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Glossary of Abbreviations

CCC	Cork City Childcare Company Limited
CCP	Cork City Partnership Limited
CELF Preschool 2 (UK)	Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals 2 (UK)
DEAP	Diagnostic Evaluation of Articulation and Phonology
ED	Electoral Division
EDI	Early Development Instrument
ETB	Education and Training Board ¹
GELI	Greenmount Early Learning Initiative
HSE	Health Service Executive
LA	Local Authority
M & E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NEYAI	National Early Years Access Initiative
OMYC	Office for the Minister for Young People and Children
PHN	Public Health Nurse
RAPID	Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SENO	Special Educational Needs Officer
SLI	Specific Language Impairment
SLCN	Speech, Language and Communication Need
SLT	Speech and Language Therapist
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
UCC	University College Cork
UK	United Kingdom
VEC	Vocational Education Committee

¹ Formed from the aggregation of Ireland's 33 VECs (abolished on July 1st) and the integration of the 16 FÁS Training Centres (on-going to June 2014), will be the vehicles for the delivery of coordinated education and training programmes across Ireland for decades to come.

1 The Happy Talk Model

Happy Talk is an innovative Project designed to improve the language and learning skills of children aged 0-6 in the Glen and Mayfield in Cork City. The Project aims to show how the Glen/Mayfield community, and the many agencies working with children and families in the area, can effectively join together their expertise (based on their previous work together) and resources to make a real difference to children's language, learning and lives.

Figure 1 - The Happy Talk Model



The Happy Talk Model can be visualised as a journey being taken by parents and children. The Project provides assessment and referrals by qualified Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs). The core elements of the Project are training, coaching and speech and language resources. All of this is nurtured through building positive relationships and working in partnership to create a language rich environment. As the children move along their journeys from home to crèche, preschool and into primary school, Happy Talk supports work towards improvements in language and learning.

1.1 Assessment and Referral

The first step of the Happy Talk journey is the assessment process. The Happy Talk Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) carried out pre-and post-intervention assessments in the junior infant classes (years one and two) and in the participating preschools (year one). The assessments provided an insight into the prevalence levels of

speech and language delays and difficulties in the area, and highlighted the specific clinical areas of concern². The team then customised the interventions based on this information.

As well as providing the core information for planning the Happy Talk work, the assessments are also a critical tool for monitoring the Project and supporting the formative evaluation, which underpins the work³. Finally, the assessments have provided an opportunity for the team to identify and refer children into alternative and complementary services including the mainstream HSE Speech and Language Service, Special Educational Needs Officer (SENO), Occupational Therapy (OT) or psychological services.

1.2 Coaching

Coaching and training is at the core of the Happy Talk model. Happy Talk is based on the hypothesis that coaching staff and parents from crèche and preschool to junior infants in primary school would have an impact on the overall language and learning outcomes for children.

The process generally begins with a parents' session, where parents are guided through language development activities. The parents are encouraged to engage proactively in the session by making resources, such as a rhyming dice or characters such as finger puppets for interactive storytelling. The parents then enter the classroom with the SLT



and participate in the session with the SLT leading, supported by the teaching staff. Coaching sessions generally include language development activities for parents and children in the classroom and feedback with parents and staff. The sessions involve learning strategies to encourage oral language skills such as:

waiting; balancing questions and comments; modelling language; and expanding on the child's language. The speech and language therapists are responsible for coaching the staff and parents and ensuring they practice these strategies.

This coaching technique was customised and used in the crèche, preschool and primary school settings, using age appropriate resources.

1.3 Training

Training is a critical element of Happy Talk. In the first two years of the Project, training was provided to parents as well as crèche and preschool workers and junior infant teachers. The training was provided in support of the overall programme or using other recognised programmes such as Elklan or Hanen. Other training initiatives included Traveller awareness training, infant mental health training, PEEP training for VEC adult literacy tutors, as well as directed workshops for upcoming teachers and childcare professionals in colleges of further education and university.

² Details of prevalence rates from other studies can be found in Appendix A1 of this report.

³ The logic models underpinning the evaluation of Happy Talk can be found in Appendix A2 of this report.

1.3 Language Rich Environment

Happy Talk realises the importance of sharing the message about the significance of early language development as widely as possible. Embedding the project in a community based organisation like Cork City Partnership and the active involvement of other key agencies working in the community has resulted in good synergies in this area. There are a number of key initiatives being undertaken by the Happy Talk team, such as encouraging greater appreciation and use of books. This has been done through the book area audit in the preschool settings, the Borrow-a-Book scheme and the development of localised story books based on the Nibbles and Twitch characters which are used in the coaching sessions. Other initiatives to support a language rich environment include the PEEP programme and Public Relations. Further details will be provided later in the report.

2 Project Highlights

Happy Talk has a number of objectives, which underpin the core aim of improving language and learning outcomes for children. Speech and language therapists work within early years and school settings providing coaching to childcare staff, teachers, resource and learning support teachers and special needs assistants in schools.

This work was coupled with skills development work with parents to build an awareness of the importance of early language development and to impart the skills required to support children's learning in this area. Some of the key Project highlights to date are presented in the box below.

Measurable gains in language development in target children (see assessment results).

450 children engaged with Happy Talk each year

100 staff engaged with Happy Talk each year

24 parents and/or carers attended Happy Talk coaching sessions in Junior Infants 2011/12

93 parents and/or carers attended Happy Talk coaching sessions in Junior Infants 2012/13

123 parents and/or carers attended the first Happy Talk programme offered in preschools (2011/12 & 2012/13)

129 parents and/or carers attended the second Happy Talk programme offered in preschools (2012/13)

56 babies and their families met Happy Talk speech and language therapists at their Happy Talk Baby Clinic since October 2012

2.1 Clinical Assessments

Happy Talk has been established as a demonstration Project, and is part of the National Early Years Access Initiative (NEYAI). The Working Group and Consortium were committed to carrying out a robust evaluation of the Project to show measurable gains and impacts where possible. Coupled with this, Happy Talk is committed to being evidence based and customised in nature. The assessment process undertaken enabled the team to plan programmes, which were focused specifically on the issues emerging from the assessments.

Standardised speech and language assessments were carried out on a random sample of children to identify areas of difficulty at the beginning of the year. These then fed into the focus of the programme delivered by the Happy Talk team. A range of standardised clinical tools were used including the CELF Preschool 2 (UK) Subtests, Renfrew Language Scales Bus Story Test and the Diagnostic Evaluation of Articulation and Phonology (DEAP). Details of the tests used and the sampling methodology can be found in appendix A3 and A6 of this report.

2.1.1 Measurable Gains in Language Development

Improved language and learning is at the core of the Happy Talk Project, and it is in this area where significant gains can be seen. Post-intervention assessment figures show a

14.6% improvement in language skills of children in junior infants in year one and a 17.7% improvement in year two.

The assessment process undertaken by Happy Talk has produced significant indirect benefits through an increase in the number of referrals and external supports elicited. The baseline position in the junior infant classes in September 2011 was that 3 children were assessed by speech and language services and 11 by the Early Intervention services of the HSE.

Since then, 28 additional children have been referred to HSE Speech and Language therapy services and 23 have been referred to a Department of Education and Skills Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO). 2 preschool children were referred to the HSE Early Intervention Team for assessment of need with parental consent.

Between September 2012 and May 2013, 3 children were referred to a private occupational therapist and 10 were referred for private psychological assessment.

Ciara – A Case Study

Ciara was in preschool, aged 4:03, when she first came to the attention of the Happy Talk Speech and Language Therapist (SLT). Ciara and her mother took part in the Happy Talk Preschool Programme. Ciara's mother approached the Happy Talk SLT and expressed her concern regarding Ciara's behaviour as well as her general development. The Happy Talk SLT consulted with the HSE SLT, who had already assessed Ciara's speech and language and following this, the decision was made to refer Ciara to the Early Intervention Service. The Happy Talk SLT met with Ciara's mother to support her in completing the forms for the Early Intervention Forum, and submitted these to the forum, along with an observation form from the preschool. The HSE SLT provided a Speech and Language Therapy Report to support this process.

Following this the Happy Talk SLT developed a social story about bedtime with Ciara. This social story helped Ciara learn some of the language around the theme of bedtime and helped her mother to encourage a routine at bedtime, in order to reduce some of the challenging behaviour demonstrated by Ciara. The Early Intervention Forum referred Ciara for further medical assessment to determine the cause of her difficulties.

In September when Ciara started in junior infants the Happy Talk SLT assessed her as part of the Happy Talk random sample. Her results continued to indicate significant difficulties in the area of language development. Following this, Happy Talk funded a psychological assessment of Ciara and her school funded an Occupational Therapy assessment. As a result of these assessments, and the SLT assessment carried out as part of Happy Talk, an application was made to the SENO, and resource hours were secured for Ciara. At this time also the Happy Talk SLT accompanied Ciara's mother to a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) drop-in service, to seek advice and support regarding Ciara's challenging behaviour.

2.2 Coaching

Happy Talk was developed in the Glen and Mayfield because stakeholders working in the city had identified significant issues in relation to speech and language delays. The Glen Early Language and Learning Pilot Project found that over 40% of children in St. Mark's and St. Brendan's National Schools had language difficulties. There is a significant body of international evidence, which demonstrates the importance of early intervention in literacy and language. Literacy and language skills form the basis for all future learning. Without these skills all



children fall behind; poor literacy affects every aspect of their life academically and their future employment opportunities. Early literacy is a predictor of future academic skills. The National Adult Literacy Survey in America found that children who have not already developed some basic literacy practices when they enter school are four times more likely to drop out in later years⁴. Poor language and literacy are indicators of poor personal and societal outcomes, such as antisocial behaviour^{5,6}, substance misuse⁷, low lifetime earnings⁸ and criminality and incarceration⁹.

Happy Talk works with the 5 primary schools in the area, as well as 6 crèches and 14 preschools to support language development. The Happy Talk coaching programmes are based on the building blocks of oral language development; attention and listening, play, understanding and finally talking.

Figure 2 – Oral Language Building Blocks



Coaching in this context works by identifying key problem areas, developing resources and activities to work on these issues and then working on implementing strategies with the parents and teachers in the classroom or setting with the children. These strategies include balancing questions with comments and modelling and expanding language. Common elements are used in all settings

and include listening rules, rhyme and phonological awareness. However resources and techniques are customised to be age appropriate.

Happy Talk worked extensively with the six crèches in the area in 2012/2013, focusing on workshops for staff and parents as well as direct coaching sessions with workers and children. The workshops with staff focused on strategies for language development including modelling, expanding, balancing questions with comments, waiting and taking turns. Parents sessions reinforced these messages and informed parents about the strategies which the crèche staff would be using with their children.



⁴ National Assessment of Adult Literacy (1993) *National Adult Literacy Survey*. Washington, D.C.

⁵ Rutter, M., Cox, A., Tupling, C., Berger, M. and Yule, W. (1975) Attainment and adjustment in two geographical areas, 1: The prevalence of child psychiatric disorder. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 126, 493-509.

⁶ Mils, S. and Stipek, D. (2006) Contemporaneous and longitudinal associations between social behaviour and literacy achievement in a sample of low-income elementary school children. *Child Development*: 77103-115

⁷ National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities. (1998). *Children with reading disability*. Washington, D.C.: Robert Bock.

⁸ McKinsey and Company (April 2009). *The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's schools*. Washington, D.C.

⁹ Jumpstart (2009) *America's Early Childhood Literacy Gap*. Washington D.C.

Beag – Having Fun with Language

Using visual arts, song, dance and music, Beag an initiative supported by Graffiti Theatre Co. held 2 sessions in each of the 6 crèches. Focusing on shadow play activities using a light box and shadow puppetry, the sessions helped to focus on listening and attention skills as well as vocabulary development.



Happy Talk interventions were offered in all of the preschool settings in the Glen and Mayfield. Sessions covered topics including: communication, the importance of adult-child interaction, link between play, listening, attention and language, questions and language, modifying language to help a child understand, social skills, speech development, strategies to help a child who has language difficulty/learning English as a second language.

Eight Rhyme Challenge

Participating preschools were invited to take the eight rhyme challenge as part of the annual play day held in the Glen Resource Centre. The preschools were given 8 nursery rhymes to teach the children in the lead up to the event. During the play day event, the children had to find Nibbles and Twitch with the help of their nursery rhyme friends and a fun obstacle course.



Junior infant classes received significant inputs again in 2012/2013, including:-

- ❑ Coaching sessions in the junior infant classes
- ❑ Elklan Programme for Parents;
- ❑ Workshops for support staff in 5 schools; *and*
- ❑ Parent sessions.

Junior Infants - Language Fun Day

The Language fun day encouraged parents to engage with the children's language in a fun way. Parents were assigned to various stations; each child received a special 'passport' describing the activities at each station. Fun games were used to teach listening, phonological awareness, storytelling and vocabulary. All parents who attended the parents' sessions got a certificate of participation in Happy Talk.



Parents and staff are encouraged to implement the learning in their interactions with the children with a view to them integrating them in their day-to-day interactions on an on-going basis.

Happy Talk as a programme has a very strong focus on learning outcomes and defined outcomes for children in terms of language development. The quantitative data reinforces the hypothesis that this type of intervention supports early language development. Key to the approach is the use of engaging and fun resources to keep staff, parents and especially children engaged.

2.3 Training

Training is a core element of the Happy Talk Project. Training was provided to all levels to enhance the skills and qualifications of people working with children, including the Happy Talk staff, parents, teachers, other educators and early years staff in order to meet the Happy Talk objective of *'Upskilling the early childhood care and education workforce'*. Formal Elklan training entitled *Speech and Language Support for Under 5s* was provided over a 9-week period to preschool staff. Workshops were provided to both crèche workers and parents in advance of the crèche coaching sessions commencing.



In addition, training was provided to local VEC adult literacy tutors to enable them to facilitate PEEP sessions in the area. Happy Talk also facilitated training in Traveller awareness and infant mental health, which was attended by workers from all settings as well as the Happy Talk team.

Happy Talk is committed to raising awareness of the importance of early language development. To that end, the Happy Talk team also presented workshops at 3rd level, to students from the BA in Early Childhood Studies and the BEd in Mary Immaculate College in Limerick, the BA in Early Childhood Studies in UCC and FETAC Level 5 and level 6 childcare students and lecturers in the Cork College of Commerce. Details of the work programmes for 2012/2013 can be found in Appendix A4 to this report.

Deirdre – A Testimonial

Deirdre is a preschool worker based in the Happy Talk area. Deirdre has participated in Happy Talk for the past two years and was involved in the Elklan training in year two.

Deirdre stated that the *'Happy Talk programme should be included in FETAC Level 5 training for childcare workers, it is a brilliant way to supporting staff to work on children's language'*. Deirdre also said that *'Happy Talk really benefits the children with speech and/or language delays, but also children that don't have specific delays'*. She felt that the programme was very positive in helping children to break down their words, sound things out and general language development. Deirdre commented that Happy Talk worked very well in her setting. She said the staff could not be more helpful...they were very approachable part of the team. Deirdre was adamant that Happy Talk should be continued in their preschool setting, but at the very least the team should continue to get refresher courses, so that they could remember everything that they had learned and continue to implement it.

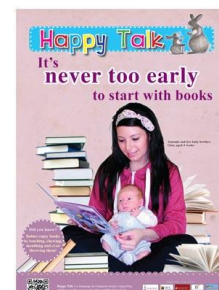
2.4 Developing a Language Rich Environment

In the Happy Talk Model, the supportive structures along the pathway to improved oral language are the *'language rich environment'*. The Happy Talk Consortium envisages communities where children are immersed in language in a way that is meaningful and accessible to them, and where the wider community understand the importance of early language development.

One of the central elements of the strategy is to promote the use of books and literacy as a key concept within the community. Happy Talk has developed and is supporting a number of initiatives including supporting crèches and preschools to develop excellent book areas in each setting, promoting a Borrow-a-Book scheme and even developing a set of localised story books using the characters Nibbles and Twitch which are used during the coaching sessions.

2.4.1 Books, Books, Books

International evidence, including a 20 year-long study led by Mariah Evans from the University of Nevada¹⁰, shows that having books in the home is a predictor of educational attainment in children. Evans et al. (2010) found that *'children growing up in homes with many books get 3 years more schooling than children from bookless homes, independent of their parents' education, occupation and class'*. Reading and looking at books can also boost a child's emergent language and literacy skills and increase the likelihood of future academic success.

**Book Area Audits**

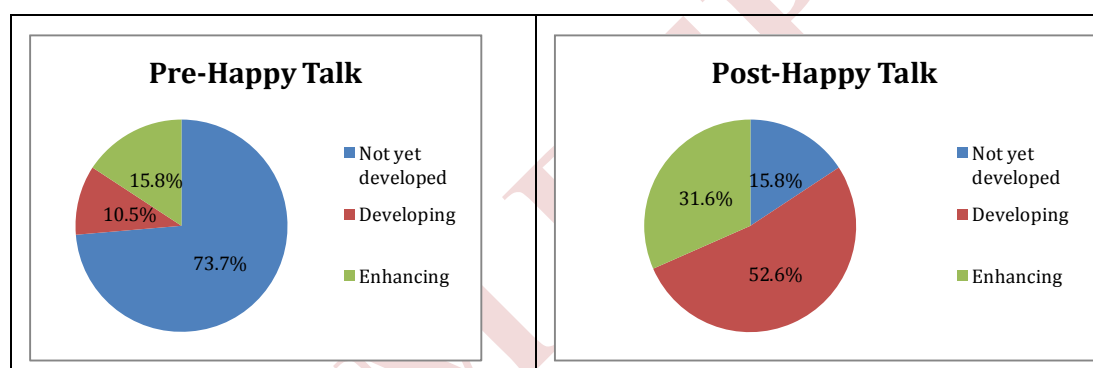
The Book Areas in early years settings play a valuable role in developing children's communication, and enjoyment of stories and books. In recognition of this and with a

¹⁰ Evans, M. D., Kelley, J., Sikora, J., Treiman, D. J. 2010, Family Scholarly Culture and Educational Success: Evidence From 27 Nations., Research in Social Stratification and Mobility, 28(2), 171-197.

view to promoting and improving book areas in the preschools and crèches involved in the Happy Talk Project, preschool and crèche staff have been supported through the Early Years Network to undertake a book area audit. A mid-term support visit was provided to all settings. Following this, each setting received recommendations to implement. All settings received supports in relation to books. These included board books for crèches, and large books, books in English and Polish and cultural books for preschools. Settings were provided with guidelines for running a session for parents to demonstrate engaging children with books for World Book Day. *Nibbles and Twitch in the Glen* a storybook illustrated by a preschool staff member was published & each child received a copy for World Book Day.

The book area audit was re-administered in May 2013 to assess the implementation of changes. It found substantial gains in many areas. The number of categories, which were not yet developed, reduced from 32 to just 5, whilst the number of categories which were enhancing increased from 27 to 90. The charts below show two key areas of the book audit, involvement of families and volunteers.

Figure 3 - Book Area Audit: Comparison 2012-2013



Borrow-a-Book Scheme

The Borrow-a-Book scheme involved the children borrowing books from their setting. Books were borrowed for varying lengths of time depending on the setting and on the child. The title of the book was written on the Borrow-a-Book card and parents filled in comments on the experience.

Feedback from parents, preschool and crèche workers was positive. The scheme aimed to generate interest among the children and to give them a sense of responsibility about taking the books home. The scheme gave crèches the opportunity to explain to parents, particularly those with low literacy levels, how to engage the child with books. Parents and crèche staff collaborated around the level and type of book that interested the child. Parents built books into the child's routine. Where the child's language was delayed the parents felt sharing the books helped. Staff, some of whom were initially reluctant about introducing the scheme, saw the positive effects of the scheme as it took off. It helped to increase awareness of introducing books to children from an early age and the rationale behind it.

'Is it Happy Talk day?'

Maeve is a typically developing four-year old who attends preschool 5 days a week. Happy Talk was delivered in Maeve's preschool, and her mother Sally was involved also, attending weekly coaching sessions. Sally reported that Maeve used to regularly ask, 'Is it Happy Talk day?' and referred to the Happy Talk speech and language therapist as Happy Talk Aoife!

'Books became a major thing for her!'

Maeve always liked books, but the Happy Talk Borrow-a-Book scheme increased her interest in books. She has lost interest in her games console, and is 'obsessed with books'! She has learned some books off by heart from hearing them being read to her, and likes "reading" them for her little brother. Sally feels that because Happy Talk promoted books Maeve was encouraged to engage with books more: 'Books became a major thing for her!' Sally also feels that the Borrow-a-Book scheme taught Maeve to have responsibility for something. She knew she had to mind the book, and if she brought home a book with a loose page she would ask Sally for tape to fix it. This scheme taught her to respect books.

Sally says there are lots of services for children with special needs, which is great, but sometimes the other children can use some support too. Maeve asks 'Am I doing Happy Talk in my new school?' As Maeve will attend one of the Happy Talk schools, thankfully she won't be disappointed!

Nibbles and Twitch Story Books

As part of the overall strategy to encourage books and reading among families in the Glen and Mayfield, Happy Talk developed two storybooks featuring the cuddly puppets Nibbles and Twitch, who are central to the coaching programme. Local preschool worker Kathy Egan illustrated a beautiful storybook called *Nibbles and Twitch in the Glen*. Feedback about the book was very positive from parents, children and staff in all settings. From the perspective of the children, the opportunity to recognise the characters and the places they knew within the community were both positive. The second book *Nibbles and Twitch visit Mayfield*, also illustrated by Kathy, will be used during the final year of the Project.

***Preschool Library Visits***

Several of the preschools in the area are being facilitated to attend the local library through the Cork City Library Service and Cork City Partnership. This initiative supports the Happy Talk books initiative. The children visit the library in Mayfield to get them used to visiting the library at an early age and to encourage their parents to return with them. The children get books to take home and there is children's entertainment put on occasionally to ensure that the children associate the library with fun and as a happy experience.

2.4.2 PEEP

Happy Talk, together with the VEC, organised training for five VEC literacy tutors in Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP). Tutors ran a six-week programme with the Glen Parent Toddler Group. PEEP is an early learning intervention, which aims to contribute towards improving the life chances of children, particularly in disadvantaged areas. Four independent research studies on PEEP have indicated that the programme is effective in enhancing parent/child interactions, skills development and parental skills and confidence.

2.4.3 Transitions

Successful experiences during early transitions can increase a child's ability to adapt to changes in the future and can provide a more secure base for the child's development and learning. The transition from preschool to primary school is an area currently being supported by the Happy Talk Project. As part of the Elklan training, preschool staff were introduced to using Mind Maps with individual or groups of children, on the theme of 'Primary school' to prepare children for this transition. This was further supported through the Preschool Staff Coaching Sessions. A second tool, the Transition

Flower was developed in conjunction with preschool staff, junior infant teachers and primary school principals. It is a tool for documenting individual children's achievements across a range of areas including: self-help skills, motor skills, thinking skills, social and emotional skills and language and communication skills. The language and communication skills relate specifically to the areas supported by the Happy Talk Project. The Transition Flower also highlights areas for the child to develop and provides preschool staff and parents with an opportunity to identify any concerns, which would be helpful for the junior infant teacher to be aware of.



2.4.5 Publicity

As part of the overall strategy to create a language rich environment, Happy Talk has been working to develop material, which can be disseminated across the community to raise awareness of the Project, and especially of the importance of early language development. To this end, the team has developed a series of posters, which are used across all settings as well as being displayed in other community settings. The use of Happy Talk posters on buses in particular has received significant support, with many people commenting that it has raised awareness of Happy Talk and especially of the importance of early language development across the community.

The posters developed by Happy Talk have received excellent feedback from all stakeholders, parents, crèche and preschool workers, teachers, principals and agency staff.

Other publicity initiatives include the development of a Facebook page, which provides handy tips and ideas for parents and workers and a Newsletter produced each term, which is distributed across the community and through the participating settings.



2.5 Supporting Parents

Parents are the key educators of their children. They are the pivotal support around which children flourish and grow. In the second year of Happy Talk an increasing number of parents have participated in the Project. In the primary school programme, parents are encouraged to attend a pre-classroom session, where they work with the SLT on tasks and materials to use in the classroom with the children. These sessions are easily accessible events where knowledge can be shared between the SLT professionals and the parents and carers of the children. The parents are then a core part of the session within the classroom, supporting a group of children through the activities prepared by the Happy Talk staff.

Parents of young babies were supported in year 2 of Happy Talk through the Public Health clinic system. Parents who were bringing their babies for their regular 7-9 month development check-up, were offered an additional session with a Happy Talk SLT. During the session parents were given advice about how to support early language development and given resources including the Communication Wheel.

Table 1 - Interventions to Support Parents

	0-3 and Crèche	Preschool	Junior Infants	All
Interventions	5 parent sessions (44 parents)	Eight rhyme challenge/playday	Elklan Programme for Parents (6 sessions) (7 parents)	Happy Talk sessions in Blackpool library (9 parents)
	3 x 1 hour parent programme (9 parents) ¹¹	22 Parent sessions as part of preschool programme (168 parents)	9 weekly 45 minute sessions in 6 junior infant classrooms (93 parents)	
	Public Health Clinics, 9 month check up (49 parents)	Elklan Programme for Parents (6 sessions) (7 parents)	Language fun day	
	PEEP programme in the Glen (12 parents)			

The table above shows that there was considerable participation by parents across the spectrum of Happy Talk initiatives in the past year. More than 400 individual parents participated in one or more Happy Talk interventions, with many of these participating in more than one of the services offered. It is important to note that other caregivers also participated in the Happy Talk sessions.

Attaining high levels of parental engagement is widely agreed to be a critical success factor for Happy Talk. It is also one of the most difficult things to achieve. In the past year the level of parental involvement has been significantly higher than in the first year of the Project. This is due in no small part to the strong efforts of teachers, crèche and preschool workers, principals and the Happy Talk team. Notwithstanding this effort, participation has been lower than expected in many of the crèche and preschool settings.



Figure 4 - Lisa Lane and Carla Mc Carthy (Scoil Mhuire Banrion)

¹¹ Note these were specific sessions provided to parents who had concerns in relation to their child.

St. Mark's Junior Infants Parents Programme – A Case Study

The class teacher and principal of the school did a significant amount of work to encourage parental attendance including a significant amount of communication with the parents in advance of the initiative. The Happy Talk SLT was invited to come and meet with the parents and explain what the initiative was about. During term time the teacher handed out Happy Talk flyers informing parents in advance when parent sessions and coaching were planned and reminded parents when Happy Talk was starting each term. The principal was visible on the mornings of Happy Talk, inviting parents to attend and when parents could not attend, the principal followed up with a phone call to query this, and to encourage parents to attend the next week. The principal visited parent sessions to chat with parents and to thank them for their attendance, endorsing Happy Talk and the teacher thanked parents each term for their attendance.

Parents and other family members attended the Happy Talk sessions regularly and there was a very high overall participation rate. The effect of this collaboration between school, parents and Happy Talk was that the parents had a positive experience of the programme and of school and learning generally. The children learned that their parents are instrumental in their learning. The parents reported that it was great to get to know other parents and that they used the activities at home and children used activities with siblings or friends. The teacher reported that children demonstrate overall improved communication and oral language skills, specifically using longer, more complex sentences, and improved listening and attention skills.

2.6 Partnership and Interagency Working

The Consortium and Working Group underpinning Happy Talk emerged from a strong base of organisations, which had a long history of working together. They had previous experience of working on similar initiatives including the Glen Early Language and Learning Pilot Project, The Glen and Mayfield Childcare Network Pre School Quality Improvement Programme, The Mahon/Blackrock Learning Initiative and the Greenmount Early Learning Initiative (GELI). Each Consortium member was required to detail their contribution to date to the Project and future planned commitments. At the time of this evaluation five of the seven Consortium members had completed the commitment forms.

The nature of the tasks and contributions varied from organisation to organisation, however a high level of interaction was noted with a number of notable trends:

- ❑ Participation in workshops;
- ❑ Raising awareness;
- ❑ Organising linkages and liaison between other key stakeholders e.g. PHN and HSE psychologists and mainstream SLT programme;
- ❑ Participation in training run by Happy Talk;
- ❑ Making a financial contribution;
- ❑ Participating in joint initiatives e.g. training, lifelong learning festival etc.;
- ❑ Providing support to SLTs;
- ❑ Supporting the recruitment process;
- ❑ Research; and
- ❑ Disseminating the learning from Happy Talk.

In terms of future commitments, the following were noted:

- ❑ Supporting policy development;
- ❑ Seeking funding for the programme beyond three years;
- ❑ Reviewing and evaluating work;
- ❑ Ongoing funding commitments; *and*
- ❑ Disseminating the learning within host organisation.

Figure 5 - Preschool Children Graduating from 'Our House'



3 Real Results for Children

This section provides an overview of the quantitative data gathered by the Project, which shows measurable gains in speech and especially language among the target children.

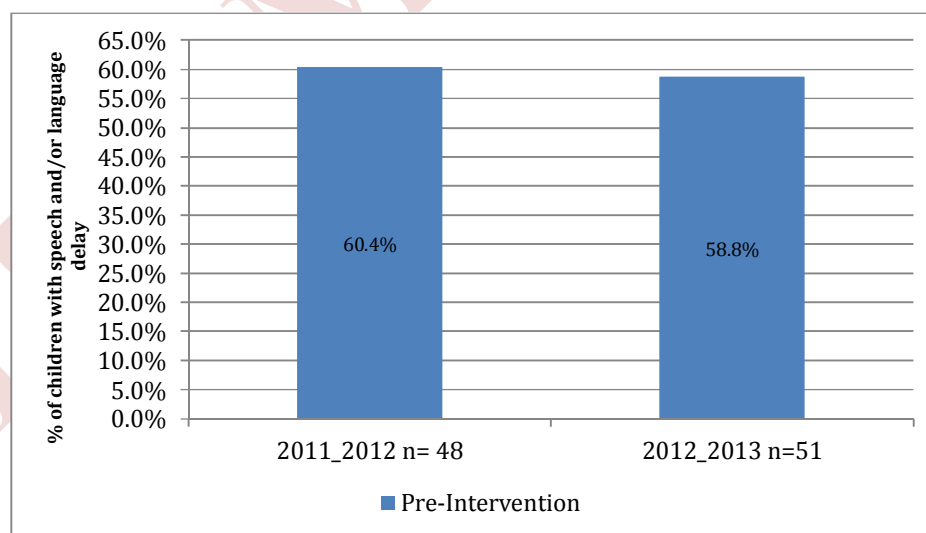
3.1 Baseline Position: Pre Intervention

Happy Talk is a population-based intervention¹². The Project was not designed to duplicate existing speech and language programmes in the city. It was designed to improve the capacity of parents, early years practitioners and teachers to develop oral language skills in children. Baseline information has been gathered on a population basis, at both preschool and junior infant class level. A number of reliable datasets have been established against which progress can be measured. The previous interim evaluation report outlined the sampling technique for the evaluation. The same technique has been used in 2012/2013 and the Project now has two years of comparable data.

A baseline position was developed using a number of different assessment tools, including the CELF Preschool 2 UK, Renfrew's Bus Story and the Diagnostic Evaluation of Articulation and Phonology (DEAP). The three assessment tools are outlined in Appendix 3 of this report.

The initial baseline position showed that 60.4% of all children in junior infant classes in the Glen and Mayfield had speech and/or language difficulties in the 2011/2012 academic year. The comparable figure for assessments in the autumn term 2012 was 58.8% of children presenting with a speech and/or language difficulty.

Figure 6 - Baseline Position: Speech and/or Language Delay



3.2 Post Intervention Results

The Happy Talk team used the same sampling technique to re-assess the class groups at the end of the academic year 2011/2012 and 2012/2013. The re-assessment results

¹² For information on the population-based approach, see Appendix A5 to this report.

showed impressive gains for children in all of the class groups with a 16.6% improvement in year one and 15.7% at the end of year 2.

Figure 7 - Change in speech/and or language delay

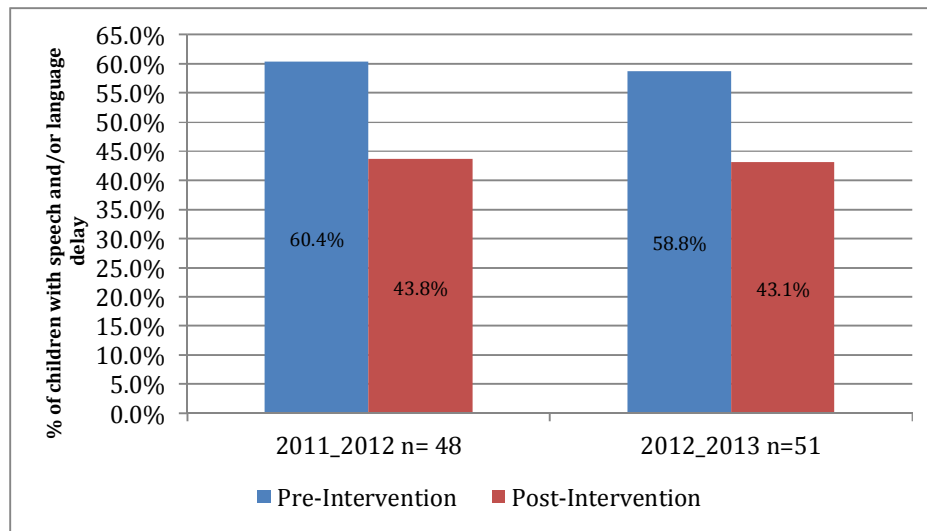
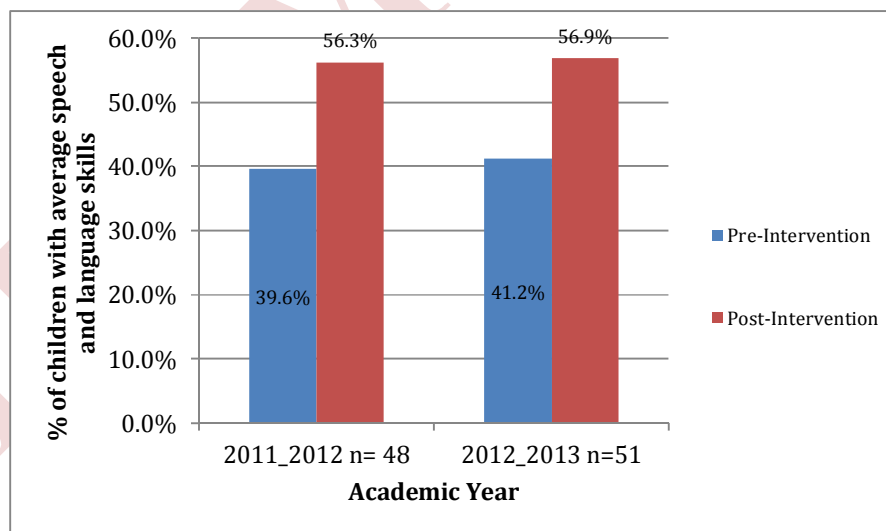


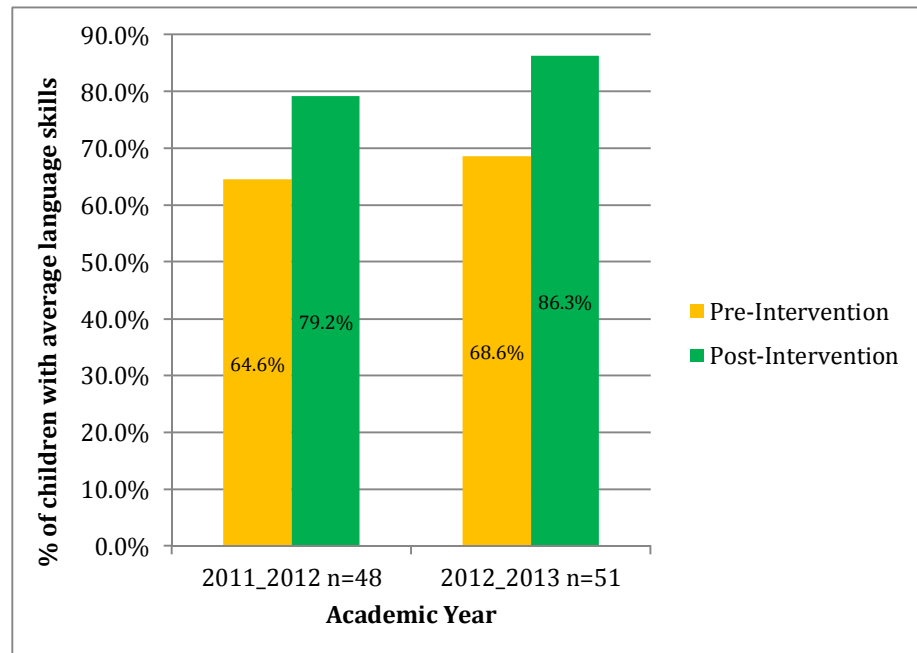
Figure 6 below shows that just under 40% of the children had average speech and language skills at the beginning of year one. This figure had increased to 56.3% after the intervention. Likewise in year two, 41.2% of the children had average speech and language skills at the beginning of the year, which increased to 56.9% by the end of the year.

Figure 8 – Speech and Language Outcomes



The Happy Talk Project in years one and two, focused primarily on oral language - the gains in this area were even more significant. By the end of the intervention in year one 79.2% of children had average language skills compared to 64.6% at the beginning of the intervention. Likewise in year 2, 86.2% of children had average language skills compared to 68.8% at the beginning of the year. Overall the gains in this area were 14.6% in year one and 17.7% in year two.

Figure 9 - Change in average language skills



3.3 Breakdown of Results

Trends across all of the measures show positive gains for children participating in Happy Talk. The two graphs below show improvements in average phonological awareness skills and average narrative skills. Average phonological awareness skills increased by 6.3% (year one) and 32.1% (year two), and the percentage of children with average narrative skills improved by 15.4% (year one) and 7.1% (year two) respectively. Much of these gains can be attributed to the initiative.

Figure 10 - Change in Average Phonological Awareness Skills

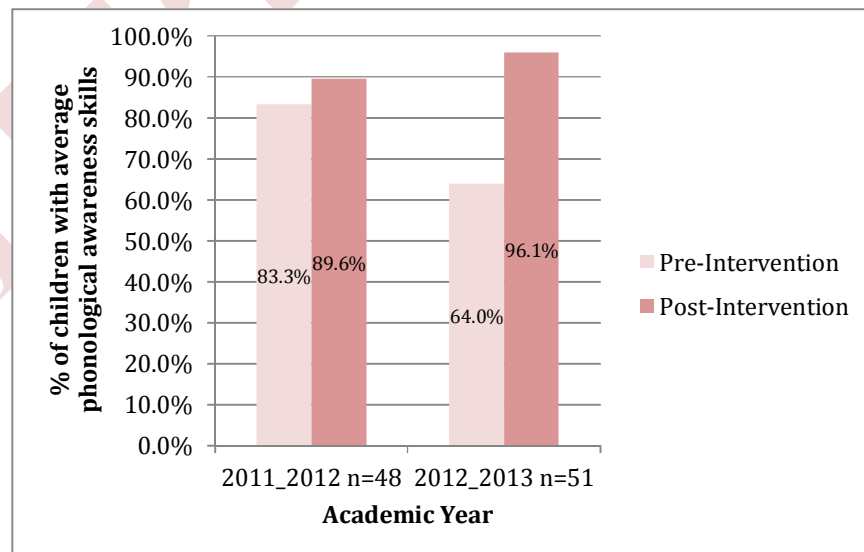
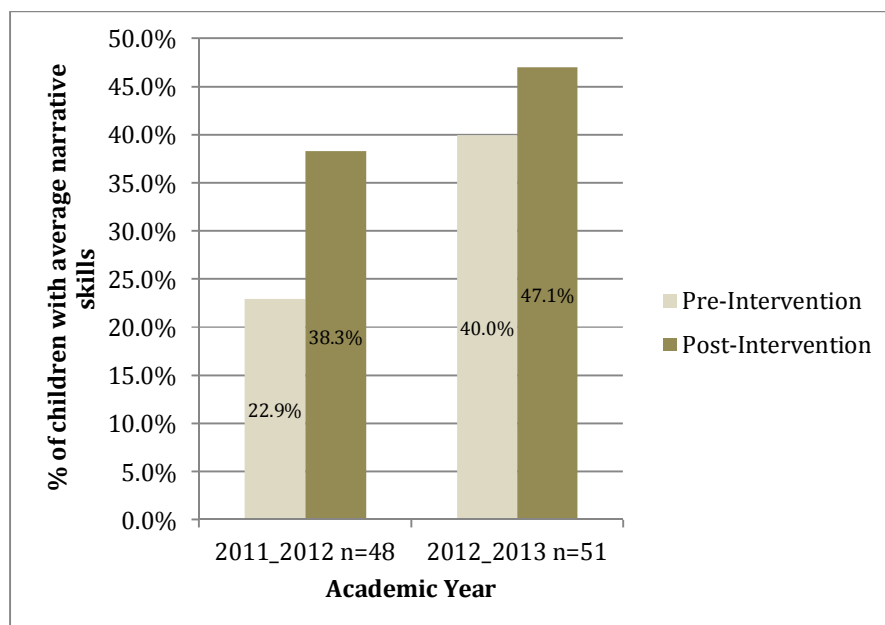


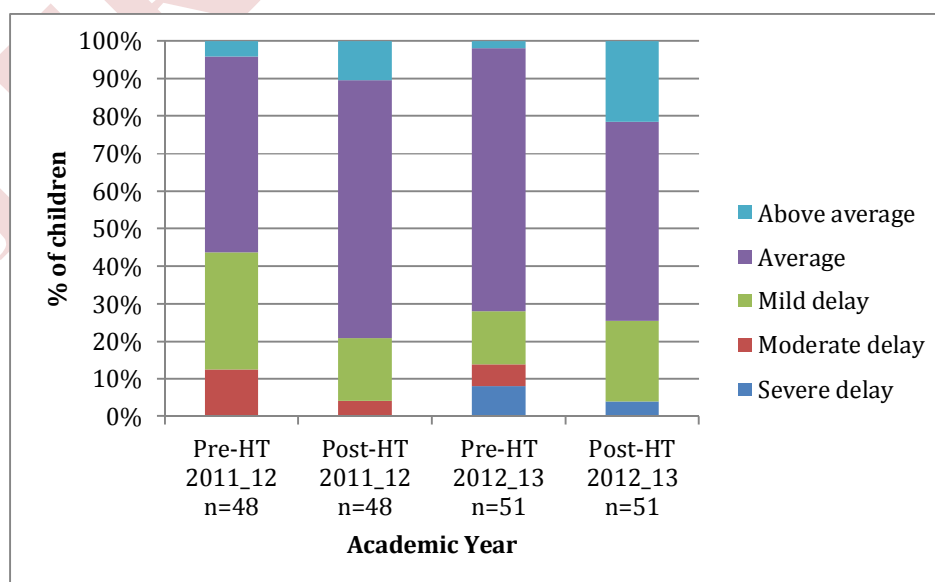
Figure 11 - Change in Average Narrative Skills



3.3.1 Concepts and Following Directions

In year one, 44% of the children presented with either a moderate (13%) or mild (31%) delay in the Concepts and Following Directions subtest. By the end of the intervention, only 21% fell into these two categories, moderate (4%) and mild (17%). In year 2, 28% of children had a delay in these subtests, severe 8%, moderate 6% and mild 14%. By the end of the intervention, the percentage of children with a severe delay had dropped to 4%, there were no children in the moderate group and the percentage of children with a mild delay was 22%, suggesting that some of the children with a severe delay moved into the mild delay category.

Figure 12 - Change in performance on concepts & following directions subtest



3.4 Impact of the Intervention

As shown above there were measurable gains for children in overall speech and language development. In addition, the severity of language delay reduced following the intervention. In year one of the intervention, the percentage of children presenting with a severe language delay dropped from 8% to 0% and from 8% to just 4% in the moderate group. Most of the children moved from these categories into the average language skills category, which increased from 64.7% to 79.3% between the assessments and reassessment period.

4 Listening to the Voices

This section of the report aims to capture the impact of Happy Talk on the children living in the Glen and Mayfield. It includes vignettes from parents, children and teachers as well as other key stakeholders in the process. This chapter has been compiled following observations by the evaluator of Happy Talk sessions in crèche, preschool and primary school settings, as well as a PEEP session. The evaluator consulted widely with crèche and preschool staff, teachers and principals from the participating junior infant classes as well as public health nurses and members of the consortium and working group. The evaluator also spoke to Happy Talk staff to ascertain what elements of the programme are working well from their perspective.

4.1 Children¹³

The evaluator observed a number of Happy Talk sessions in May 2013. The observations were held in crèche, preschool and junior infant classes, with two of the three Happy Talk speech and language therapists. The evaluator was especially concerned with trying to capture the impact of the Project on the children. Based on these sessions it was clear that the Happy Talk SLTs had an excellent rapport with the staff of each setting, parents and especially the children that they interacted with. The children were delighted to see them coming and showed high levels of excitement when the session started.

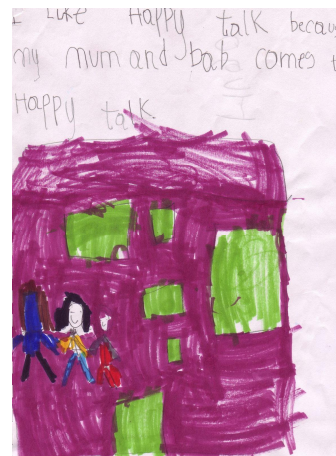
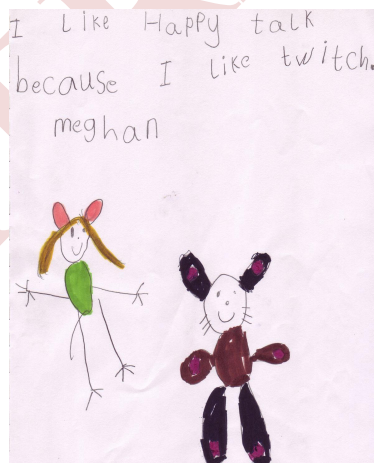
At the beginning of each session, the children are encouraged to 'wake up' Nibbles by calling out to him. Nibbles the hand puppet then 'wakes up' and

greet the children. The children all know Nibbles and Twitch, and the children know the listening rules and where they are used.

The children all knew the 'hello' song and were very engaged in the sessions.

It was clear from the observations that children are extremely happy to have their parents in the classroom with them, indeed the children whose parents attended seemed to be particularly proud that their parents were present. International literature shows a very clear link between

positive parental involvement and good educational outcomes for children. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995)¹⁴ argue that *'parents influence their children's educational outcomes through modelling of school related behaviours and attitudes. In*



¹³ Artwork on this page is thanks to Meghan and Hugo from St. Patrick's National School.

involving themselves in aspects of their children's educational lives, parents behave in ways that demonstrate that activities related to school are worthy of adult interest and time'.

Figure 13 - Enjoying a cuddle with Nibbles and Twitch



4.2 Parents

The evaluator had an opportunity to meet with a number of participating parents and other carers during a number of observation sessions in June 2013. The parents were universally supportive of the approach. The evaluator noted good levels of engagement and enthusiasm for the Project. Feedback from teachers, preschool workers and Working Group members was that the dynamic within the classroom was generally very positive when parents participate in the process. In some cases, discipline issues have been noted. In other cases, feedback was that children whose parents did not participate have felt left out or let down in the sessions.

Overall, the importance of parental engagement in early language work with children cannot be over-emphasised.

¹⁴ Hoover-Dempsey, K., and Sandler, HM, (1995) Parental Involvement in Children's Education: Why Does it Make a Difference? *Teachers College Record*. Volume 97, No. 2, Winter 1995.

John – A Case Study

A parent attending the preschool coaching sessions revealed her child (age 3yrs) was exhibiting challenging behaviour e.g. aggressive, pulled the oven door off its hinges, etc. Through discussion she reported he was not sleeping until the small hours of the morning and he appeared very unhappy. This mother was accompanied by the SLT to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) drop-in clinic and was given advice from a psychologist. The advice was mainly based around the bedtime routine and the mother was given a referral form to complete. A follow-up discussion with the mother was made three months later. She implemented a better bedtime routine, was consistent with bedtime and did not talk to her son if and when he got up; just put him back to bed. She also implemented new ideas herself like walking home from preschool instead of driving to get more exercise. She is happier and believes her son is also happier and sleeping more.

A separate research exercise was undertaken by a 4th year speech and language student from UCC. The researcher contacted all of the parents who had attended the developmental baby clinics for their 7-9 month old babies. The parents were assured that their responses would be anonymous.

All of the parents contacted rated their level of satisfaction with the service as very satisfied. The majority (60%) found all aspects of the clinic useful and reported they changed their interactions with their babies as a result of the clinic (75%).

One parent said 'I am really glad I went... taught me a lot... the girl wasn't rushing... she spent time explaining it to me'.

Another commented that 'the (communication) wheel should be given in those EU mom¹⁵ bags... great information for parents... these extra tools are great... parents are so busy, all these things are very helpful'.

One mother stated that the session 'really brought my attention to her [daughters] language and speaking... it's good to be mindful... a fantastic initiative'.

Finally another participant commented that 'it is a great service... great that it was free... great to get tips at such a young age... I didn't think you needed to think about speech and language until a child was four or five... I know much more now'.

Beth – A Case Study

Beth was very nervous on her child's first day of school and didn't feel confident going into the school or talking to the teachers. She thought it must be very nerve-wracking for her child. After becoming involved with Happy Talk and leading the activities she felt much more confident. She participated fully in the coaching sessions and helped the children through the various activities.

Beth said 'I really enjoyed the parents' sessions and became very confident in leading the group of children I worked with each week. I don't feel nervous about getting involved with school anymore, thanks to being involved with Happy Talk'.

¹⁵ Bag with information provided to expectant mothers.

4.3 Crèche and Preschool Workers

A consultation session was held with crèche and preschool workers in June 2013, a total of 33 workers participated in the focus sessions.

There was a very good understanding of why the Project is being held in the two areas of Glen and Mayfield. The crèche and preschool staff understood that there are significant issues in relation to early language development in the area. A number also acknowledged that it is a RAPID area, with high levels of disadvantage. There was universal agreement that Happy Talk has been beneficial to the children and parents in the settings.

Workers felt that the assessments provided in the settings were very helpful, and they called for more of this specific and direct intervention type of work. They were pleased with the nature of the initiative, stating that it was *'very hands on'* and *'practical'*. The participants in the focus groups were very complimentary of the Happy Talk team, with comments like *'the girls were excellent'*, *'they have a brilliant way with the parents'* and *'they make it all so easy to understand'* and *'very good to work with, very natural, work seamlessly in the setting'*.

The facilitators observed that there was a very good awareness of the Happy Talk techniques as well as specific skills, which were identified as learning outcomes by the team. Overall the participants demonstrated a high level of awareness of the learning outcomes.



The participants spoke at length about particular tasks and resources, which they felt, were and will remain very useful in their settings including:-

- ☐ Nibbles and Twitch
- ☐ Story books
- ☐ Soundbox
- ☐ Rhyming
- ☐ Waiting strategies
- ☐ Expanding

The participants were particularly taken with some of the simple techniques introduced by Happy Talk, especially the Listening Rules. One participant commented *'the listening rules are brilliant, so simple, we will be using that for years to come'*.

The participants felt that there had been great advertising done locally and through the newsletters, posters etc. They said that there is a high level of awareness about the Project locally.

4.3.1 Issues Emerging

Happy Talk has worked very hard to ensure that the resource requirement on staff in the various settings was as low as possible. In particular the team had all of the course work and resources pre-prepared (unless the preparation is part of the parents session before hand). There was some feedback from preschools, which participated in the national NEYAI evaluation that there was a substantial time requirement from Happy Talk. On further consideration, it was discovered that the time requirement was due in the main to the work required for the national evaluation and it did not impact on the other settings.

Transition Flower

There was a general sense of concern about the transition flower tool. All of the participants agreed that it is a good idea in principle but it is not working in practice. The main reason for this is that the workers are concerned about recording anything that could be perceived as negative by the parents. By and large parents want their children to go into primary school with a clean slate, so it was believed that they would not welcome a resource, which highlighted issues of concern about the child.

Other workers commented that they did not feel skilled enough to fill it out properly. The junior infant teachers echoed the concerns about the transition flower; who generally found that the flowers were presenting an exaggerated picture of the children's ability, and did not inform them of what they really needed to know. One worker commented that *'teachers are more concerned about practical issues like: can he tie his shoes, open his lunch box – the concept needs work'*. Another one stated that *'there is too much temptation to focus on the positive'*.

The transition flower highlights the issue of staff confidence and their competence in staff/parent interactions. This is echoed in the national evaluation of NEYAI, which found an inverse relationship between the quality of staff/parent interactions and competency in staff/parent interactions, which they felt could be explained by the fact that staff who are less competent over-estimate the quality of their interactions. Another possible explanation for the difficulties emerging in relation to the use of the tool is that some of the childcare workers have been trained using High Scope¹⁶ - the High Scope programme teaches childcare workers to focus on the positive. The effect of this training may be that pre-school workers are not equipped to report on perceived problem areas for the children.

Parental involvement

The crèche and preschool workers commented that it can be very difficult to get parents to participate. When asked to expand on this issue, it became clear that some parents using the crèches and preschools in the area, see them as care arrangements as opposed to educational settings. Most of the workers felt that this was a great opportunity lost. One worker commented that *'It is a pity, because it is such a good service'* another felt that it *'may be because parents are working'*. Conversely, one group of parents looked for an extension in the number of parent sessions, because they felt that it was an excellent service. The workers feel that it is positive that *'Happy Talk promotes an open door policy for parents'*.

Interestingly, unlike the principals and teacher, the crèche and preschool workers did not feel that it was within their remit to encourage parents to attend the sessions. One worker said *'that it really is their own decision, I wouldn't try to influence them one way or another'*. Another worker felt that a leaflet for parents would be useful. Although all parents received the newsletter, she felt that a short explanatory leaflet which would indicate the format and content of each session would be useful at the beginning of the process, so that they would not have to explain what it is all about to each individual parent.

In the case where parents did attend the sessions, there were some concerns that there can be a break down in discipline. Much like the teachers feedback above, some of the workers felt that it was difficult to know who should be the disciplinarian when there are parents present. One worker commented that some of the children are much more likely to *'act up'* when mum or dad is present.

¹⁶ High Scope is an American educational approach, which emphasizes active participatory learning.

4.3.2 Impact on Children

The crèche and preschool workers said that they could see great overall improvement in the children's oral language. They also commented that there were improvements in the confidence levels of some children. They observed noticeable gains in language and vocabulary, as well as understanding of concepts.

The workers all felt that the programme has influenced and improved the way that they work, for example using more listening and less questioning, expanding and using more expressive language.

4.4 Principals

Feedback from the principal teachers of the five participating primary schools was extremely positive. The principals are acutely aware of the speech and language delays facing children in their schools, and the long-term educational ramifications caused by early language delays.

They believe that the coaching model is the appropriate approach to upskill both teachers and parents. The level of parental participation was variable across the five schools, although generally it was better than the previous year, mainly due to the efforts of school staff. One principal teacher said *'Happy Talk has been a great success in our school, the children are more confident in their language'*.

The principal teachers commented that one of the most significant indirect benefits of Happy Talk was the level of assessments and referrals of children to mainstream HSE services.

One of the principal teachers commented that the Project should be more flexible to provide assessments for other children with needs in the school, since the resources are there on the ground. All of the principals agreed that having Happy Talk in the school has improved relationships with the HSE and has encouraged greater communication between both sides.

All of the principals were adamant that resources like Happy Talk were absolutely crucial in their schools, if there was to be any chance of breaking the cycle of educational disadvantage faced by children in the area. Furthermore they advocated for a system where mainstream Speech and Language services would be provided within the school setting. They contended that this would be in line with international best practice, and would dramatically reduce the number of appointments, which are lost through people not attending, and would as a result be a better use of resources.

One principal teacher commented that Happy Talk and other similar projects need to be cognisant of the overall demands of the school and the school calendar. The teachers, crèche and preschool workers, and especially those preschools which were involved in the national evaluation, echoed this sentiment.

4.5 Teachers

The evaluator met the junior infant teachers from all 5 participating schools to get feedback on the Happy Talk Project. The teachers echoed the sentiment of the school principals. All five were in agreement that Happy Talk was a very positive addition to their

school. They agreed that the programme was fit for purpose and was specifically designed to tackle the issue of low language skills in the junior classes of their schools.

Most of the teachers agreed that parental involvement is a key success factor for Happy



Talk, as it provides a forum for parents to interact proactively with their child's language development and also provides skills and knowledge, which some parents may lack. Feedback about the organisation of Happy Talk was very positive, with teachers commenting that *'it is easy to remember'*, *'easy for teachers to maintain'* and *'very specific and focused on oral language'*. In particular teachers praised

the innovative approach taken with Nibbles and Twitch; the puppets were credited with incentivising the children's engagement. Equally, teachers were very complimentary of the resources provided through Happy Talk. They commented that the resources were *'very imaginative'*, *'useful'* and *'fun'* for the children.

When questioned about the specific impact the teachers have observed in the children, some of the following comments were elicited:-

- ❑ *'I give the children more time to finish their sentences'*
- ❑ *'Children are better at listening, speaking and taking turns'*
- ❑ *'Social skills have improved'*
- ❑ *'Rhyming is much better now'*
- ❑ *'Syllabic awareness is much improved'*

Some secondary benefits were also observed by the teachers:-

- ❑ *'Parents are more aware now – there is a higher level of attendance at parent/teacher meetings'*.
- ❑ *'There is improved communication between the (HSE) SLTs and the teachers'*.
- ❑ *'The kids that came through Happy Talk preschools had better oral language than the other children at the beginning of the year'*.

4.6 Consortium and Working Group Members

The Consortium and Working Group has continued to work effectively over the past year. Each agency participating in the Consortium and Working Group was encouraged to complete a document, which outlined their role in the Project and their on-going commitment in terms of tasks. Five of the seven signatories of the Memorandum of Understanding have completed their individual commitments to date. A review of these documents shows a marked change in the dynamic of the group since the first interim report was completed in July 2012. When the Project was being developed and funding applications were being made, the members of the working group in particular were taking a very *'hands on'* role in the project. Once the staff came on board and began to undertake the implementation of the project, the roles naturally began to shift somewhat. The roles and responsibilities of the team and executives and the agency stakeholders is now clearer at all levels. The consortium members were universally complimentary of the Happy Talk team, stating that *'they are excellent'*, *'we were so lucky to get them'*, *'they have made the Project what it is.'*

The high level of commitment and engagement with the Project is to be commended, and the evaluator noted very high levels of ownership of the Project. This ownership of

the Project is viewed as very important by all members of the Consortium and Working Group, who view it very much as a collaborative Project, which is led by Cork City Partnership. Having a lead partner like CCP is very important to a project like Happy Talk as it provides a high level of assurance to funders in terms of accountability and transparency. The community relationships already developed by CCP have been extremely valuable in supporting the project and instilling confidence from the beginning of the process. Some issues emerged around specific roles and responsibilities during the course of the year, resulting in a redrafting of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which underpins the operation of the Project. While some of the agency representatives felt that these issues had been dealt with satisfactorily, others felt that there were some legacy issues, which were impacting on positive working relationships in some cases.

Overall the Working Group and Consortium members were very impressed that the Project had managed to avoid 'Scope Creep', and had stayed very true to the initial core aims and objectives. Coupled with this there is a sense that the Project has become well known within the area, and across the city. The participating agencies are spreading the word of Happy Talk to other parts of the city.

4.6.1 Project Focus

Happy Talk has been very well resourced through funds from NEYAI and Tomar Trust. Given the level of resources that were available in the two communities, it was mooted that there could have been additional work done especially around the speech issues which presented with the children in the settings and schools targeted. The focus on oral language was considered to be the most important intervention, as it did not impact on or duplicate mainstream HSE Speech and Language services, however, given the level of need which presented itself in the area, it is possible that this strategy could have been changed sooner. It is understood that the Happy Talk team will undertake some direct speech work in the Glen and Mayfield in 2013/2014 in consultation and collaboration with the HSE.

4.7 Other Stakeholders

The evaluator spoke to representatives of the Public Health Nurses (PHN) from the HSE. The PHNs were involved in supporting the work of Happy Talk through the developmental clinics for 7- 9-month-old babies. The PHNs did not have much overall exposure to Happy Talk and were not certain of all of the Project's overall objectives. They were very impressed with the level of branding that the Project has achieved, and they commented that Happy Talk is very well known throughout the area.

Figure 14 - The Glen Story Point



5 Emerging Lessons

The third and final year of Happy Talk is commencing for the academic year 2013/2014. There is a wide diversity of opinion from the Working Group and Consortium members about the direction that the Project should take and the future if any of Happy Talk. It is clear from the consultations that there is universal approval of the initiative. All of the stakeholders consulted were positive about the approach, the operations and the impact of the Project. However, when asked to consider the future of the Project, no consensus emerged. All of the stakeholders, especially from the Working Group and Consortium believe that the learning from Happy Talk should be and is being disseminated across their organisations. Some of the partners believe that the Project should be continued in the Glen and Mayfield, perhaps in a more abridged version, with a focus on Continued Professional Development (CPD). Others believe that it should now be delivered in a different area of the city, so that the learning can be transferred more widely. There are suggestions that the learning from Happy Talk should be mainstreamed through the main agency responsible for speech and language services, namely the HSE. There are resource issues associated with all approaches and there are very limited resources available at the present time.

5.1 Future Planning

There have been significant resources expended on Happy Talk to develop a professional oral language intervention and to raise awareness of the importance of oral language in young children. The Working Group and the Consortium should allocate sufficient time in the coming 12 months to examine the data emerging from the Project and to consider the options for the future of the Project. Some options, which have emerged during the consultation phase, which could be considered include:

Piloting the delivering of an integrated suite of primary health services (including speech and language) within the school settings. This approach is partly implemented already by the HSE, which is piloting speech and language clinics in the DEIS schools in some parts of the city. Resource teachers, SNAs, and class teachers, observe and participate in the sessions. There is also protected time for teachers to liaise with the speech and language therapist. The approach is widely approved by the teachers and the principals in the five participating schools. The perceived advantages of such an approach are:-

- ❑ Children whose parents have difficulty accessing the HSE Clinic, and might not otherwise attend for therapy, have the opportunity to receive speech and language therapy in school.
- ❑ Teachers are closely involved in the therapy programme and can carry over activities in the classroom.
- ❑ Goals in therapy can be decided in conjunction with the teacher, ensuring that the outcome of therapy helps improve the child's functioning within the class setting.
- ❑ Reduction in the number of Do Not Attend (DNA) which has serious resource implications for the HSE core teams;
- ❑ Ability of the schools to replace missing appointments with other children, thus maximising the available resources;
- ❑ Create greater partnership between schools and SLT services and minimise out of classroom time for children;
- ❑ School may be a less threatening environment for some parents.

A similar evaluation of the Speech and Language Therapy Service of Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative undertaken by Dublin Institute of Technology concluded that *'integration of services such as SLT within the community and/or educational system meets the needs of the community in a way that traditional clinic based services do not'*¹⁷. (Pg.4)

Transfer the model to a different area ó there has been some discussion about support for similar initiatives within the city. The Happy Talk type approach could add value to a holistic early years approach in other disadvantaged areas.

Continued Professional Development ó some of the key stakeholders of the Project, especially workers from the crèches, preschool and primary schools would welcome a continuation of Happy Talk in their settings and schools. Ideally, they would like a Happy Talk type intervention available to all classes and children. Alternatively, a continuation of the Project in its existing format could be considered. Finally, the staff commented that some form of CPD would be essential to ensure that the learning from the Project is not lost over time.

5.2 Legacy of Happy Talk

In the event that the Happy Talk Project finishes and does not continue in the Glen and Mayfield, it is important to ensure that resources are left in place to support workers and staff in all of the settings as well as parents. The Happy Talk team are currently working on a manual for use by other SLTs working in the community, which includes all of the Happy Talk resources developed to date. The evaluators believe that this approach is very positive and will ensure that much of the hard work undertaken remains of benefit to the area.

However, in order for this work to be as useful as possible, it is incumbent upon the Working Group and Consortium members to disseminate it as widely as possible. One of the unique elements of Happy Talk observed by the evaluator is the relationships which underpin the work across all of the settings, school and with parents and children. Users of the Happy Talk manual must be aware that the approach has been successful because of the time given over to building and nurturing these relationships.

5.2.1 Building Quality Services

The Working Group and Consortium are aware that there are variations between the services being delivered in the crèches and preschools across the area. They should work closely together and with the settings to ensure that all childcare settings in the Glen and Mayfield reach high quality standards, with high skills levels attained by as many workers in the field as possible. While this is not the core remit of Happy Talk, it is clear that the level of qualifications and skills of crèche and preschool workers can have an impact on service provision. This echoes the findings of the NEYAI National Evaluation. In a presentation on the baseline findings given to the Learning Community, the evaluators stated that *'Education and qualification levels of staff in the early years sector are low by comparison with the national population'* and that *'about three quarters of centre based childcare is part time'*.

¹⁷ Hayes, N., Keegan, S. and Goulding, E. (2012) *Evaluation of the Speech and Language Therapy Service of Tallaght West Childhood Development Initiative*. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative (CDI).

5.2.2 Linking Health and Education

Speech and Language therapy generally, including Happy Talk, is an area, which crosses over between health and education. The mainstream Speech and Language services are embedded within the Health Services in this country, although there are clear and significant links to education, with this service being linked to the school settings. One of the legacy issues emerging from Happy Talk is the need for policy makers to think more holistically about services such as speech and language therapy, with policy makers from each side recognising and valuing the contribution of the other.

The Progressing Disability programme recommends early intervention and school age interdisciplinary teams in local areas. It recommends intervention in school where appropriate. The Programme is being organised at national, regional and local level and includes representatives from the health and education sectors, statutory and non-statutory service providers and parents working together to see how current services can best be reorganised.

The HSE is working very closely with the education sector, which is fully involved in the development of the Programme, to ensure that, from the children's and parents' perspective, the services provided by each sector are integrated as much as possible. The HSE recognises that the active engagement of stakeholders will be a critical element of this change process and the implementation of this Programme will continue to involve broad consultation. It is expected that the 0-18 years geographical teams in Cork City will be in place by December 2014.

5.3 Operational Issues

While Happy Talk has been successful overall, exhibiting positive outcomes for children, parents and staff, there are some operational issues, which can be improved for the final year of the Project.

5.3.1 Focus on Speech

The Happy Talk team has managed to achieve efficiencies in their work over the course of the Project. It is anticipated that less time will be required to undertake the core programme in 2013/2014. This is mainly due to the amount of time, which will be required for planning. An additional speech and language therapist was also appointed towards the end of last year. This additional resource will enable extra work to be carried out. It is proposed that these additional resources should be used to focus on direct one to one work with children who are presenting with speech delays.

5.3.2 Transition Flower

There have been concerns raised about the transition flower from both the initial users (preschool workers) and end users (junior infant teachers). Initial recommendations to improve the transition flower were implemented at the end of year one, however the tool still appears to be causing difficulties. It is proposed to continue the roll out of the transition flower for year 3 and then review its overall efficacy.

5.3.3 Roles and Responsibilities

The Working Group and Consortium spent some time during the past year working out difficulties in relation to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the organisations. It was the view of some of the members that this process deflected from the work of the Project and focusing on future planning. In the future, there should be clear and written understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all parties at the beginning of any project, which requires high levels of interagency collaboration like Happy Talk.

5.4 Parental Engagement

The issue of parental engagement is a key one for all projects of this nature. The level of engagement by parents in year two of the Project has been higher than in year one. One technique, which has worked particularly well in reminding parents about attendance, was the use of text messages. It is proposed that all mobile phone numbers of participating parents should be gathered at the beginning of the intervention and a web text system to remind parents should be sent in advance of Happy Talk sessions.

Given that Happy Talk is now firmly rooted and accepted within the two communities of the Glen and Mayfield, consideration should be given to linking into one of the mainstream parenting interventions such as *Incredible Years* to add value to the parenting sessions from both initiatives. It is understood that *Parents Together* is being implemented in term one of 2013/2014.

Figure 15 - Parents from Scoil Mhuire Banrion receive certificates of attendance



Appendices

A1 Prevalence Rates

Source	Sample size/ systematic review	Speech only	Language only	Speech and language	Speech or language	Specific Language Impairment
J Speech Lang Hear Res. 1997 Dec;40(6):1245-60. Prevalence of specific language impairment in kindergarten children.	7,218					Overall 7.4% Boys 6 8% Girls 6 6%
J Speech Hear Disord. 1986 May;51(2):98-110. Prevalence of speech and language disorders in 5-year-old kindergarten children in the Ottawa-Carleton region.	1,655				16.2% - 21.8%	
Screening for Speech and Language Delay in Preschool Children: Systematic Evidence Review for the US Preventive Services Task Force Heidi D. Nelson, MD, MPH	Systematic review		2 6 19%	5% - 8%		
Ziegler, J. C., et. al. (2005, September 27). Deficits in speech perception predict language learning impairment. <i>Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America</i> , 102(3a): 14110614115.						7%
Int J Lang Commun Disord . 2000 Apr-Jun;35(2):165-88. Prevalence and natural history of primary speech and language delay: findings from a systematic review of the literature. Law J , Boyle J , Harris F , Harkness A , Nye C .	Systematic review	6.4% 6 24.6%	2.14% - 19%		4.56% 6 19%	
Prevalence of speech and/or language impairment in preparatory students in northern Tasmania 2008, Vol. 10, No. 5 , Pages 364-377 (doi:10.1080/17549500701871171) Belinda Jessup ^{1A} , Elizabeth Ward ¹ , Louise Cahill ² and Diane Keating ²	308	8.7%	18.2%	14.3%	41.2%	
http://www.asha.org/research/reports/children.htm	Review of lit.		2-19%		7%	Definition of SLI

A2 Happy Talk Logic Models

Table 2 - Objective One

Objective One - Improve Language and Learning Skills of Children aged 0-6 in the Glen and Mayfield						
Outcomes	Baseline	Indicators	Targets	Methodology/ Instruments	When	Responsibility
Measurable gains in children's language development in the 0-6 age groups.	60.4% of all children in junior infant classes in the Glen and Mayfield had delayed speech and/or language skills at the beginning of the 2011/2012 academic year and 58.8% had delayed speech and/or language skills at the beginning of the 2012/2013 academic year. (Pre-intervention) EDI Language and Competence Mean = 8.0 EDI Communication Skills and General Knowledge 6 Mean = 6.3	42% of all children in junior infant classes in the Glen and Mayfield had delayed speech and/or language skills at the end of the 2011/2012 academic year and 43% of children had delayed speech and/or language skills at the end of the 2012/2013 academic year. (Post Intervention) No EDI data available for 2012/2013 at the time of the evaluation report.	5% improvement from baseline by 2014 [To date an 16.7% and 15.7% improvements have been observed between pre and post intervention groups] EDI Language and Competence Mean = 8.6 by 2014 EDI Communication Skills and General Knowledge 6 Mean = 7.2 by 2014	Formal diagnostic assessment of children using CELF Preschool 2 ^{UK} instrument and the Renfrew bus story and DEAP. Early Development Instrument questionnaire administered to teachers and parents.	Junior infants in Q4 2011. Reassessment in Q2 2012. (Same in 2013 and 2014) Preschool 1 6 Q1 6 2012 Impact will be assessed by the assessment of junior infant pupils in 2012 and 2013.	S&L therapists EDI will be re-administered by UCC in 2012, 2013 and 2014
Improved social outcomes for children.	EDI 6 Social Competence = Mean 7.4 Emotional Maturity = Mean 7.1	Improved behaviour Improved social skills Improved self confidence Engagement in learning Improved scores on 2 EDI domains	EDI 6 Social Competence = Mean 7.8 Emotional Maturity = Mean 7.4	EDI will be re-administered by UCC in 2012, 2013 and 2014	As above	EDI will be re-administered by UCC in 2012, 2013 and 2014

Table 3 - Objective Two

Objective Two - Improved parental capacity to support childrens' language development.						
Outcome	Baseline	Indicators	Targets	Methodology/Instruments	When	Responsibility
Improved parental capacity to support childrens' language development.	No baseline data available	Improved parental participation in school activities. Improved parental confidence (self reported)	Improved parental capacity to support childrens' language development.	Customised programmes using the Elklan and Hanen Parents Programmes as a resource at crèche, preschool and junior infant levels. Interviews and/or focus group with parents	Parents' programmes to take place in tandem with interventions in the crèches and preschools. The parents' programmes at crèche and Preschool level are being run on the same days as the coaching. The coaching and parents programme are integrated so that the parents' programme directly supports what is being coached with the staff.	S&L therapists Observation (evaluator) UCC ó EDI tool

Table 4 - Objective Three

Objective Three - Greater awareness of early intervention in language and learning in the community						
Outcome	Baseline	Indicators	Targets	Methodology/ Instruments	When	Responsibility
Increase in number of children identified and assessed	3 speech and language assessments. 11 Early intervention assessments in the academic year 2011/2012 in the five participating schools	28 additional children referred to HSE S&L 23 children referred to DES (SENO) 2 Preschool children referred to early intervention team. 3 children referred to private OT 10 referred for private psychological assessment.	5% increase in referrals from the baseline.	Recorded by HT team	On-going	HT SLTs
Improved transition arrangements between preschool and primary school	Zero baseline ó no transition arrangements are currently in place in the Preschools	Participation by preschool staff and teachers. 5 primary schools participating 302 transition flowers completed in 2013.	Guidelines developed by December 2012 Guidelines being implemented by 50% of services by April 2014	Qualitative review of documents and procedures. Stakeholder interviews/focus sessions	March 2012 and March 2013	HT Coordinator
Improved coordination between services in the Glen and Mayfield	No baseline	Qualitative reports based on stakeholder consultations and observations. Number of new collaborative interventions.	Improved collaboration as evidenced by self reports from stakeholders	Questionnaire to be delivered to all partners by the evaluators in Q1 2012 and Q1 2014 Commitment forms	Q1 2102 Re-administered in Q1 2014	-HT Coordinator
Greater awareness of early intervention in language and learning in the community	Book audit: Out of a total score of 152 (19 services x 8 domains) 32 Not yet developed 93 Developing 27 Enhancing	19 services participated in 2012/2013 5 -Not yet developedø 65 -Developingø 90 -enhancingø	Book Audit: Out of a total score of 152 (19 services x 8 domains) 0 Not yet developed 30 Developing 122 Enhancing	Review of audit reports. Stakeholder consultations	April 2014	HT Coordinator

Table 5 - Objective Four

Objective Four - Upskilling the early childhood care and education workforce						
Outcome	Baseline	Indicators	Targets	Methodology/ Instruments	When	Responsibility
Improved skills and capacity of early childhood care and education workforce	Baseline being established by National Evaluation in participating services (20 workers)	Participation in training programmes. Participation in training with S&L therapists	New skills development for 80% of core (non CE or Tús) early childhood care and education workforce in the area.	National Evaluation Questionnaire	Baseline questionnaire in 2012. Re-administered questionnaire in 2013	Evaluator/National Evaluation team HT team

A3 Details of Assessments Used

A3.1 Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals

[CELF Preschool 2 (UK)]

This is an assessment standardised on a UK population. It is used with children aged 3 to 6;11 years. It examines receptive (understanding) and expressive (use of language) skills. It also measures knowledge of words and use and understanding of grammar. It is used to diagnose language delays and is widely used across Ireland and the UK.

The CELF Preschool 2^{UK} has a supplemental subtest examining phonological awareness abilities (knowledge of sounds in words and sentences). Ability in this area is key to the development of literacy. This is a criterion-referenced subtest and does not provide standardised scores or percentile ranks.

A3.2 CELF Preschool 2 (UK) Subtests

Sentence Structure

Aim to evaluate the child's ability to interpret spoken sentences of increasing length and complexity. Understanding spoken sentences is important in developing conversational skills, participating in interactive story-telling and following directions.

Word Structure

Aim to evaluate the child's ability to (a) grammatically mark words and (b) use appropriate pronouns.

Expressive Vocabulary

Aim to evaluate the child's ability to label pictures of people, objects and actions.

Concepts and Following Directions

Aim to evaluate the child's ability to (a) interpret spoken directions of increasing length and complexity that contain concepts, (b) remember the names, characteristics and order of mention of pictures and (c) identify the targeted objects from among several choices. These abilities relate to following classroom instructions, remembering assigned tasks and following teacher instructions.

Recalling Sentences

Aim to evaluate the child's ability to (a) listen to spoken sentences of increasing length and complexity, (b) repeat the sentences without changing word meaning or grammar. This relates to the ability to internalise simple and complex sentences in order to accurately recall the meaning and structure of spoken sentences.

Basic Concepts

Aim to evaluate the child's knowledge of concepts of dimension/size, direction/location/position, number/quantity and equality. This skill is usually acquired through experience with the environment and is important for following directions, participating in games and locating people and objects in the environment.

Word Classes

Aim 6 to evaluate the child's ability to perceive relationships between words that are related by semantic class features and to express those relationships. This skill relates to word associations and is important for categorisation skills and matching antonyms and synonyms.

A3.3 Renfrew Language Scales Bus Story Test

This test asks the child to retell a narrative. It has been standardised on a UK population. It is used with children aged 3;9 to 8;5 years. It provides 3 scoring parameters; a mean score per age and standard deviations for information the child has provided in the story, a mean score per age for sentence length and a mean score per age for number of subordinate clauses used by the child in the story.

A3.4 Diagnostic Evaluation of Articulation and Phonology (DEAP)

This is an assessment standardised on an Irish population. It examines the child's ability to produce sounds in isolation and in words compared with other children their age. It allows the tester to differentiate between:

- ☐ articulation and phonology difficulties,
- ☐ disorder and delay and,
- ☐ diagnose the type of disorder present (consistent vs inconsistent).
- ☐ It provides standardised scores and percentile ranks for intelligibility (ability to be understood).

A4 Happy Talk Interventions 2012/2013

A4.1 Crèche Programme

Parent's Summer Course: Three 1 hour sessions were run for parents who had specific concerns about their children's language development. Themes covered included: communication, adding language and taking turns. Following each session, the SLT coached individual parents alongside their child in the crèche. The coaching focused on the strategies explored during the sessions.

Crèche staff workshops: Two workshops were run for staff of all 6 crèches on language development. They focused on recapping Happy Talk strategies: modelling, expanding, balancing questions with comments, waiting and taking turns; creating an environment for language development and adding language. Tailored SLT supports were also provided e.g. a workshop was run for Newbury crèche.

Parents sessions: Two sessions were run for parents to introduce them to the Happy Talk strategies, which the crèche staff would be implementing with their children in the setting. The sessions focused on listening and attention, strategies being used within the crèche and the importance of rhyme, rhythm and repetition for language learning. Parents with specific concerns about their child were met individually.

Crèche staff: Beag, Graffiti Theatre's Early Years arts team, integrate drama, music and visual arts in their approach with children aged 0-3 years. Happy Talk collaborated with Beag, recognising that language development could be supported through their approach. Beag ran a workshop for crèche staff, which explored shadow play, sound chamber, vocal gymnastics, creating a sound kitchen and imaginative play.

Beag then visited each of the 6 crèches and ran 2 sessions in each. The sessions focused on shadow play activities using a light box and shadow puppetry. They also provided opportunities for developing vocabulary. Shadow Play activities help to develop listening and attention skills. They also create opportunities for exploring sound using musical instruments. Sound activities help to develop listening skills. Listening is one of the building blocks for language development, reading and comprehension. Sound is also the foundation of music.

Coaching crèche staff: The SLTs ran 7 sessions in each of the 6 crèches aimed at coaching staff in integrating language development strategies in their interactions with the children over the course of the year. Each session included a focus on listening, skills development and action rhymes.

Summary of topics covered

- ☐ Coaching
- ☐ What's involved in Communication Listening Rules and games
- ☐ Responding to music
- ☐ Rhyme
- ☐ Strategies
 - Balancing questions with comments
 - Modelling
 - Expanding

Learning Outcomes - Staff

Staff will:

- ☐ Understand and use the Happy Talk strategies; modelling, expanding, balancing questions & comments
- ☐ Be more aware of their interaction with the children, particularly their own use of language

- ☐ Encourage listening and attention skills (e.g. games to play)
- ☐ Understand the importance of rhyme and practice nursery rhymes and songs

Expected Outcomes - Parents

Parents will:

- ☐ Understand how and why their child communicates
- ☐ Understand and use the Happy Talk strategies; modelling, expanding and balancing questions & comments
- ☐ Understand and practice the strategies -Observe, Wait, Listen & -Taking Turns & -Adding Language (Hanan, 2007)

Expected Impact on Children

Children will have:

- ☐ More opportunities to communicate and talk
- ☐ Improved grammar
- ☐ Improved listening and attending skills
- ☐ Increased vocabulary

A4.2 Preschool Programme 2012/2013

Term 1

In term one Happy Talk was offered to 6 of the 14 preschools, following from last year, when 8 of the 14 received the programme.

Elklan Speech and Language Support for Under 5s (1 session per week for 8 weeks) was offered and 12 preschool staff attended from the 6 settings.

Staff workshop: Preschool staff learned coaching as a method; revision of strategies: balancing questions and comments, modelling; expanding; joint planning; parental engagement. 14 attended from the 6 settings

Staff coaching: sessions were run in each of the 6 preschools focused on listening; Happy Talk strategies; phonological awareness.

6 Parent sessions were run in each of the 6 preschools to support these coaching sessions.

Term 2

During Term 2 a 2 tiered delivery was introduced.

An intensive programme was delivered in the 5 settings presenting with greatest need within The Glen and Mayfield or part of National evaluation. An 8 week programme comprising of 2 weekly staff coaching sessions was offered. There were 4 consecutive parent sessions, which focused on vocabulary (body parts, describing feelings), concepts, strategies (modelling, expanding, balancing questions with comments) how to share books and pretend play, rhythm, and rhyme.

The same programme was delivered in the remaining 9 settings but with 1 weekly coaching session.

Term 3

Preschool Programme: 8 sessions were run in the 5 preschools with the greatest need, and taking part in the NEYAI evaluation. 4 of these sessions were coaching session for parents and 4 were coaching sessions for staff only.

In the remaining 9 preschools this term - parents and/or staff were coached in the setting were coached for 4 sessions.

Other:

Play Day: 3 sessions were run for preschool children by Happy Talk, as part of the wider play day event. It involved a rhyme challenge.

Learning Outcomes - Parents and Staff

Parents and staff will:

- ☐ Understand the importance of rhyme and phonological awareness
- ☐ Be more aware of the language they use when talking to the children
- ☐ Use the Happy Talk strategies in their interactions with the children
- ☐ Understand the importance of developing listening and attention skills

Expected Impact on Children

Children will have:

- ☐ Greater phonological awareness
- ☐ Improved listening and attention skills
- ☐ Improved grammar
- ☐ Increased vocabulary

A4.3

Junior Infants Programme

Parents of junior infant children were invited to attend Elklan Let's Talk With Under 5s programme for parents, running for 5 weeks. Note this programme was also offered to parents of preschool children.

Topics covered:

- ☐ What is communication?
- ☐ Adult-child interaction
- ☐ The link between play and language
- ☐ Understanding language
- ☐ Using Words and sentences
- ☐ Asking questions and sharing books

Two staff workshops were run for junior infant and senior infant teachers, Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), resource teachers and Home School Liaison (HSL) teachers in the 5 schools. These workshops covered the Happy Talk strategies, the planned Junior Infant programme, identifying curricular themes for language development and joint planning.

Junior Infant Programme Content

- ☐ **Listening skills** including listening rules and listening games; reading books, silly stories
- ☐ **Strategies** including modelling and repetition, expanding, balancing questions with comments
- ☐ **Language development** including sorting words, linking /grouping word, action words
- ☐ **Narrative skills** including: sequencing and storymap; colourful stories (what, where, start, what happened, end); conjunctions of more complex sentences; asking why and modelling full sentences using colourful story; acting out stories
- ☐ **Phonological Awareness** including blending and segmenting compound words, identifying syllables in words, identifying sounds in word
- ☐ **Rhyme:** the children learnt a rhyme each week. In the final term, the rhyme activity incorporated the use of conjunctions.

Parent Sessions

The parents made support materials as part of the session such as Monster boxes for sorting items, feely bags for descriptive words and individual photobooks which contained photos of themselves and their child engaged in activities and which would serve as a reminder of the programme content.

Language Fun Events were held for each of the schools. Parents supported the running of the activities and those who attended Happy Talk sessions during the year were presented with certificates.

Learning Outcomes – Staff**Staff will-**

- ☐ How to use the strategies
- ☐ Greater awareness of their interactions with the children
- ☐ Greater awareness of the language they use
- ☐ Importance of phonological awareness
- ☐ Awareness about normal speech and language development

Learning Outcomes - Parents

- ☐ How to use the strategies
- ☐ Greater awareness of their interactions with the children
- ☐ Greater awareness of the language they use
- ☐ Importance of phonological awareness

Expected Impacts on Children

- ☐ Improved listening and attention
- ☐ Longer sentences
- ☐ More complex sentences
- ☐ Better ability to identify and generate rhyme
- ☐ Greater knowledge and use of concepts (describing words such as top/bottom)
- ☐ Better grammar
- ☐ Begin to generate simple stories

A5 Population Based Research

The term *population-based* is traditionally used to describe a study that involves a defined general population, as opposed to populations based on occupation, gender, race etc. In this case the physical area of the research is quite small, so it could also be defined as a cohort study.

Population based research enables a study of a cohort, which is representative of a defined population. In this case children living in the Glen and Mayfield aged between 0-6 years of age.

A5.1 Benefits of Population Based Research

The advantages of population based research are many, but specifically in the case of Happy Talk it:-

1. Allows the project staff and evaluator to estimate the distributions and prevalence rates of specific variables in the reference population, particularly speech and language delays. Given the high level of pre-intervention assessment and the relatively high confidence margin, the team is confident that the prevalence rates identified apply across the overall population.
2. The key variables measured in the assessments form a baseline, which can be compared with distributions in future cross-sectional samples so as to assess risk factor trends over time.
3. Population based research provides an ideal setting in which to carry out unbiased evaluations of relationships between interventions and outcomes, but also among any other variables of interest, even those which were not specified in the original study hypotheses. One of the key objectives of Happy Talk was to evaluate the impact of the project.

A5.2 Applying Population Based Research to Happy Talk

Happy Talk aims to improve the language and learning skills of children in the 0-3 and 3-6 age groups (in the Glen and Mayfield). The decision was taken by the Consortium to deliver most of the Happy Talk interventions within a classroom setting either in primary schools, preschools and crèches in the area, to ensure that there is no duplication between its work and the mainstream work of the speech and language services of the HSE. Since all of the interventions would be applied in group setting as well as through coaching with parents and teachers, it was very important to understand:-

- ☐ Overall prevalence rates of speech and language delays in the population; and
- ☐ The impact of the interventions on the overall population (of children aged 0-6).

In use of the EDI tool by UCC adds to the value of the population based approach, as the EDI also uses a population based approach and therefore the data can be used to assess outcomes for Happy Talk.

A6 Sampling Methodology

In year one of Happy Talk, assessments were carried out at both preschool and junior infant levels, to ascertain prevalence levels as well as the specific clinical needs of the children to inform the development of the customised programmes. In year two, assessments were only undertaken at junior infant level. Individual assessments were also undertaken at preschool level, where specific issues were identified with individual children. In all cases the same sampling methodology was used to ensure consistency in the research programme.

A sample size was selected based on the population of the junior infant classes participating in the Project. A confidence interval of 9% and a confidence interval of 95% were applied to the population to ascertain the acceptable sample size. A random sample of children was then selected from the school roll, excluding children whose first language is not English.

A6.1 Confidence Interval/Margin of Error

The confidence interval is also known as the margin of error. This means that if 47% percent of your sample picks an answer you can be "sure" that if you had asked the question of the entire relevant population between 38% (47-9) and 56% (47+9) would have picked that answer. The confidence interval is the amount of error that can be tolerated in the sample.

A6.2 Confidence Level

The confidence level is the amount of uncertainty you can tolerate. Suppose that there are 20 yes/no questions in your survey, with a confidence level of 95%, you would expect that for one of the questions (1 in 20) the percentage of people who answer yes, would be more than the margin of error away from the true answer. The true answer is the percentage you would get if you interviewed/assessed everyone in the population.