Case study: Every Sheffield Child Articulate and Literate

Every Sheffield Child Articulate and Literate (ESCAL) is a community-wide strategy to deliver development of communication skills from 0-19 years. It works with a range of partners to raise awareness and to help identify and support children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). The team is made up of six professionals and, since ESCAL began in 2009, the team has shown continuous commitment to embedding a coherent communication strategy. In 2011, it won the ‘Communication Strategy’ Award at the Shine a Light Awards, and this year has won this category a second time, as well as being named ‘Team of the Year’.

The strength of the ESCAL team lies in its ability to work with a range of partners, including the City Council, Speech and Language Services, the NHS, Ethnic Minority Traveller Achievement Service, Learning Support and Inclusion Services, the voluntary and community sector, schools, early years’ providers, parents/carers and the fostering and adoption services.

This enabled it to embed the ESCAL speech and language tracker in early years’ settings, primary schools and now secondary schools, as well as in services such as youth, family support, health and fostering. It has also identified gaps in service delivery, and found creative ways to work in partnership to make SLCN a priority. The ESCAL team has also offered a training package to multi-agency teams, early years’ providers and schools to help universal provision, identification and support of children and young people with SLCN.

Successes of the ESCAL team include:

- 20 Talk Volunteers recruited and trained to work with children on a 1:1 basis
- 30 Communication Ambassadors recruited in partnership with national children’s charity I CAN to distribute resources resulting in better awareness of language development in 434 families in just 3 months
- 600 early years’ practitioners receiving training on early attachment and language development and now using the ESCAL tracker to identify children with SLCN
- 12 primary schools have gained the Communication Friendly School’s (CFS) Quality Mark and another 15 schools are working towards it.

The ESCAL Family Time Campaign has helped hundreds of families to receive key messages about children’s language development. This included:

- Top Tips for New Parents posters reaching 6,500 families
- 740 families accessing activities during August and receiving information
- 39,000 children receiving a Talk Activities poster in July
- 11,000 households reached via an awareness-raising article in targeted areas via community magazines and newspapers.
In both awards, judges praised its reach to diverse settings and the excellent evidenced-based impact it was able to document. The team was able to approach hard-to-reach families using a marketing campaign, which took the information to places where the families might go, like council sports venues. The team has also made great efforts to work with ethnic minorities and children who speak English as an additional language to make sure their speech, language and communication skills are being developed.

The *Shine a Light* judges also praised ESCAL because its speech and language strategy is one of the council’s key campaigns and is now linked to Sheffield’s corporate plans for 2011-14. But most importantly, the programmes are popular with people in Sheffield, with 75% of primary schools and 74 early years providers signing up to ESCAL, and 308 families signing up to the Family award, which encourages talking in the home.