

Impact of Effective SLCN Intervention Work

Clare Johnstone RCSLT (Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists)

Key points:

This case study illustrates the power and effectiveness of targeted provision to meet SLCN (Speech Language and Communication Needs).

Background

Child A (15 years old) had 20 placements prior to her current placement breaking down the majority of them as a result of challenging behaviour. Child A came into care after disclosing about the abuse she suffered from a family member at a young age. Child A has a history of aggressive behaviour both verbal and physical assault towards adults caring for her, peers and the environment. Child A has been arrested numerous times and when first coming to her current placement needed to attend court cases due to behaviour in last placement and number of police charges which were in double figures. The court saw a change in her behaviour in the short time she was at her current placement and agreed that under our supervision would be kept safe.

Child A came into this placement on a 3:1 staffing ratio due the risk of assaulting staff. She was known to target females with attempts to bully and intimidate them. Child A has learnt a lot of behaviour from family and also from being in the care system for most of her life. We have seen improvements in her behaviour since being with us and staffing levels have reduced to 2:1 and now she is working towards 1:1 support and this is now being trialled just at school.

Child A has made excellent progress and has shown when feeling low that she can communicate her feelings and not target staff with negative behaviour when feeling low. There has been the odd occasion of an outburst but overall she has improved in this area.

Screening and Assessment

When Child A came to her current placement information gathered from paperwork (SEN Statement) stated that there were no obvious difficulties with her ability to communicate but that she would use behaviour to communicate her emotions. Staff observations in relation to her communication skills and difficulty understanding information raised concerns (Staff had received training from a speech and language therapist) Assessment by a speech and language therapist showed that Child A's test results indicate that her overall expressive and receptive language skills were indicative of a borderline mild/moderate delay with her language skills.

Significant difficulty was evident with:

- Receptive language and the ability to retain, process, recall and sequence information that has been presented
- Vocabulary - word knowledge and relationships
- Inference, it was observed that Child A had difficulty with the ability to infer information, following and giving instructions, providing a sequenced order of events in a narrative and understanding of idioms.
- Working memory scores were also within the mild delay range which indicate the impact on Child A's ability to hold onto information long enough to use it. Working memory enables us to keep several pieces of information active whilst using them. Difficulties in this area impact on learning, reasoning, comprehension, memory and social interactions.

Personalised Provision

This information was used to support the staff team with understanding the challenges Child A had in relation to understanding the things that were being said to her and her ability to express herself. It was also used to support her when attending court so that the court was able to see that she had significant unidentified difficulties, shared with her social worker, teachers and shared with the psychologist who was providing therapy for her. The staff team both within the residential placement and school were able to adapt their communication and teaching styles to meet Child A's needs.

Staff were educated in relation to strategies to use such as

- "Think, time rule" from the Communication trust
- Emotion cards to support Child A to reflect on her feelings, to then give them to staff to support their understanding of how she was feeling to then support her with managing the feelings
- Staff using and encouraging a language rich environment focusing on emotional language
- Checking her understanding by asking her to repeat back information
- Chunking of information and visual supports such as time tables.

Child A received 1:1 intervention focusing on understanding of questions, verbal reasoning, emotional vocabulary and a small friendship social skills group.

Child A was also given support to understand her difficulties so that she could then understand that she wasn't "stupid" or "trouble" but that there was a reason for her finding things difficult.

Impact

Recent assessment has indicated an improvement in Child A's assessment scores and she is now placed at borderline average ability. This will have an impact on her education ability, employment opportunities, she now has no criminal record and her overall communication and social skills have improved and she is managing her behaviour better.

Social worker for Child A:

"What I have experienced is Child A's much improved confidence in expressing herself, listening and understanding. This has been an invaluable part of the progress she has made in placement and has allowed her greater opportunities to make meaningful relationships with adults and peers alike currently and in the future."

About Clare Johnstone

"My name is Claire Johnston, I am a Speech and Language therapist and my caseload is predominantly looked after children and young people who have been excluded from mainstream schools or Pupil referral units. Prior to training as a SLT I worked as a health care assistant in a children's hospital mainly working on a CAMH's unit and whilst studying I worked as a carer in residential children's homes.

I work in an independent SEN secondary school and residential children's homes in Birmingham. The age range of my caseload is 11 to 18 years old at the moment. We have referrals from all over the country for the residential provision and a variety of local authorities refer to the school we work with some of the most challenging young people in the country. The young people have a variety of diagnosis such as:

- Autism
 - Attachment disorder
 - Mental Health difficulties
 - Learning difficulties
 - Self-harm
-

- Ligature tying
- Extreme challenging behaviours
- PTSD, Anxiety (the list goes on).

They have often experienced extreme physical and sexual abuse and at risk of or been a victim of C.S.E

Most of the young people placed with us in the residential provision have experienced multiple placement break downs, often having been placed in 10 or more placements prior to us. They may be on the edge of going to a secure unit or they are leaving a secure unit and most have had contact with the police either due to behaviour in the community, damaging property, physical abuse / assault to staff or family. “

Claire Johnston
Speech and Language Therapist
MRCSLT, RegHCPC

Thoughts of Others Ltd

Email: cjohnston4slt@gmail.com
