

Case study: Children's Commissioning Team, Reading

Reading Borough Council's Children's Commissioning Team is a social care commissioning body. In response to the growing numbers of children with SLCN, the team worked with Education & Extended Services to jointly commission speech and language provision for 0-5 year olds. Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust played a joint role in creating, developing and refining the service.



The team performed a needs-analysis for 0-5 year olds in January 2011, and revealed a need for a universal speech and language therapy (SLT) provision, which would have impact and provide preventative strategies and interventions, while facilitating wide-scale identification of children with SLCN.

The three partners had designated roles – the team used their research to define the mixtures of support types which could be implemented and cohort-based interventions (rather than one-to-one work); the education team developed joint working requirements among providers such as Children's Centres and childcare settings and arranged the wide-spread roll out of the ECAT monitoring tool, while the health team assisted with the roll out, defined the universal interventions and developed staffing arrangements to support all settings.

They were praised by judges because they were able to prove the impact of their interventions, which are based on evidence and recommendations from policy. They had set themselves a target of reducing the number of children identified as being at-risk of a language delay by 20%, but in 2011-12, they were able to reduce this figure by 43%.

Judges also complimented the team on their clarity around how the needs of children with speech and language difficulties were identified. The team works jointly with the Education and Extended Services at the council and with Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust to achieve this. Joint commissioning is believed to be the best way to offer children's speech, language and communication services, as recommended by Communication Champion for children Jean Gross in her *Two Years On* report released in January 2012, to prevent children slipping into the administrative gaps between education and health departments.

The team were also able to demonstrate some impressive results. Reading Borough Council has also created Young Commissioners, a group of young people who volunteer their time to assist with commissioning activities. Their involvement has included working with parents, particularly young parents, to gather feedback on service provision, offering guidance to the SLT service on improvement, performing site visits to education and care providers, and reporting recommendations to lead commissioners. Through this work, the young people have acquired their Youth Achievement Awards and have been nominated for *Children and Young People Now's* National Youth Volunteering Award.

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