



Press Release

For immediate release (18.10.2011)

40 STRONG COALITION DEMONSTRATES BENEFITS OF UNITING TO SAY HELLO

Sarah Teather, Minister of State for Children and Families, joins The Communication Trust's parliamentary event to celebrate anniversary of national year of communication launch

The Communication Trust, a 40-strong coalition of voluntary and community sector organisations with expertise in children's speech, language and communication, has today (19th October 2011) marked 'one year on' since the launch of the *Hello* campaign (national year of communication) at a celebration event at the House of Commons, London.

Over 200 *Hello* supporters, including sponsors BT and Pearson Assessment, gathered with MPs and Ministers at The Communication Trust event – sponsored by Annette Brooke MP - to celebrate the achievements of the national year to date and to unite efforts to ensure that children and young people's communication development remains a national priority.

Attendees were praised for their efforts in raising the profile of *Hello* – a campaign, run in partnership with Communication Champion, Jean Gross, to make children and young people's communication development a priority in homes and schools across the country. A particular emphasis has been on creating tangible improvements for the 1 million children and young people living in the UK today with some form of speech, language and communication need (SLCN) that can affect them early, severely and for life.

Highlights at the event included a speech from 18-year old, Ben Morfey, a remarkable young man who uses alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) to express himself. Ben, who attends the *Dame Hannah Rogers School* for children with physical and learning disability, used his cheek to activate his electronic voice output communication aid (VOCA), which allows him to communicate his thoughts. Ben has quadriplegic cerebral palsy (affecting four limbs), dystonia and a moderate learning disability. Ben's speech was timely as the *Hello* theme for October is 'Not just Words' coinciding with International AAC month.

Bronwen Hewitt, Chief Executive of the Dame Hannah Rogers Trust, said; "We are all incredibly proud of Ben and honoured The Communication Trust has recognised him to support them at that notable event. Ben has mastered his communication and just by clicking a button with his cheek he is able to develop sentences, send text messages and tell jokes! Ben is testament to our mission at Hannahs of empowering, advocating and enriching the lives of people with disabilities."

Anita Kerwin-Nye, Director of The Communication Trust, said; "Today, we are one year on since the launch of the *Hello* campaign, which built directly on John Bercow's landmark review. We have worked with voluntary, corporate and public sector bodies to improve understanding of what 'typical' communication

development looks like, how to identify if children are struggling and where to turn for help and support. So far, this collaboration has produced fantastic results. 300,000 resources have been distributed, a new 'good communication' best practice awards scheme has been developed and over 200 *Hello* co-ordinators are supporting the campaign locally.

"We also have a new City & Guilds Level 3 Award in place enabling the current and future children's workforce to support the speech, language and communication development of all our children. The focus of *Hello* is now centred on the legacy programme into 2012. We are continuing our work around multi-agency commissioning and supporting strategic planning between primary care trusts and local authorities. It is vital that this work is not lost as we go into a phase of public service restructuring.

"On behalf of everyone involved in *Hello*, heartfelt thanks go to our Communication Champion, Jean Gross, who has worked tirelessly to support the national year and to directly influence changes in policy and local practice. We are hugely grateful to our sponsors, BT and Pearson Assessment, for their long standing commitment to this area and for working with us to develop a portfolio of resources and initiatives that will exist for many years to come. Finally, our on-going appreciation goes to the Minister, Sarah Teather for her commitment to improve services for children and young people with SLCN. *Hello* embodies in practice the success that comes with The Communication Trust's effective model of third sector collaboration."

Jean Gross, Communication Champion, said; "*Hello*, the national year of communication, seeks to make children's language development everybody's business. I feel we are really beginning to achieve this when I hear about the range of people getting involved. Two recent examples to highlight are the North Yorkshire school meals service, where staff have been using signs, symbols and pictures to help them communicate with the children and the Hertfordshire's school travel service. They are running a Buggy Buddies scheme in 'walk to school week' that involves parents and children in fun talking and listening activities. Everyone from schools and nurseries to museum services, midwives and Mayors are coming on board with the *Hello* campaign.

"It is starting to become much more widely known that children's communication is the core life skill for success at school and future wellbeing. This is new, and will be key to improving outcomes for children and young people in the future. The parliamentary reception has been an important opportunity to acknowledge the vital work of The Communication Trust – representing 40 organisations that lead in the field of children's speech, language and communication. The Trust's leadership of *Hello*, and the enthusiasm, creativity and tenacity of our local *Hello* champions has been incredible. In the coming months, I look forward to working with The Communication Trust on embedding the success and learning from *Hello* into future work plans."

In addition to Ben, other speeches were given by Children and Families Minister, Sarah Teather; Annette Brooke MP, Jean Gross; the Government's Communication Champion for children and Gillian Gaskell – Speech and Language Therapist at Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Trust and *Hello* local co-ordinator.

Communication is a skill that anyone can learn and improve. It underpins everything we do in life. However, for some children, their daily struggle to communicate means they are shut out of life. *Hello* aims to help thousands of children and young people across the UK to improve their communication skills so they can live life to the full. Please visit www.hello.org.uk for further information.

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Notes to Editors

- *Hello* is the national year of communication – a campaign to increase understanding of how important it is for children and young people to develop good communication skills.
- The campaign is run by The Communication Trust, a coalition of 40 leading voluntary sector organisations; in partnership with Jean Gross, the Government’s Communication Champion. Together we aim to make 2011 the year when children’s communication skills become a priority in schools and homes across the country.
- The campaign is supported by BT and Pearson Assessment and is backed by the Department for Education and Department for Health. Please visit www.hello.org.uk for further information or to sign up for regular updates.
- The national year was originally proposed by John Bercow MP – now Speaker of the House of Commons – in his July 2008 Review of Services for Children and Young People (0-19) with Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN).
- The Communication Trust raises awareness of speech, language and communication issues amongst everyone that works with children and young people. It was founded by Afasic, BT, Council for Disabled Children and I CAN. For more information, visit www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk