

TITLE OF REPORT:	Youth Justice Service – Speech, Language and Communication Needs
REPORT OF:	Strategic Director, Children’s Social Care & Lifelong Learning

Summary

To provide an update on the impact of Speech, Language and Communication Needs for young people involved with Gateshead Youth Justice Service.

1.Introduction

All young people involved with Gateshead Youth Justice Service undergo a robust assessment of need.

The assessment considers the young person’s individual needs, this includes Speech Language and Communication. This report considers the high levels of SLCN in young people open to Youth Justice Services and how this is being addressed in Gateshead.

2.Background / Context

There is not a common definition for Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN). SLCN can be a ‘hidden disability’ because it is often not visible or obvious and young people can become adept at hiding the true nature of their difficulties. Young people with SLCN can often come across as “intelligent and articulate”, which can make needs harder to identify.

The bullet points below highlight the different elements of speech language and communication.

Speech refers to:

- Saying sounds accurately and in the right places in words
- The sounds people make to communicate words
- Speaking fluently, without hesitating, or prolonging and repeating words
- Speaking with expression with a clear voice, using pitch, volume and intonation to support meaning

Language refers to:

- Speaking and understanding
- Using words to build up sentences, sentences to build up conversation and longer stretches of broken language
- Understanding and making sense of what people say

Communication refers to:

- How we interact with others
- Language is used to represent concepts and thoughts
- Using language in different ways to question, clarify, describe
- Non-verbal rules of communication, good listening, looking at people

3. What is the impact of speech, language and communication difficulties?

Young people with SLCN have difficulty communicating with others. This may be because they cannot say what they want to, have difficulty in understanding what is being said to them or do not understand the social rules of communication. By the time young people enter the youth justice system, many of those with SLCN will have developed coping strategies to mask the impact of the SLCN. This might include:

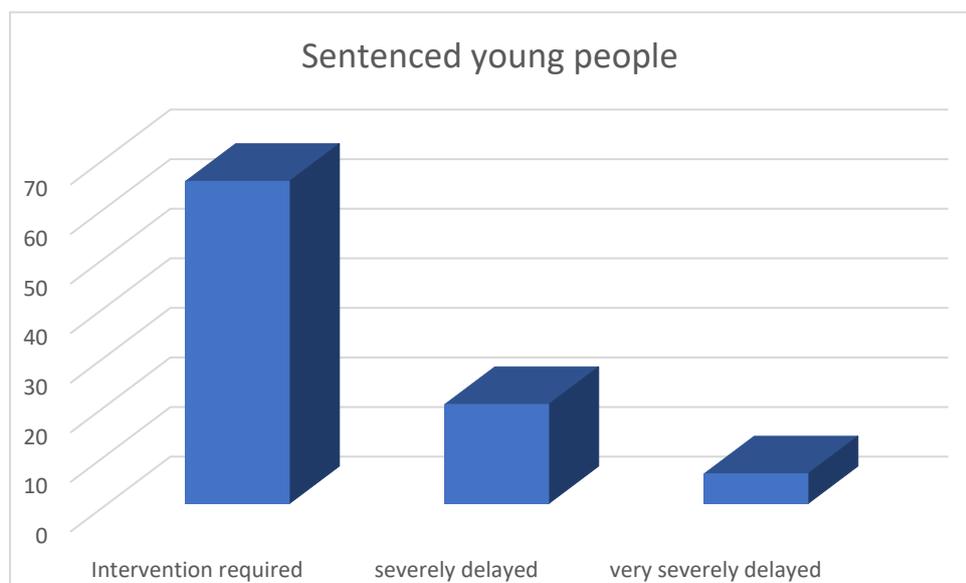
- having a good level of surface conversation which they cannot maintain when conversations develop
- being very quiet and seemingly compliant
- using aggression to deflect hard conversations/to avoid having to admit that they don't understand
- being disruptive and having difficulty engaging
- indicating they understand, when they do not
- saying they understand when they do not

The 2015 Communication Trust report 'Doing Justice to Speech Language and Communication' found young people with SLCN who enter the criminal justice system may not understand their sentence and its requirements. The Youth Justice system uses technical language and many young people do not understand commonly used words such as breach, condition and remorse. Many young people struggle with the concept of time, which has an implication if they fail to attend appointments and breach their sentence. Over 60% of young people who are accessing youth justice services present with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) which are largely unrecognised. The research shows that people with SLCN are overrepresented in the justice system and if these problems are not addressed early on then these will significantly impact upon their functioning.

AssetPlus is the Youth Justice Boards assessment tool which is used for all young people subject to a court order, it incorporates elements of the The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists SLCN screening tool with additional neuro-disability

questions. Clear Cut Communications is a organisation in Durham that specialises in SLCN for young people in the Criminal Justice System, they have produced a AssetPlus Screening Support Pack. Gateshead Youth Justice Service has worked with this screening tool for a number of years and has recommissioned the training for new staff and as a refresher for other staff. The screening support pack is an interactive resource that has the screening questions rewritten into questions which the young person can understand. The screening tool can be completed in relation to all young people and can be conducted by practitioners or non-specialist health staff. Judgements are made based on observations of the young person and information provided by primary carers or teachers. Following the screen, young people may need to be referred onto speech and language therapy for a full assessment to determine the extent of their needs.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists worked with a Youth Offending Service and they screened all young people subject to the most intensive community sentence. They found 65% of the young people required speech and language therapy intervention. A significant number (20%) scored at the 'severely delayed' level on standardised assessment and 6% as 'very severely delayed'. (Gregory, Bryan, 2009).

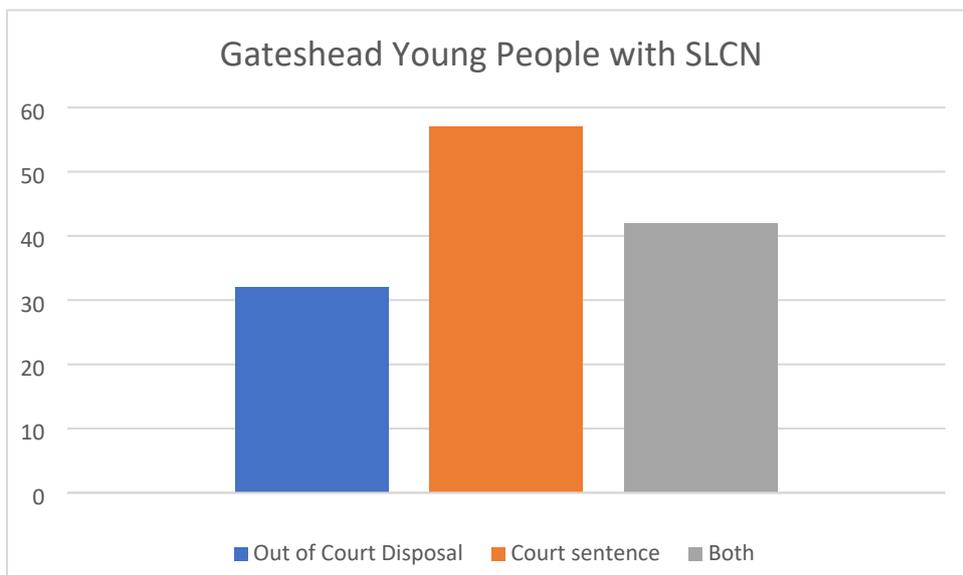


A study of young people in a Secure Training Centre were screened for speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). Only two of the participants had previously been identified with SLCN. Of those screened 72% were found to require any additional support and 14.4% were identified for 1:1 speech and language therapy intervention. (Bryan, Garvani, Gregory, & Kilner, 2015)

A further research project at a Young Offender Institution found 67% could be classified as having a developmental language disorder. (Turner, 2017)



In the current cohort of young people open to Gateshead Youth Justice Service 42% had been identified as having a Speech, Language or Communication difficulty. There are two routes into the Youth Justice Service, the first is via police for an Out of Court Disposal and the second through being sentenced at court. Young people in the Out of Court Disposal cohort tend to be young people who have committed less serious offences and are not prolific offenders. Young people sentenced through the court tend to be young people who are already been dealt with by an Out of Court disposal but who have continued to offend or have committed offences that are so serious they cannot be dealt with in an alternative way. In the Out of Court disposal cohort 32% of young people had a SLCN and in the cohort of young people who received a court order 57% of young people had an identified SLCN need.



4. Working with young people with SLCN

It is essential that young people subject to statutory interventions fully understand the requirements and expectation placed upon them. Young people are required to provide information about their offending behaviour and peer and family relationships. Identifying where a young person has SLCN may increase the likelihood of a young person successfully completing requirements placed on them. The Bercow report described difficulties in responding to interventions as being “sufficient to affect their ability to communicate with staff on a day-to-day basis, to prevent them from benefiting from verbally mediated interventions such as education and offender behaviour work and, if not addressed, to contribute to reoffending” (Bercow, 2008:41). The report ‘Children and Young People in Breach’ (Hart, 2010) suggests there is evidence that children and young people who have been subject to enforcement procedures may have struggled to comply because of a lack of comprehension about expectations.

Youth Justice Case Managers ensure the language used with young people at all times is appropriate to their need and development, particular attention should be given to the stages where key information is exchanged:

- at the police station (if undertaking an appropriate adult role)
- while completing an assessment of need, risk or vulnerability
- during the court process
- while explaining the requirements or conditions of an intervention
- when considering issues of non-compliance

The Communication Trust guide ‘Sentence Trouble’ (Communication Trust, 2009) suggests that workers delivering youth justice services can positively interact with a young person with speech and language difficulties by:

- giving the young person extra time to listen to and understand what is being said
- asking what would assist them in promoting their understanding
- emphasising specific words that they should focus on
- ensuring that the young person gives their own explanation of what has been said to verify whether they fully understand what is expected from them
- giving the young person reminders of any future appointments
- flagging anything the young person has said which the staff member does not understand
- providing the young person with a brief overview before providing them with a more in-depth explanation
- providing them with a wide variety of activities to encourage their engagement
- providing them with positive encouragement and feedback
- simplifying written materials using clear writing and understandable terminology

- using short sentences with appropriate pauses to allow them to process new information
- using uncomplicated language that the young person is familiar with
- using visual tools to encourage their understanding

5. Gateshead Youth Justice Service – Summary

Gateshead Youth Justice Service provides a Court Officer to all Magistrate and Crown Court hearings. In line with the Youth Justice Board guidance: Work in court, we ensure that young people understand the requirements of their court order, ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in court, and make sure that they receive the support they need to understand and engage in the court processes.

All young people are assessed for SLCN using a screening tool

Young people's needs are taken into account when planning interventions to address their offending behaviour

Young people are supported in the police station

Gateshead Youth Justice Service is working with Clear Cut Communications to ensure all staff are confident in using the screening tool and signposting where appropriate.

6. Recommendations:

The Committee is asked to:

- (i) Note and comment on the contents of this report.
- (ii) Identify any areas of work which the committee would be interested in receiving updates about.

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