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Voluntary sector coalition responds to Early Language Development Programme announcement

The Communication Trust, a 40-strong coalition of voluntary organisations with expertise in speech, language and communication, today welcomed the announcement that I CAN will be leading the **Early Language Development Programme (ELDP)** contract along with several other Trust members. However, it suggested the programme needed to go further to ensure all children's needs were being met.

ELDP is a three-year Department for Education funded programme to support the foundation of good communication development in young children. It is focusing on developing the speech, language and communication skills of pre-school children through partnerships with children centres. It was one of several contracts awarded following the SEN Green Paper.

The Communication Trust, which is this year leading the *Hello* campaign (national year of communication), has campaigned for continued investment in early language support following the *Every Child A Talker programme* (ECAT). ECAT successes included ensuring children reached the best possible language levels before they started school and identifying children with potential difficulties at a much earlier age. The ELDP investment is building on this work on very early language with a particular focus on under-3s.

Anita Kerwin-Nye, Director of The Communication Trust, said: "This important piece of work, led by the voluntary sector, shows real commitment to meeting the speech, language and communication needs of children early on. It also builds directly on the successes of ECAT providing support for local staff and adds to the momentum of the *Hello* campaign.

"With more than 50% of children in some areas arriving at school with significant language delay, further investment in early language will help to address a significant growing public health issue. Early language is one of the biggest predictors of future earnings and this programme is starting to address the challenges outlined in Graham Allen MP and Frank Field MP's recent reviews.

"The ELDP model, developed by I CAN, works through children's centres and we hope it will provide a launch pad for professionals to build on their learning and work towards the City and Guilds Award in Supporting Children and Young People's Speech Language and Communication developed by The Communication Trust, in partnership with City & Guilds. We also want to see the ELDP working with local authority early years teams and those working directly with parents.

Kerwin-Nye continues; “It is vital that the ELDP is not seen as a replacement for an area-wide strategic approach to commissioning services for all pre-school children. We know there is currently a shortage of speech and language therapists and other expert staff yet these professionals are crucial if we are to respond to the needs of children and families identified through the ELDP.

“The Communication Trust is also calling on Government to develop standards and guidance for Health and Wellbeing Boards on the characteristics of an effective speech, language and communication strategy. Some excellent models of provision supporting speech and language exist already and we look forward to highlighting these at our *Shine a Light Good Communication* awards on November 23rd.”

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For more information or to speak to Anita Kerwin-Nye, please contact Lynne Milford, Press Officer, on 020 7843 2564 or email lmilford@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk

Notes for editors

- The Early Language Development Programme is a three-year Department for Education funded programme to support the foundation of good communication development in young children. The members of The Communication Trust involved are I CAN, Children’s Society, Action for Children and Elklan.
- 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 (CDC) and children’s communication charity I CAN.
- It is a coalition of 40 leading voluntary sector organisations and an advisory group which includes the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, Association of Educational Psychologists and the General Teaching Council.
- *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, 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.