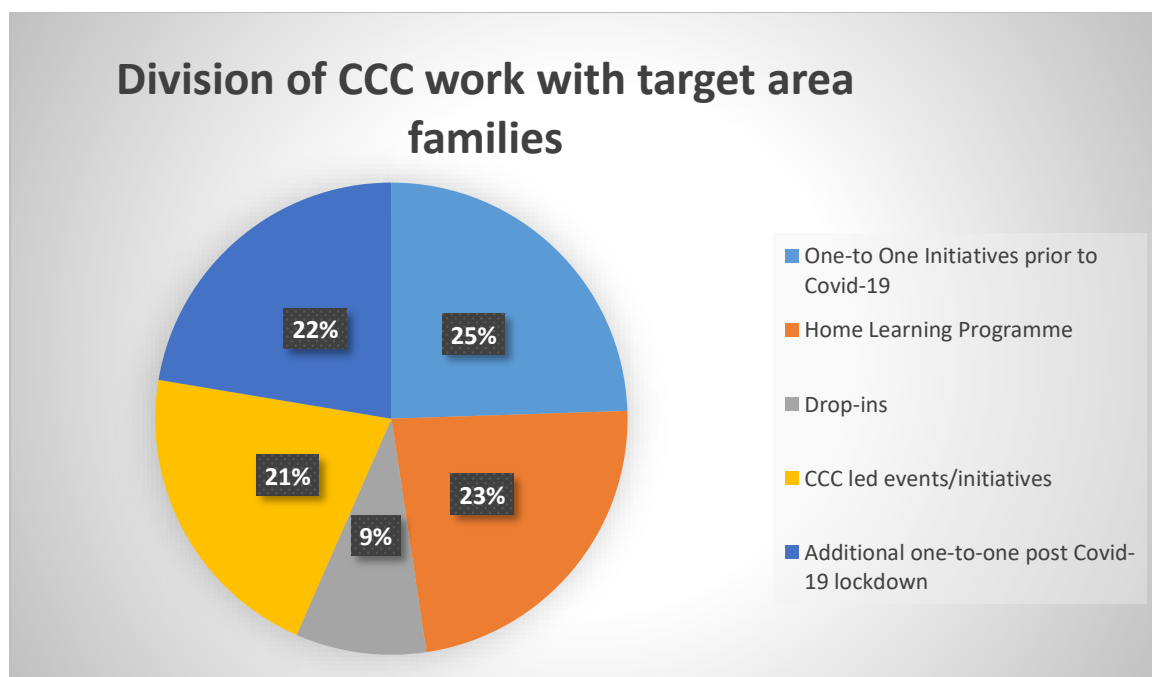


Figure 7: Division of work undertaken by CCCs with 374 families in the four target wards.

Within the four target NOA wards, CCCs had engaged 374 families. Prior to Covid-19, only a quarter of the families engaged by CCCs were receiving one-to-one support. Unsurprisingly, due to Covid-19 restrictions, the bulk of CCC work with families was ‘converted’ into one-to-one work by telephone or by email. Lockdown restrictions leading to cancellation of the third and fourth cycle of the HLP, drop-ins at schools and libraries and other CCC-led events has had a particularly heavy impact on the outcome of this data.

### 5:3 Breakdown of costs

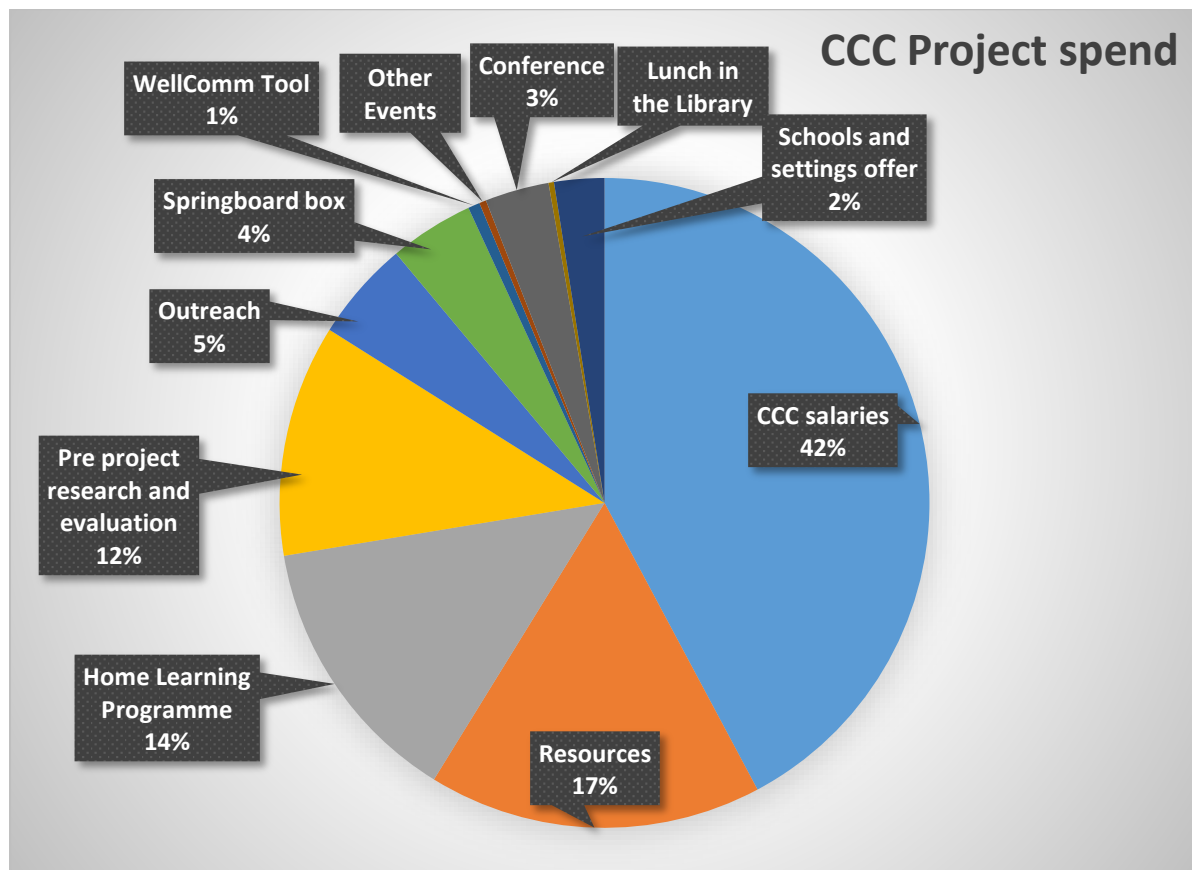


Figure 8: Breakdown of CCC project spend (up to May 2020)

Whilst the Springboard box and Home Learning Programme costs have been represented separately within this cost graph, it should be noted that they form part of the same initiative and it was the same parents that benefitted from them. This is significant as they represent 18% of the total cost, the largest proportion outside of the CCC salaries, whilst the numbers of families supported through this initiative represented just over a fifth of the total. In addition to this, a large proportion of the resources budget was also used to purchase toys and materials to facilitate the HLP group sessions.

Other initiatives do not feature, as they did not incur additional costs other than CCC time. Interestingly, the Conference represents only 3% of budget spend and yet was the largest event organised by the CCC team and provided the largest group of participants with professional development.

Further analysis, in particular looking at cost per participant, would be significant in determining value for money, however, this needs to be considered, as identified earlier, alongside the time spent with participants, and/or potential reach. We will therefore discuss relative value for money and a closer breakdown of information and analysis for the specific initiatives below.

## 5:4 Large scale Continued Professional Development

*Why use this initiative?*

“It is almost impossible to overstate the premium that should be placed on training and deploying the necessary workforce. From therapists to specialist teachers, to SENCOs, to classroom assistants, we need the right people in the right place to offer the right service. Professionals need to be trained themselves and to train others with the resources required for both purposes.” (Bercow 2008 p66)

In her review of Early Education and childcare qualifications, Nutbrown (2012) called for a clearer focus on the professional qualifications and status of staff in early childhood care and education. Nutbrown stated that for all those who work in settings supporting children, continuing professional development “is an essential part” (Nutbrown, 2012, p7). The review reiterated the importance of all those working in the early years sector having the training to build knowledge and skills to work both with the children and their families. There were clear messages that professional development should be consistent across all early years settings, and particularly highlighted:

“the importance of all those who work with children understanding language development. The evidence for strong support of young children’s early language development is overwhelming,” (Nutbrown, 2012, p19)

The review went further to state that practitioners need to have opportunities to learn about theoretical and pedagogical approaches and that this should be given in tandem with practical application suggestions and time for reflection.

Horden (2013) drew on Nutbrown’s work and reflected on the tensions in the landscape of professional development that have occurred over time and highlighted the difficulties that Early Years settings have faced in recognising the need to maintain quality training for staff whilst simultaneously receiving decreased funding for such aspects of their work.

This is echoed by the work of Lane et al. (2014), who identify variability in educators or setting leaders training as a barrier to quality instruction of early literacy skills in pre-school children across the United States. In their review of a range of professional development programmes, they identify that those who engaged in professional development evidenced the significant impact that improved practice had on children’s outcomes.

When this is coupled with the findings of Bonetti’s (2018) comprehensive analysis of the English early year’s workforce, which includes an increased reliance on unpaid staff, a decline



in the number of providers with highly qualified staff and increasing turnover of staff, there is a clear need to prioritise high quality professional development for all early years education and care providers.

#### *What happened at this initiative?*

A conference for NOA Communication Champions

*Number of CCCs involved: 4 Number of participants 193 Duration: 1 day*

*Costs (additional to the time of the CCCs): £9061 Cost per participant: £46.94*

Two conferences were planned during the period of this project. The first in July 2019 and the second in July 2020. Unfortunately, despite extensive planning and booking, the second conference was cancelled due to Covid-19.

For the first conference, invitations were sent to approximately 180 Early Years Foundation Stage settings/professionals across the Norwich Opportunity Area, including schools and settings with Communication Champions, Pre-school and settings who had not at that point directly engaged with the Communication Champion project and other stakeholders such as the working group and NOA representatives.

At the first conference, held in Phase 1, highly reputed keynote speakers Elizabeth Jarman and Mark Burns delivered input to all delegates on 'Communication Friendly Spaces' and 'The Learning Imperative', whilst local and regional leaders provided updates on the Norwich Opportunity Area context, initiatives and developments (see conference agenda, Appendix 2). Participants had the opportunity to attend three workshops from a selection of five delivered by local partners across a range of Speech, Language and Communication themes. Exhibitors had been invited to provide opportunities for delegates to find out more about local support services and agencies, as well as retailers of early years resources.

193 individuals attended the conference, 56% of these completed the evaluation of the conference at the end of the day and 13% completed an 'impact' survey in May 2020 reflecting on their practice since the conference.

The conference cost £9,601, which equated to just under £50 per participant. As the Norwich Opportunity Area, funded this event on this occasion, it was free to delegates. It was a full day event including lunch. Similar training opportunities by reputable providers cost practitioners in the region of £150 for a full day.

#### *Analysis of impact*

Evaluations at the end of the day indicated that:

- 100% attendees felt the objectives for the day had been met by the content and organisation;
- 81% of attendees believed the Keynote speakers were the most useful part of the conference day;
- on average 79% of workshop attendees rated the workshops as good or excellent; most notably,

- 97% of attendees of the 'Building relationships with shy children' workshop rated it as either excellent or good

Of those who contributed to the impact survey:

- 100% of respondents had made changes in some way to their setting inspired by the keynote speech on communication friendly spaces.
- 75% of respondents reported that they had audited and/or reorganised their setting's environment along the communication friendly principles provided in the talk
- Just under half of respondents had also reviewed resources in their settings and undertaken further training or reading on this aspect of practice.

Following the workshop, led by the CCCs on supporting the Home Learning Environment, two-thirds of respondents commented that they had developed new or additional ways to engage parents and encourage home learning.

Respondents also indicated that attending the workshops influenced their use of the Library service resources, promotion of library service offers to parents and focus and attention on the way they build rapport with children.

Data for the impact study was limited, but demonstrates very positive impact on practitioners who attended the conference.

Evidence suggests that this initiative provided cost effective professional development, which not only raised the importance of this aspect of development in practitioner's minds but also has the strong possibility to lead to practical review, evaluation and action in improving practice in settings. It also provided valuable sharing of practice across the local network and opportunity for development of community amongst practitioners.

## Case Study 1: Providing CPD and networking opportunities

### Communication Champions Conference

By consulting with colleagues from the local authority early years advisory team, CCCs were able to plan the day in detail. They gained feedback and information on how previous conference days had been organised as well as suggestions for how to work in the conference centre.

CCCs liaised frequently with the centre conference coordinators in the months and weeks leading up to the day and worked closely with them to ensure that the workshops, refreshments, location of exhibitors' stands etc. were well organised.

Consideration for conference content, took into account potential professional barriers (capability, motivation and opportunity) that delegates may face in supporting children and their families effectively. CCCs recognised the importance of keynote speakers who could not

only talk about relevant subject matter, but had a high reputation in the early years community.

One delegate reflected on the impact the keynote speech had on the practice in her setting:

**“We are more aware of making the environment outside more interactive for children to explore and learn from...Inside we constantly evaluate...”**

Networking was encouraged on the day, by providing space and time between sessions for delegates to talk and reflect with one another. Delegates highlighted this in comments:

**“It was great to share best practices with each other and as always it was useful to take time to reflect on what is working well and what are for improvement there are [sic]. I returned to school with renewed rigor!” [sic]**

Engaging with both children and parents was a key focus of the conference day sessions and providing the delegates with both background information and practical strategies was integrated into all sessions.

Attendees commented on the impact they had noticed since returning to their settings and working with children and families:

**“It helped us recognise more of the barriers to children’s language development.”**

**“I feel that I take a moment to think and reflect prior to interventions. I now have a plan and send activities home for carers to do with their children.”**

**“We have changed the way we overcome the barriers for ‘shy’ children.”**

### *Potential for a further conference that was evident prior to Covid-19*

Planning was already well underway for the second conference, with an expected delegate attendance of 300 practitioners from across the Opportunity Area. Two highly respected keynote speakers had been booked; Michael Rosen, a well-known children’s author, poet and Children’s Laureate 2007-2009 and Jean Gross, an educational expert who was the government’s former Communication Champion and who has led many national initiatives aimed at improving children and young people’s life chances. Workshops and exhibitors had been planned, taking on board feedback from conference evaluations.

The budget for this event was in the region of £11,000. With the target 300 attendees, this would have equated to £37 per head and so represented very good value for money.

## 5:5 Cascading training

### *Why use this initiative?*

There are a range of professional and voluntary/community workers who come into direct contact with parents and families with young children such as health visitors, community group leaders and Home-Start volunteers. The Communication Trust put forward the suggestion that such professionals should be knowledgeable, skilled and confident in sharing information about the importance of speech, language and communication skills, adding that they:

“have a vital role to play in sharing information about typical language development, encouraging a language rich home environment and helping parents whose child may be struggling with their language and communication to access relevant local additional support” (The Communication Trust 2018 para 19)

Evidence given to the Life Chances Enquiry (The Communication Trust, 2018) highlights the need for ongoing professional development, for those providing front line, universal services to families and young children, focussed on the importance of speech, language and communication as a central life skill and identifying children whose skills are not developing as expected for their age. They recommended that this include regular mentoring and coaching from colleagues with expertise in speech, language and communication.

Home visiting volunteers in particular, offer support that is especially important for parents developing confidence across a range of issues. The Home-Start scheme has been specifically shown through research (Deković et. al, 2010) to positively impact parental sense of competence in the long term, leading to positive parenting and empowerment of parents. This is vital work. Home-Start Norfolk Annual report (Home-Start Norfolk 2019) states that of the families referred to them, 63% parents have low self-esteem, 41% needed help accessing other services, 70% felt isolated and 77% were coping with their own mental health.

### *What happened at this initiative?*

In Phase 3, the CCC team initiated the drive to offer Communication Champion training to all local partners who work directly with families. This was part of a focus to ensure that a legacy was left by the CCC project for future families. It was also recognised that there was a proportion of parents that the CCCs had no way of meeting or making contact with, due to restrictions on them undertaking home visits. Whilst there was an instance where a CCC was invited to attend a home visit by a health visitor (Case Study 12), who believed the parent would benefit from attendance at the Home Learning Programme, CCCs could not drive this approach as it was at the discretion of the health visitors. Furthermore, as the Case Study highlights, the vulnerability of this parent made this approach questionable on reflection. The focus for the CCCs was to support and link up with those who already undertake the home-visits to help equip them to support the parents specifically with their child’s communication and understand the opportunities within the CCC project for parental support.

*Number of CCCs involved: 2    Number of participants 10    Duration: 2.5 days*

*Costs (additional to the time of the CCCs): £420.50    Cost per participant: £42.05*

The initiative was targeted at those working with early years families, whether it be in a professional or voluntary capacity. The first informal meeting gave an introduction to the CCC team, their work on the HLP, the referral process and some key 'top tips' for parents to improve their interactions with children and encourage their child's communication. This was followed by two more formal training days addressing the following:

- Speech, Language and Communication in children: Definitions, typical development, attention and listening, understanding of language, vocabulary, expressive language, speech sounds and impact on other areas of learning
- Identification and assessment of Speech, Language and Communication needs in children.
- The communication environment, including the home environment; engaging parents and involving children.

At the time of Covid-19 lockdown, one group had completed the face-to-face cascaded training. The group consisted of ten Home-Start volunteers: a local community network of trained volunteers, who work one to one and offer regular support, friendship and practical help to young families in their own homes helping to prevent family crisis or breakdown, as they go through challenging times.

#### *Analysis of impact*

Feedback from the co-ordinator indicates that the training has had a positive impact on the confidence and strategies that volunteers are using with individual parents and families they are working with. As Case Study 2 below exemplifies, it has enabled volunteers to model techniques and positively make a difference to the speech and language development of young children and offers a model of 'how to reach' some parents who are not able to access universal provision.

### **Case Study 2: Cascaded training to a small group**

#### **Home-Start**

Without the ability to conduct home visits, CCCs recognised that there might be many families that they were unable to reach through their established methods.

One CCC also reflected on the time that she had worked as a volunteer and the needs that present themselves for volunteers:

***"It can be quite isolating working as a home visiting volunteer and these training days are great for allowing volunteers to feel part of the bigger picture of their organisation."***

After making a connection with the co-ordinators, the CCCs found that there was definitely a need for training in this aspect of supporting families. One recalled:

“There was lots of acknowledgement from the Home-Start staff and volunteers that they were seeing families where children’s speech and language was not where we would hope it to be, that parents didn’t have information about how to support their children and that they felt they (the volunteers) could do something to help.”

It was clear to CCCs after reading the Home-Start report (Home-Start Norfolk 2019), that through these volunteers the CCCs could reach a wide range of families, who face many (and at times a combination of) the capability, motivational or opportunity barriers.

Home-Start volunteers helped 236 families in Norfolk, 505 children aged 0-5 and had 141 volunteers across Norfolk recording 2611 hours of home visiting support. (Home-Start 2019) Long serving volunteers had completed between 5 and 18 years of service with the scheme.

Following the three day training led by CCCs one attendee fed back:

“I am more informed of the SLCN and where to sign post them to see what other help they could get, what help we can give them with different activities and settings they could visit.”

One CCC continued to maintain contact with the co-ordinator offering addition support through links to resources online, that the volunteers could use with the families they were supporting.

The coordinator also fed back to the CCCs that volunteers had been using a range of the play-based strategies introduced to them through this training and that one particular example had been written up as a successful case study. The volunteer had been using play activities to support the younger child’s speech and language, whilst giving the mum a break. The volunteer continued to do this via video call during Covid-19 and reported on the progress in language skills over the period of a few months. This had supported a mum of two children, who was suffering mentally and emotionally, in developing better interactions with her children and confidence to help them in future.

Initially the CCC team had hoped that this training would not only help individual volunteers supporting families, but would also lead to referrals for the HLP. This outcome was fraught with difficulties:

“the main issue was always going to be whether we could encourage parents who lacked confidence to go out of the house and attend a session with others.”

Feedback from the Home-Start co-ordinator confirmed the reluctance of families to attend group sessions; “they fear being ‘looked at’ and think that other parents will be in cliques and the larger the group the worse it is.” She also noted that “some of the families would benefit but the children had additional needs which didn’t make a group appropriate.”

The CCC reflected:

“I would like to set up joint home visits with Home-Start to families and take talking tips into family homes – the course in its group format is not appropriate for more vulnerable families where the parents perhaps have poor mental health and low self-esteem. They would benefit greatly though with the support for their children’s speech language and communication and this would seem the way to reach them.”

Between the training session in February and the end of the data collection period in May, no referrals had come from Home-Start volunteers for the Home Learning Programme. This was both a relatively short period for volunteers to work with parents and potentially an unrealistic expectation due to the range of difficulties facing these families.

#### *Potential for future training that was evident prior to Covid-19*

In discussion prior to Covid-19, Home-Start co-ordinators and CCCs envisaged a potentially more effective approach to supporting families in attending a group based HLP. Their conclusions and key priorities regarding the needs of their families were as follows:

- Time would be needed to build up to a family going to a course/group.
- The Home-Start scheme would need to initiate the introductions.
- A member of the CCC team could be introduced and could join a home visit to get to know the family.
- Ideally a few activities would take place in the home so the course itself would be less intimidating and they would have some relationship with the CCC at the course when they arrived.
- To have smaller groups at the Home Learning Programme – a group of 10 families would probably still be too large for some parents to face at one time.
- Some families would face other barriers to attending the HLP course. Training volunteers would ‘reach’ some of these families and enable the delivery of the same messages.

CCCs had also discussed this cascaded training with community leaders and groups of workers within the sector and identified many who were interested and could see the benefits of attending this training. CCCs have subsequently organised for this training to be offered online, devised and hosted by the I Can charity (I Can 2020).

- 60 people from the Early Childhood and Family Service (ECFS) team (30 from Norwich and 30 from the South team) had undertaken the initial self-assessment stage of the training and have been directed to the online training
- CCCs have offered to share their online training Norfolk wide with Library Staff, Home-Start, Get Me Out of These Four Walls (GMOTFW), MAP, Early Childhood Family Service, Early Help and Social Care
- CCCs also identified five Parent and Toddler Groups who had previously shown interest and were working with Norfolk County Council Community and Partnerships to make this training available to all Parent and Toddler groups countywide.

Further tracking of who actually undertakes this and an evaluation of this training would be helpful, particularly in the light of the new approach to online learning methods. This may have the potential to make the course more accessible to some in the sector. It would also, as noted by one of the CCCs ‘have potential implications in terms of the amount of money we are spending on training’; given that CCC time needed to conduct this training is vastly reduced, as are costs, such as venue hire.

This initiative has potential to be a very cost effective and important initiative in enabling a consistent message and level of training across the variety of early years settings and community facilities that support parents and families. The online format has potential to enable providers from further afield or with barriers in the form of transport or time to attend a fixed-venue training format.

Given that this evaluation has come early in the roll-out of this initiative and the roles of the CCCs is about to come to an end, we would recommend that co-ordination of and assessment of impact of the online training is conducted in order to evaluate the potential of this approach to continue to be offered in the future.

## 5:6 Schools offer

<i>Number of CCCs involved: 2</i>	<i>Number of eligible Schools and settings:</i>	<i>Duration: N/A</i>
<i>Costs (additional to the time of the CCCs): £7,500</i>		
<i>Cost per school: £500.00</i>		

The CCC team worked with schools and settings offering nursery provision within the four wards. The offer requested schools and settings to allow CCCs to set up a drop-in space, an information board/table to advertise their initiatives and use the referral system to inform the CCCs of families in need of targeted support. The CCCs recognised schools and settings as a ‘gatekeeper’ to a great number of parents; an avenue for recruiting parents for the Home learning Programme as well as one-to-one work. CCCs offered to help support the school to run information events for parents; maintained contact with schools and settings and supported their work with families further by sending a monthly newsletter for sharing with the parent body (see Appendix 3).

Take up of the schools and settings offer in Phase 1 and 2, was high within Wards 1 and 2, there was active engagement from leaders. In these cases, the linked CCC was invited to facilitate a drop-in event at the schools on a regular basis and was invited to family focussed events where the staff could direct parents in need of support for their child’s communication to the CCC. These settings were already invested in the Communication Champion Network and understood the aims of the NOA priority. Other schools and settings in Ward 3 and 4 appeared, from the CCC’s perspective, harder to gain a working relationship with, with only a third of settings signed up for the offer in these earlier Phases.

In January 2020, the schools and setting offer was further developed to include an incentive or ‘Reward’ for schools to engage in the form of £500, with approved recommendations of how the money could be spent (See schools offer Appendix 4).

Fifteen schools applied, indicating how they would spend the money and gained approval from the CCC team. Following Covid-19, the offer was further revised (see Appendix 5). The CCC team also requested that in place of their presence at the school, all schools in receipt of the parent engagement incentive produce a case study to document how the funding has engaged and supported parents in developing their understanding and supporting their



children with their communication skills. Some schools also updated their request in order to support parents through lockdown.

The numbers of schools signing up for the new offer increased significantly, particularly in Ward 3 and 4 where the numbers of schools engaging with CCCs increased from five to eleven.

### Case Study 3: Incentivising the schools and settings offer

#### Engagement with leaders

One of the CCCs reflected on the difficulties they faced in making contact with schools and setting leaders.

**“The main challenge was to arrange a meeting with me to discuss the offer and then sign up. As many of the schools/settings in the areas were not engaging already, it took many hours of phone calls, emails and visits to even get a meeting at some of the schools.”**

Many schools and settings appeared to face their own professional barriers to engagement with respect to capability within the staff team, opportunity and/or motivation; for example demands on time and competing priorities. The CCC noted,

**“I think with some of the schools, although I would email and try to call multiple people at the schools, but they are just so busy that these get missed or forgotten about.”[sic]**

CCCs persisted in their efforts in communicating to schools and settings, inviting them to events they were running, in the hope of building relationships with them.

**“This was the case with one school, as I had been contacting them for a while with no response and then the deputy head teacher just happened to come to one of our Lunch in the Library sessions, so I was able to discuss this with him. They then signed up to the new offer and arranged a meeting.”**

Within this CCC’s wards, it was notable that of the 11 schools and settings who applied for the offer, over half of them had not previously engaged with the CCCs.

The CCC reflected, **“It was really positive that so many schools/settings from my areas signed up to the offer as this is why we created the offer so it had the intended outcome.”**

**“It also allowed me to create better relationships with the schools and settings and arrange drop-ins to support their families as we were giving them something in return for their engagement.”**

Within the CCC team there was clear recognition that the development of these initiatives over time meant that some had not had as long to embed, and could have been much more productive had they been established in the initial stages.

**“...if this offer had started earlier, (at the beginning of the project) it would have given me more time to get the schools engaged and may have made it slightly easier to engage with schools from the start.”**

The results of this updated initiative suggests that persistence, communication, networking and incentives support engagement from schools and setting leaders, overcoming the potential barriers they were facing. However, this evaluation comes at a point where the impact of this initiative for parents cannot be undertaken and researchers recommend that case studies that are collected from these schools, are analysed for the most effective underlying methods or principles and both the results of the analysis and the examples are shared across schools and settings to support them in developing their practice. These may also prove to be a useful addition to a presentation or workshop for a future communication conference.

## 5:7 Drop-ins

*Number of CCCs involved: 4*

*Recurrence: weekly or half-termly*

*Costs (additional to the time of the CCCs): £0*

*Cost per parent: £0*

*What was the purpose of the initiative?*

The main purpose for this initiative was to meet parents and families in their target wards. It provided a neutral space for discussion and allowed CCCs to explain their offer to families or sign post them to other support services, groups or organisations.

*What happened with the initiative?*

Whilst the original proposal suggested that each CCC be based in different community sites (See Appendix 1), a considered decision was made for the CCCs to be based in the Woodside Community Hub, Norwich. Whilst this base lay outside of the target wards, it was the base for many of the County Councils Early Years services and provided networking and office facilities.

Drop-ins were one of the first established initiatives at local libraries with advertising of the service posted on the library website and initially flyers were posted in the locality. CCCs were available to talk to parents about any concerns they may have with their child and in some cases, CCCs undertook some one-to-one assessment tasks, using the WellComm screening tool (a toolkit designed to help early years workers identify children from six months to six years old who might be experiencing delays with speech and language). Whilst some CCCs completed the screening during the drop-in session, some found it difficult in a public space such as the library. CCCs reported that drop-ins were not well visited and not

particularly productive for recruiting parents to the HLP. Data suggested that drop-ins created approximately a fifth of contacts with parents during Phase 1 and 2. CCCs changed the time that they were available at the libraries, to overlap with the end of an established parent and child groups and updated the publicity. However, as other initiatives became established and referrals started to be made by schools, settings and other community workers, this initiative only brought contact with a small proportion of parents and families, as see in Figure 9 below.

School drop-ins were established with invitation or agreement from the school leadership following receipt of the school offer (as discussed above see 4:6) and so were not consistently available throughout each of the four wards. Schools who had already engaged with the Norwich Opportunity Area initiatives, and had Communication Champions within their staff, appeared to take up the offer more quickly than others, according to CCC reflections. The format for school drop-ins consisted of setting staff directing or encouraging parents to attend the drop-ins, where they believed these parents might benefit.

In effect, although all schools and settings within the target wards were selected because of their geographical location, the setting staff were taking this initiative one-step further and ‘indicating’ who should attend. This not only increased parental knowledge about the existence of the initiative but also went some way to ensure that the parents with most need were able to meet with the CCCs, as exemplified by Case Study 4 below.

*Analysis of impact*

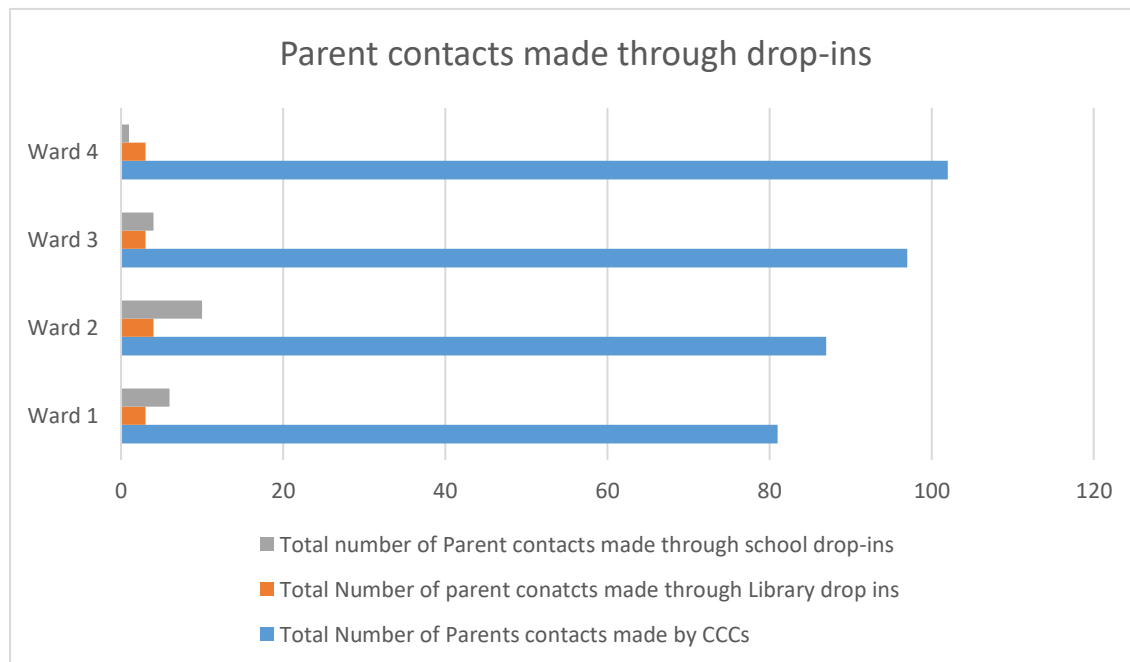


Figure 9: Number of contacts made with parents (to work directly with CCCs) by geographical area

Overall 3% of contacts with whom the CCCs ended up working directly with, came from the Library drop-ins and 6% came from school drop-ins.

Parental misconceptions about the library venue for the drop-in may have been an issue in reaching the widest audience. Parental comments during a group session led by the CCCs in the library during the autumn term, revealed that a large majority of carers had not visited the library with their child before; that myths such as having to be silent in the library or not being able to bring buggies in had led them to believing it was not an appropriate environment to visit with their children.

Another potential reason for the lack of engagement with the Library drop-ins may have been the presumption that parents have undertaken their own diagnosis and are aware that their child has difficulties and is not progressing sufficiently. It also presupposes that these parents are happy to acknowledge these worries/concerns and that they have the confidence to approach a stranger about this.

Other contacts were made through referrals from local partners such as schools, settings, health visitors, ECFS and community groups. A breakdown of this information was not available to researchers.

## Case Study 4: Making a drop-in successful

### Little Acorns Pre-school

School and setting drop-ins can offer an opportunity for the CCC to make parents aware of what they can offer in terms of support. CCCs have been adaptable to the space and facilities that are available, but always take resources that can help convey information or engage families in discussion.

The CCC explained, **“I set up a little table with some leaflets and information, I also took our Springboard box with me to show to the parents too.”**

There are a range of ways that these drop-ins can be presented, but the CCCs found that when the staff, who knew their parent cohort so well, were able to direct them to the sessions, they were able to overcome the potential barriers of capability and motivation and this led to a higher degree of successful engagement.

**“The attendance levels were very pleasing compared to other attendance levels at other drop-ins that I have been to....because the setting was very proactive and had chosen specific parents who they thought would benefit from the drop-in. They had called all of the parents that morning to ensure that they would come in and attend.”**

Drop-ins offer an initial conversation, a starting point for getting to know the families' needs and an opportunity for the CCCs to make a private appointment with parents in a neutral space. It can become difficult for the CCC to manage, if parents are not clear on the purpose/remit/scope of these drop-ins.

“Some of the parents have so many concerns about their children that aren’t related to speech, language and communication so this makes it difficult to answer these questions, especially when pressed for time.”

The CCC reflected on the value of meeting up to discuss things in more detail at a later point as an approach to overcome potential barriers, such as embarrassment.

“Although there wasn’t a lot of time with each family (at the drop-in), this actually worked quite well because it gave me the chance to do a more in-depth 1:1 meeting at another time with each family which sometimes feels nicer for the family as they feel more comfortable opening up to me without all of the other parents there.”

“I think some of the parents had a different view of their child’s development to the views of the staff at the setting, so when a member of staff was in the room, it made it slightly awkward for the parents to talk openly about their concerns.”

Ultimately, the purpose of these drop-ins is to support parents and identify those who would benefit from of the HLP. In the case of this drop-in, two parents out of the six went on to attend the HLP.

As Case Study 4 above shows, where there is good communication and co-operative working between the school/setting and the CCC, these drop-ins can be very effective. Evidence suggests that where the setting staff have good knowledge of their parents and are able to select and encourage those who have specific need to attend the drop-ins they are productive and useful. This is a missing element of the library drop-in set up, where the approach is dependant more on the chance of families dropping in, or having sought out the CCCs of their own accord.



## 5:8 Home learning programme (HLP)

### *Why use this initiative?*

Parents need to be able to offer the ‘quality’ of talking opportunities such as those explored and expressed by Law et al. (2017) namely: talking about that which has captured the child’s interest; adding variety to the words used and connecting new words to meaningful contexts in the child’s day to day life. Building on what the child has said and expanding their vocabulary, leads to benefits for language learning in the wider sense (Taumoepeau 2016). More importantly though, supporting the parents to use language boosting strategies day to day, should, according to studies, result in children’s language developing at a greater rate (Hoff 2003).

Educational programmes have long drawn on Bandura’s social learning theory (Bandura and Walters 1977) believing that learning occurs in a social context through observation and/or direct instruction.

Axford et al. (2015) report that live modelling of strategies for parents has considerable potential for improving parent-child interactions. Although there is evidence (Axford 2015) to show the positive impact that selective group based interventions has on the bonding and warmth parents show to their child, there is only limited evidence for group-based interventions to support parent-child interactions to improve language skills. However, in the RCT by Garcia et al. (2019) findings suggested that language skills developed well as a result of a group based parenting intervention focussed on behaviour skills.

At the time of writing there were many evaluations of Elklan’s other training courses available, indicating the positive impact they have had on staff working with children. There was no published evaluation of the ‘Let’s Talk at Home’ course, for researchers to review.

### *What happened at this initiative?*

<i>Number of CCCs involved: 4</i>	<i>Number of participants: 88</i>
<i>Duration: 6 session of 45-60 minutes each</i>	
<i>Costs (additional to the time of the CCCs and toys/resources used in the sessions):</i>	
<i>Provider Contract (Elklan): £35,425</i>	
<i>Operational costs (room hire, consumables): £5542</i>	
<i>Springboard boxes: £12,657</i>	
<i>Total costs: £53,624</i>	<i>Cost per parent: £609</i>

Prior to the CCC team being in place, the NOA procured the services of Elklan to plan and support a six week Home Learning Programme. ‘Let’s Talk at Home (LTaH)’ was a 6-week parent and child speech and language skills course designed by Elklan and delivered by local

Elklan registered tutors with the CCCs in a supporting role (CCCs received additional Elklan co-tutor training for this role). Elklan provided the six session plans for content, recording sheets for collecting observation data, parent evaluation forms and small token for parents to take away at the end of sessions as a reminder of the ‘talking tip’.

Elklan is a well-established organisation with a strong reputation for its quality of training. The ‘Let’s Talk at Home’ course, which was used for this HLP, was a relatively new addition to the suite, designed to support parents with children two years and older. As part of the contract, there was a thorough process of evaluation of each cycle by Elklan tutors, the CCCs and the course designer at Elklan. Difficulties were identified, for both logistically managing the sessions (i.e. having enough tutors on hand to complete the observations in the given time) as well as tailoring a prescribed scheme to the needs of the particular parents enrolled in these wards of Norwich. There were changes made between the each of the three cycles of this programme and the fourth cycle had to be cancelled.

CCC’s organised the venues for the sessions and procured the resources for the children to play and engage with during these sessions. These were decided upon in agreement with Elklan and formed the basis for the Springboard box (discussed below). They also planned and organised a one off celebratory event for all parents to attend at the end of the six weeks.

In the first and last sessions of the course, tutors observed and documented the parent and child interactions, with the four sessions in between planned for delivering and practicing the four talking tips.

Four cycles of this programme were planned for the duration of the CCC project across the four wards: summer 2019, autumn 2019, early spring 2020 and late spring 2020, resulting in 16 groups of parents and their children.

Cycle	Parents registered	Parents completed	% Parents completed	Notable incidents
1 – Summer 2019	45	40	89%	Little parental engagement with CCC post course
2 – Autumn 2019	23	16	70%	First session format and timing approached differently. Higher drop out in early stages.
3 – Spring 2020	29	26	89%	Three session delivered face to face, subsequent content shared by CCCs via email and telephone
4 – Summer 2020		N/A	N/A	Cancelled due to Covid-19
Totals	97	82	84%	

Figure 10: Numbers of parents completing Home Learning Programme



## *Analysis of impact*

Adjustments made to the timing and nature of the first sessions, to facilitate closer observations in cycle two led to higher rates of parental dropout early on. This was readjusted for cycle three, which resulted in positive parental engagement.

Evidence identified that parents and their children predominantly 'played' independently through the first HLP session. The majority of parents and children were not known to each other prior to the HLP and none of the parents had met the Elklan tutor prior to the first session. By the final session, there was increasing evidence of interaction between the parents and the children including children calling out each other's names, indicating increased levels of familiarity, confidence, well-being and involvement

Elklan tutor observations undertaken at the first and last HLP sessions consistently showed an improved quality shift in parental interactions with their child, where there was a consistent carer attending sessions. Evidence showed an increase in adults giving time for the child to speak, an increase in comments and decrease in questioning or giving of directions and an increase in parents adding words and extending vocabulary when responding to a child.

Although the assigned observation sessions lent themselves to data collection for evaluation and documentation purposes, CCCs and researchers identified a number of issues with this:

- On the first day of welcoming (and in most case meeting) parents and children to a new space, CCC/tutor time and focus is not given to supporting the transition. CCCs confirmed,  
"but then we get our clipboards, observe the children and are writing things down, I don't think this is welcoming, I think it could put families off coming back...I'm not sure how it is beneficial to the parents."
- The overt observation process in itself was seen to influence the way parents interacted with their child. CCCs and researchers noticed  
"the parents don't act naturally, some parents definitely are trying so hard and end up saying lots and asking lots of questions but I am not sure that's what they would do ordinarily."
- The 'talking tips' are not always as straightforward as they could be and care needs to be taken with the visuals. They were seen to be misinterpreted by parents.  
"The first week's talking tip has a traffic light visual. It relates to waiting for the child and then responding but I had two instances in cycle 3 where parents I discussed this with talked about road safety and how they already did this with their child, one was a family with EAL but one wasn't."
- Some strategies, messages or approaches do not recognise the impact of capability or motivational barriers amongst the parent body. Evidence from session reflections, identify strategies such as asking parents to conduct a 'massage' with their child or 'write



a pledge' whilst in the sessions were not successful and put parents visibly ill at ease.

CCCs also specifically identified

**“a task sorting words into describing, action and object words was difficult for families from an EAL background or for parents who may have lower levels of literacy,”**

Tutor observations of the children's utterances identified that they were longer at the end of the course compared to the start of the course. Whilst this may indicate direct evidence of impact from the 'top tips' and improved interactions with parents, researchers would urge caution in using this data to confirm this. Researchers question whether other contributing factors had an impact on this result. For example, the children could have been:

- more reluctant to speak in the first session, due to the unfamiliar setting and people around them.
- conscious of being watched or observed by the tutors
- influenced by the emotional and/or behavioural reaction of their parents to being observed
- feeling more comfortable/familiar in the setting and more at ease to speak by the sixth session

By using a prescribed scheme, there was a need to follow the direction/planning provided, which left the CCCs less opportunity to be responsive and make adaptations according to the needs of their groups. Although there were changes made following the completion of a cycle in agreement with Elklan, CCCs were not able to make decisions to change or adapt the sessions at the time. Day (2013) clearly identifies the need for responsiveness to individual needs and realities, practical help and maximum flexibility to really support working with parents and families. It is also notable that despite investment in the Communication Champion training and procurement of the WellComm Toolkit resources, the CCCs played a secondary support role in these HLP sessions, which arguably, they had the skill and knowledge to lead.

The talking tips offered through this programme were not unique to Elklan and are freely available through a variety of media including

- the WellComm resources (The Big book of Ideas and video clips),
- The Communication Trust web based resources (The Communication Trust 2020a)
- The suite of very well organised videos and downloadable information and activity leaflets produced by East Coast Community Healthcare Speech and Language Therapy (2020a, 2020b).

Parental feedback in the form of evaluations conducted during the final session was overwhelmingly positive, indicating that during the six (or three) weeks, their confidence in supporting their children with developing their language had increased. Eighty four percent of parents from the three cycles gave feedback.

Between 95% and 100% found the course helpful in:

- changing the way they talk to their child,
- stopping and waiting so the child could take the lead,

- giving them new ideas developing their child's talking and vocabulary.

Comments from parents who spoke to researchers include:

**"It has benefitted us. It has been a valuable opportunity from me and him to focus in a quieter atmosphere."**

**"We trust them [Tutors/CCCs] now."**

**"Speaking to her [Elklan tutor/Speech and Language Therapist] has helped me with feeling reassured."**

**"It's given me ideas and pointers and reminded me to give him time to think."**

**"I've got a fresh perspective. It's made me start to notice what I am saying to him."**

Whilst the findings for these relatively short courses are initially positive, it is long-term change that is desired. As Law et al. (2017) explain, simply providing the training to parents does not mean that the strategies are regularly and consistently put into place in the home. Law et al. (2017) also note that, as time progresses the needs of the child may change or develop such that the support and strategies that the parents use may also need to change and develop. There is a strong case from Law et al. (2017) for developing longer and more lasting relationships with these families and ensuring that there is effective monitoring of the children's progress at different stages of their communicative development.

CCC's tried in many ways to accommodate this by inviting parents to other CCC led events and maintaining contact through weekly e-newsletters (see Appendix 6).

Although the first cycle of the HLP were well attended, few of the parents continued to engage with initiatives led by the CCCs. One reason for this may be that by the end of the course the CCCs had a few 'one off' summer events to direct parents to, but no regular CCC led initiatives that would engage these groups on a regular basis. CCCs had also not engaged these parents in the Facebook closed community groups. In contrast, by the autumn term, more initiatives were in place and invitations to join CCCs prior to or after the HLP were made; more parents had also joined the online community groups.

Evidence from parental comments were very positive about attending additional initiatives, as the children and parents themselves had started to build friendships/familiarity up within the group and they felt they wanted this to continue.

Evidence from one of the CCCs who led a Story-walk in the autumn term, highlighted the importance of the established relationships in engaging parents. Whilst she invited parents from both the first and second cycle of the HLP, only parents from the second cycle chose to attend. This could have been a result of not having an established relationship with this particular CCC. However, this may not have been the only contributing factor as the CCC explained that they also took place at differing times and days and many families did have other commitments.

Beyond the HLP and for those in cycle three who were unable to complete the sessions face to face, CCCs maintain the support for families through generalised and more tailored advice over the phone and via email as the Case Study 5 below exemplifies.

## Case Study 5: Working with parents over time/beyond the course

### Remote Approaches

Weekly play ideas across a theme were put together in an e-newsletter and sent to parents with whom the CCCs had been working or started working (See Appendix 6 ). They were also sent to the Home-Start coordinators to share with staff who continued to work with vulnerable families. They were designed to overcome a variety of potential capability and opportunity barriers, explained the CCCs,

“General tips and strategies and activities that will be of value to all young children in developing their communication skills and providing ideas for low cost and easy at home activities for parents to do with their children.”

For those who had not been able to complete the HLP face to face, the CCCs went one step further and

“offered a weekly phone call to talk thorough the tips they missed (3 weeks) and a sheet was sent to them explaining the talking tip. These sheets were only sent to families who had been part way through the training. Once the talking tips had been completed families were offered the option of further tailored support or if they were happy then they would be on our mailing list to get the weekly play ideas.”

The CCCs valued hearing back from families they had not seen for a while and felt positive about their role in supporting remotely.

“It was great to link up with some families from previous round of Elklan and hear how they are getting on and be again a source of support at a time when families were suddenly in isolation and home.”

Effective engagement and response came when the CCC tailored their emails and comments, using their knowledge of the families. For example:

“How about a nursery rhyme bag – choose a bag and decorate it or a small box or basket. Put inside props for different rhymes then as a family you can use it to sing rhymes and songs with Cindy. You can probably find plenty of objects around the house – plastic sheep = baa baa black sheep, but you could make some with Daniel – eg a sparkly star, the paper plate clock! Daniel could make some shakers to put in too so you can have bounce and rhyme at home!”[sic]

CCCs received positive feedback from these correspondences,

“I have had two parents request the play dough recipe, other parents let me know their child is enjoying outdoors, water play and one family I know tried the regrowing [sic] ideas with a range of vegetables. I have also been sent a photo of a child proudly showing off the chocolate cookies from our play sheet.”

Emails and newsletters were designed to signpost parents to a variety of other sources of ideas and support. In addition, CCCs were

**“referring all families back to our Facebook page which is our other source of providing ideas and suggestions for families.”**

Researchers have identified that whilst there was sound rationale for procuring this provider, (as the CCCs were unknown at that point and it ensured an evidenced based quality assured programme to be delivered consistently in each of the wards), this approach does not offer value for money in the long term.

The Home Learning Programme is clearly a strong initiative for supporting parents in developing their interactions with the children and also enabling social learning opportunities and providing a milieu for community building. However, researchers feel strongly that there are services, resources and expertise locally that could be more readily and effectively drawn upon in order to plan and co-ordinate these sessions in future. It is also our belief that the recommendation within original proposal, of a Home Learning Programme (Appendix 1) with a longer duration, would be wise to follow in future. To enable relationships to build more effectively; the sense of community to become stronger within the participants of the group; the CCC/tutors to more effectively monitor the progress of parents and children over time; for parents to embed the strategies they are being shown and for the children to develop more confidence in their speech and language skills.

#### *Inclusion of Springboard boxes*

*Number of CCCs involved: 4*

*Number of participants: 88*

*Costs (additional to the time of the CCCs): £12,657 Cost per parent: £144*

Although the original proposal suggested this as a separate initiative to support parents, the Springboard boxes were included within the HLP initiative. They were delivered as a substantial ‘gift’ (a large box containing 21 toys/items including duplo, a book, playdough and activity cards – see Appendix 7 ) to parents who attended at least four of the HLP sessions with their child and include resources that have been available during the sessions. At a cost of just under £150 each, it is hard to see how these could ever be sustainable longer term. However, there was some hope at the start of the research that gaining parental feedback could help in determining the resources that parents felt most engaged their children.

Fifteen parents from the HLP were willing to give feedback on the Springboard boxes, so it is difficult to draw any lasting conclusions on the parents’ perceptions given the spread of the limited data. The item, which featured most in feedback, was Playdough, with a third of parents identifying it as the resource that their child enjoyed the most and the resource that encourages the most communication from their children.



*Why use this initiative?*

The Department for Education (2018) identify a multitude of barriers that parents face, particularly with reference to improving the home learning environment and many of these act as a barrier to attending interventions, initiatives or local support groups. Barriers exist for many in even leaving their own homes, leaving them isolated and vulnerable (Home-Start Norfolk 2019). Axford et al. (2015) showed evidence of how other programmes used an individualised approach to support parents. They showed that printed materials and other resources that help parents and practitioners gain knowledge, led to practitioners including key messages into normal conversations and interactions with parents in practice settings, and positive impacts on parents' interaction with their children. CCCs themselves have met many parents who do not fit the criteria needed for the specific group based Home Learning Programme or CCC led events being offered (e.g. age of child, timing of sessions) through this project, therefore needed to include an individualised initiative.

*What happened with this initiative?*

One-to-one occurred face to face and via telephone or email support with the CCCs using the WellComm pack resources, ideas from their Communication training and freely available activity ideas found through trusted online sources, such as The Communication Trust (2020a) website. In phases 1-3, this support was offered to families where the CCCs felt that targeted support was required by the parent and child, but where the HLP groups were either inaccessible or inappropriate for the family.

CCCs also used this approach to supporting families further once the specific one-to-one support had improved parental interaction with their child or once a parent had completed one of the other initiatives, such as the Home Learning Programme. Parents throughout the phases have received weekly email 'newsletters' with suggested activities, links and recipes. (see Appendix 6)

In Phase 4 one-to-one support has been offered to all those who had already been identified as needing support as well as those expected to be taking part in the 4<sup>th</sup> cycle of the HLP. Newer referrals from local partners have also been made through Phase 4, where support so far has been exclusively through remote options via the telephone or via email.

Prior to lockdown telephone support was only being provided for six families and email support was only being given to seventeen families. However, as Covid-19 affected initiative delivery, these numbers rose dramatically.

At the point of data collection;

45 families were receiving telephone support (a than a seven fold increase).

62 families were receiving email support (just over three and a half times the original number of families being supported in this way).



This initiative may have seemed insignificant in the earlier stages, with so few parents being supported in this way. However, these particular circumstances highlight the importance of being prepared to work in a range of ways and shows the skill that these CCCs had in adapting their approach to continue their support for families, particularly in light of the Home Learning Programme tutors/organisation not being able to transfer their coaching online. CCCs devised specific newsletters that addressed the talking tips, which parents on the HLP would have received in their final sessions. CCCs presented a range of ideas for parents to try out at home and tailored support for individual families with differing needs (see Appendix 6)

Targeted schools and settings also received CCCs monthly newsletter to share with parents. (see Appendix 3)

### *Analysis of impact*

## Case Study 6: Supporting individual needs

### Gemma

The first time the CCC met Gemma, she was at a CCC Community event for the GMOTFW group (See Case Study 8). The CCC explained how she started to

**“... give tips and see if any attending families would benefit from additional support. Once I had chatted to this parent (Gemma) and she was asking for more guidance about how to support her baby's speech I asked her to complete an expression of interest form, gave her our team details and arranged to phone her to arrange a meeting.”**

The CCC was aware, as with other drop-in sessions that, within a public space and gathering of parents, there is little privacy to share concerns and organised a meeting. The CCC noted, the **“initial meeting allowed me to find out from this parent a little of her story”, “Mum has various struggles herself and she knows she wasn't initially in a good place to be a parent but she wants to do what she can now.”**

Whilst Gemma was proactive in asking for help through the CCC, she had been made aware of her baby’s potential speech and language issue through another professional. Gemma was motivated but had capability barriers.

**“She said she would like tips on how to help her baby as although he is just about to reach his first birthday the health visitor says he shows a delay in his development.”**

The CCC knew that she would have to work one-to-one with this parent ‘due to age of baby’ as the Home Learning Programme was not designed for pre-verbal children.

The CCC was also mindful of the range of needs that Gemma presented with and commented,

“I felt this parent would really benefit from a little time spent with her now while her baby is still only one, it might help later prevent there being speech delay...”

“I also wanted to support getting her to other groups, it was decided in a follow up phone call that we would meet in the town centre at Millennium library for a chat and ideas and then I would accompany them to baby bounce and rhyme at the library.”

The meeting in this case was not straight forward, explained the CCC,

“Meeting up was difficult, she cancelled a few but I think it wasn't because she didn't want to meet, the baby was poorly, she had to go to another meeting etc. but we kept rearranging until we found a time.”

Patience and perseverance paid off and meeting face to face, gave the CCC an opportunity to model interaction techniques and give Gemma a few simple resources to share with her baby.

“We only had one face to face meeting but I was able to give her a few ideas to try at home and some printed talking tips for babies as well as gift a book start book which mum really appreciated and I modelled how she could use the book with her baby. I also gave her some bubbles and demonstrated using those.”

The CCC made recommendations for groups that might support Gemma in interacting with her baby and was pleased to report, “she now attends bounce and rhyme run by GMOTFW.”

Subsequently Covid-19 prevented any further face-to-face chats, but the CCC talks to Gemma on the phone every couple of weeks and sends activities via email to try with the baby.

The CCC reflected on families like this, where they do not fit the HLP, which is aimed at 2 years old +.

“I would like to have a resource to pass on to parents of little babies. I have been using online resources etc. and put things together but I think I would like to devise talking tips for babies. I often meet parents with little babies at bounce and rhyme too and feel a little ill equipped with appropriate resources when their babies are actually at the ideal age where we can make a difference by supporting parents to help them boost their children's early speech.”

The Case Study 6 above exemplifies how important the one-to-one work has been for the CCC, in order to cater for the needs of the parents they have met. It demonstrates the need for CCCs to be knowledgeable and adaptable to the circumstances and people they meet. Whilst this approach may be more intensive from the CCC's individual time, there are relatively low additional costs, and in the case where parents do not fit the group learning criteria, one-to-one work has been an essential initiative, that in more recent circumstances has been the broadest base of their work.



## 5:10 Community events led by CCC

*Number of CCCs involved: 2*

*Number of participants: 80*

*Costs (additional to the time of the CCCs): £716*

*Cost per parent: £9*

CCCs developed a number of different events, some repeated more frequently than others, for target parents. These events were largely centred on storybooks and activities across a range of settings. Whilst engaging parents to interact with their children, this also offered the CCCs times to talk to families and introduce themselves, to promote their work and find families who would be suitable to work with the CCCs further.

*What happened at these initiatives?*

[Lunch in the Library](#), took place in local libraries and was open to all parents in the area. They were advertised locally with leaflets, posters and through Facebook. These were one off events available to all in the area with an aim to meet and greet parents in the locality, encouraging all to engage with books and the library and promote the CCC project. A story was read or told by an invited storyteller and themed or linked craft activities were devised by the CCCs for families to engage with their children. Food was also provided for families.

[Story-walks](#) took place in local parks and included parents who were known to the CCCs and had been invited. The CCC also visited the park in the days prior to the event and invited families who were there. The CCC also invited parents in the vicinity to join the group on the day. These were weekly events available to anyone in the area, but they also offered opportunities for the CCCs to maintain already established relationships. It also aimed to encourage all to engage with books and promote language opportunities outside. The CCC based activities or games in the park around a book, which was also read to the families. It was open to more adaptation depending on the conditions and families that attended.

[Story-sack workshops](#) were small group activities that took place over the course of three sessions. Attendance at this was by invite from the CCCs. Resources were provided for the parents to build a story sack around the theme of a popular books and learn how to engage their child with activities around the theme to improve communication skills.

[GMOTFW parent event](#) was offered to the parents supported by this group across the whole of Norwich. This was run as a 'stay and play' or 'drop-in' session, in a central location, during which the CCCs led play activities, circulated and talked to parents about talking tips and how they might be able to help. The benefits of this are shown through Case Study 6 above and Case Study 8 below.

*Analysis of impact*

These initiatives were a useful vehicle for building relationships prior to the HLP, continuing the support for families once the HLP had been finished and for enabling the CCCs to identify individuals who would benefit from one-to-one support.

The timings of these affected how many families attended. School holidays were the most well attended sessions, although the Christmas holiday showed less engagement from

families, perhaps due the range of other commitments that families have at this time of the year.

The cost of these events per participants was low, but it is difficult to calculate the impact on parental skills given their one- off nature. The benefit of these events is seen when they are considered as part of the wider offer. The following case studies exemplify the benefits of these initiatives.



## Case Study 7: Promoting the project through community events

### Lunch in the Library with Elmer

CCCs lead a number of these events in the local libraries. It was advertised to encourage children of all ages to attend. On speaking to those who attended, to find out how they heard of the event, there was a range of responses: leaflets from their school, library, playgroup, and the bounce and rhyme group as well as looking online. CCC were pleased that **“all avenues of advertising had been successful”**

CCCs had reflected after previous events and it had helped them to plan for some of the practical elements. They explained.

**“We have extended the session recently from one hour to hour and a half – this gives more time for the activity and allows some flexibility for arrival times.”**

The focus for this ‘Lunch in the Library’ was on the ‘Elmer’ story. CCCs had considered the opportunities that this particular story and craft activities would lend to vocabulary development and interactions with the children,

**“we modelled use of the words while we were collaging with the parents and children together. In the story time, we encouraged children to name colours, name animals and then for the song – ‘an elephant is very.....’ asked children to contribute their own ideas.”**

These open events offered opportunity to meet new parents and families. The CCCs recalled, **“only 2 out of the 12 families that came were already known to us.”**

This is an important aspect of the CCC work, as it allows the CCCs to share what the project has to offer families and address some of the potential barriers that parents face.

**“We were able to use the event to promote what we do – Story-walk group started again the following week from Earlham library and families were interested in joining us.”**

As the Library served as a ‘base’ for the CCCs and continued to house a drop-in session, the CCCs used this opportunity to create a reminder and promote future use of the library.

**“We made a large collage Elmer and it is now in the library with a sign that says who the CCC team are and what they can offer along with contact details. Good visual advert as well as nice for children who made it to come back and visit their Elmer and so encourage library visits.”**



## Case Study 8: Leading an event hosted by others

### Get Me Out The Four Walls event

Considering a variety of ways to build and sustain working with parents and partners has been an objective of the CCC work alongside finding new 'ways in' to meeting groups or individuals. Connecting with charity organisations and volunteer groups who particularly support isolated or vulnerable parents, was one approach taken to achieve this.

Co-ordinators publicised and let parents know about the session; on this occasion, thirty-two parents attended the two-hour 'discovering treasure basket play' session.

*"I met parents I have not come across at other sessions. This is a group that supports parents struggling with well-being/ mental health possibly post- natal depression etc. so it is a very welcoming environment for vulnerable parents although as open to all the drop-ins are a diverse group of parents. Seems a good place to find parents that we have struggled to meet in our other outreaches."*

The CCC set up and ran the activities (parachute games, singing, and nursery rhymes) for the morning with the focus on messages about importance of play with babies. However, this also gave rise to sharing information about upcoming events.

*"I was modelling use of descriptive language etc. I was also promoting upcoming lunch in the library and Story-walks inviting families and giving out leaflets as well as discussing the [HLP]course if appropriate"*

When service providers and agencies connect, families can be directed and supported effectively. This event led to a number of families gaining or accessing support as seen here and in Case Study 6.

*"The first family to arrive said they had been referred to the CCC team by their health visitor the day before (the referral was in when I got back to the office) so I was able to spend time with them, tell them about what we could offer and they were interested in the [HLP]course."*

*"They signed up to attend [HLP] sessions .... It was good to be able to talk face to face and spend time with them."*



## 5:11 Community/volunteer group support

### *Why use this initiative?*

Drawing on a range of literature and their national survey of church leaders across the denominations, Biggs et.al (2015) highlighted that over half of all children in England were accessing some form of parent toddler group via churches. Opportunities for both the children and the parents to develop life skills; cultivate community bonds; grow friendships and improve their own personal well-being were identified as key features. They go on to make clear recommendations for churches to encourage and grow their capacity to facilitate a parent and toddler group within its offer “as a body of people committed to long-term engagement in support of social justice” (Biggs et.al 2015 p3).

With this in mind, taking time to visit church based groups and volunteer led and community groups of a similar nature, offered CCCs another gateway to parents within the community wards.

### *What happened at this initiative?*

<i>Number of CCCs involved: 2</i>
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<i>Costs (additional to the time of the CCCs): £0</i>
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Two CCCs took time to regularly attend a variety of groups held within local community centres, church halls and Early Childhood and Family Service Bases. They offered to lead small activities or

### *Analysis of impact*

Similarly, to the CCC led events above, these initiatives were a useful for building relationships and knowledge within the community, promoting the project and identifying families who may benefit as exemplified below.

## **Case Study 9: Promoting the project through community groups**

### **St. Michael’s Stay and Play**

Finding ways and places to meet families in the target communities is an important part of the CCC role,

**“This is a drop in group for the local community run by a number of volunteers, I met one childminder on my visits, a mixture of mums and Dads and some grandparents. Average attendance was approx. 8-10 families.”**

The purpose of attending local groups is to promote the work of the project and invite families to the Home Learning Programme or other CCC led events. An additional benefit of attending a volunteer led group like this would also be to help these groups and their leaders.

**“I suggested specific activities I could offer the group and we chose what would fit in with Karen’s (the group leader) ideas already so the activities linked to key times in the year: spooky painting, messy play, snow sensory treasure baskets canvas painting.”**



Understanding the range of language rich activities that support children in their development, the CCC can add value in the form and variety of activities she brings to the group.

“I would also like to try and introduce the occasional story time....It would be good to do a focus on sharing books especially as they are sited very near the local library.”

“I think it is important to reach out to these community groups to share ideas about how they can support the families coming to their group with the activities and resources they put out each week, for some of these children not attending another setting this could be particularly important.”

Providing opportunities for the children was a starting point, but having a medium through which to start conversations with the parents was important. With careful thought regarding the type and nature of the activity, the CCC ensured that she could have time with parents as well as the children.

“my aim was to make my input activity very child led and open ended and allow me an opportunity to talk to the parents about why my activity was benefitting their child’s speech and language development.”

Communicating this to the parents required a range of approaches,

“I have printed explanations to put out alongside the activity explaining the benefits to the children. I don’t think the parents read them unless I draw their attention to them. I have also begun to try and talk to the parents at snack-time when they are with their children so I can say (name) really loved the paint today“

Three parents contacted through this group signed up for the third cycle of the HLP.

“Two of these parents first attended the Story sack workshops. I was able to get to know parents over repeated visits and build up trust. When it was time for (the HLP) to run the families I think trusted me more.”

After regular visits and encouragement, engaging two families to come to Story sacks workshops at a library which was not their nearest venue and then to attend the HLP,

“...felt like a step forward after failing to engage families early on.”

Relationships and trust have grown with the group leaders too, providing opportunities to engage them with other initiatives and involve them in sustaining the focus on quality opportunities for interaction.

“I appreciate the warm welcome I get from Karen and she wants me to do return visits. The group leader is interested in coming to our cascade training”

“Karen is clearly well respected and works hard for her local community, families trust her, she is a key person to be involved in the legacy of our work. I imagine she will be running this group for many more years to come.”

## 5:12 Social media

### *Why use this initiative?*

‘Over the past decade a range of media-based methods have been developed to provide information to parents during the first few years of life. These media-based models are underpinned by recognition that parents need good information about the perceptual and communicative abilities of their baby, and their role as a parent in promoting emotional/social, communication and cognitive skills in infants and young children. The provision of information in new and accessible formats is aimed at meeting the needs of busy parents for whom traditional sources of knowledge (e.g. extended families and community supports) have declined as a result of wider social changes to the family and working life.’ (Axford et.al 2015 p34)

Axford et.al (2015) succinctly make the case for the use of well-constructed content shared through social media for supporting parents in developing their skills. This is backed up by Department for Education (2018) who explain that preliminary evidence from a campaign in the United States shows that this approach shows promise. They go on to discuss the importance of keeping messages simple, issuing them regularly and using imagery and video content and ensuring that it is inclusive to all literacy levels.

Whilst Facebook offers businesses and organisations the largest ‘reach’ (Ionos 2020) it is recognised that it takes time to build and develop relationships required for groups and/or individuals to ‘Like’ ‘Share’ and engage with your page.

Interestingly, Feehan (2020) notes that engagement rates used to be significantly higher on Instagram compared to Facebook, however during Covid-19 they have decreased. In this same period, Facebook and Twitter activity has remained consistent with pre-Covid-19 data.

Taking on board consideration for the target audience may influence the decisions leaders make in which social media forum to use. Khoros (2020) indicate in their demographic guide that not only the numbers of users differ between forums but so does the percentage of users in differing age bands, the time they spend on the forum and the devices they use to access social media.



### *What happened at these initiatives?*

In Phase 1, CCCs set up a Facebook (FB) page with closed Facebook groups for each of the Home Learning Programme Centres. This was the only online forum that CCCs gained permission to employ as part of this project. We address each of these separately below:

### *What happened with Facebook Closed Groups?*

Membership and activity in Facebook Closed Groups				
Closed group	Number of CCC members	Number of Parent members	Number of posts in May	Number of new members in May
One	1	1	0	0
Two	1	4	0	0
Three	1	6	0	0
Four	1	9	0	0
Five	1	0	0	0
Six	1	0	0	0

*Figure 11: Membership and activity in Facebook Closed Groups*

Uptake by parents to join these closed groups was consistently low and they were not an effective strategy to support and engage parents. Furthermore, parents did not choose to use the forum as a space to communicate with one another.

### *Analysis of impact?*

We have not been able to establish first hand why parents have not chosen to join the closed groups, there are factors regarding ‘membership’ of these groups with which target parents may feel less comfortable. Whilst the term ‘Closed’ suggests it is private, a Closed group’s name and description are not at all “closed,” but are publicly visible. Features of a closed group include: (1) new members must ask to join or be invited by a member, rather than just adding themselves; (2) only current members can see the content of group posts; and (3) only current members can see the group in their News Feed.

These groups were formed by the CCCs and not the parents themselves. The ‘owner’ or administrator of the group in this case was the CCCs. Parents, therefore needed to be approved to join, which may in itself offer a barrier to deciding to apply. With the CCC as an admin member of each group, this was not essentially a closed space just for the parents, but an open forum with the CCCs in attendance. Without any specific incentive or need for the parents to join at the start, the membership applications relied upon curiosity and goodwill. Given what we do know about barriers to engagement and the time it can take to build trust and relationships, it is not surprising that parents were not quick to sign up for this initiative.

### *What happened with the main FB page?*

In the early stages, the page was managed by the team taking turns to put up content, which was relevant to the target audience. In the winter 2019/20, responsibility for managing it was



taken on by one particular CCC who had an interest in furthering the online opportunities. The detail of this can be more clearly seen through Case Study 10 below. As more time was allocated to this initiative, posts became more regular and strategies were employed to further the ‘reach’ of the content and build links with project and community partners.

The following data was drawn from the Facebook Analytical tool.

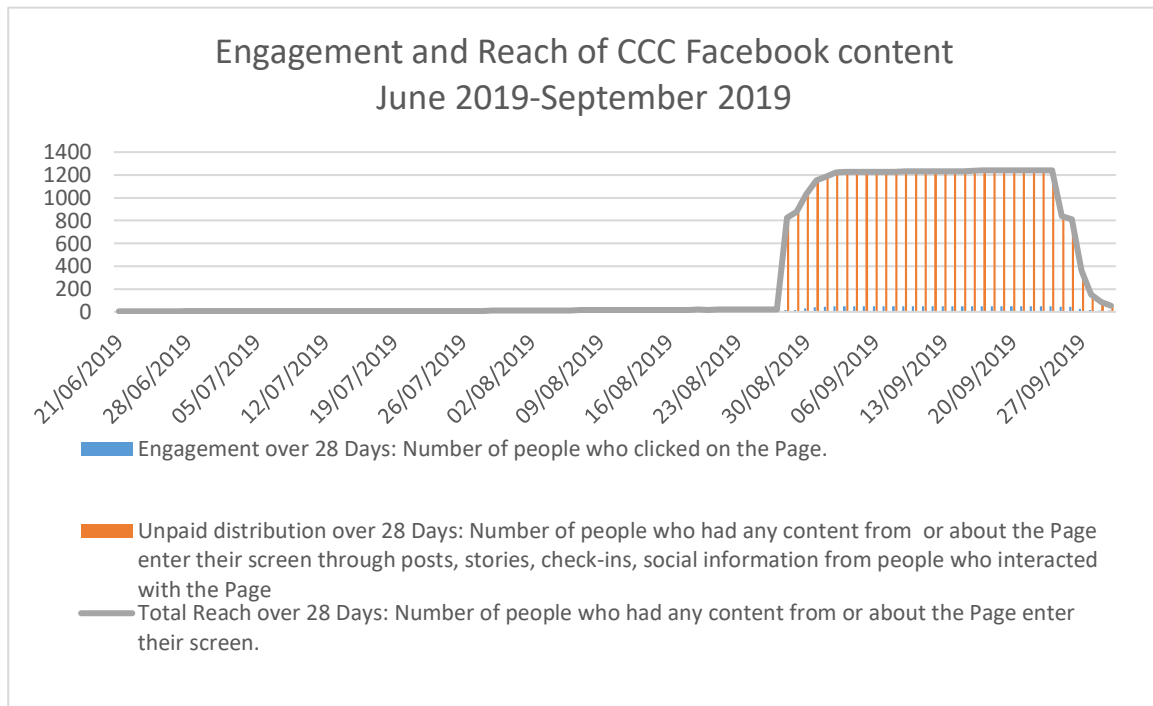


Figure12: Facebook page: Engagement and Reach of content: June 2019-September 2019

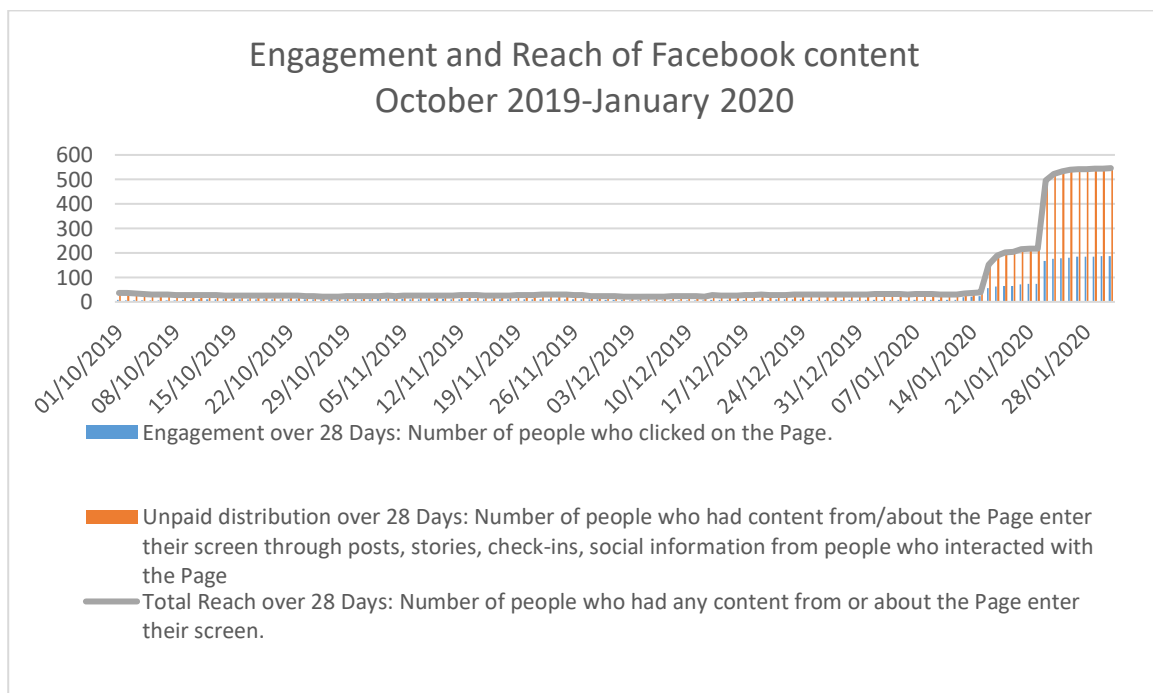


Figure13: Facebook page: Engagement and Reach of content: June 2019-September 2019

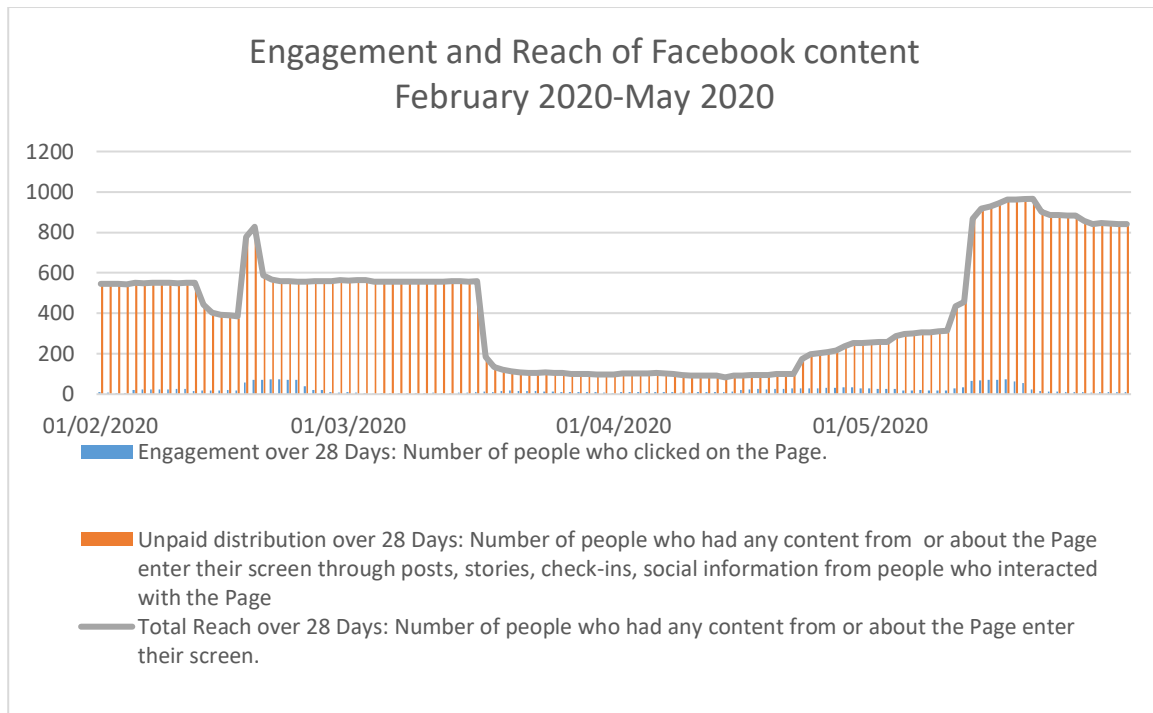


Figure 14: Facebook page: Engagement and Reach of content: June 2019-September 2019

### Analysis of impact

Data provided by Facebook Insights above show a number of interesting trends.

The number of people who have content from the page can increase significantly with engagement in the form of ‘sharing’ or ‘liking’ even from a relatively small number of others. Figures 12, 13 and 14, above each show that even with an average of only twenty-two people engaging with the page, there can be demonstrative increases in the numbers of people that the CCC content reached in total. When researchers looked back the page, we were able to identify a number of strategies that the CCCs had employed.

The surges shown early in the project (Figure 12) in August 2019 were prompted by making additional links to the posts and by creating ‘Events’ through the page. These were also promoted and shared by wider groups. At the end of August 2019, the posts also included a number of local and ‘trending’ hashtags #norfolkandsuffolklookforabook #readingrocks #norwich and #norwichopportunityarea, which was a particularly effective strategy for increasing the reach of the content.

This trend is mirrored across the phases, where we see that the total reach of the content is directly related to ‘unpaid distribution’ by groups, or networked partners sharing and ‘liking’ content. This has been a useful strategy used in order to spread the content of the page across the social media community.

We can also see there are longer durations of time in Figures 12 and 13 where the reach is below 100. In contrast, Figure 13 shows improving trends of engagement and reach. This relates to the management of the page and time allocated to CCCs to work on it as detailed in Case Study 10 below.

Whilst the closed groups have had little to no impact on parents, the Facebook feed at its peak in May 2020, engaged 105 people over the period of 28 days resulting in unpaid distribution to 964 Facebook feeds and reached a total of 966 people. Given the broader accessibility of social media than physical poster or leaflet advertising, this format goes beyond the remit of supporting families within the four wards of Norwich.

Given the prevalence of social media today, developing a strategy to promote an organisation's message is important for impact. Examples of this can be seen being used by other Opportunity Areas, such as Derby who have combined it with the tag-line 'Let's Talk Derby' to get universal messages out into the public area and advertise or market their events and services. Local parent and child charity 'Get Me Out The Four Walls' is another good example of an organisation that makes initial contact with parents successfully through social media and shows how it can be used to reach out particularly to parents, who are struggling with mental health difficulties.

There is still potential to explore the wider offer of both this social media platform and others further. For example, for a relatively small cost, a Facebook post could benefit from a 'Boost', which would widen the distribution and reach.

Strategies such as timings for post need to regularly monitored and researched, particularly in the light of changing home and work circumstances. Arens (2020a, 2020b) has looked at statistical data to determine optimal timing for posting on Social media and has written about the changes that have occurred since Covid-19

## Case Study 10: Providing an online platform

### Facebook

When the CCC project began, the Facebook page was the responsibility of the whole team and any of them who had content would add it to the page. **"It was a slow start but we had so much other stuff to set up in those early months"** recalls the CCC.

By September each CCC took responsibility in turn each week but as the CCC comments, **"consistency was lacking between the posts."**

By November, one CCC had capacity and an interest to take full responsibility for the page content and started to consider a strategy for improving engagement and reach.

**"Initially I emailed out to all our partners inviting them to 'Like' our page. It was clear early on that I needed to have time to give to it [Facebook Page]."**

In January, it was agreed that the CCC would have dedicated time. Initially the focus was on considering the strategy for timing posts. The CCC explains the approach,

**"I was thinking about our audience and when they might be active on the page...for example may have some time in the day when their children are settled for a nap. Playgroup or nursery**

group leaders may be [more active] later on after they had finished their group work. ... I needed to post more than once a day and the content could have a different focus.”

The main Facebook feed was developed greatly over Phase 3 and 4 of the CCC project, due to the strategic approach and more regular postings. Despite having no specific marketing or social media training, this CCC has increased both the numbers of people who see posts from this page and those who engage with the posts significantly.

The focus on content matter and supporting others to make links and take opportunities that are already available online led the CCC down a variety of avenues.

“Stories are such a lovely way to engage children and we know how important it is, so I trailed linking up with story-telling videos online. It’s a nice thing to watch with their child, but also shows them (parents) ways to do this.”

“I also included links to things like ‘30 Days Wild’ which have so many simple and free activity ideas.”

“On reflection” the CCC commented, “like anything, it takes time to create your networks, links...I know this is important, I met a parent through social media who was asking about her kid’s speech, our chat online led to meeting up with 3 parents and 2 of them come to the Elklan course.”

“I have been posting links to online stories on youtube etc. and have added a quick activity suggestion to each post. These are at 9.30am to give families the whole day to listen to the story and try the activity if they want, we hoped to become part of family routines.”

## 5:13 Online information materials

### *What is this initiative?*

This initiative started after the enforcement of Covid-19 lockdown measures, when face-to-face work was no longer possible. The CCCs were directed to help produce materials to support a joint project with a variety of departments within Norfolk County Council, called the ‘Talk and Play every day’ campaign. The objectives of this campaign align with those of the CCC project, in building parent confidence and motivation, informing and supporting them to develop more understanding of how to stimulate and support children’s language.

The CCCs undertook a variety of roles in the project, including content writing, visual content production, publicity and communications.

Content produced has potential to be a sustainable and valuable resource, particularly if advertised and distributed effectively across all agencies, organisations, departments, schools and settings, groups and charities who work or support families of young children.

## Part 6: Emergent themes

Researcher debriefings and the use of the critical friend throughout the process helped researchers to examine how thoughts and ideas were evolving as the project developed. The thematic analysis of the data contributed to understanding of different perspectives, generating unanticipated insights and providing a complex account of the successes of the project. The themes presented in this section contribute to the understanding of ‘what works’ and are in no particular order of hierarchy.

### 6:1 Empowering families

Whilst the main impact of the CCCS work was intended to manifest in children’s speech, language and communication development, it is clear that the main thrust of their working has had to be with the parents and carers of those children, and for children of this age the barriers to this cannot be disentangled from the parents’ own needs. Parental readiness, ability and confidence in supporting their children’s development are aspects that CCCs recognised as key factors of success.

Furthermore, a key point from the NOA initial local consultation at the very start of the NOA plan was that parents vocalised the lack of support groups in the area for speech and language needs. Parents recognised their need for support and would have welcomed such an offer. The nature of such support groups is not specified, and it is evident that even if such support groups had been made available, there remain many complex barriers to parents’ possible engagement with them.

However, one of the thematic threads that reveals itself through the qualitative data, and a sub-theme to the idea of parental empowerment, is the importance of parent-parent interaction and support.

In early CCC reflective notes (October 2019), there are stories of parents supporting each other in coming along to groups and drop-ins, musings on the benefits of developing community belonging, of parents and children learning from each other, and of helpful developing friendships between parents and between children:

**“One family where the parent was very chatty with adults instead of the child, made a lot of progress by the end; the child was interacting with mum more because she was giving him more attention, so the messages have really helped there.”**

**“Pre-school has reported noticing changes within friendship groups because of the course [HLP], two non-verbal children were then playing together more at pre-school and consequently their parents then started doing activities together outside of the course or pre-school. Similarly, two children who had difficulties with**

social interaction bonded and then spent the whole day together at the zoo on our celebration day.”

These are interesting notes, recognising the importance of emotional safety for parents and children attending the groups, of peer support, and indeed the collaborative nature of learning itself. When planning initiatives, this evidence suggests that supporting factors from peers, to facilitate engagement, are perhaps as important to consider as support offered from a professional.

Further evidence of this sub-theme, of parents benefitting from each other’s differences and supporting each other in their learning, was noted in a CCC reflection on two very differing HLP groups within the second HLP cycle. The initial feeling had been that the first group with more than twice as many parent and child participants (11 parents and 14 children), had created an atmosphere that was too busy, in comparison to a calmer, less well-attended second group (3 parents and 4 children). It had **“felt very rushed and it was a struggle to have enough time to reach every parent more than once.”** However, this view changed when the same CCC reflected on the positive value of parent-parent interactions, as opposed to parent-CCC interactions.

**“... I think that because there were more attendees on the first course [in the first group], the parents had a better experience because they could see and interact with other families and see others making progress with their communication skills. Additionally, the mix of parents meant that the shyer parents were encouraged by the confident parents resulting in there being more conversation and putting the shy families at ease, which ensured that they returned for the next sessions. Whereas the second group of parents have had a different experience. The small number of parents has meant that the atmosphere has been slightly awkward at times, especially as most of the parents are quite quiet.”**

It appears that that there may be value in focusing on wider relationship building within the services provided by the CCCs, both for parents and for children. Recognising that informal networks are important sources of support for parents, and a focus on parent-parent peer support could facilitate positive engagement with services by some families who may otherwise choose not to engage, and offers some possibilities for a legacy to the project in the form of support groups and friendships.

A final sub-theme under the notion of family empowerment is about listening to what parents say and sharing the responsibility: parents as partners. The ‘Home Matters’ report by the Foundation Year Trust et al. (2018) highlights that parents welcome knowledge and expertise from professionals, but they also want their own views and knowledge taken seriously. Case Study 11 explores an example of how important that recognition of partnership is.



## Case Study 11: Parents as partners

### Katherine

Katherine is the mother in a family referred to the CCCs just before the COVID-19 lockdown. This prevented the parent-CCC relationship from developing in person, yet still support was provided via a number of approaches. Initially, Katherine was able to speak through her concerns about her child on the telephone, allowing the CCC to gain as much information as possible about her concerns. Targeted support via email and further phone calls offering advice were used over the subsequent weeks.

After a number of weeks of support, Katherine felt that her child was speaking more clearly than before. She felt reassured that there appeared to be no major issues with her child's speech. The CCC working with Katherine noted, **"It is pleasing ... that [Katherine] feels that she is seeing improvement in her child, she reports he is talking more and that his speech is clearer."**

The CCC reflected: **"This [was] mainly down to the success of [Katherine] supporting their own child. In our current role, we are mainly facilitating and signposting parents to useful information. It is hard to coach or meaningfully change the way parents interact with their child but this particular family were keen to try different activities that they were provided with."**

However, the CCC also recognised the challenges of relying on Katherine's own feedback and assessment of her child: **"From experience we know that this is not always accurate. Parents often under- or over-estimate the ability of their children. [It is] important to ask targeted questions, be clear with parents about age related expectations and ask parents to give recent examples of their child's speaking, listening, etc."**

It is unknown if this parent had alternative options or places to go to for support. Yet the positive impact that occurred with the targeting of CCC support indicates a usefulness of their position and level of intervention with this family at this time.

The CCCs comments reflect the difficulties with physically distanced professional relationships with parents and children. However, when this is recognised, attempts can be made to break down these physical problems. When trust and confidence to create change is unequivocally placed in parents' hands, positive change is still possible and this should be recognised as a foundation on which to move forward with future work for all families.

## 6:2 An inclusive approach



“What parents do is more important than who parents are”  
(Sylva et al. 2004, p.57)

Research tells us that parents are keen to help their children learn, that they welcome more information, and there is ‘significant scope’ to work with them on developing effective home learning approaches (Hunt et al., 2011; The Foundation Years Trust, 2018). Yet we also know that for disadvantaged families, SLCN are often just one of a number of complex needs that these families might be dealing with. A wide range of difficulties could present, in areas such as physical and mental health, behaviour, relationships, attachment and loneliness, work stress, unemployment, housing issues, education, literacy and numeracy, amongst much else. The barriers to successfully supporting their child can manifest in many complex ways (Foundation Years Trust et al., 2018) and it is therefore necessary that any practitioners working with families within the community hold an awareness of potential difficulties if they are going to engage successfully with such families. The recognition that a parent needs to have the ability to engage with their child’s development before anything else can progress in a home environment is vital. Field concurs:

‘There is a strong relationship between different aspects of parenting and parents’ health and well-being and their children’s outcomes. Policies to improve poorer children’s outcomes are more likely to be successful if they target a wide range of issues such as parents’ education, positive parenting relationships and the home learning environment.’ (Field, 2010, p.44)

In their review of interventions with families, Axford et al. (2015) noted that programmes focussing on parenting practices and parent-infant interaction had an impact on ‘improved parent-child relationships, reduced parental stress, improved parenting attitudes, more positive parenting, less punitive parenting, increased verbal stimulation and warmth, and also positive child outcomes in areas such as language and behaviour.’ (Axford et. al, 2015, p.34). Furthermore, whilst Morris’ (2012) scope of study was only with highly vulnerable families with complex needs, the findings from the families’ perspectives are interesting when considered in the context of wider community and family working:

“The multiplicity of needs and problems meant that simple tasks were difficult and professional interventions that did not display a broader understanding of family life were problematic. Families relished the help that built bridges for them to services, and understood, for example, that missed appointments may be a symptom of need and not simply a cause of problems. Where extended understanding of the family and family life was evident... families valued this approach.” (Morris, 2012, p.205)

Examples of the positive impact of the “mediating influence of family support” (Young, 2013, p.47) also comes in two recent reports on the Home-Start programme (Warner, 2019; Sugarman and Chadasama, 2019). Using Home-Start’s administrative data, it is shown that nearly 95% of parents suffering with mental health issues saw improvements after following and completing a Home-Start support visit programme. For the most stressed families, high rates of improvement were recorded in 96% of those facing isolation, 94% of those



experiencing low self-esteem, and 95% of those coping with mental health issues. (Warner, 2019)

The CCCs recognise that, as in the Home-Start example, their work had the potential to impact on all families in all circumstances. Whilst not always in the home, some of their work with local support groups has been valuable in the context of supporting parents' needs first, to enable parents to be in the best possible position to support their child.

The following reflective notes are examples of the CCCs recognising the needs and barriers that might be in place for these families. In the first, a CCC considered the barriers for families, particularly those that are working with other organisations for additional complex reasons, noting that a referral for SLCN may not be top priority:

“...there have been no referrals. I would like to know why. I do know that the families they [Home-Start] support have multiple needs and that the children's speech and language will not probably have been the reason for their referral and support from Home-Start. That these families are often socially isolated and the parents have mental health issues in a lot of cases.”

“The second Mum I was concerned about coming was referred by a health visitor and I had been on a home visit to meet her prior to the course and hopefully reassure her and be a familiar face. She was also due to come with a friend but week 1 the friend couldn't come. I was very pleased to see this mum came anyway and although she found the group difficult due to the social aspect, in particular the circle times, she came 2 out of the 3 weeks we were able to run.”

“The observation sheet on week 1 I feel is problematic for three reasons. Firstly it's week 1 which I like to say is a getting to know you week but then we get our clipboards, observe the children and are writing things down, I don't think this is welcoming, I think it could put families off coming back.”

“This group not only meets the social needs of families in the area they provide a healthy snack for everyone – always lots of fruit and after every session families are given a bag of fruit and other food to take home. They do meals in the school holidays etc.”

An example of the CCCs engaging with local groups that support complex family needs is their linking up with the family support group 'Get Me Out The Four Walls.' This is an informal support group created 'to ensure that no mother, father or carer feels alone and isolated at home after the birth of their children.' Offering informal social meets, the group gives parents the opportunity to meet other parents, in the belief that such support helps aid stabilisation of mental health.

A further example is an organised zoo trip that a CCC wrote about in her reflective notes afterwards. She recognised the need to build confidence in the mothers attending sessions and events. With this particular zoo trip, there was a focus on maternal mental health and bonding of children and parents, which felt successful in the context of this event.

The value of expanding, encouraging and supporting parental confidence and aspirations is highlighted in the 'Big Hopes Big Future' report (Young, 2013), which evaluates a project to support disadvantaged families in helping children through the home environment to be school-ready. The report demonstrated that by putting parents "at the heart of the solution...children can and do make significant progress even in the most challenging circumstances" and furthermore "Significantly, children in families with the highest needs showed the most progress - including those whose parents have mental health problems and were coping with complex and multiple disadvantage." (Young, 2013 p.4)

Day's (2013) concerns illustrate this theme of inclusive family practice: that it is more helpful to focus on families' strengths as opposed to needs and adversity, acknowledging difficulty but not being led by stereotypical or unhelpful views of "disadvantaged" or "hard to reach" families. Knowing that one style of initiative will not fit all, listening to families' perspectives and experiences, and adopting an approach built on the idea that support is not done 'to' families, but 'with' in partnership, are all key components of effective inclusive initiatives.

## Case Study 12: Supporting a parent's needs

### Sarah

Sarah was identified as a highly anxious person, a parent who finds it difficult to engage with professionals for fear of herself or her child being judged.

One CCC accompanied a health visitor to Sarah's home, upon agreement and at the invitation of the health visitor. However, Sarah found the visit to be overwhelming and had to leave the room, although she did request a leaflet be left for her to look at in her own time.

Following a further phone call to offer reassurance about the course at a time when she was not so upset, Sarah agreed to, and then did, attend the next round of the HLP. After one group session, in which Sarah chose to leave slightly early due to her anxiety, she reflected with the CCC that she finds the social part difficult herself, and that she does not go to groups because of that. Despite her anxiety in the first week, Sarah had been surprised at how much her daughter had appeared to enjoy the session, and she had been **"much better than she thought she would be."**

The CCC reflected on the difficulties and balance required for such high resource (time) attempts to engage families **"I think to just have some background about the family you are visiting and maybe their concerns, will always help you find the best approach. Referrers often give just a few minor details on the referral form but a phone chat beforehand would help. I have rung referrers a few times since this to chat about the family before I make first contact and that definitely helps."**

...given the final outcome I think the home visit on balance was helpful even to this parent as she has gone on to interact with us.”



### 6:3 Trust

“The relationship between parent and practitioner is at the heart of effective services to involve parents in their children’s early learning. For a parent who lacks the confidence and trust to access services, forming a warm and positive relationship with a practitioner can be the bridge to available help and information” (Roberts, 2009, cited in Hunt et al., 2011).

A high proportion of CCC reflective notes noted trust as a cornerstone to effective relationships developing between themselves and families. Unsurprisingly, built into those reflective responses was the notion that one of the key factors for such trust to develop was the building up of relationships and having time for repeated meetings:

“I was able to get to know parents over repeated visits and build up trust...”

“The more I visit the more I get to know the parents the chatting becomes more natural and they are less suspicious of why I am there!”

“I think because she’d had some time to get to know me it enabled her to come to the group, she does appear to find social situations difficult but she came and was sad when we had to cancel after 3 weeks.”

“The more I visit the more I get to know the parents the chatting becomes more natural and they are less suspicious of why I am there!”

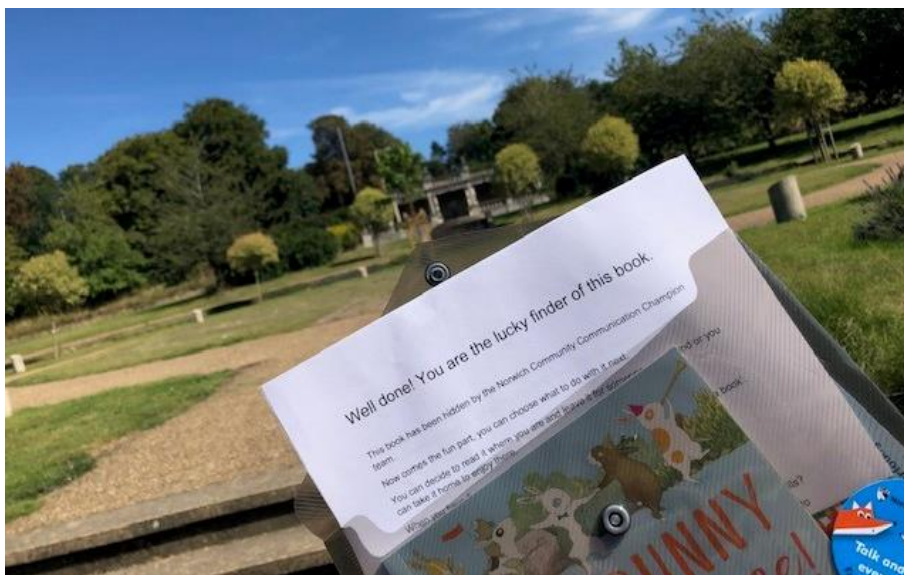
“...it did make it clear that to engage parents, they need to have in-person contact regularly, otherwise they won’t engage with you and that connection will diminish rapidly when face to face contact isn’t possible.”

This theme, of personalisation and of a developing a relationship-based approach, of families knowing who the CCCs are and feeling comfortable in that relationship, was revealed in a number of places, including in this reflective note about the CCCs social media use:

“Most popular posts have been those with personalised content written by the CCC team, addressing parents/carers, especially those with photographs of trips, outings, or of the CCC team members at events and groups.

These tend to be shared and commented on, and the reach increases greatly as a result.”

Frequency of contact is specified as a factor of success in Warner’s 2019 report on the impact of the Home-Start national volunteer programme. Looking at the nature of the support and the rate of improvements in parental mental health, and thus potential improvements for the children in the family, findings concluded that the more frequent the contact (in this particular context, home visits), the faster the improvement. Interestingly, this report also detailed that longer home visits correlated with slower improvements overall, although did balance that with recognition that more complicated family circumstances, hence the longer visits, are likely to be a factor here.



## Case Study 13: Building relationships

## Preparing for the Home Learning Programme

One particular example of the impact of effective relationships building by the CCCs was shown in improved attendance at the HLP between cycle 2 and 3 (see Figure 10). As cycle two started in early October, CCCs had little time after the summer holiday period to identify and sign families up for the group based sessions.

In contrast for cycle three, CCCs started had more time to identify families and organise opportunities to meet with parents in order to aid their 'transition' on to the course.

The conversion rate of those who continued forwards to access and complete the course (albeit an interrupted one) was increased where the CCC had established a relationship with the parents beforehand, perhaps through visits to home, community groups or events.

CCC reflections noted the importance of having built those trustworthy relationships well before an HLP course began:

"I think because she'd had some time to get to know me it enabled her to come to the group [HLP course]"

"I encouraged families who were thinking of doing the HLP to come...as a way to build relationship prior to the course whilst also giving them a worthwhile activity that they could do/use between now and then."

"Initial contact with families started with plenty of time before the course [HLP] was due to start and this enabled the CCC team to make some connection with the parents... The initial attendance was higher [on HLP 3] than on HLP 2 when many families were signed up just a week before the course started so hadn't had a chance to meet one of the CCCs."

"They came on the first HLP [session] ... and it was good that I had already met them 1:1 five times before the course started so they both felt really comfortable with me and at ease with the new situation/course."

Face-to-face contact with potential parents before the first session of a HLP can help to remove any negative expectations of the programme before commencement, and enables families to begin to feel comfortable, heard and reassured by the CCCs.



## 6:4 Style of event and location

The CCCs prepared and led a variety of different events and sessions to help them reach and engage as many parents as they could. These were met with varying degrees of success, and many CCC notes focus on their reflections of what worked and what might have worked better.

Sub-themes here include notions of feeling safe and of effective use of the outdoor environment and physical spaces available.

The research literature shows that the ability to communicate, for us all, is dependent on the social and emotional as well as the physical environment, and so the inclusion of this theme is important here.

Whilst leading a parent and child Story-walk event at the local park, one CCC reflected on the different needs of children in the outdoor environment, the opportunities it offered her to work with families and her response to that:

“The park has a nice layout – there is a great log that I take a cover for and the children like to climb on it and sit down while we read the story together looking at the book as I tell the story. Then there are natural areas where we can get amongst the trees and also a grassy area to run on as well as the enclosed play area.”

“It’s good to get parents and children out for a short walk and then a run around. Suits children who like to be physical.”

“Lots of opportunities to model to parents how to use new vocabulary in a fun way –e.g. being giants and climbing beanstalks – lots of giant voices and stomping as we chanted Fee Fi Fo Fum! Hide and seek was especially popular...”

Difficulties were also reflected upon:

“It is difficult as we do not know numbers for these events. It can be quite cramped in the session. One child wasn’t comfortable with the crowded nature of the area and so he sat with his parent on the edge of the activity but his parents were taking him the craft things and so he accessed it in a way that he was comfortable with...The space does limit what you can do but, there was a child on a previous occasion whose parent said that he had also found it too crowded (we use the children’s library area and it is cramped but next time could move the large book containers that divide the area to give us a little more room).”

We have already touched upon the importance of families feeling safe, comfortable and at ease. Awareness of physical and emotional barriers that families might have should be reflected upon and all efforts made to remove them. The misconceptions about the library, identified in Part 4:7, being one example of this.

## 6:5 Effectively reaching families

Raising awareness of who the Community Communications Champions were and the services they were providing for parents and children was clearly critical in engaging families with these services. Even where families were aware of the CCCs and the services offered, there were likely to be multiple reasons why they still may not have engaged with them. These may have included, amongst others, the use of alternative services, geographical barriers to accessing the support, parents' own mental health needs, and parents' work commitments.

Communication was key. In one reflective note, a CCC considered the difficulties that arose when trying to ensure communication strategies with families and pre-schools were most effective. In this instance, her time was not well utilised and she wrote:

*"I was under the impression (from the setting) that there would be lots of parents attending this coffee morning and therefore assumed it would be in a bigger room and I could go around and talk to some of the parents individually. However, because it was in such a tiny room and there weren't enough chairs for everyone, it became a very awkward situation as there were 4 adults (and 2 little ones) and they hadn't been told that I would be coming, so it felt like I was intruding on their conversations."*

In another note on attending a community session:

*"The parents were not target parents, 2 of them were early years teachers themselves (on maternity leave) so I felt that although it was good that they knew about how to help their children's SLCN, it was a bit patronising if I had tried to tell them more about it. Next time, I would make sure that the setting had advertised the fact that I was going to attend, and I would also try to ensure that the setting had chosen some 'target parents'."*

In comparison, of a similar session in a different location, the same CCC noted:

*"The attendance levels were really good because the setting was very proactive and had chosen specific parents who they thought would benefit from the drop-in. They had called all of the parents that morning to ensure that they would come in and attend."* (As detailed in Case Study 4)

This personal touch, of phoning parents individually to invite them and perhaps reassure them, is evidence of the analysis and distinction needed between the effectiveness or not of a time-consuming activity that yields positive results, or a less time-consuming activity that yields poorer results.

Further difficulties with communication also became evident within this theme:

“Some of the parents have so many concerns about their children that aren’t related to speech, language and communication so this makes it difficult to answer these questions, especially when pressed for time.”

“I think some of the parents had a different view of their child’s development to the views of the staff at the setting, so when a member of staff was in the room, it made it slightly awkward for the parents to talk openly about their concerns.”  
(Case Study 4)

Moreover, of the difficulties in reaching families that were simply exacerbated after lockdown:

“Also, one of my more engaged parents only has a home telephone number, no email, or Facebook, or mobile phone so it has been really difficult to stay in contact with them as although I can call them, there isn’t a way to send the family any links to information or any of our activity sheets/advice.”

“Well at the moment it feels like we are just reproducing information and activities that can already be found online so for this job to work effectively, it is essential to have that 1:1 contact with parents on a regular basis, otherwise they won’t engage.”

Further notes commented on the misconception that the CCCs had stopped working during lockdown, and whilst leaflets advertising their continuing support were distributed widely, several weeks had perhaps already unfortunately been lost here.

Some reflective notes revealed the difficulties the CCCs faced in articulating the nature of their role and what it was that they were offering. Their tongue-twisting ‘Community Communication Champion’ title, when used to introduce themselves, sometimes lacked the clarity and definition that the target families needed to engage them. Parents and groups were less likely to engage in something that they could not understand or for which they could not see a need. A clear offer is required, as uncertainty or complexity is not conducive to engaging people.





## 6:6 Skills for family and community working

### *Interpersonal skills*

Early years practitioners need to be well trained and knowledgeable, and there are important interpersonal skills that contribute to their competency. Sullivan (2015) surmised that confidence in early years staff is key to engaging with families, enabling them to support all families in ways that are informed, objective and calm.

The CCCs reflective notes were a mix of confident and proud narratives of times when they felt they had made positive impact, alongside stories of nervousness and frustration at, for example, an ‘awkward’ library drop-in, and concerns that they or their structures may be too “officious” and/or “off-putting” to families. There were also reflections on their own capacity in the role. There was recognition that some of their work was pushing their own personal development, and that some situations they found themselves in were socially daunting, especially for anyone in the role who was not a parent. Furthermore, reflections and data revealed differences between the ways that families engaged with individual CCCs. This was perhaps due to the CCCs different skills and levels of confidence in engaging families and effectively building relationships. Despite this, the researchers note that the CCCs were reflective and aware of their different individual strengths and to this end, they appeared to support each other well and work effectively as a team unit.

A study by Morris suggested that families “wanted professionals to understand their realities” (Morris, 2013, p.205). It implied that professionals should hold a deeper, more open and more respectful understanding of the nature of families that they work with, and qualities such as empathy, patience and honesty would all complement such understanding. Feeling confidence in your own knowledge, abilities and skills is also surely an essential part of that.

The CCCs recognised and reflected on others whose approaches they valued, and there was a clear sense of wanting to learn from other professionals to develop and refine their own practice with families:

**“Karen is clearly well respected and works hard for her local community, families trust her, she is a key person to be involved in the legacy of our work. I imagine she will be running this group for many more years to come, these volunteers have a longevity that staff in support services don’t usually have.”** (Case Study 9)

**“Having Sophie involved is still important. The CCC team can lead the sessions themselves but I value her experience and as a speech and language therapist she is better placed to recognise the children in the group that just need this generalised support and those that might be presenting with issues that are going to need speech and language therapy input in the future. I rely on her expertise to help think about signposting and where to direct these families once they have completed our course.”**

**“As a practitioner I learn a lot from the way she [the storyteller] delivers stories. I have worked with her in the past on a number of collaborative projects so was very**

confident to book her for this event. She is very animated, she moves around and gets down to the children's level, there is no book in between her and the children so it is a very personal communication, she used her whole body and facial expressions, she speaks quietly but then alters her voice and volume for her different characters, she is funny and engaging and children and adults respond equally to her delivery style."

In terms of wider skills needed for the CCC role, there are examples in the reflective notes of gaps in specific skills, knowledge and/or experience. Furthermore, because such gaps were not immediately plugged by additional training, it took time to fill those gaps and overcome those hurdles.

It was clear from the reflective notes that the CCCs were proud of their work on the conference and its evident success. This was keenly felt amongst them, as none had had prior experience or knowledge of events planning and organisation.

It was also evident to researchers, through a series of ongoing conversations with a number of people involved in the project, that the peer/parent ambassador idea initially stalled due to lack of certainty and knowledge in how to approach it (for example, how to recruit parents for the role). Once more awareness of the community and family needs was in place; more confident ideas about this were able to be formulated. Yet by this time, the CCCs found that other barriers had unexpectedly appeared, such as lacking time to build relationships and, more specifically, knowing that they could not begin any such recruiting activity because they would not be in role as CCCs long enough to professionally and properly support and embed the peer ambassador role in the community. Thus, the idea of parent ambassadors was never realised.

### *Community knowledge*

Many reflections by the CCCs centred upon the importance of knowing the local area and the community in which they were working. Indeed, when they began in their posts, the initial strategy had been that each CCC would work with and support families within a particular ward area that had been assigned to them individually. As the project progressed, this was amended due to the limitations of this approach, such as the recognition that parents may choose to access parent and child groups beyond the geographical ward in which they lived, and because this became a restrictive factor in effective sharing of workload. Despite this recognition that the geographical boundaries were a starting point that required flexibility, the CCCs continued to acknowledge the usefulness of local knowledge, and the need to tap into effective sources of local information and already well established local support.

One CCC reflected:

**"The first people who were really helpful to us were the local library staff. They were able to give us some local knowledge about the areas and what times parents are around so that we could come and set up in the library at those busier times.**

They also signposted parents to us and our drop-ins and would sometimes call us if they had a parent in the library who wanted to contact us.”

Another noted the difficulties that their lack of knowledge of the local area presented in making the best use of their time:

“We spent a lot of time at the beginning of the project meeting many professionals; some of those have not proved that useful throughout the project. In hindsight it may have been better to be more selective about who we were linking up with. However, it is difficult to do this when you know little about the organisations who are working in the area already.”

Further comments highlighted the difficulties of being based at an office a distance away from their specified wards, as well as the challenges of having so many office-based tasks in Phase one.

“There were too many meetings, especially in the first few months of the project. Too much time was spent at a range of meetings and it was not the best use of our time.”

“It would have been extremely useful and time-saving if these meetings had taken place prior to our appointments, thus enabling us to start our work with families a lot sooner.”

Especially during this first phase of the project, the CCCs acknowledged that limited time was spent being present within their wards, and they reflected on how difficult it was to build positive relationships with families without being able to make themselves a ‘familiar face’ in their areas. A stronger presence in the community at an earlier stage would perhaps have been beneficial.

### *Adaptability*

The CCCs showed great adaptability, perseverance and professionalism in their roles. They recognised the requirement to be flexible and responsive to needs as they arose, and they spent much time trying to orient themselves to their roles and what might be possible within the period allocated to the project. They worked well as a team and their own personal and professional development was evident as the project progressed.

Yet alongside this, they acknowledged missed opportunities, frustration at disabling procedures and barriers in areas such as administration, networking, changing remits and foci. The lack of initial grounding of the project, and having to do much of this alongside immediate work within the community, produced some uncertainty and challenge. Two sub-themes emerged in interviews with the CCCs: the temporary nature of their role and the

project as a whole; and the lack of training and having to learn ‘on the job’. Both of these produced challenges in a role that was constantly evolving.

In contrast to the Communication Champions Project, where investment largely centred on training existing early years practitioners, the CCC project fell foul of what the Early Intervention Foundation (2018) describe as ‘short termism’, where services that have taken time to set up are withdrawn as the funding ends. What has been clear from the start is that this knowledge of the short-term nature of the CCCs has directly affected the implementation and engagement with initiatives by both the parents, partners and the CCCs themselves.



## Part 7: Recommendations

Recommendations are based on this evaluation (quantitative data and qualitative findings), in addition to observations by the research team during activities and events and relevant research literature. The recommendations are presented as principled approaches, with more specific examples of recommended actions used to illustrate as necessary. They are intended to form the foundation of any strategic approach moving forwards, confident in the notion that these core fundamentals are grounded in evidence and theory.

A recent evaluation of the national volunteer-led Home-Start support programme recognised that

“effective and efficient provision to support families in need is of particular importance in the age of austerity, especially where, as in the UK, this had led to the widespread reduction or withdrawal of a range of public services for families and children.” (Sugarman and Chudasama 2019 p5)

In light of the effects that are no doubt impacting on and being felt within our communities during and following the Covid-19 pandemic, this statement feels all the more pertinent. A subsequent report (Warner, 2019) also identified that whilst volunteer projects can make a valuable and unique contribution to achieving positive child outcomes, they are not a substitute for support from paid professionals. The nature of the support of the CCCs has, perhaps, bridged some of these boundaries, and recognition of this is paramount when considering sustainability and impact factors.

### Recommendation 1: A balanced strategic approach

The CCCs belonged both to a wide-reaching outspread network of organisations and people supporting families in their geographical areas, as well as to a tiered vertical network of support for SLC development in children. Their role was, therefore, situated in a complex location within that, and thus required clear positioning, marketing and structure to ensure clarity of role and the most opportunity for impact. This clarity was elusive at times, for all partners. Whilst we recognise that there is merit in an approach that is responsive, flexible and swift to adapt, there are also challenges that occur in this way of working, and this is perhaps especially so in a short-term project of this scale.

We suggest that any similar role or offshoot of the project going forward would benefit from a reposition to ground the work within what is already available, and that a shift in balance to a more fixed strategic approach from the outset would be beneficial. Time and focus are crucial elements here. Effective notions of the time needed to embed strategies and to gain long-lasting impact, as well as time to monitor progress of families and children or to effectively adjust support offered, are key requirements. Due diligence for monitoring progress and impact long term must be part of that strategic plan. Alongside that, a keen and unwavering focus on the intended impact (in this case, for the community and home learning

environments, for early (pre-school) children) should be sustained and not shifted at all junctures or possible divergences.

## **Recommendation 2: Train local partners**

All practitioners working in roles with families and children in the community require a clear skills set that will enable them to make the most impact. We know that the parents' influence is key to closing the attainment gap, and therefore an understanding of families and their possible or likely needs sits alongside, and not below, the knowledge needed of specific intervention support for children (in this case SLC development).

Conferences and cascading of training is a cost-effective and far-reaching approach that can support all those involved with supporting families with young children – volunteers and professionals. The value added impact here stems from ensuring there is a stronger universal offer to parents and improved quality of pre-school provision. Training that supports parent partnership, as well as background theory and clear guidance for practice about HLE and SLC development, would be most beneficial. Training should allow practitioners to begin with, and then build on, parents' strengths, encouraging confident non-judgemental relationships with families to be developed and sustained.

The use of parent ambassadors offers further potential for good impact. If parent ambassadors are trained to use everyday opportunities to chat to other parents about children's SLC development and the HLE, or to encourage reluctant parents to participate in groups, they could help to build bridges between families and professionals/institutions.

Any training or upskilling of practitioners in the local community or of parent ambassadors/champions requires a strategic approach, close monitoring and support to ensure longevity and continued impact.

## **Recommendation 3: Empower families**

“... [W]hen parents believe that they are capable of positive parenting, and that their actions will positively affect their children's behaviour, parents are more likely to exhibit positive parenting skills.” (Dekovic et al., 2010, p.264)

Transference of knowledge, responsibility and capacity over to families, as well as community workers and volunteers, who work directly with those families, offers the most scope for a longer-term legacy in the community. This will help to move families away from reliance on others to support them and ensure that even without a paid professional in the CCC role to guide and support, families remain confident to take on the responsibility of their child's SLC development themselves.

Whilst there were initial plans for 'peer ambassadors/parent ambassadors' to become a reality, these were never established, which was perhaps short-sighted in terms of realising longer-term impact, as parent-parent support has been shown to be important. A focus on parent-parent peer support could facilitate positive engagement with services by some families who may otherwise choose not to engage, and offers some possibilities for a legacy

to the project in the form of support groups and friendships. If such wider peer support services are part of a strategic plan moving forward, there should be an emphasis on seeking the voice of service users, seeking parents' views and establishing an ongoing parent support group to help shape future services. Not only do parents require unhindered accessibility to quality universal information and resources on children's SLC development, some would also likely require a clear referral process to additional support should they seek it.

#### **Recommendation 4: Effectively reach families**

Families are more conducive to receiving support and benefitting from it if they feel valued and listened to rather than judged, and as in the collated notes from the conference: partnership with families is about doing *with*, not doing *to*. A focus on building trustworthy relationships - and recognition of the time that this may take for some families - is crucial for building a strong platform to extend parents' support for their children's learning. Where this is difficult, or circumstances do not allow, then effective collaboration with local community groups can give further access to some families, and this approach should be employed where appropriate to do so.

In terms of publicising offers and finding ways to engage families from the outset, there are lessons that have been learned from initiatives within the CCC project. Clear simple messages, free of jargon need to be publicised through a wide variety of outlets or avenues. This also needs to be maintained, ensuring that there is regularity and a 'presence' either physically or virtually.

#### **Recommendation 5: Invest in existing services and use existing resources**

We have already highlighted, in 7:4 above, the importance of making best use of partnerships within the community, and this can be extended to include the wider best practice and wealth of resources that already exist in the public domain. For example, SLC resources developed by the Norfolk Family Information Service are readily available online and further related resources for developing SLC, such as a 'Top tips for developing talk' leaflet and a 'Summer talk activity pack' are easy to find via the Communication Trust website. There is also a CPD short course on SLC development on the Communication Trust website, which is suitable for all volunteers and practitioners working with young children. All of these resources can be utilised and there is no need to 'reinvent the wheel' or duplicate.

A further consideration is the high cost of using a private company to deliver training or support, such as the HLP, when that could be delivered locally by simply ensuring training and confidence to do so is adequate. Whilst we recognise that there were benefits in bringing in an external provider, we have also recognised the huge cost associated with doing so, and we suggest that the CCCs themselves had the training and local knowledge that placed them in a prime position to lead such initiatives.

Signposting and connecting-up of existing services is a crucial element of community and family support working, so that family needs and referrals are dealt with most effectively, and in a timely way.

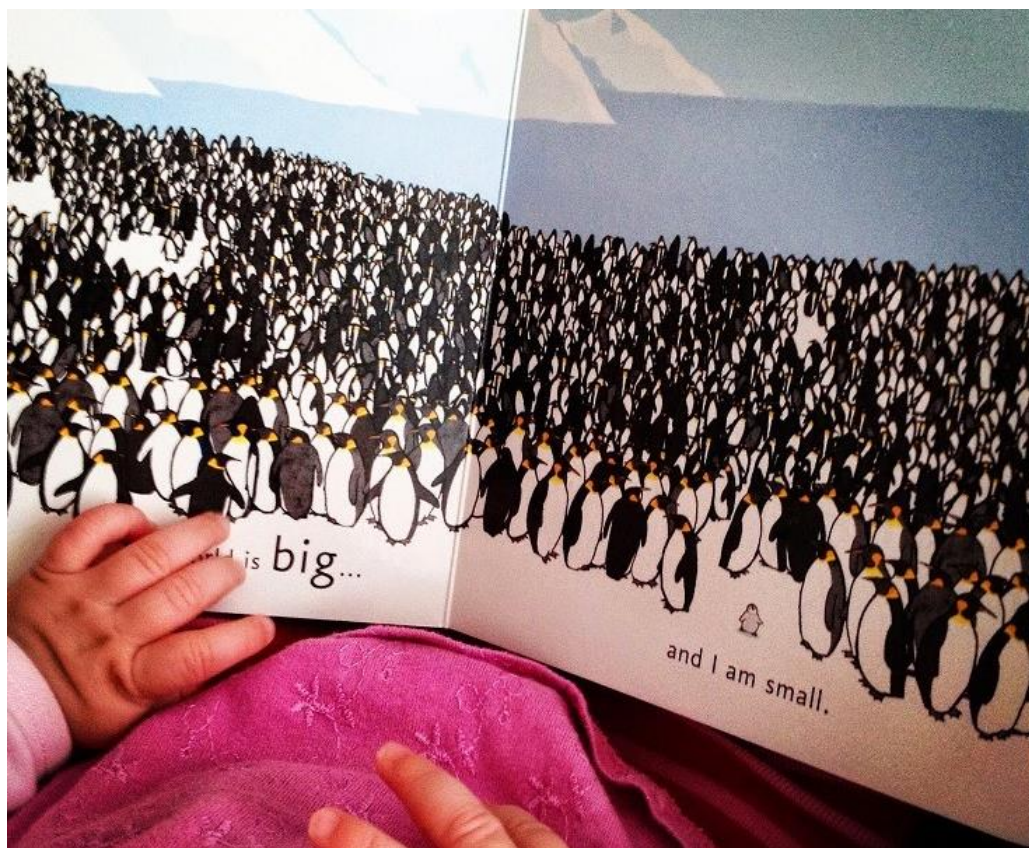


## Recommendation 6: Focus on emotional readiness in parents and in children

“In order to have a meaningful impact on the HLE, any approach must understand and seek to address the barriers faced by parents.” (Department for Education 2018 p.18).

There are many barriers that parents face to providing a home learning environment supportive of communication development. These barriers include capability, opportunity and motivational factors. There is a growing body of evidence that suggests supporting parents should be part of any wider approach to improve outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Hunt et al., 2011; Field, 2010). Suggestions include that initiatives or interventions for any aspect of improved school readiness should not be exclusively focused on the child but should aim to improve interactions between children, parents, peers (and teachers.) The CCC project has worked within that notion to some extent, but there is perhaps room for clearer recognition of this factor, for longer-term impact.

Furthermore, whilst the primary focus of the CCC project was to support SLC development in children, the relevant research literature clearly indicates that the approaches that practitioners take to support children in developing language and communication skills cannot be disentangled from the need to develop children’s emotional capacities alongside. Thus, despite there being such complexities around emotions and language, any practitioners working with children and families should be clear from the outset of (1) what their goals are for the programme (i.e., develop SLC development, increase parent engagement) yet still be mindful of (2) how to develop and support emotional wellbeing within those families. Both of these priorities will ensure the most benefit is gained from the initiatives offered.





## Part 8: Conclusion

The impact of the CCC roles has been far broader than expected. The legacy of their work by providing CPD, cascading of training and contributing to the Talk and Play Everyday project will continue after their contracts cease. Most notably evidenced through the case studies was the profound impact on those families and professionals that CCCs worked directly with, particularly where relationships were built and support was continued over time.

It is clear that trust and building relationships within the community, both professional and parental is the platform on which any initiative must start. In the case of families, this can only come from gaining an understanding of both strengths and needs, moving away from the stereotypical deficit view of disadvantage, but understanding and identifying the potential barriers; supporting parents to overcome these. A key approach of 'how to reach' parents was partnership and linking up with a range of local leaders, volunteer organisations, community workers and health and social services, who provided a trusted partner and access to families through a variety of avenues.

Similarly, we must be wary to avoid believing the misconception that everyone who works with children and young families understands how to support them with their children's communication skills, or that they do not also suffer with barriers to engagement. Training and upskilling all of those who work with parents of young children (voluntary or paid) ensures a consistency of message and offers an opportunity to reach a wider range of families. Prioritising training, such as the online Communication Champion training, is an excellent approach for overcoming barriers of access.

Successful work with families recognised the needs of both the adults and the children, accommodating and supporting both. A key strength in this, was the adaptability and use of a range of approaches to tailor the support in a way with which the parents could engage. In addition, key to this success was recognition that the personal social and emotional needs of both the children and the families were directly linked to their ability to engage and communicate. This has never been more relevant than during the current ongoing conditions and uncertainty brought about by Covid-19.

Making change sustainable requires empowerment of families to know the issue, not to rely on outside help and to make changes themselves, by providing them with knowledge, agency and peer support.

There were some high levels of investment in initiatives through time, finances and/or the training given to the CCCs. An example of this, the Home Learning Programme, was highly invested in through all three modes, but this did not necessarily ensure that the initiative had the highest level of impact or represented the best value for money and could be better managed in future. In other cases, such as the development of a social media presence: little

time, no finances and no training was given to a medium that has potential to reach further and wider than any of the others.

Clarity of strategy and focus on making best use of, and/or investing in local expertise, resources, training and services is a key priority now for decision makers and local leaders. The case studies exemplify what has worked within the initiatives but there is a feeling within the CCC team and the researchers that this project had only really started to gain confidence and momentum, that the dangers of ‘short-termism’ are very present, and there is much more that could be explored to develop and improve the initiatives on offer.

Critically, the CCC project, alongside the priority-one network partners, ‘championed’ the cause and aimed to raise both the status of and focus on young children’s communication with their communities. They strove, as The Communication Trust articulated, “get people on board, make things happen and make a difference” (The Communication Trust 2020b p.1).

Local decision makers should identify who will champion this cause at all levels going forward, to ensure that this work, along with the facilities and services for children in the critical pre-school years and their families, are not withdrawn, diminished or forgotten; rather that the legacy and focus of this vital work is sustained and continues to improve lives and make a difference.



## Part 9: Glossary of terms

**CC:** Communication Champion; someone who is an Early Years setting practitioner and has undergone Communication Champion training

**CCC:** Community Communication Champion; employees of Norfolk County Council to work across a variety of settings and in the wider community to work towards achieving Priority 1 of the Norwich Opportunity area; to improve early speech, language, listening and communication.

**DfE:** Department for Education.

**ECFS:** Early Childhood Family Services; offers support to 0-5-year-olds and their families in Norfolk.

**EEF:** Education Endowment Fund; an independent charity dedicated to breaking the link between family income and educational achievement.

**EIF:** Early Intervention Foundation; a charity championing and supporting the use of effective early intervention to improve the lives of children and young people at risk of experiencing poor outcomes.

**Elklan:** a Speech and Language training provider; procured for the CCC project to plan and lead the Home Learning Programme.

**EYFS:** Early Years Foundation Stage; the stage where a child is 0-5 years old; standards for learning, development and care are set out for all schools and Ofsted-registered early years providers, including childminders, preschools, nurseries and school reception classes in England.

**FIS:** Family Information Service; provides free, confidential and impartial advice and guidance on funded early education and childcare, home learning and related services in Norfolk.

**GMOTFW:** Get Me Out The Four Walls; a registered maternal mental health charity based in East Anglia that offers informal social meets around the county for mothers, fathers and carers to attend.

**HLP:** Home learning Programme; a group based initiative to support parents interacting with their child.

**LTaH:** Let's talk at Home; name of the Home Learning Programme produced by Elklan.

**MAP:** part of a national network of youth charities supported by Youth Access; working to improve services for young people; getting involved in national campaigns, such as around youth mental health; developing new services, such as online support.

**NOA:** Norwich Opportunity Area.

**Springboard Box :** A gift of play resources given to parents who attended and completed the six week Home Learning Programme (see Appendix 7).

**SLC;** Speech, Language and Communication.

**SLCN:** Speech, Language and Communication Needs; an umbrella term defined in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice. “Children and young people with SLCN have difficulty in communicating with others. This may be because they have difficulty saying what they want to, understanding what is being said to them or they do not understand or use social rules of communication. The profile for every child with SLCN is different and their needs may change over time. They may have difficulty with one, some or all of the different aspects of speech, language or social communication at different times of their lives.”

**Ward:** a local authority area, typically used for electoral purposes.

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# Appendix 1

## Original proposal and CCC project response

Original proposal	Phase 1 Start of the CCC project Spring/summer 2019	Phase 2 Status in November 2019  Autumn/Winter 2019	Phase 3 Status in March 2019  Spring 2020	Phase 4 Status in June 2019  Summer 2020
2 year project duration	18 month project	No change	No change	CCC contracts end August 2020
EIF/EEF Evidenced home learning programmes (HLP) identified	Pilot Home learning programme by well reputed Speech and Language training provider chosen – Elklan ‘Let’s talk at Home’	HLP planned to run four times for each of the four Norwich wards. 2 Cycles complete (Spring 19 and autumn 19)	3 <sup>rd</sup> cycle (spring 2020) started but interrupted	4 <sup>th</sup> cycle adapted by CCCs as Elklan unable to deliver HLP remotely.
HLP duration 12-24 weeks proposed	HLP duration 6 weeks chosen	No change – 6 week programme delivered to 2 cohorts of parents and their children.	HLP for 3 <sup>rd</sup> Cohort – 3 weeks delivered as planned prior to lockdown. Remaining ‘talking tips’ and support delivered by phone and email.	HLP for 4 <sup>th</sup> cohort of parents not delivered by Elklan. CCCs working with parents one-to-one over the phone and via email.
Each CCC will work with a target ward	3 CCCs in place. Each focussed on work within a target ward (1 covering 2 wards temporarily)	CCCs working in pairs - schools team and community based team. Each CCC working with 2 wards	As before 2 teams with particular focus as well as joint projects such as Communication Conference	CCCs working from home due to Covid-19  Also undertaking work for a joint ‘Talk and Play’ project
Each CCC hosted by local library, nursery or children’s centre as their ‘hub’	All CCCs based at Woodside Community Centre hub for administrative tasks. Libraries used for ‘drop-ins’ base	No change	CCCs increasing presence in community groups and centres.  New schools offer developed for schools team.	All CCCs working from home.
Join CC for communication champion training and become part of network	As proposed	As proposed	As proposed	As proposed
CCCs will make introductions with parents least likely to engage with support from children’s centres, through referrals	As proposed,  Meeting parents in community buildings – libraries, schools, community centres etc.	As proposed Meeting parents in community buildings – libraries, schools, community centres etc.	As proposed Meeting parents in community buildings – libraries, schools, community centres etc.  Home visit	As proposed  Contacting new referrals via phone and email.
CCCs will work towards 4 stages with parents: <b>1</b> -Introduction and sharing of opportunities and resources	CCCs Working effectively with parents on Stages 1-3	CCCs Working effectively with parents on Stages 1-3	CCCs Working effectively with parents on Stages 1-3	Work on stage 1 and 3 continues remotely.

<p>2 - Encourage/accompany parent to group sessions at the base for that neighbourhood</p> <p>3 - Coach and support parent to implement strategies in the home</p> <p>4 - Encourage parent to act as an ambassador to friends and family, through real-world or online social networks</p>		<p>Opportunities for linking up with parent ambassadors in other community initiatives being explored.</p>	<p>Stage 4 not developed.</p>	
<p>CCCs will simultaneously gather feedback from parents at each stage to inform a study of the barriers to taking up these kinds of interventions, what works in encouraging these families to engage</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>CCCs using parent questionnaires to identify target audience views</p> <p>Strategies (phone calls and emails) to identify barriers, so far not effective.</p>	<p>CCCs using edited parent questionnaires at the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> HLP</p> <p>Feedback gathered from voluntary and community groups/workers regarding barriers</p>	<p>Feedback received via email and phones from parents.</p>
<p>CCCs create a sharing platform on social media to connect target parents who participate in the programme</p>	<p>Facebook page started.</p> <p>Closed groups established for each cohort attending HLP.</p>	<p>All CCCs contributing and taking turns for responsibility in posting and maintaining this main feed. Closed group take up limited.</p>	<p>1 CCC identified to develop a more regular, responsive and strategic approach to main page feed. Closed groups advertised but take up still limited.</p>	<p>CCC Social media focus on main page feed. Objective to provide resource links information and support for parents and practitioners.</p>
<p>CCCs organise very local “experiences” for target parents</p>	<p>Focus initially on recruitment for HLP.</p>	<p>Local experiences being explored and started.</p>	<p>Small range of local experiences being delivered.</p>	<p>Local experiences not possible due to lockdown.</p>
<p>Staff profile of CCCs: level 3 education, experience of working in similar communities,</p>	<p>Not all CCCs have experience of working in similar communities.</p>	<p>No Change</p>	<p>No Change</p>	<p>No Change</p>
<p>Training in – interview skills, local EY/child development referral and support structures</p>	<p>All CCCs Training: Comm Champion – Level 3; Elklan co-tutoring; Safeguarding; Autism awareness; information security.</p> <p>Individual CCCs: Communication Friendly spaces; Caught or taught; connecting with nature</p> <p>Understanding of referral systems established.</p> <p>No further training</p>			
<p>300 families directly supported by CCCs to at least stage 1 over 2 years, 70% to stage 2, 60% to stage 3, 20% to stage 4 (60 ambassadors)</p>	<p>374 families directly supported by CCCs to stage 1, 162 (49%) families to stage 2, 260 (69%).families to stage 3, No families supported to become ambassadors</p>			
<p>32 programmes run over 2 years, assumed take-up = 640 parents</p>	<p>16 HLP programmes run over 18 months, take up 82 parents</p> <p>Additional CCC led events resulted in take up of 80 parents</p>			
<p>A report to inform greater understanding of the barriers to participation in intervention in Norwich, and the strengths and challenges of using different “hubs” for this type of work</p>	<p>Interim report delivered December 2019</p> <p>Comprehensive evaluation report completed and delivered July 2020</p>			

Opportunities to connect 25 parent ambassadors to Norwich school and PVI setting Communication Champions Network	0 ambassadors recruited or connected
A platform for parents to share strategies and experience with peers	6 Facebook closed groups created, 20 parent members across all 6 groups.  No new posts or members in the last month(May 2020)

# Appendix 2

## Conference Agenda



Norfolk County Council

### Communication Champions Conference Agenda 201



Norwich  
Opportunity Area

**08:30 Arrival**

Registration/Workshop Sign Up/Refreshments

**09:00 Becky Taylor, Head of Delivery for Norwich and Ipswich Opportunity Areas, Department for Education**

Introduction to the Communication Champions Conference, 2019.

**09:15 Elizabeth Jarman, International Learning Environments Expert and Award-Winning Author [www.elizabethjarman.com](http://www.elizabethjarman.com)**

**Part 1** - Getting the Environment Right for Children and Families: Developing the Communication Friendly Spaces Approach in your Context.

**10:00 Break**

Refreshments available in foyer

**10:30 Elizabeth Jarman, International Learning Environments Expert and Award-Winning Author [www.elizabethjarman.com](http://www.elizabethjarman.com)**

**Part 2** - Getting the Environment Right for Children and Families: Developing the Communication Friendly Spaces Approach in your Context.

**11:15 Tim Eyres, Head of Integrated Commissioning, Children's Services, Norfolk County Council**

The Early Years Transformation Academy

**11:30 Stuart Allen, Head Teacher at Mile Cross Primary School**

The Communication Champions Network and the Development of our Hub Schools/Settings

**11:50 Ashley Cater, Communication Champions Project Manager, Norfolk County Council**

Workshop overview - sessions, times and locations (see over page)

**11:55 LUNCH**

**12:45 – Workshop ROUND 1** (12:45 – 13:15)

**13:20 – Workshop ROUND 2** (13:25 – 13:55)

**13:55 – Workshop ROUND 3** (14:05 – 14:35)

Return to Auditorium

**14:40 Stuart Allen, Head Teacher at Mile Cross Primary School**

Welcome back

**14:45 Mark Burns, Director Plus One Learning and Author of Three Best-Selling Books on Learning, Including 'The Learning Imperative', Winner at the Business Book Awards 2019**

The Learning Imperative

**15:45 John Crowley, Head of Education Achievement and Early Years' Service, Norfolk County Council**

Closing thoughts and raffle

**16:00 Close**

## **WORKSHOPS**

1. Building Rapport with Reluctant Children  
Watson Room  
Delivered by: Communicate; Emma Ferris
2. The Home Learning Environment and Parental Engagement  
Franklin Room  
Delivered by: The Community Communication Champions; Liz Hughes, Megan Parsons and Oliver Joyce, Norfolk County Council.
3. Using Picture Books to Stimulate Conversation in the Home and in School  
Crick Room  
Delivered by: Norfolk County Council Library Service; Caroline Barker, Harriet Cox and Helena Last
4. Partnership Working  
Wilkins Room  
Deliver by Action for Children; Cathy Barber and Cheryl Morris
5. Changes to the Referral Process for Speech and Language Therapy  
Auditorium  
Delivered by East Coast Community Healthcare (ECCH) Speech and Language Therapy Service; Ali Howell and Claire Taylor

## Appendix 3

Monthly e-newsletter produced for settings to share with their parents.

### Community Communication Champions



## MAY 2020 Newsletter

The Community Communication Champions team are working with the schools and settings in the Wensum and University areas of Norwich to support parents and carers with their children's speech, language and communication development.

Although we have had to make some changes to our work due to COVID19, we are still here to give you some tips and activities to help your children's development whilst you're at home.

We hope you enjoy this month's tips, activities and advice, and if you would like some further advice or support please get in touch with us - our contact details are on the next page.



### TALKING TIP

#### Thinking Time

As adults it's easier for us to process language we have heard and to make a response.

Children take longer to understand what has been said to them and then to decide what action should be taken e.g. what to say or do, so it is really important that you give your child time to think before repeating what you have said.

7 seconds thinking time is a good amount of time to give a young child.

### LISTENING & ATTENTION ACTIVITY

#### Try playing Simon Says!

It's a game that children love to play but it also helps to get them to focus on what you're saying and to follow your instructions.

It's also a great way to help younger children learn the names for different body parts, "Simon says, touch your nose!"



## Community Communication Champions



### RECIPE

#### Cheese Straws

##### Ingredients:

175g plain flour  
75g butter/margarine - cut into small pieces  
115g grated cheese

##### Method:

1 egg - beaten



1. Preheat the oven to 200C/400F/Gas Mark 6
2. Put flour in a bowl, add butter/margarine and rub together using your fingertips.
2. When the mixture looks like breadcrumbs stir in the grated cheese.
3. Keep 1 tablespoon of egg separate. Stir the rest of the egg in the pastry mixture. Mix until you have a smooth dough, adding a little water if it's too dry.
4. Knead the dough and then roll out into a rectangle. Brush the remaining egg over the dough.
5. Cut the dough into strips (about 7cm by 1cm).
6. Bake for 8-10 mins on a greased/lined baking tray until they are golden brown.
7. Allow to cool slightly and ENJOY!

### EVERYDAY ACTIVITY

Children are very inquisitive, and you can encourage this by having fun with some everyday activities whilst also building your child's language.

Why not try a colour themed bath time?



Decide on a theme, such as the colour orange, then take a walk around your house together collecting lots of (waterproof) items that are orange coloured. (e.g. coloured toy brick, plastic cup, toy car etc.) You could even add a small slice of fresh orange to the bath water if you have some so that you can talk about the orange's texture and enjoy the smell. This would help to make this experience multi-sensory.

Then enjoy a fun orange bath whilst talking about the different items you've collected with your child – do they sink or float? Do they fill up with water? This is a great chance to use some different language and learn colours.

# Community Communication Champions



## NURSERY RHYMES & SONGS

Nursery rhymes can be a really good way of engaging your child, as the simple rhythms are easy for them to follow and actions can be added to make them more exciting.

Don't worry if you don't feel entirely comfortable or confident straight away, or if you don't know the words, there are lots of online videos you can sing along to. The BBC have some great examples on their website.

### Ten in the Bed

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/school-radio/nursery-rhymes-ten-in-the-bed/z7bnmfr>

Have a go at singing 'Ten in the Bed' – or have a listen to the video linked above.

You could develop your song time further by making some nursery rhyme baskets filled with different toys or objects to use whilst singing your rhymes. For example, you could find 10 toys or objects and lay them next to each other under a blanket as you sing 'Ten in the Bed'.

## MESSY PLAY

	<b>What you need:</b>	<b>Method:</b>
<b>Oobleck</b>	Cornflour Water	1. Mix 2 parts cornflour to 1 part water 2. Add food colouring or paint if you want to add some exciting colours

Oobleck is a non-Newtonian fluid. That means it sometimes behaves as a solid and sometimes as a liquid. But even if you're not interested in the science behind it, it's still a lot of fun and is a highly enjoyable activity for children who like goo.

You might want to play around with the ratio to get the right consistency- it should form a tight ball of dough when you compress it in your hands, but ooze out like a liquid when you relax your fingers. Obviously, get your little one to help in the making of the Oobleck. Apart from imitation skills, following directions and eye contact, you can also work on finger dexterity or trace shapes and letters on a shallow tray, the possibilities are endless!

## Community Communication Champions



**Norwich**  
Opportunity Area

### HELPFUL LINKS

Below are some useful websites to visit, they contain lots of helpful tips and activities for you to try with your little ones at home!

Hungry Little Minds -

<https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk/>

BBC Tiny Happy People -

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people>

ICAN's Talking Point -

<https://ican.org.uk/i-cans-talking-point/parents/>

The Communication Trust -

<https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/resources/resources/resources-for-parents/>

Norfolk County Council's Family Information Service Facebook -

<https://www.facebook.com/NorfolkFIS/>

Your local libraries have Facebook pages too which they are still updating with lots of new information, make sure you check them out!

Mile Cross Library -

<https://www.facebook.com/milecrosslibrary/>

Earlham Library –

<https://www.facebook.com/earlhamlibrary/>

### CONTACT US

We'd love to see some of your creations and hear about the fun you have whilst doing these activities so please send us an email or a Facebook message if you manage to give them a go!



Follow us on Facebook

**@Community Communication Champions**

We post daily with fun things that you might want to try at home with your children!



**Norfolk** County Council



# Appendix 4

## Schools and Settings Offer 2020: Early Years

### Community Communication Champions



### Required engagement

#### 1. Parental Support Drop-ins:

We would like to give the parents at your setting the opportunity to have an informal conversation with a member of the Community Communication Champion Team about any concerns they may have regarding their child's speech and language development. The team can give parents advice on typical communication development, effective talking tips and strategies, games and ideas for use in the home learning environment and much more. The team can also offer parents the opportunity to engage in Elklan 'Let's Talk at Home' training with their child and/or discuss creating a package of 1:1 support.

As a setting, we would kindly ask that you provide an area for one of the CCC team to be based and that you promote this drop-in to your early years' parents. The duration of a drop-in session is typically 1 hour at either pick-up or drop-off time and we try to hold these sessions on a monthly basis (depending on take-up).

#### 2. Request for Support Referrals:

As a setting you can refer families to the Community Communication Champion Team for extra support around SLCN. This support can be tailored to the families' individual needs and focus on different areas of communication. As above, the CCC team can work with parents on a 1:1 basis to coach them in using effective talking tips and strategies, share simple SLCN based games and activities for use in the home learning environment and offer parents the opportunity to engage in Elklan 'Let's Talk at Home' training with their child. The CCC team also run a range of groups and events for families in the local community, therefore they can support parents to access these groups with their child. Lastly, where necessary, the CCC team can conduct a WellComm Speech and Language Assessment of a child and provide the parents with follow up activities that they can do in the home. The CCC team will work to monitor the child's progress alongside the parent and provide feedback to the setting where requested.

In order to fulfil this 'required engagement', we would like to ask your setting to refer 2 suitable families to us each term. In return we will also provide your setting with a free story sack!

To refer a family, a 'Request for Support' form will need to be completed with the parents' consent and sent to the CCC team. A member of the team will then aim to be in contact with the family within 7 days of receiving the request.

## Community Communication Champions



### 3. Information Table/Noticeboard and/or CCC E-Newsletter

The Community Communication Champion Team will help your setting to create a speech, language and communication noticeboard or table, in a parent-friendly space within your setting. This space would house information about, and contact details for, the CCC team plus other relevant information about speech, language and communication development and local groups and events. This space could also be used to share a new talking tip with parents each half term and promote any related school events.

For those parents that may not have sight of noticeboard/table top space, the CCC team will also be producing a half-termly e-newsletter for settings to share with their parents via their website, online channels or own newsletter. As above, this e-newsletter will inform parents about the CCC teams news and upcoming family events, plus sharing talking tips and ideas that they can use in the home.

#### Optional extras

### 4. Support with Speech, Language and Communication Events

The Community Communication Champion Team would really like to encourage all local schools and settings to strengthen their offer to parents by setting up and/or organising an SLCN focused group or event. This could range from a half termly story café to a weekly stay and play session at the setting. Either way, we are keen to get settings thinking more about their approach to parental engagement and how this could be improved.

As a result, the CCC team are offering to support local schools and settings to set up and initially run an SLCN event. As you see in the 'rewards section', the £500 reward fund could be used to support this. Therefore, to give you some initial ideas, we have provided you with a list of local practitioners that are able to run parent and child sessions in your area. Please talk to your CCC team member about your options.



Norfolk County Council

## Community Communication Champions



### 5. Communication Champion Network Meetings

As you may already know, the Norwich Opportunity Area has chosen 4 settings from across Norwich to become Communication Hubs. The purpose of these hubs is to act as local centres of excellence around SLCN and continue to drive this conversation forward. From September 2019, the 4 hubs have taken over the running of the 'Communication Champions Network' and they are now looking to expand their networks to include more local schools and settings. As a member of the Communication Champions Network, you are invited to attend a network meeting once every half term to build professional relationships and share best practice with local colleagues; plus, through attending this meeting, your setting becomes eligible to benefit from a range of fully-funded training. Currently, the hubs are focusing on providing free Sign Along, Word Aware, Elklan and Talk Boost training. If you would be interested in attending your local meeting, please speak to your Community Communication Champion.

#### **Hubs:**

Mile Cross Primary and Catton Grove Primary (North Norwich Partnership Hub)  
Lionwood Infant and Nursery School  
Lakenham Primary School  
Peapod Preschool



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## Community Communication Champions



### Reward

In return for your engagement with the above, your setting will be gifted £500 to spend on any of the options below.

The options below have been chosen as they each help to promote ways in which parents and staff can support speech, language and communication development in the early years. Where possible, we are keen for you to use this money to prioritise the improvement of your parental engagement approach as we know that this is an area that often receives little funding. Nevertheless, if you do feel that your setting already offers a significant parental engagement package around SLCN, please take a look at options 2 and 3.

**This incentive expires on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020.** To sign up, please complete and return this form to [redacted]. Following this your local CCC will arrange a follow up meeting with you to plan next steps. Once your setting is enrolled in this offer, engagement with the CCC team is expected to last until the end of the academic year 2020.

#### 1. Parent/Child Activity Sessions:

With the primary focus of our work being on increasing parents' knowledge, understanding and confidence to support their child's early speech and language development, we have provided you with a list of local activity providers who run sessions for parents and their children within schools and settings. The CCC team have previously worked with each of these providers and have rated their sessions very highly.

Lawrence Bradby – Sainsbury's Centre for Visual Arts.

Session focus: Encouraging speech, language and communication through storytelling and play.

Working in family groups using familiar day to day objects, Lawrence supports children and their parents to co-create worlds in which narratives can emerge. Parents/carers are encouraged to work at same scale as their children and explore communication via multiple forms.



# Community Communication Champions



Ian Brownlie – Freelance Artist  
Session focus: Encouraging speech, language and communication through music, song and storytelling.  
 Ian can provide a combination of participatory music making, song, story and tactile making for the parents and children at his sessions. Ian’s sessions promote communication between the parent and child within an expressive and creative environment.

Lindsey Symington – Early Years Home Learning Advisor, Norfolk County Council  
Session focus: Encouraging speech, language and communication through sensory exploration.  
 Lindsey would tailor a session to your cohort of parents, taking into consideration their children’s ages; working with themes of discovery bottles, treasure baskets and sensory sessions. This session would then be delivered by our CCC team.

Please note that other providers are available and will be considered if sourced by the setting.

Activity	Description	Price for 1 hour session	Mileage Cost	Number of Families per session
Lawrence Bradby	Art	£60	None	Up to 15 children plus parents
Ian Brownlie	Music making/song	£100	45p per mile	Up to 15 children plus parents
Lyndsey Symington/CCC	Discovery bottles/treasure baskets	£50	n/a	Up to 15 children plus parents

## 2. WellComm Assessment Toolkit:

The WellComm Toolkit provides settings with a standardised way of measuring children’s speech, language and communication development between the ages 6 months and 6 years old. The accompanying Big Book of Ideas then provides practitioners with a range of level-specific follow on interventions to support the child’s continuing development. More information on this toolkit can be



## Community Communication Champions



found here: <https://www.gl-assessment.co.uk/products/wellcomm/> Please note, WellComm is one of the accepted assessment tools for speech and language referrals to ECCH.

If you would like to purchase the WellComm Toolkit with your £500 fund, the Norwich Opportunity Area will also fund you an additional £31.50 to purchase the WellComm Wizard online data collecting tool too, allowing your setting to easily create SLCN data reports and monitor children's progress. In return, the Norwich Opportunity Area would kindly ask that your data is shared with them through the Wizards cluster reports model until August 2020.

WellComm Assessment Toolkit	
Description	Price
WellComm Early Years Toolkit (6mths – 6yrs) + 1-year WellComm Wizard license	£449 toolkit + £82.50 wizard = £531.50

### 3. Training -

East Coast Community Healthcare (ECCH) and Norfolk County Council's Early Years and Achievement Service, both offer a wide range of SLCN training opportunities for early years practitioners across Norfolk. Please use the links below to explore what CPD opportunities are currently available:

Provider	Webpage	Notes
East Coast Community Health (ECCH)	<a href="https://salt.ecch.org/training-courses/">https://salt.ecch.org/training-courses/</a>	Please note: The costs are displayed on the individual course pages.
Norfolk County Council Early Years and Achievement Service (NCC)	<a href="https://www.schools.norfolk.gov.uk/Early-years-foundation-stage/Workforce-development/NCC181500">https://www.schools.norfolk.gov.uk/Early-years-foundation-stage/Workforce-development/NCC181500</a>	Please note: The costs are displayed on the individual course pages. Booking for NCC courses may require access to the 'Provider Portal'.

### 4. Other –

If you have any other SLCN related suggestions that you would like to use your funding for, please speak to a member of the CCC team.

# Community Communication Champions



## Memorandum of Understanding

\_\_\_\_\_ [insert school/setting] agree to the following CCC engagement opportunities:

(Please tick as appropriate)

Engagement		
	Drop-ins	Essential (where the setting has space)
	Referrals	Essential
	E-newsletter	Essential
	Notice Board/Information Table	Essential
	Support with SLC events	Desirable
	Communication Champion Network	Desirable

Provided the options selected above are adhered to between the date of sign up and the end of the academic year 2020, the Norwich Opportunity Area agree to fund your setting £500 to spend on one or more of the below incentives:

(Please tick as appropriate)

Budget: £500		
Parent/Child Activity Session		Cost
	Lawrence Bradby - Art	£60
	Ian Brownlie – Music Making/Song	£100
	Lyndsey Symington/CCC – Discovery Bottles/Treasure Baskets	£50
	Other – Please detail	



Norfolk County Council

## Community Communication Champions



WellComm		Cost
	WellComm Early Years Toolkit	£449
	1-year Well Wizard License	£82.50 (additional £31.50 funding provided)
Training Please list which courses you would like to attend		Cost
Other Requests Please detail		Cost

**This incentive expires on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2020.** To sign up, please complete and return this form to [redacted]. Following this your local CCC will arrange a follow up meeting with you to plan next steps.

Once your setting is enrolled in this offer, engagement with the CCC team is expected to last until the end of the academic year 2020.

Setting/School Representative	Norwich Opportunity Area Representative
Position:	Position:
Name:	Name:
Signature:	Signature:
Date:	Date:

# Appendix 5

## Covid-19 update to Schools and Settings Offer 2020: Early Years

**Community  
Communication  
Champions**



### **The Norwich Opportunity Area Schools and Settings Offer 2020: Early Years**

We would like to thank you for signing up to our 2020 Schools and Settings Offer; we are grateful that you've been involved with our project so far and have helped us to work with many families. However, given the current pandemic, our offer has had to be re-evaluated and amended to account for the recent changes we are all experiencing.

We understand that you will no longer be able to meet the original requirements of the offer, given the partial school and setting closures resulting from COVID19. However, we have agreed that we would still like to honour our original offer of providing you with a £500 fund but ask that you adapt your plans to deliver the benefits of these activities/tools innovatively as soon as practically possible or as soon as your school/setting re-opens to all children.

Once you have used your funding for your selected rewards, we would then like to kindly ask you to complete a case study for the Norwich Opportunity Area to show the impact that these interventions had on your parents and children. This is the only requirement that we are asking for in place of the original requirements. A case study template will be provided.

Under the current circumstances and given the impact that this pandemic is having on children's education, our work to address the communication gap becomes even more important. Our aim is to help you to continue your speech, language and communication support for both the children and parents at your setting and we hope that this fund can go some way to supporting you with that mission.

# Appendix 6

Weekly e-newsletter produced for parents.

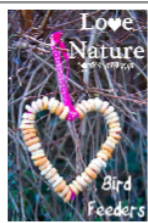
## Sheet 9: Ideas to try at home (all about birds!)

**Help the birds** – put out some water in this hot weather your birds will love taking a bath or having a drink from your home-made bird bath. The children will also enjoy topping up the water.

**What to do:** Lay out four bricks on a piece of open ground, where the birds will have a good view all around, place a dustbin lid or a shallow bowl on the bricks, add tap water.



**Storytime:** A Busy Day for Birds read by Ore Oduba from CBeebies <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rPThRJA9cZ0>



For other ideas <https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/makes/bird-feeder?collection=easy-craft-activities-for-kids>

**Make a bird feeder** using breakfast cereals and a pipe cleaner - thread Cheerios onto the pipe cleaner and when you have filled most of the length twist the two ends to close. Fasten in a tree with a piece of string. Keep watch for visitors to your feeder! Your children will be using the small muscles in their hands to thread which will help when they need to hold a pen and write. You can sit and chat (and eat Cheerios!) while you all do some threading. If younger children can't hold the pipe cleaner stick the end into some blue tack to make a base. If you don't have a pipe cleaner you could also use any thin wire or even string (but that is harder to thread).

Songs about birds:

### Two Little Dickie Birds

Two little dickie birds  
Sitting on a wall,  
One named Peter,  
One named Paul.

Fly away Peter,  
Fly away Paul,  
Come back Peter,  
Come back Paul.



### There Was a Wise Old Owl

by Leonie Guenther

There was a wise, old owl --  
Who lived up in a tree.

He sat upon a branch --  
So all the world he'd see.

He looked at a snake,  
He looked at a bee.

He looked at a mouse,  
But he winked at me!



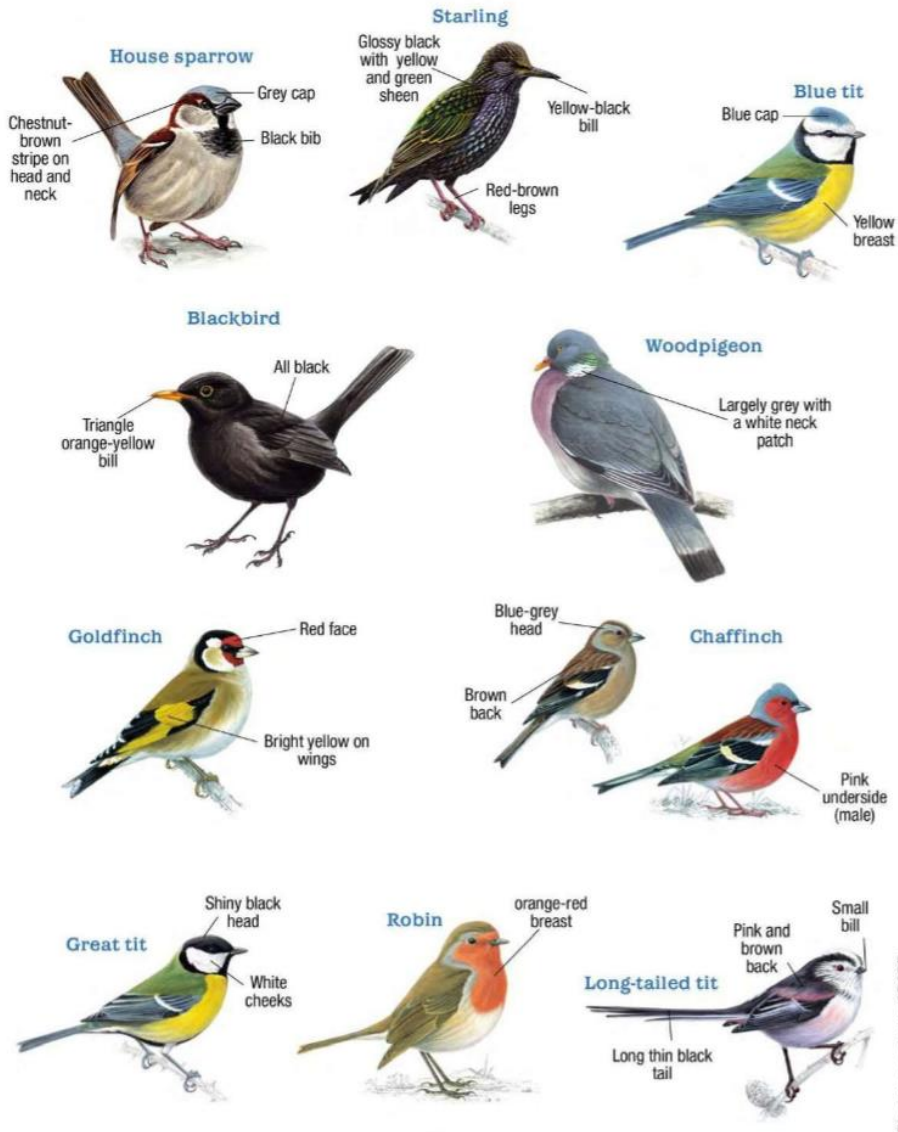
<https://simplecraftideas.info/paper-plate-dream-catchers/>

See if you can find a feather and make a dream catcher to hang over your child's bed (a Native American tradition). It is believed that the bad dreams would be caught in the web and the good dreams would slide down to the sleeping child. The use of feathers is also believed to work as ladders for the good dreams to reach the sleeper.



Which birds can you see in your garden or when out on a walk – tell your children the names of the birds and describe them – what size/colour are they? What are they doing (perching in a tree)? Copy the sounds of birds or pretend to be birds and flap your wings!

## Guide to the top 10 garden birds



# Appendix 7

## Springboard box resources


### Springboard Resource Box



This booklet is to help you to get the most out of the items in this box, and to give you some ideas of how to use them with your child.

**Remember everything you learnt on the course!**

### Tales from Acorn Wood Book



**Ideas for Use**

- Read through the story with your child and use the teddy bear toy to act out the characters.
- Use the pictures in the book to make up your own story.
- Let your child guess what might happen on the next page.

**Where to use it?**

- You could use one of the locations from the book to read it in, e.g. under a shady tree, in the kitchen, by a pond.
- Take it with you where you go so that you always have a prompt to use.

### Teddy Bear



**Ideas for Use**

- Talk about teddy's body parts - name them together.
- Can you decide on a name for teddy? Listen to your child's ideas and help them think of a name.
- Provoke that teddy can talk. Can your child talk to teddy? This is great for developing their imagination!
- Talk about how teddy feels. Is he happy? Is he sad? Why? Make up a story with teddy in it.
- What does he feel like? You could use words like soft, fluffy, furry, squishy.

**Where to use it?**

- Anywhere and everywhere!
- Teddy loves meeting new cuddly toys and going to different places.
- You could take teddy to the library to find some books.

### Craft Kit


**Ideas for Use**

- There are lots of different things in the kit for making, drawing, sticking and colouring.
- Your child will have lots of their own ideas so follow their lead and let them use their imagination.
- Show them how to use different things in the kit and then let them try. Talk about what they are doing and follow their lead.
- Talk about different textures... It feels sticky, smooth, etc. What does it look like? Does it smell?

**Where to use it?**

- There is a messy mat so you can use the kit anywhere!
- You could collect things from outside to use with the craft kit (leaves, twigs, grass).
- You could do some junk modelling with boxes!

### Duplo




**Ideas for Use**

- Use the Duplo bricks to explore building different shapes and objects with your child.
- You could talk about the different colours and even see if your child can follow simple directions when playing!
- Duplo also presents a great chance to think about words and phrases like 'on top of' and 'below' with your child.

**Where to use it?**

- Duplo is great to play with at home, as well as there being lots of great language opportunities activities like playing with Duplo can also improve your child's motor skills.

### Play Tea Set




**Ideas for Use**

- You and your child can use the tea set together to do some imaginative play.
- Pretend you are going to have a tea party with boys as guests (you could use the teddy bear as one).
- you could talk about what you might eat or drink, the colours of the plates/cups or how many cups there are.
- This set could also be used with real water/juice to practice pouring and drinking from a cup.

**Where to use it?**

- The tea set can be used in many different settings and come in a handy box so that it can be easily transported and taken with you.
- You could use it in the bath as a fun bath toy to learn colours. Ask the child to find the red cup and saucer when they are all hidden in the bath with them.

### Velcro Food



**Ideas for Use**

- The fruit & veg can be used together with some of the other items such as the teddy bear and the tea set to create a great imaginative play tea party. Use it to talk about the colour and shape of each item.
- The set is great for helping your child's fine motor skills by trying to cut the fruit in half using the wooden knife.
- Your child might want to mirror what you are doing when preparing food, you could explore the language around this.

**Where to use it?**

- This is a great resource to be used in the home environment.
- Could be taken with you to support everyday activities such as shopping - when you pick up a carrot the child could put the carrot in their basket.

### Sensory Selection Pack

**Ideas for Use**

- Encourage your child to explore and discover the different items within your pack.
- Help your child to describe something by using words such as 'shiny' and 'noisy'.
- Take the coloured lenses around your house or outside to see how the difference in environment changes the sensory experience.

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**Where to use it?**

- These can be used in many locations and taken out with you as many of the items are small and your child can hold them easily.

### Playdough Recipe Ingredients & Cutters/Rollers



**Ideas for Use**

- Use the ingredients to make the playdough together with your child.
- Use the language within the instructions to help to show your child what needs to be done.
- Make shapes with the playdough whilst asking your child about what they are making.
- You could then make up stories using the playdough models.

**Where to use it?**

- Once you've made the playdough you can keep it in an airtight container for up to 6 months.
- Take it with you wherever you might want to use it.
- Initially you will have to make the playdough at home.


### Mr Potato Head



**Ideas for Use**

- Use this toy to play with your child, talk to them about different body parts and the names for the clothing Mr Potato head wears.
- Think about introducing basic concepts, different colours.

### Toy Phone



**Ideas for Use**

- This phone makes different noises when you press the buttons. Talk about what each picture means and help your child listen to the noise made for each button.
- Pretend to have a chat on the phone. You could use your mobile phone to show them how to do this (but they probably already know!).

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- Pretend to have a chat on the phone. You could use your mobile phone to show them how to do this (but they probably already know!).
- They might find it hard to pretend to talk to someone who they can't see - ask them who they'd like to talk to.
- Show them how to take a photo with your phone.

**Where to use it?**

- When you're out and about help them pretend to take photos of something they see and like.
- It's great to use at any time and you'll probably find that they won't want to put it down!

### Football




**Ideas for Use**

- Talk to your child about the colours, how it feels, how it moves. Help them say 'ball'.
- What can we do with the ball? Watch your child as they work out what to do with it. They will find lots of ways of using it!
- Show them how to use the ball in different ways and talk about what is happening (The ball is rolling... I can kick the ball... Bounce the ball to me).

**Where to use it?**

- Anywhere and everywhere!
- Help your child play with the ball on their own, with you, and with other children. This will help them learn how to take turns, play with others and share.

### Magnifying Glass & Bug Hunt Sheet



**Ideas for Use**

- Go for a walk outside and take the sheet with you.
- Let your child put a mark in the box with the drywipe pen when they see one of the bugs.
- Ask your child some questions about what you find.
- Use the questions and words on the sheet to help you.
- Try to help your child to describe the bugs using the keywords on the sheet - they are there to help!

**Where to use it?**

- Take it into the garden or an outside area with you. It is waterproof, so you could see if you can find more bugs in the rain than in the dry weather!
- You could go on a 'bug walk' in a local park or forest.

### Outdoor Activity Cards



**Ideas for Use**

- Follow the suggestions on the cards which give you ideas for interacting with your child within the outdoor environment.
- You could choose to do the same one again but approach it in a different way or ask your child how you could do it.
- Be sure to talk to your child throughout the activity to make it a beneficial experience for you both.

**Where to use it?**

- Use these cards in any outside area with the relevant conditions (mud, wind and puddles).
- Take them with you wherever you go, they are a small portable size.

