

MILTON KEYNES Youth Offending Team

Interview with Diz Minnitt

Key points:

- **Understanding a young person's communication problems is often the gateway to understanding which factors are at play, and thus influence the support required to secure better outcomes**
- **Due to the statistical prevalence of complex needs that impact on young people in the youth justice system, Diz advocates “screening out” rather than “screening in”**
- **The Communication Trust YOT training resource “Sentence Trouble” is still an excellent “go to” resource for help, advice and strategies to improve practice**
- **“Engagement” is still the essential first step in order to secure better outcomes- staff need to be empathetic, emotionally aware and skilled in reaching out to build positive relationships**
- **Significant concerns regarding what is happening “down the tributaries”. Are schools becoming less inclusive? Why are more primary and KS3 children and young people being permanently excluded from mainstream schools and academies? Is “alternative provision” any more effective than mainstream school in identifying the *reasons* for poor behaviour?**

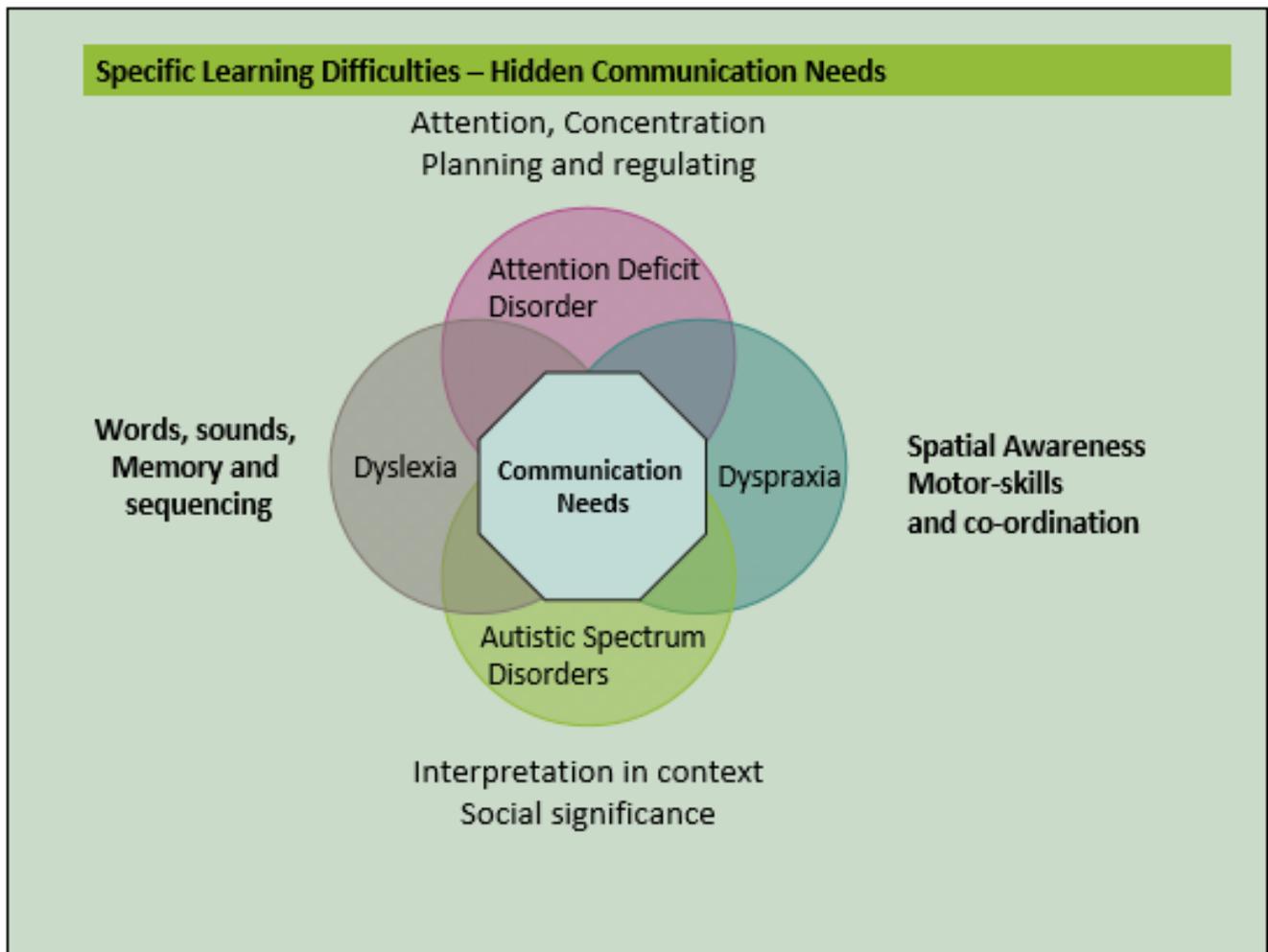
Diz is a tireless campaigner on the issue of meeting the speech language and communication needs of young people in the youth justice system. He has worked with practice managers, politicians and national communication charities to develop awareness, strategies and professional development resources.

Milton Keynes YOT reoffending rates are amongst the lowest in the country.

“Understanding a young person's communication problems is often the gateway to understanding which factors are at play, and thus influence the support required to secure better outcomes” says Diz.

The role of a Speech and Language Therapist is vital in the youth offending team’s staffing model and practice... and Diz feels this should be the case in every YOT across the country!

“The ‘Crystal model’ is a case in point”, says Diz, who has worked with Communication Trust during the development of a resource to help support professionals working with young people in the Youth Justice System. “Using Speech and Language Therapists to probe communication needs can be a window to uncovering the sometimes complex and multifaceted underlying issues that are the major barriers to securing better outcomes.”



Slide taken from "Sentence Trouble" training, showing how communication needs are an emergent property from a range of disabling conditions, alone, in combination and to varying degrees (see below for links to online resources and training programme)

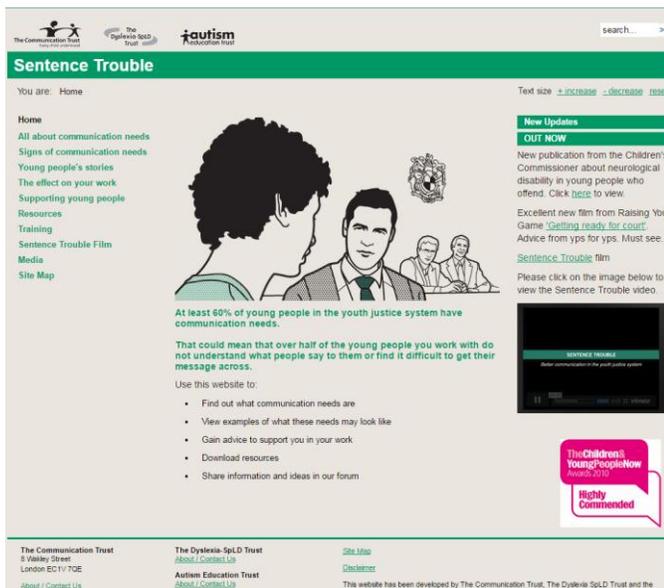
It is incredibly rare to have a clearcut "one problem" issue to address: many many young people seen by the YOT have a degree of comorbidity (e.g. ADHD, Dyslexia, Aspergers, by degree and in combination). It is therefore vital to focus on personalised provision rather than simple or routine therapies. An approach like this also reduces the possibility of a young person being "labelled" or stigmatised by a particular condition.

Diz Minnitt also advocates "screening out" rather than "screening in": it is statistically likely that a YP entering the youth justice system has some kind of special educational need; this should be the starting point; it is statistically likely that the social context of the YP is one of vulnerability and disadvantage (surely this should be a local safeguarding alert... especially if the young person is looked after)

Diz Engagement is the first step to securing better outcomes (dependent on the intuitive, "emotional intelligence" skills of the practitioner as much as training and experience).

Finally, Diz raised significant concerns about what is happening "down the tributaries", noting the increasing numbers of young people, even of primary age, who are afflicted by "structural (socialised) disadvantage", who also have undiagnosed special educational needs which (in combination) are leading to exclusion. "What is happening in primary schools around working out the *reasons* for poor behaviour? How skilled are schools not only in behaviour *management*, but *understanding* why there is poor behaviour, then addressing the root problem? Why are children and young people being excluded from mainstream academies and schools? How effective are PRUs and Alternative Provision in identifying issues, reversing trends, meeting the needs of vulnerable children?" Good questions Diz!

Click on this image to link to the Communication Trust resource "Sentence Trouble".



<http://www.sentencetrouble.info/>

Contact Details

Diz Minnitt

Operational Manager, Milton Keynes Youth Offending Team
 Children and Families
 Milton Keynes Council
 Manor Road Centre , Oakwood Drive , Bletchley
 Milton Keynes MK2 2JG

Telephone: 01908 254645
Email: Diz.Minnitt@Milton-keynes.gov.uk
