



Early Years Workforce Development: Speech and Language Support

1. Context:

1.1 Herefordshire Council

In Autumn 2019 Herefordshire Council was seeking to make an investment in the early years workforce to deliver improved early identification and support for young children with speech, language and communication needs, and their families.

Accordingly, a tender was published for a service to:

- Deliver communication friendly setting accreditation and lead communication practitioners within target settings throughout Herefordshire.
- Deliver practitioner training for Elklan's 'Let's Talk' or equivalent parent training programmes.
- Support settings to deliver their own small group and individual work, using learning from evidence-based programmes.
- Establish self-sustaining networks of lead communication practitioners.
- Establish and embed an online toolkit for use by families and professionals.

The intended contract duration was 27 months (January 2019- March 2021 inclusive), with a key objective that work, learning and benefit of the service should be sustained beyond this time.

1.2 Elklan

Elklan Training Ltd was established in 1999 by two experienced speech and language therapists, Liz Elks and Henrietta McLachlan, in response to a demand for training to be delivered by speech and language therapists to education staff to enable them to be more effective in their support of children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

Elklan specialises in providing accredited training and professional development to staff in early years, primary and secondary education settings, to enable them to more effectively

support the speech, language and communication development of all children, including those with speech, language and communication needs. Elklan trains and licences speech and language therapists and highly specialist teachers to be Elklan Tutors, delivering training in their own areas. Elklan provides the Tutors with the resources and support they need to train other practitioners and parents and to enable the practitioners to implement and embed changes in practice in their settings. Elklan also enables whole settings to achieve *Communication Friendly Setting* (CFS) accreditation, supporting the communication development of all children, including those with additional speech, language and communication needs.

Since 2001 Elklan has been responsible for training provided to over 70,000 staff in educational settings. Elklan also provides training to parents and carers, both directly, and through the staff working regularly in early years settings and schools.

In addition to working with individual settings Elklan has extensive experience of working on an area, or authority wide, basis, implementing time limited programmes to meet the specifications of tenders and grants. This involves on-going monitoring, reporting and communication with local authorities and local speech and language therapy services as well as extensive evaluation activities.

Elklan works across England, within the majority of local authorities, as well as working at national level with partners including universities, government departments and national funders including the Education Endowment Fund and the Nuffield Foundation, meaning the personnel put forward for this tender were aware of current and emerging practice on the ground.

2. Elklan's Proposal

Elklan successfully submitted a proposal to Herefordshire Council which included the following activities:

- Identifying, with a stakeholder group, target early years settings for the programme.
- Providing one of two accredited courses to practitioners (Lead Communication Practitioners or LCPs), from the settings:
 - *Elklan Speech and Language Support for 0-3s or*
 - *Elklan Speech and Language Support for 3-5s*Practitioners to have choice regarding attending courses over 10 X 2-hour weekly sessions or intensively over 3 full days. Options regarding time of day and day of week (including weekends) were also offered.
- Enabling the LCPs to cascade a lighter touch training course, *Communication Counts*, to all staff in their settings through provision of powerpoints, teaching notes and support.
- Supporting LCPs to lead their settings in gaining accredited Communication Friendly Setting status, and in gaining a Level 4 qualification themselves.
- Training and equipping some of the LCPs to be tutors for the delivery of *Let's Talk* courses for parents.
- Supporting the newly trained *Let's Talk* Tutors (LCPs) to deliver their first courses to parents.

- Providing an additional day's training to the LCPs about best practice in supporting children using evidence based small group interventions.
- Developing, promoting, and embedding an accessible age-appropriate online toolkit for families and professionals.
- Providing opportunities for LCPs to provide peer support to each other through networking.

2.1 Implementation Plan

The principal activities to be undertaken and their initial phasing are set out below:

| TERM | Spr 19 | Sum 19 | Aut 19 | Spr 20 | Sum 20 | Aut 20 | Spr 21 |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Stakeholder and setting engagement | | | | | | | |
| 7 X <i>Speech and Language Support</i> Courses | | | | | | | |
| <i>Communication Counts</i> , training cascade in settings | | | | | | | |
| Settings gain Communication Friendly Accreditation and LCPs gain Level 4 awards | | | | | | | |
| <i>Let's Talk</i> Tutor training | | | | | | | |
| Delivery of <i>Let's Talk</i> to parents and carers | | | | | | | |
| Training courses for practitioners in evidence-based approaches/small group interventions | | | | | | | |
| Evidence -based small group interventions delivered in settings | | | | | | | |
| Network activity | | | | | | | |
| Toolkit launch | | | | | | | |
| Toolkit refresh | | | | | | | |

2.2 Targets

Initial activity targets were agreed as follows:

| | | |
|------------------|----|--|
| Settings engaged | 94 | |
|------------------|----|--|

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| Training Course for practitioners: <i>Speech and Language Support</i> , level 3 | 7 courses held | 105 practitioners trained |
| Practitioners achieving Level 4 awards, achieving Lead Communication Practitioner status | 93 | |
| Settings achieving Communication Friendly Setting (CFSe) status accreditation | 85 | |
| Practitioners trained to work with parents | 2 courses held | 30 practitioners trained |
| Parent courses | 30 courses | 150- 300 families reached |
| Practitioners trained in evidence-based interventions | 7 courses held | 90 practitioners trained |
| Small intervention groups run in settings | Number of groups facilitated by Tutors: 90 Number of groups delivered independently by settings: 85 | Number of children attending groups: 450 |
| Number of visitors to online toolkit | 1,880 | |

3. The requirement for revision to plans and targets

The original plans and targets were changed during the programme's lifetime, as a consequence of the external context, beyond the control of the partners; Herefordshire's changed policy for the early years sector; and the availability of new Elklan programmes, which were offered to Herefordshire.

3.1 The external context

Herefordshire experienced extreme flood conditions in autumn 2019, with less severe repetitions in February 2020 and 2021. These impacted on families and settings, with travel severely restricted and practitioners unable to attend training events.

In March 2020 the whole of the UK was placed under 'Lockdown' in response to the Covid-19 pandemic; many children and practitioners were unable to attend settings and it was not possible to convene groups of families or practitioners for programme activities. Some early years settings in Herefordshire closed completely with staff being placed on furlough. Government restrictions on the terms and conditions of furlough resulted in staff being unable to continue training. In general, the workforce was under stress and priorities for services and individuals were changed.

The Covid-19 pandemic affected every part of the programme, with the publication of the Toolkit delayed by the need for website staff (Wellbeing, Information and Signposting for Herefordshire, WISH, or Talk Community website) needing to focus on guidance in respect of Coronavirus.

3.2 Herefordshire Council

The agreed proposal included additional training for Lead Communication Practitioners in evidence based practice:

'Speech and Language Support' and 'Communication Counts' Training will introduce evidence-based approaches and strategies for supporting all children's speech, language and communication development, including those children who have EAL and additional speech and language needs. LCPs will benefit from an additional day's training about best practice in supporting children using evidence based small group interventions such as Elklan's Early Years Based Information Carrying Words resource (EYBIC), The Nuffield Early Language Intervention (NELI) and I CAN's Early Talk Boost. This course will be provided 7 times to the original LCP cohorts in May 2020.

Following this training 90 LCPs were to be provided with a resource for delivering an evidence-based, small group intervention, facilitated and supported to deliver it to groups of children in their settings, and then supported to deliver to a further group more independently.

In September 2020 the contract monitoring group expressed reservations regarding this part of the planned programme; structured intervention groups were not viewed as reflecting the local authority's early years ethos and their holistic approach to a child's learning. ,

3.3 Elklan's Programmes

For parents and carers:

The original tender submission included the training of 30 LCPs to deliver a training course to 5-10 parents each. This course, *Let's Talk with Under 5s*, provides theory together with practical strategies through weekly sessions and attendees can gain 3 credits at Level 1. Parents attend without their children and Elklan's delivery proposal included provision of creche facilities.

By January 2019 Elklan had developed, and successfully trialled, a more practical course for parents, along the lines of a stay and play sessions, *Let's Talk at Home*. Parents attend with their children and the course Tutor models coaches and supports parents in implementing appropriate strategies. Elklan was able to offer to train Herefordshire LCPs in delivering this programme and to support them in implementing it, at no additional cost.

For Childminders:

During 2019/20 Elklan developed a programme through which childminders could progress to a *Communication Friendly Home Learning environment* (CFHLE) award. This was open to childminders who had already undertaken, or were undertaking, one of Elklan's *Speech and Language Support* training courses. This being far more appropriate to their context than

the CFSe award available to early years settings. The CFHLE programme was publicised within Herefordshire in October 2020.

4. Revisions to plans and targets: April 2020

Soon after the agreement to implement Elklan's new programmes (*Let's Talk at Home* and *CFHLE*), implementation plans were revised again, as a consequence of the pandemic, in April 2020.

The majority of adjustments made were in regard to the delivery mode, rather than the volume or timing, of activities. However, work with parents and small group interventions were delayed and risks to the target numbers, for all activities, were acknowledged.

- **Stakeholder involvement:**
The purpose of each planned stakeholder meeting was reviewed and e-mail, video conferencing or social media contact planned, as appropriate, to replace face to face meetings.
- **Setting engagement:**
As it was not possible to continue with face-to-face meetings to either gain engagement or to network between settings already engaged it was determined that virtual meetings, social media, email and the Herefordshire page of the Elklan website would be used.
- **Training delivery:**
As face-to-face delivery was no longer possible Elklan introduced an on-line offer including live webinars and e-learning modules for all future courses. This was not possible for *Let's Talk at Home*, which requires children to attend with parents.
- **Practitioners working towards gaining level 3 accredited awards whilst completing *Speech and Language Support Courses*:**
Learners, who had attended training, needed to undertake activities in their settings and include these in Learning Logs so that Accreditation could be awarded. Some settings were not open, or had limited numbers of children in attendance, many practitioners were not working within settings. Elklan agreed, with the awarding organisation, that assignments based on historical experience or hypothetical situations would be accepted.
- **Tutor visits to settings:**
It was not possible for Tutors to visit early years settings or childminders to provide support or to conduct audits. Video conferencing facilities were used to support practitioners and a format for conducting audits virtually was developed.
- **Gaining of CFSe Awards**
It was acknowledged that settings and practitioners might not be able to prioritise further work in this area at the current time.
- **Practitioner work with parents:**

As it was not possible to gather parents, or parents and children, into groups for delivery this work was largely suspended although some practitioners used their learning from *Let's Talk* to deliver to parents on an individual basis, either face to face or virtually.

- The Toolkit

It was acknowledged that conflicting priorities might delay the launch and limit the volume of the Toolkit. Publicity planned through public events and posters was also redesigned to focus on social media and newsletters. There was recognition that reach might consequently be reduced.

5. Revisions to plans and targets: February 2021

As a result of the continued impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the local context a formal contract variation came into force on the 15th February 2021. Targets were revised, ending, or cancelling work in some areas whilst increasing planned activity for work considered more feasible in the context. There was a zero net effect on the budget.

| Performance Indicator | Original target | Revised target |
|--|------------------------|----------------|
| No of Learners undertaking level 2/level 3 training (<i>Speech and Language Support</i>) | 105 | 205 |
| Settings achieving CFSe | 85 | 76 |
| Childminders achieving CFHLE | 0 | 18 |
| Practitioners trained as parent tutors | 30 | N/A |
| Parent Groups run | 30 | N/A |
| No of Learners trained in Evidence based interventions | 90 | N/A |
| Settings delivering small group interventions | 90 (tutor facilitated) | N/A |
| Number of visitors to online toolkit | 1,880 | 1,400 |

6. Programme resources

The programme has been delivered to the budget set through the original tender process. (£462,271.50) with monies from those activities which did not proceed reallocated to those which were increased, or which required additional expenditure, in the context of the pandemic. For example, in addition to increasing target numbers for attendance at *Speech and Language Support* courses, these courses had a higher than anticipated rate of attrition, requiring additional courses to be held and additional support to be given to learners.

Of specific note:

- Resources, for providing childcare whilst parents attended *Let's Talk with under 5s* courses and for training practitioners in evidenced based practice, were reallocated to delivering additional *Speech and Language Support* courses and to marking and accrediting the work of learners on these courses.

- Resources for providing materials to parents were reallocated to extend delivery licenses for the practitioners trained as *Let's Talk with under 5s* delivery Tutors until January 2022 at minimum.
- Resources to provide a training attendance allowance, to contribute to backfill whilst practitioners attended training were overspent at £29,350, against a budget of £28,225 (Elklan has absorbed this cost).

7. Activity

7.1 Courses offered to Herefordshire learners

| | Programme Plan (original) | | Actual delivery | |
|--|---------------------------|----------------|--|----------------|
| | Courses offered | Learner places | Courses offered | Learner places |
| Speech and Language Support (0-3s or 3-5s) | 7 | 105 | 23 (16 courses delivered and 7 cancelled due to booking numbers or Covid) | 345 |
| Communication Friendly Settings | 7 | 93 | 9 (7 courses delivered and 2 cancelled due to booking numbers) | 135 |
| Communication Friendly Home Learning environments | 0 | 0 | 3 (2 courses delivered and 1 cancelled due to booking numbers) | 45 |
| Parent Tutors (Let's Talk with under 5s or Let's Talk at Home) | 2 | 30 | 3 | 45 |
| Evidence Based practice | 7 | 90 | 0 | 0 |

7.2 Courses offered to Parents

Initial plans, for trained practitioners to act as Tutors, training parents groups, whilst being supported by Elklan Tutors were necessarily halted by pandemic related dictates on social distancing. However, prior the end of March 2020 Elklan Tutors were able to offer support to 14 parents groups run by staff from Children's Centres and settings (further 5 courses cancelled), 5 further courses were later offered to families on a one to one basis by trained staff.

7.3 Networking

Prior to the Covid-19 outbreak 3 network meetings were held, in accordance with the implementation plan. Following this Networks have been maintained through virtual

contact and through a dedicated Facebook Page. Elklan has made an average of 30 posts per term on the Facebook page.

7.4 The Toolkit

Parents and professionals Toolkits were launched on the WISH website (subsequently known as 'Talk community'), in July and November 2020 respectively. Proposed revisions and updates were submitted in August 2021.

Publicity has been through training courses, newsletters, emails and Facebook.

8. Programme Outputs

Please see Appendix 1 for details of Learners and settings.

8.1 Settings engaged:

120 eligible settings have engaged with the programme. Additionally 2 further settings, which Elklan understands were not eligible (Freedom Kids Hereford and Harvard Children's Centre) engaged.

8.2 Accredited Learners at Levels 2 and 3

Learners have been able to participate in either *Speech and Language Support for 0-3s* or *Speech and Language Support for 3-5s*. Through attendance at a minimum of 80% of the training sessions making up their course, and completion of an on-line Learning Log, marked by their Elklan Tutor, they are able to gain an accredited award through OCN. Learners most usually gain this award at Level 3. However, where learners are struggling with the academic demands of their course, they are able to complete, and be accredited for, a learning log at Level 2.

| Level of Award | 2 | 3 | Total |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|--------------|
| Number of Learners | 18 | 171 | 189 |

8.3 Other Learners

A significant number of early years practitioners have enrolled on and participated in the *Speech and Language Support* courses offered as part of the project but have not progressed to gaining an accredited award. For the majority of these Learners the barrier to gaining accreditation has been the need to fully complete a Learning Log, to the required standard, outside of the formal course sessions, often in their own time. Informal feedback has indicated that the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on this, with practitioners being under increased pressure at home and at work, compared with that which they anticipated when enrolling on courses.

Whilst this group of Learners have not gained accredited awards they have undertaken valuable training in supporting children's speech, language and communication needs.

The number of Learners who have participated in *Speech and Language Support* courses, who have not gained an accredited award: 55.

This brings the total number of Learners who participated in *Speech and Language Support* courses to 244, which is in excess of the revised target of 205.

8.4 Accredited Learners at Level 4

Learners who achieved an award at Level 3, and who were based in settings, were offered the opportunity to undertake further activities to become Lead Communication Practitioners (LCPs) for their settings.

- Additional training course
- Completion of a Level 4 Learning Log
- Cascading *Communication Counts*, a 5 X 1 hour training course, to all staff in their setting
- Participation in an audit of their own, and one other, setting

Successful completion of these activities led to a Level 4 award, accredited by OCN.

Number of Level 4 Awards: 51.

8.5 Communication Friendly Settings

A Communication Friendly Setting (CFSe) Award is made to settings which have:

- A Lead Communication Practitioner in place.
- A minimum of 80% of staff who have received Communication Counts Training.
- Demonstrated that they have adopted and embedded strategies for supporting children's speech, language and communication development.
- Successfully undergone an audit undertaken by an Elklan Tutor or peer.

CFSe status initially lasts for 3 years and can then be renewed.

The number of settings who achieved CFSe status was 51. This is less than the revised target of 76.

Elklan offered 135 settings the opportunity to undertake this work. Unfortunately, 21 settings made significant progress through the process but were unable to complete in the time frame, in the majority of cases this was indirectly or directly due to the impact of Covid-19 which caused staffing issues, difficulties in grouping staff for training and some redeployment of key staff.

8.6 Communication Friendly Home Learning Environments

The Communication Friendly Home Learning Environment (CFHLE) programme has been developed specifically for childminders, although it is considered to have wider applications with, for example, foster parents.

In order to gain CFHLE status. for their childminding setting a Learner is required to:

- Complete a *Speech and Language Support* course, at either level 2 or level 3 (including satisfactory completion of the Learning log)
- Complete a check list regarding the physical environment, resources, interactions, and strategies used to support children's speech, language and communication
- Host a visit from an Elklan Tutor so they can observe practice and support the learner to develop it.

CFHLe status initially lasts for 3 years and can then be renewed.

The number of childminding settings which achieved CFHLe status was 21, in excess of the target of 18.

8.7 Parent Tutors and Work with Parents

32 practitioners, from settings and Childrens Centres were trained to deliver either *Let's Talk with Under 5s* or *Let's Talk at Home*, a more practical play-based course which children attend alongside their parents. This work was suspended as a consequence of social distancing however, it had already exceeded the target of 30.

The trained practitioners registered courses for parents that they were delivering, or planning to deliver, prior to social distancing restrictions being put in place, some were subsequently cancelled or run on a one-to-one basis. 54 parent/carers learners completed courses (57 registered).

8.8 Evidence Based interventions

As detailed in above, in sections 3.2 and 5 of this report, this part of the programme, training, equipping and supporting early practitioners to deliver small group interventions to children with additional speech, language and communication needs, was cancelled.

8.9 Networking

3 face to face network meetings were held prior to March 2020. After this a dedicated Facebook page was used to maintain engagement with practitioners, with an average of 30 posts made by Elklan each term. Elklan Tutors also held webinars for practitioners needing additional support in specific areas or wanting to find out more about specific areas of development.

8.10 The Toolkit

At the time of their respective launches the Toolkits contained the following pages, in addition to an introductory page, all in regards to speech, language and communication development for under fives:

Parents' Toolkit:

- General information about speech, language and communication
- What you can do to support your child
- Activities and ideas to support your child's language development
- What's available in Herefordshire
- What to do if you are worried about your child's speech, language and communication
- My child has a diagnosis. What does this mean for their speech, language and communication?
 - Developmental Language Disorder
 - Stammering
 - Selective mutism
 - Autism
 - Hearing impairments
 - Glue ear
 - Down's syndrome
- Information for parents who speak English as an additional language
- Top Tips fact sheet (Top Tips also included on every page).

Practitioners' Toolkit:

- General information about speech and language development
- Typical language development
- Assessing children's language development
- Resources and activities to support children's language development
- Intervention and monitoring for children with speech, language and communication needs
- Diagnosed conditions which can affect children's speech, language and communication
- Support for your setting
- Who else may be working with children with speech, language and communication needs?
- Bilingualism and English as an additional language
- Good practice and great idea fact sheet (good practice also included on every page).

In the summer of 2021 Elklan checked and refreshed all links within the Toolkits and provided additional, downloadable, activity sheets to be added.

From July 2020 to August 2021 there were 1,189 users of the Toolkit with 11,087 page views. Between them the users had 1,552 sessions using the Toolkit.

Two of the Toolkit pages proved to be the most popular pages, as measured by page views, on the Wellbeing, Information and Signposting for Herefordshire (WISH) or Talk Community website.

9. The Programme Outcomes

Elklan has collected data regarding programme outcomes in the following ways:

- Feedback from participants on all training courses
- Online questionnaires completed by participants on *Communication Counts*, the cascaded training delivered by LCPs within settings
- Pre and post programme questionnaires, to which all practitioners engaged with the programme were invited to respond
- An online survey (Survey Monkey) regarding the Toolkits publicised through the Elklan/Herefordshire Facebook page and through training participants

9.1 Feedback on training and its impact

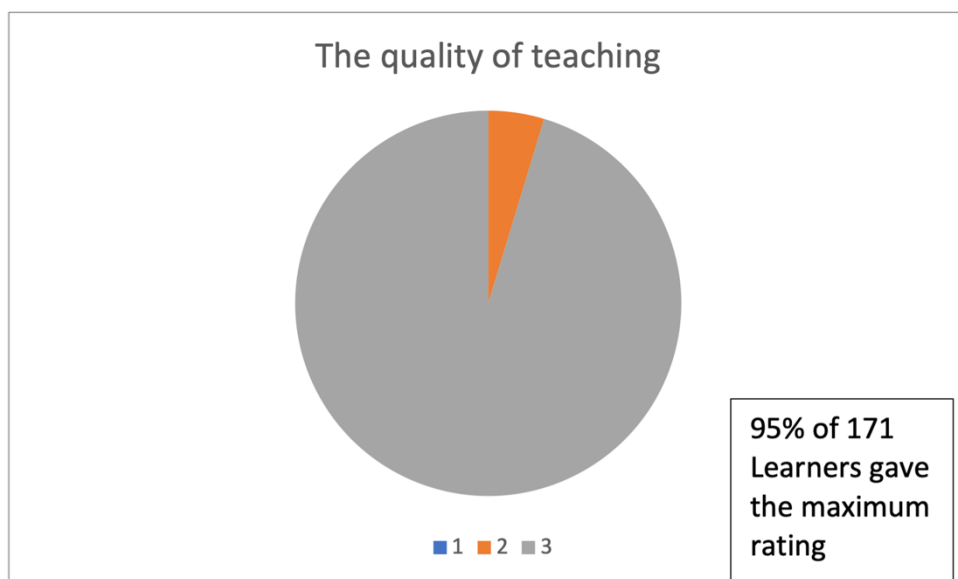
Speech and Language Support

Full feedback from participants for each of the 16 courses is included in Appendix 2.

The quality of training

Participants were asked to rate the course content and quality of teaching on a scale of 1 (low) to 3 (high).





It can be seen that training was highly regarded by Learners, in terms of both content and delivery.

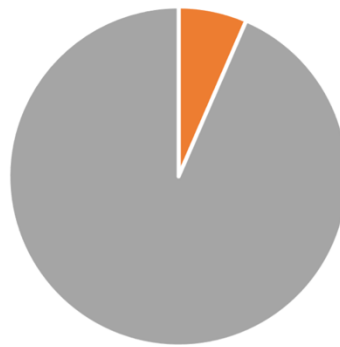
Sample comments from learners:

- *Brilliant course, X is a great tutor with a lot of patience and a passion to get us all passed.*
- *I really enjoyed this course and was a bit nervous before I started about not knowing anything. Now it has finished I am surprised with how much I did know and how much more I know thanks to the course. X did an AMAZING job and was so lovely and made sure we all felt comfortable with the sessions before we left.*
- *I really enjoyed the course, I liked X's teaching style, it was a good mix of practical, visual and auditory learning.*
- *Very, very interesting and beneficial. Has made me think about all I do as well as my colleagues. Information delivered was clear, with lots of practical advice and the theory behind it from a knowledgeable, experienced tutor.*
- *It's a wonderful course, easy to access and delivered excellently!*
- *The course was very insightful and really exceeded my expectations.*
- *I looked forward to the sessions with X our Elklan tutor. All of the course content was delivered clearly and the sessions were, friendly, informative and interesting.*
- *Very well delivered, great tutor, lots of help and encouragement, changed my practice for the better, very worthwhile and would recommend.*
- *I really like organisation from the very first day. I've received my book straight away, there was absolutely no problem when contacting with my tutor, she was also always really helpful and emails were always answered.*

Learning new skills and changing practice

After completion of training learners responded to a number of questions regarding changes in their knowledge, skills and practice, responses were as follows:

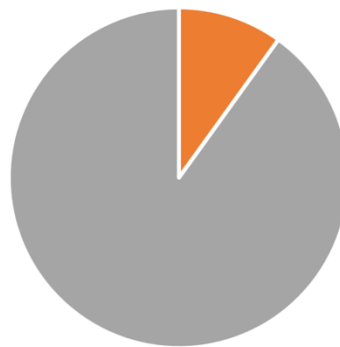
How effective was the course in helping you learn new skills?



■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3

93% of 169
Learners gave
the maximum
rating

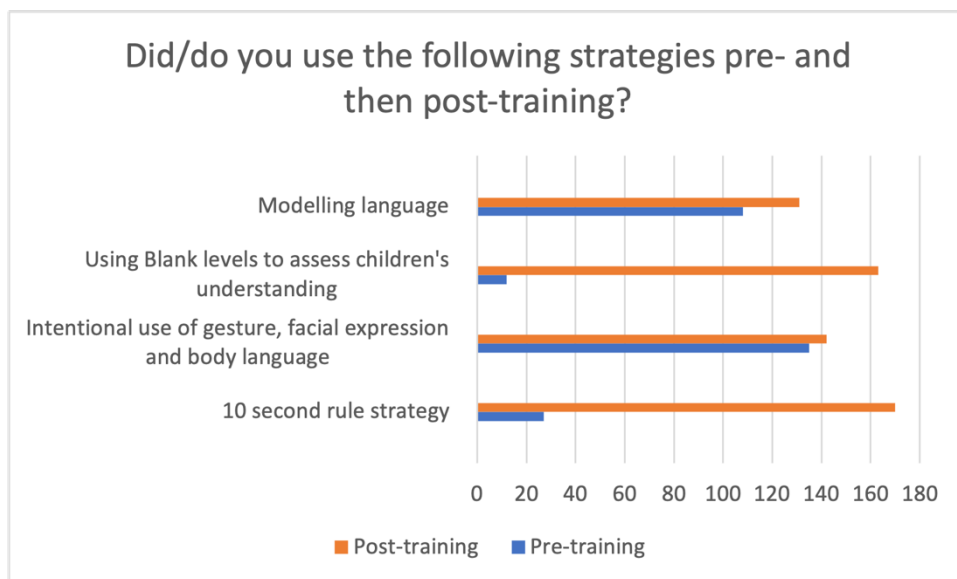
How effective was the course in changing your practice?



■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3

90% of
171Learners
gave the
maximum
rating

Learners were specifically asked about some of the strategies they used pre and post training. Evaluation formats changed over the period of the programme, only those questions included in the majority of evaluations are included in the following analysis.



It is extremely positive that learners not only considered that the training had taught them new skills but that they stated this had changed their practice and were able to be specific about changes they had made.

Sample comments from learners:

- *Great course, great tutor and great ideas to use in my practice.*
- *The course has had a real impact on my knowledge and understanding of communication and language within 3-5 year olds.*
- *I learnt a lot and have used a lot of what I learnt in our setting.*
- *I really enjoyed the course and have learnt many new skills.*
- *I loved taking part on this course and found some many of the strategies were super simple to put into practice but have made such a difference.*
- *I feel that this course has had a very positive impact on my setting and has greatly improved the speech and language support we provide the children in our care. It's very good at supporting you to reflect on practice and think about improvements that need to be made.*
- *It is a fantastic course and I have learnt many new strategies to use within my practice.*
- *I have used so many of the strategies in my work.*
- *All of the information and knowledge I have acquired will make me a much better practitioner.*
- *Very beneficial for myself and my colleagues to provide the children with a language rich environment, whether it is non-verbal or verbal communication strategies. Giving children time to respond is so important.*
- *Really interesting course and has changed my practice within the EYFS setting.*
- *I am grateful to have had the opportunity to take part in this course as it has provided me with a number or resources and strategies I can now use.*

- *Very informative course that relates directly to practice, giving lots of tools for practitioners to use in both their assessment of language and interactions with the children. I've learnt a lot with will positively impact my future practice.*

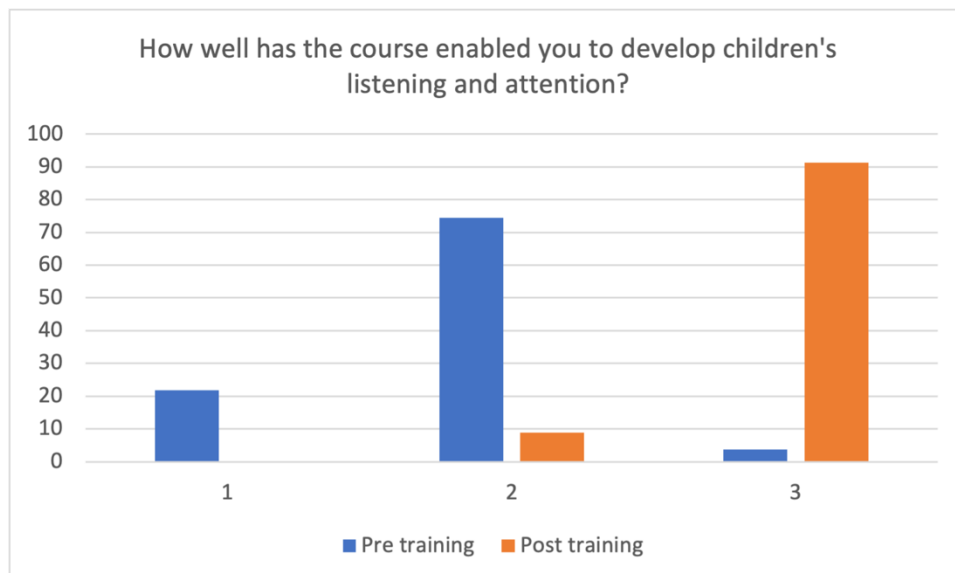
Practitioner confidence

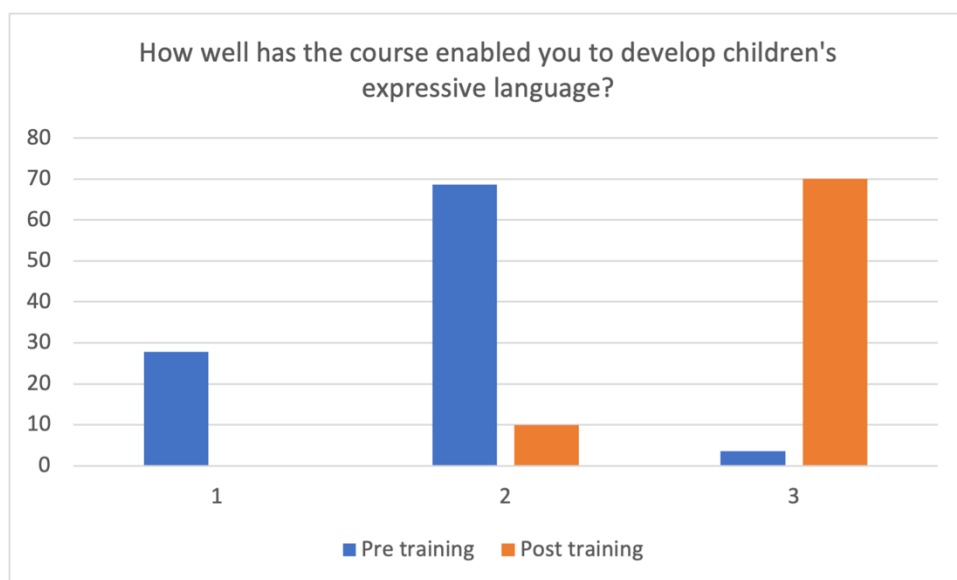
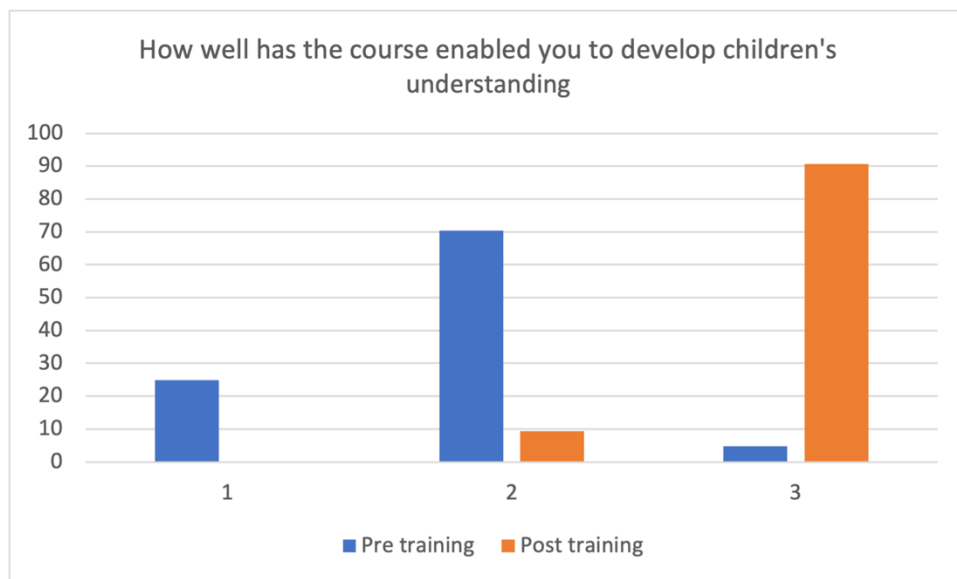
Learners rated their confidence on a scale of 1(low) to 3 (high), pre and post training: Total numbers of respondents are shown in brackets*.

| | Average confidence rating pre training | Average confidence rating post training |
|--|--|---|
| How well has the course enabled you to develop children's listening and attention? | 1.82 (78)* | 2.91 (80)* |
| How well has the course enabled you to develop children's understanding? | 1.80 (169)* | 2.91 (171)* |
| How well has the course enabled you to develop children's expressive language? | 1.76 (169)* | 2.89 (170)* |
| How well has the course enabled you to develop children's social skills? | 1.86 (77)* | 2.88 (80)* |

These confidence ratings are presented graphically below:

- Please rate your confidence pre and post training (1=low and 3=high)





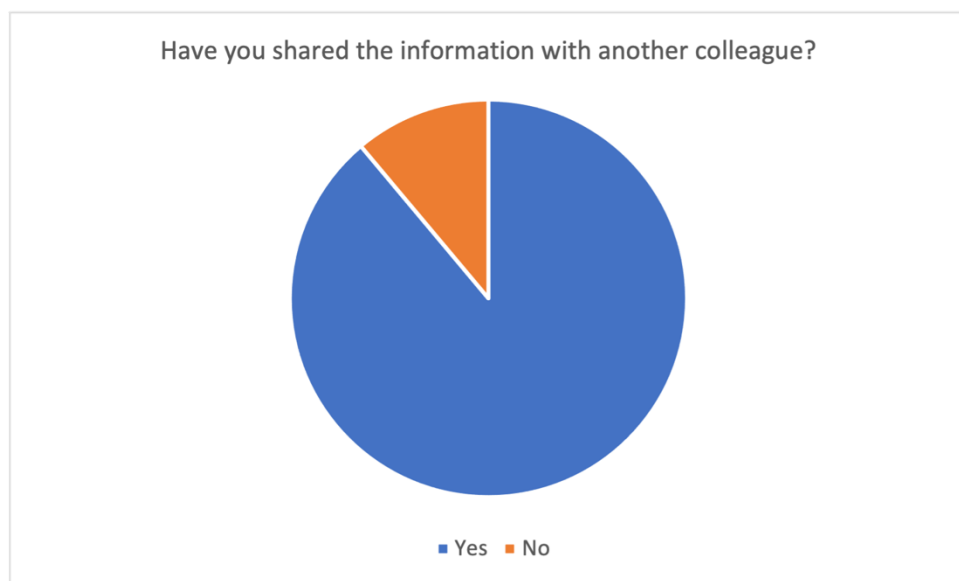
It is very pleasing that the range of responses, as well as the average ratings, decreased post training; no respondents gave a rating of 1 (low confidence) in response to any of the questions post training, in contrast there were 121 ratings of '1' pre training.

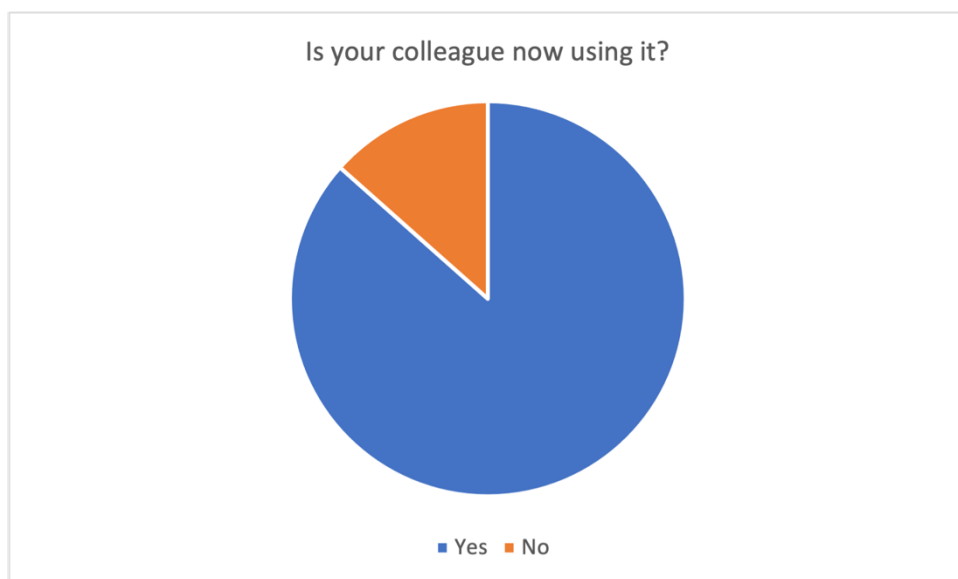
Sample comments from learners:

- *I have thoroughly enjoyed the course and have found it really useful to reflect on my practice throughout. I now feel more confident and empowered to better support children with speech, language and communication difficulties.*
- *The tutor has been an amazing support and made everything easy to understand. Giving me the confidence to implement ideas into my setting.*
- *Thank you for helping me gain my confidence back within Speech and Language. The Early Language builder book is a great resource too!*
- *It is a brilliant course and I was so pleased that my knowledge has developed so well over the last few weeks. I will now be able to take time to put everything into practice over the coming month/year.*

Sharing the knowledge!

88.9% of respondents (number: 189) stated that they had shared information from training with another colleague, and 86.6% reported that the colleague was now using this knowledge. This marks a very significant sharing of good practice.





Sample comments from learners:

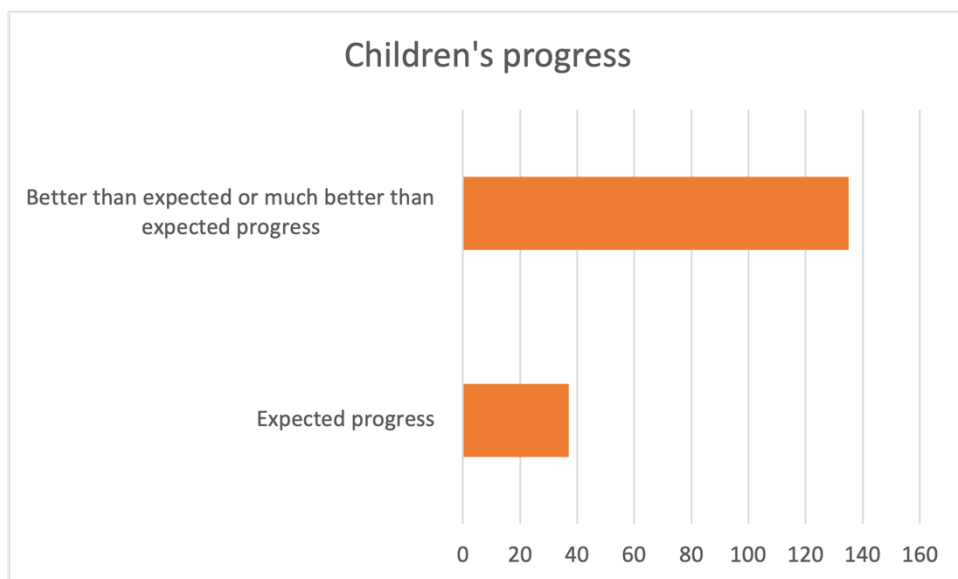
- *I feel myself, and the setting and therefore the children have benefited tremendously from this course.*
- *The course has enabled myself and therefore my colleagues, through information sharing, to better our practise and allowed us to enhance the development of the children within our care. I would recommend the course to anyone wishing to improve their own practise.*
- *I feel I have learned a lot and am looking forward to the level 4 and being able to share it all with staff as the bits I have shared have been well received and I think staff will appreciate gaining a greater knowledge of why we do things and how we can improve as a setting.*
- *I loved the course and have gained a lot, that I can't wait to share and pass on to the staff to help with the children we care for.*

Outcomes for children

Learners were asked:

Following the course, do you consider the progress of the child or children you support to be as expected, better than expected or much better than expected. Responses were as follows:

| | As expected | Better than expected | Much better than expected |
|-----------------|-------------|----------------------|---------------------------|
| No of responses | 37 | 117 | 18 |
| % of responses | 21.5 | 68.0 | 10.5 |



Unfortunately, only 11 of 170 respondents reported that they could provide numerical data about children's progress. Those that said they could cited, for example, the following as evidence:

- Communication and language, 4 children are now secure 30-50 months where they were stuck on emerging for understanding.
- Percentages of children who gained the ELG in 2019, Listening and Attention 25/30 - 83%; Understanding 26/30 - 87%; Speaking - 90%.
- Data spreadsheets show improvements in language, listening and communication.

Learners were clearer on providing examples of things children said before and after they implemented strategies learnt on their courses, examples included:

- 'Tar' is now 'car'. 'Cata' is now 'tractor'. Able to use rhyming words and clap out rhythms.
- Child has spoken more, and speech is clearer.
- Child has started forming more complex sentences.
- Since changing the visual timetable the children are having more discussions regarding the routine with staff members and each other and are showing much more of an awareness of the routine. The children that were participating in these activities are beginning to use linking words in sentences which they were not before and have all made improvements with their expressive language and confidence, speaking in front of others.
- Child before training used pointing and gestures to indicate wants at snack time. After training implemented using choice for snack time with real objects asking question 'milk or water?' He is beginning to use one word to indicate his choice. 'milk' then adults modelled back his response 'milk please'
- Increase in verb endings through more fun activities.
- Before: "Shoes." After: "My shoes are pink!"
- Before this course we had one individual who struggled to communicate at all. Now she uses communication cards and single use words to express herself.

Learners made comments in course evaluations regarding the impact the training had on children they worked with, for example:

We had a Ofsted inspection during the time of us doing the course, they commented in our report - "Staff attend regular training and share new learning with the rest of the team. They speak enthusiastically about the positive impact of recent language and communication training on children's learning. This contributes to high-quality teaching and children's good progress."

- *Thanks for teaching such a life changing course. This i know has changed the outcome for at least one child at setting and at home with his family as i have shared information with them. For their little boy who used to not say anything he now says Mum, Dad and will communicate his needs. He also hums twinkle twinkle little star and without my help i do not think he would be where he is now. Now i use it in everyday practice within a few minutes i can obtain the attention and communicate freely with children with EAL this has been eye turner for many staff who are now keen to be do this.*

9.2 Feedback from Communication Friendly Settings

Communication Counts

The Lead Communication Practitioner in each setting working towards CFSe status was required to deliver *Communication Counts*, a lighter touch course, to a minimum of 80% of the staff in the setting. Each of the 5 sessions of *Communication Counts* has a written challenge that staff take part in individually, with a final additional evaluation at the end of the course.

Over the duration of the Herefordshire project completion rates for the challenges were as follows:

| | Number of responses |
|--|---------------------|
| Communication Counts Challenge 1 | 350 |
| Communication Counts Challenges 2A and B | 324 |
| Communication Counts Challenge 3 | 300 |
| Communication Counts Challenge 4 | 291 |
| Communication Counts Challenge 5 | 278 |
| Communication Counts Challenge CFSe Evaluation | 280 |

The collated reports of each Challenge are contained in Appendix 3. The results are overwhelmingly positive with setting staff reporting learning new information which enabled them to increase their effectiveness in supporting children's speech, language and communication.

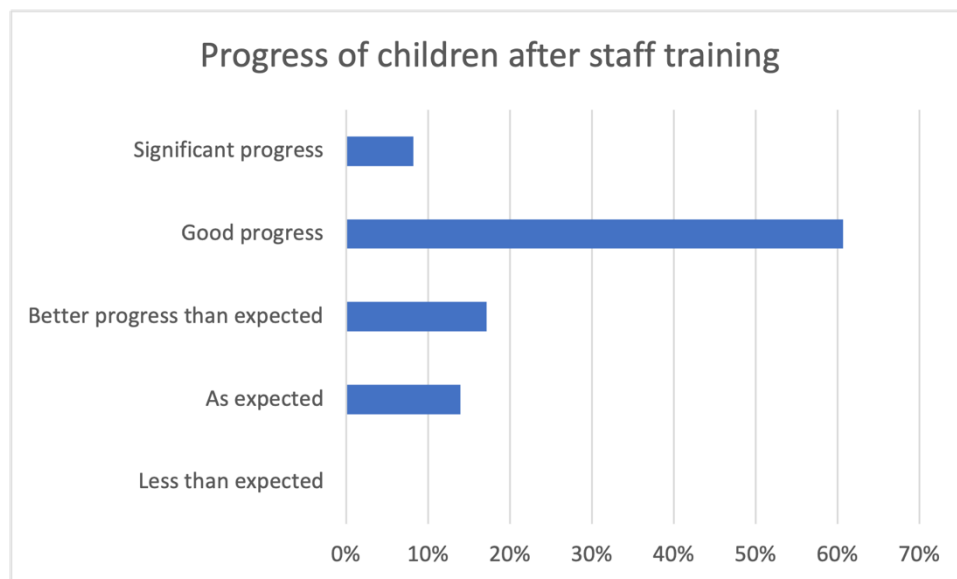
In completing the final questionnaire, the Communication Counts Challenge CFSe Evaluation:

- 96.43% of respondents indicated that the course was effective or very effective in helping them learn new ideas about supporting children's language and communication skills.
- 93.57% of respondents said that the course was effective or very effective in changing the way they talked to and supported children to develop their language and communication.
- 100% of respondents reported their setting having changed to make it more communication friendly, including 67.14% who considered this change to be 'considerable' or 'significant'.
- 99.64% of respondents would recommend the course to others.

The Communication Counts participants were also asked about the progress of children in their setting which they thought was connected to the knowledge and skills they had gained from the course.

Progress was rated as:

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------|
| Less than expected | 0% |
| As expected | 13.93% |
| Better progress than expected | 17.14% |
| Good progress | 60.71% |
| Significant progress | 8.21% |



Sample comments from participants:

- *Just being able to review my practice periodically has been incredibly helpful - I also really liked the word flower and will be using it a lot in the future!*
- *I was made more aware of how I am interacting with the children, especially my use of language.*
- *I learnt a lot about my own practise and also how to talk to the children in a more appropriate way.*
- *I really enjoyed learning the different strategies and look forward to putting them in to place within my practice.*

- *Enjoyed working as a team to highlight the key areas that needed to be changed/ in the setting.*

9.3 Communication Friendly Home Learning Environments.

The CFHLE, as a relatively new Elklan offer, was evaluated prior to this report. The report of this evaluation and the questionnaire completed by participants is included at Appendix 4. Here is a summary:

The quality of training and materials

Learners were asked to rate elements of the programme on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high).

| Rating | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Total No. of respondents |
|--|---|---|---|---|----|--------------------------|
| The quality of support received from the Tutor | | | | | 14 | 14 |
| Ease of understanding of the environment checklist | | | | 3 | 11 | 14 |

The ratings were supported by comments from the participants which included:

- *I thought the course worked well for me and I would not like to change anything.*
- *I'm not sure there is anything that needs improving, I found it quite straight forward and the tutor was extremely helpful and supportive.*

Childminder confidence

The childminders participating in the CFHLE programme were asked to rate their confidence in offering a Communication Friendly Home Learning Environment to parents, and provided the following responses:

| Rating | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Total No. of respondents |
|---|---|---|---|---|----|--------------------------|
| Confidence in offering a CFHLE to parents | | | | 1 | 13 | 14 |

Sharing the knowledge

93% of the childminders who completed the questionnaires said that they would recommend the CFHLE programme to other childminders.

Outcomes for children

Childminders demonstrated changes they made to their home environments as part of the evidence they supplied to gain CFHLE status. Their comments on the impact of participating in the programme included:

- *I absolutely loved working through the CFHLE videos and photos. It made me look at my setting with fresh eyes and see what works and what needed updating. Sometimes we don't always notice our daily practise until we scrutinise it.*
- *The most useful change was my lounge. I have turned it in to a relaxing quiet room with some sensory lighting, beanbags and a story den.*
- *I found rearranging the room and creating different areas, especially the quiet book area has helped.*
- *...it made me really thing about my setting and how I interact with the children on a daily basis.*

9.4 Let's Talk at Home

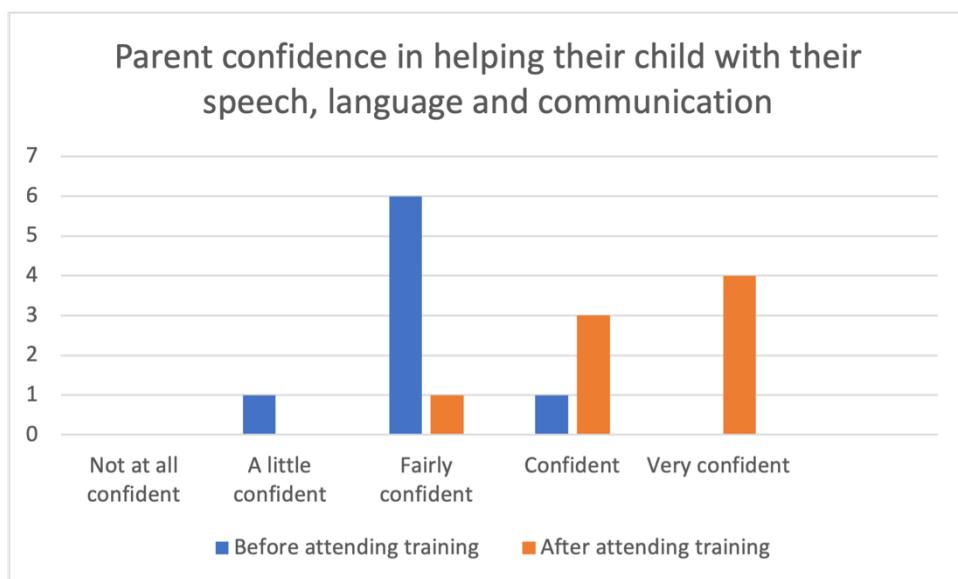
Feedback from the parents and carers who attended 3 Let's Talk at Home courses, delivered by practitioners trained and supported by Elklan, has been received This is included in full in Appendix 5.

Outcomes in terms of parent confidence in supporting their children's speech, language and communication, the strategies they gained to do so and the changes in their interactions with their children are all positive.

Parent confidence

Parents rated their own confidence in helping their child with their speech language and communication:

| | Not at all confident | A little confident | Fairly confident | Confident | Very confident | Total responses |
|---------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------------|
| Before attending training | | 1 | 6 | 1 | | 8 |
| After attending training | | | 1 | 3 | 4 | 8 |



One parent commented:

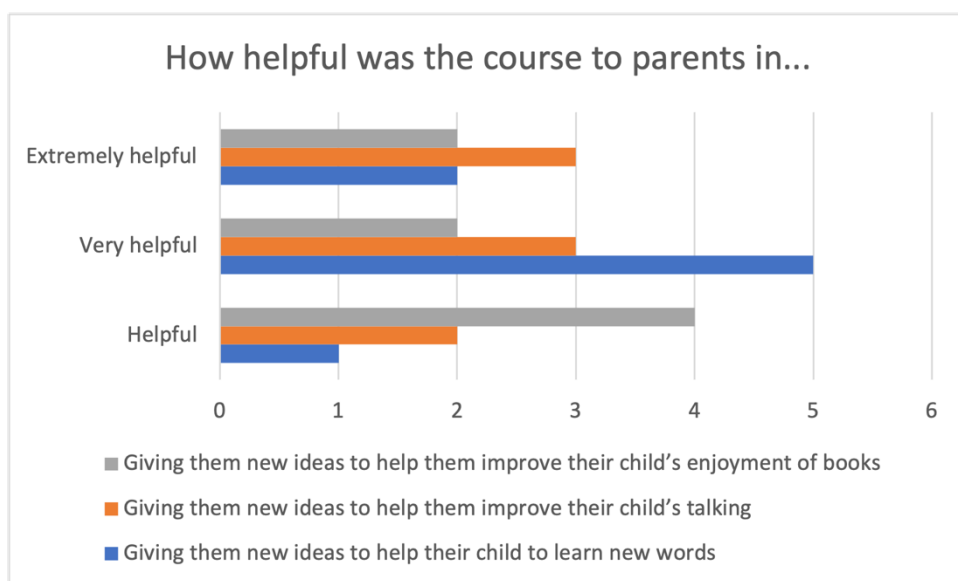
- *Really enjoyed the course with Jo. It's helped me feel confident to help bear with his speech*

Although only a small number of responses from parents are available it is very pleasing to observe that every parent who responded indicated an improvement in their confidence in supporting their child.

Parent knowledge

Parents were asked how helpful the course was in.....

| | Not helpful | Slightly helpful | Helpful | Very helpful | Extremely helpful | Total responses |
|---|-------------|------------------|---------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Giving them new ideas to help their child to learn new words | | | 1 | 5 | 2 | 8 |
| Giving them new ideas to help them improve their child's talking | | | 2 | 3 | 3 | 8 |
| Giving them new ideas to help them improve their child's enjoyment of books | | | 4 | 2 | 2 | 8 |



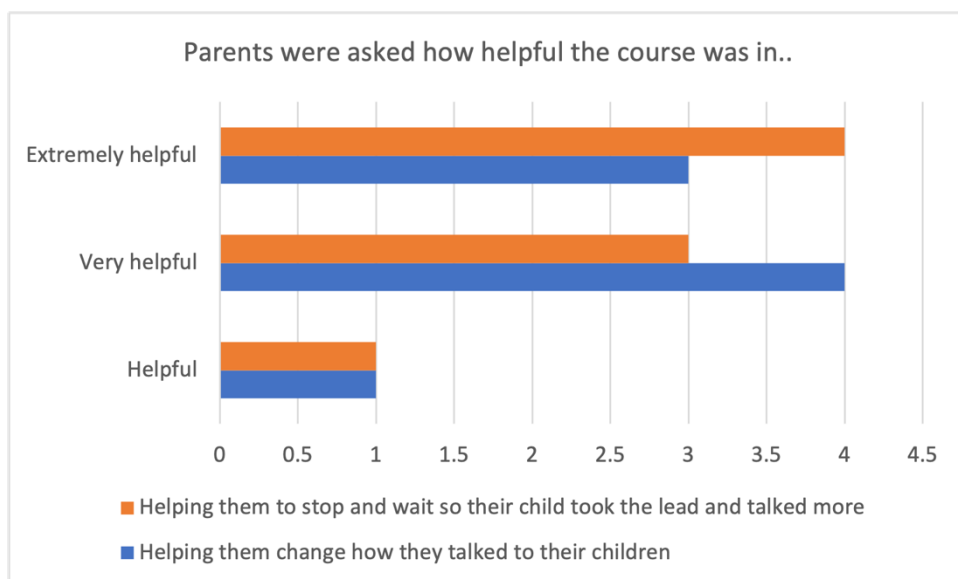
Comments included:

- *I thought the course was very good and definitely gave me some additional ideas of how to help bring on G's speech. G has really enjoyed the course too! Thanks very much Daisy, you've been great."*
- *"The course has a nice relaxed feel to it, the tips we were given I found very useful when interacting with my child, focussing on his speech and expanding his vocabulary."*
- Every parent found the ideas provided to them in all 3 areas at least helpful.

Parent behaviour

Parents were asked how helpful the course was in...

| | Not helpful | Slightly helpful | Helpful | Very helpful | Extremely helpful | Total responses |
|--|-------------|------------------|---------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Helping them change how they talked to their children | | | 1 | 4 | 3 | 8 |
| Helping them to stop and wait so their child took the lead and talked more | | | 1 | 3 | 4 | 8 |



These results indicate that parents have been able to use the information they gained on the course to change their behaviour so as to better support their children.

Parents were also asked whether they were using any of the new ideas, gained on the course, with other children they had at home. The only parent who responded negatively to this question had no other children at home. This outcome indicates that the parent training for children considered vulnerable to speech, language and communication needs will have additional benefits for their siblings.

9.5 The Toolkit

Circulation:

The link to the feedback survey was sent directly to 211 practitioners/professionals, with encouragement to them to circulate further. It was also sent to members of the Project Management Group, with a request to distribute it to their networks and posted on the Elklan/Herefordshire Facebook page.

Responses: 21

- 5 respondents work in Children's Centre/s
- 2 respondents are speech and language therapists
- 1 respondent described his/ her workplace as NHS
- 1 respondent described him/herself as an independent practitioner
- 1 respondent works as a practitioner in a maintained early years setting
- 11 respondents were parents

Questions for practitioners and their responses:

- Have you attended any Elklan Training in 2019, 2020 or 2021?
Yes: 9
No: 1

- Have you heard about, or seen, the speech and language toolkits hosted on the WISH website?
Yes: 9
No: 1
- How many pages of the Practitioners' Toolkit have you looked at?
All: 1
Most: 5
Some: 2
A few: 1
None: 1
- Did you gain any new information from the Practitioners' Toolkit?
(9 responses)
No: 1
Yes: 8
- Which pages did you find most useful? (Mark as many as apply)
 - General Information about speech and language development: 6
 - Typical language development: 5
 - Assessing children's language development: 4
 - Resources and activities to support children's language development: 8
 - Intervention and monitoring for children with speech, language and communication needs: 3
 - Diagnosed conditions which can affect children's speech, language and communication: 3
 - Support for your setting: 3
 - Who else may be working with children with speech, language and communication needs: 3
 - Bilingualism and English as an additional language: 5
 - Good practice and great ideas factsheet: 6
- What else would you like to see in the Practitioners' Toolkit?
(1 response)
Downloadable activity ideas
- Have you signposted and parents or carers to the Parents' Toolkit?
(8 responses)
 - More than 10: 2
 - 3-10: 0
 - 1-3: 4
 - None: 2
- Is there anything else you would like to see in the Parents' Toolkit?

(5 responses)

- More downloadable activity ideas (2)
- Examples of messy tray ideas for develop speech and language at home
- Short videos to illustrate
- For it to be more visually accessible instead of a white background with lots of information in black (2)

Questions for parents and carers and their responses:

- Have you heard about, or seen, the speech and language toolkits hosted on the WISH website?
Yes: 11
No: 0
- How many pages of the Parents' Toolkit have you looked at?
All: 1
Most: 6
Some: 3
A few: 1
None: 0
- Did you gain any new information from the Practitioners' Toolkit?
No: 0
Yes: 11
- Which pages did you find most useful? (Mark as many as apply)
 - General information about speech, language and communication
 - What you can do to support your child 10
 - Activities and ideas to support your child's language development
 - What's available in Herefordshire 3
 - What to do if you are worried about your child's speech, language and communication 11
 - My child has a diagnosis. What does this mean for their speech, language and communication?
 - Developmental Language Disorder 3
 - Stammering 1
 - Selective mutism
 - Autism 1
 - Hearing impairments 2
 - Glue ear 2
 - Down's syndrome
 - Information for parents who speak English as an additional language 1
 - Top Tips fact sheet 8
- Is there anything else you would like to see in the Parents' Toolkit?
(4 responses)

- Simple ideas I can do without getting ready beforehand
- More quick and easy ideas, not too clever
- Short and simple ideas
- Easy to print- no photos

9.6 The Herefordshire Elklan programme

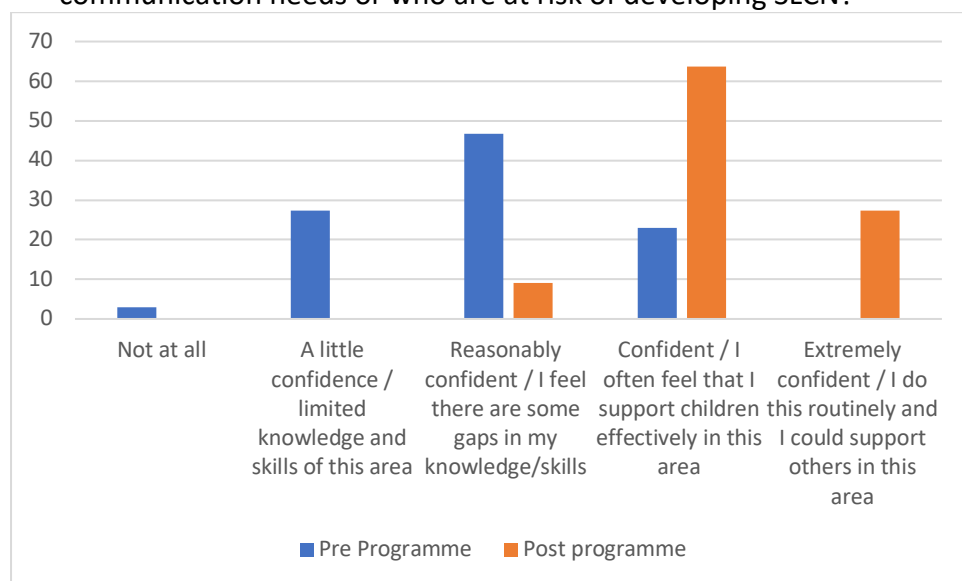
Practitioners were asked to complete a questionnaire at the outset of the programme, and the same questionnaire at the end.

135 practitioners completed the pre-programme survey and 44 the post-programme Survey. Reports of these surveys, in their entirety, are included as Appendix 6.

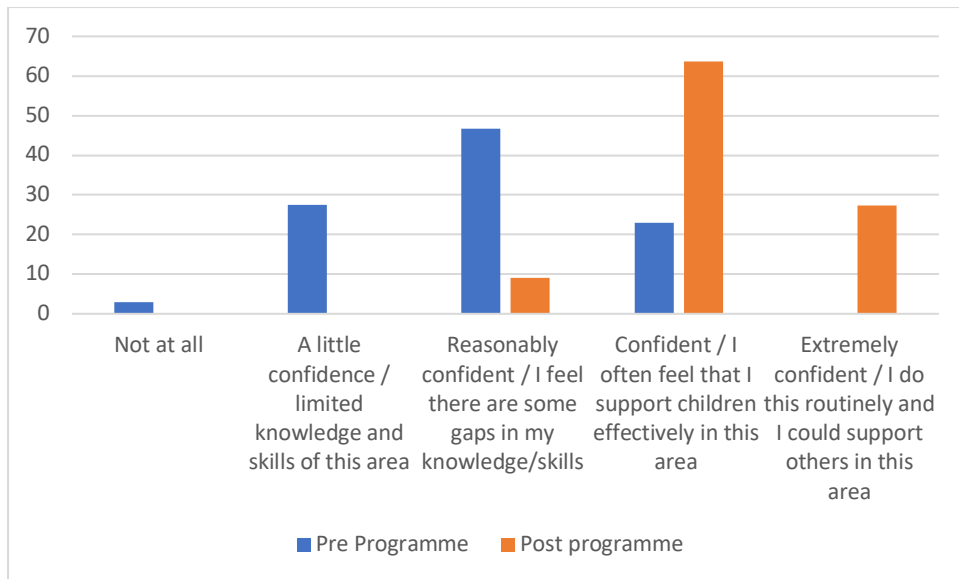
A comparison of the responses to questions, using percentages of respondents rather than numbers as these are so different, is as follows:

Confidence regarding supporting children's speech, language and communication development

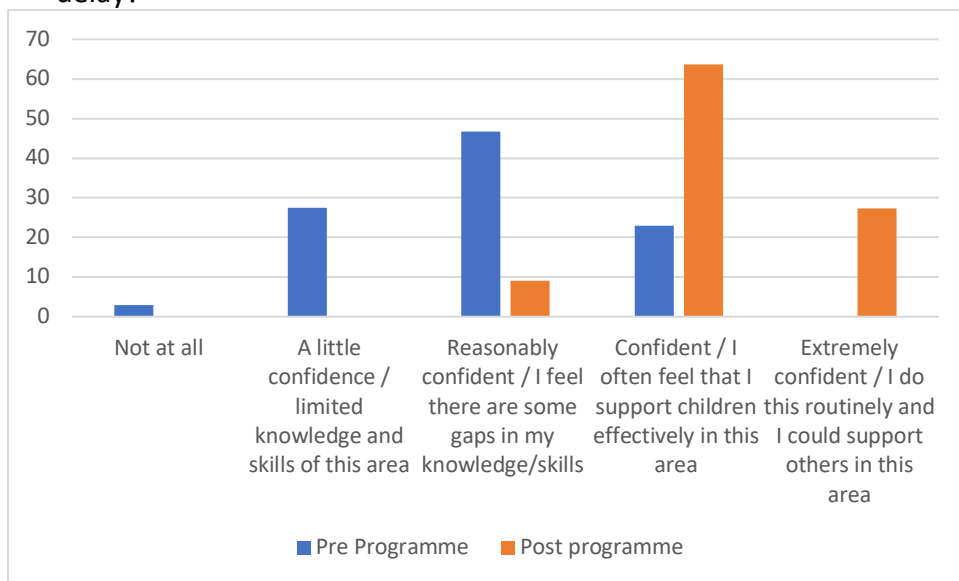
- How confident do you feel in identifying young children with speech, language and communication needs or who are at risk of developing SLCN?



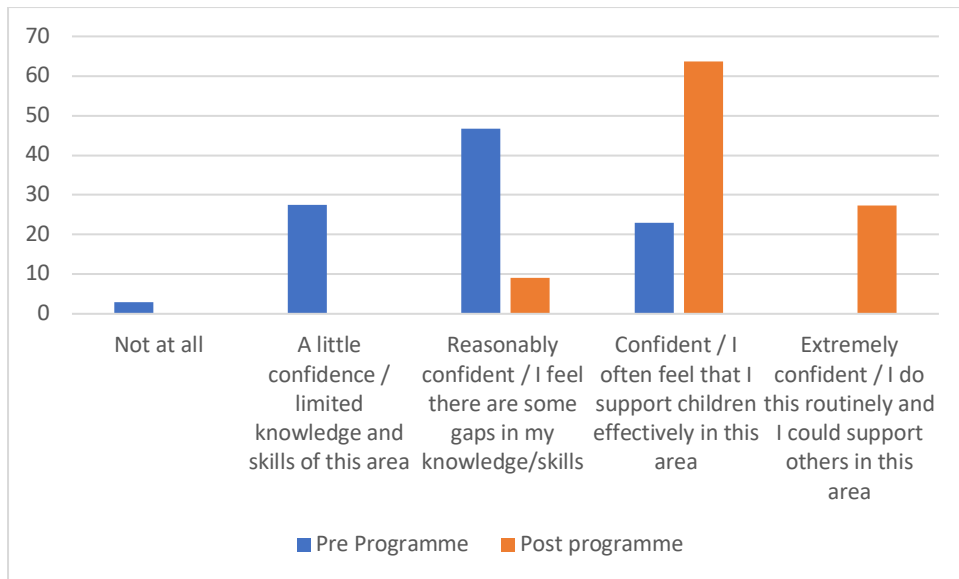
- How confident do you feel in knowing the difference between an environment which is or is not communication friendly?



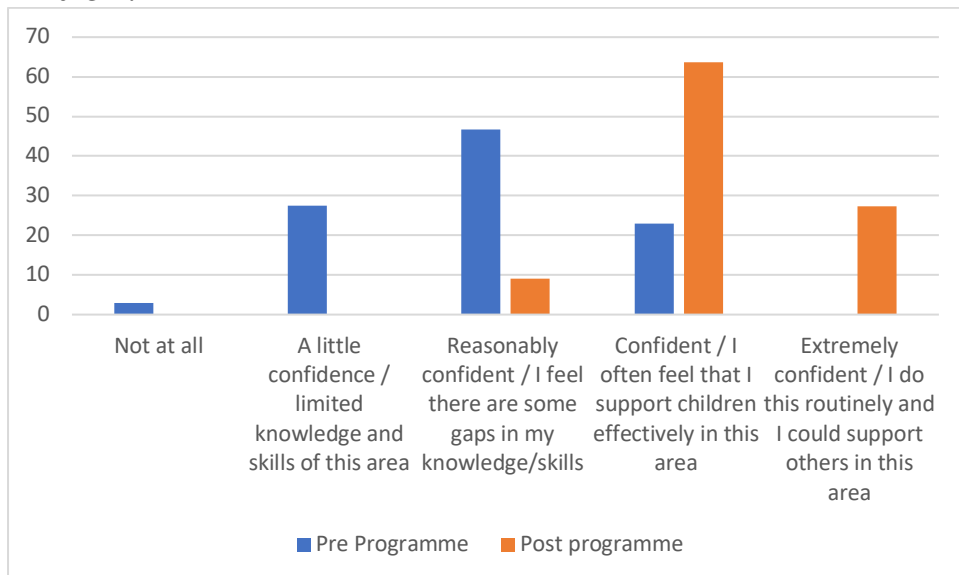
- Thinking about your interaction with young children, how confident do you feel that your style of interaction promotes the communication of all young children but particularly those who have or are at risk of speech, language and communication delay?



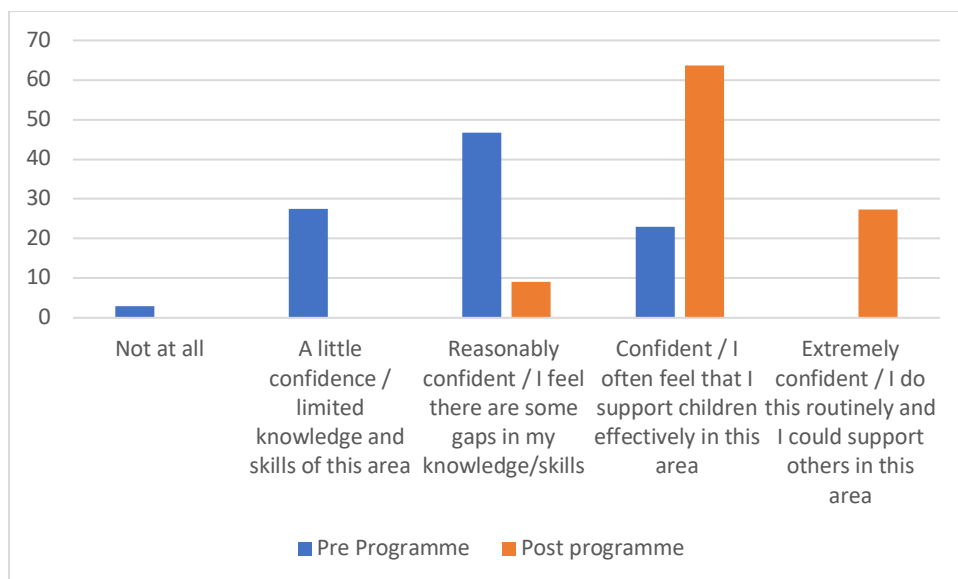
- How confident do you feel in supporting children to understand and name new vocabulary?



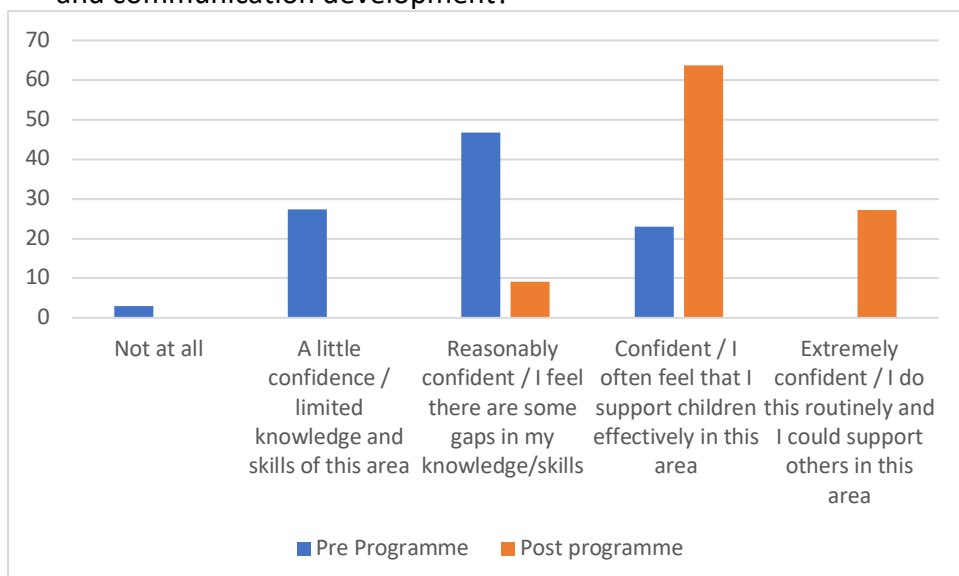
- How confident do you feel in helping young children to understand things you say to them?



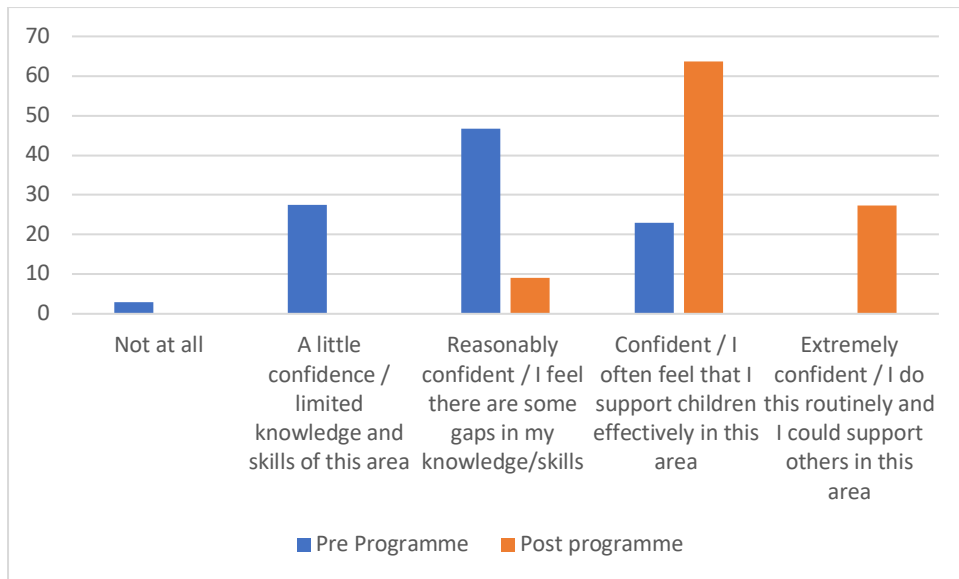
- How confident do you feel in helping children to develop their talking skills? (Talking skills = ability to get their message across, e.g. through gesture and vocal sounds, say words and/or sentences)



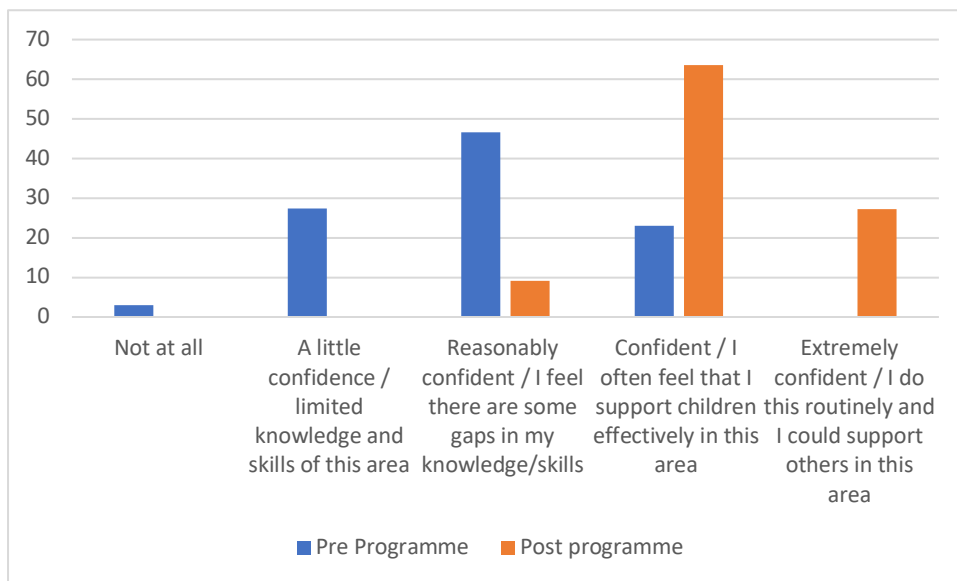
- How confident do you feel in talking to parents about their child's speech, language and communication development?



- How confident do you feel in understanding the advice given to you by someone like a speech and language therapist or teaching advisor when they visit your setting to discuss a child?



- If you are concerned about a child's speech, language and communication development, how confident do you feel in assessing whether they are meeting their communication milestones?



Small Group Interventions

Respondents were asked:

Is any small group or individual work undertaken in your setting/school/provision to support speech, language and communication needs of children with identified difficulties (as far as you are aware)?

Prior to engaging with the programme 66.7% of respondents said 'Yes', afterwards 65.91% did.

Training for Parents and Carers

Respondents were asked:

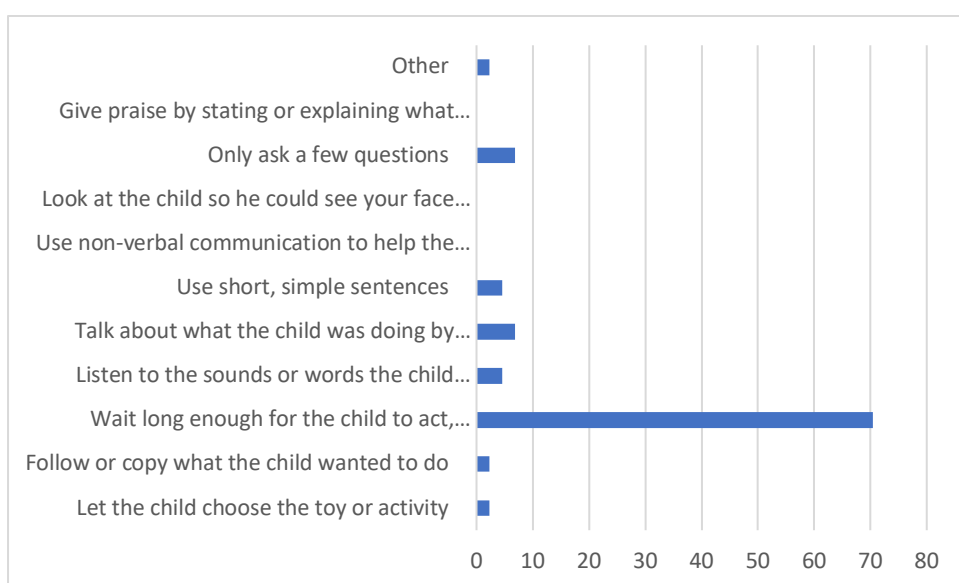
Does your setting/school/provision currently offer any training for parents in supporting their children's language development?

Responses indicated a slight increase over the programme duration, from 13.33 to 18.18%. The only courses named as being delivered to parents post programme were Elklan 'Let's Talk' courses, whilst there were a range reported prior to the programme.

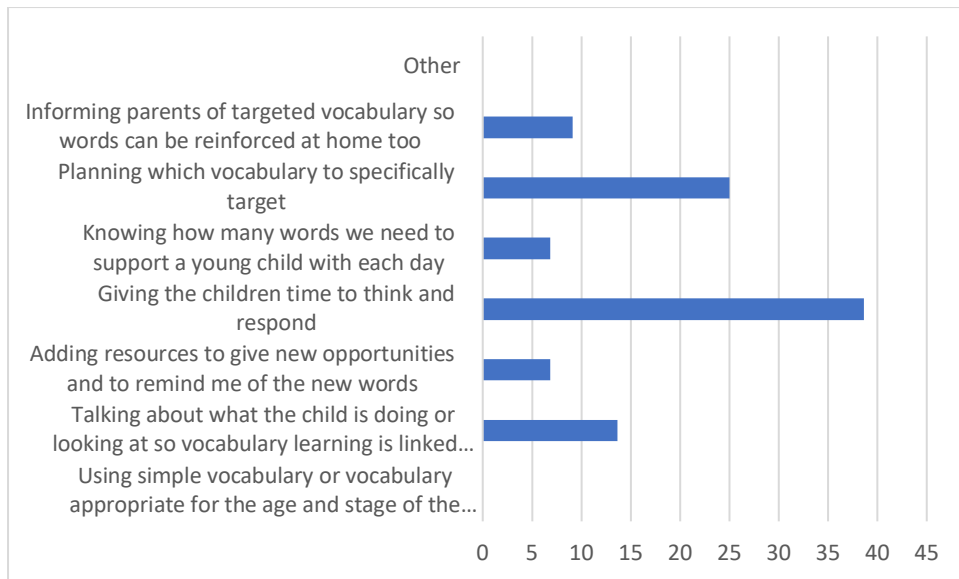
Changes in practice

The post programme questionnaire asked respondents to identify changes in their behaviour and practice which they thought impacted on children.

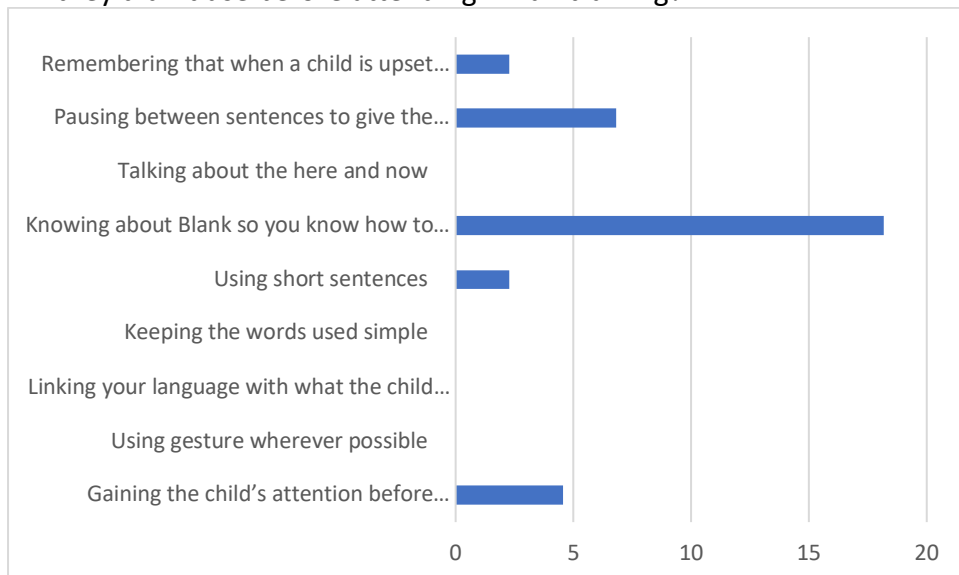
- Which change in their interaction had the most impact on encouraging children to communicate more.



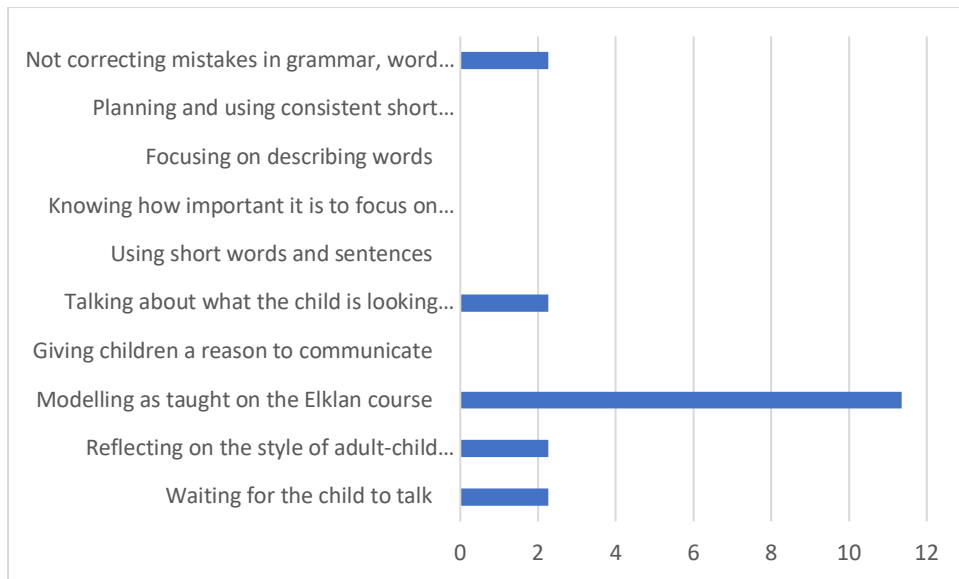
- Which change they had made which had the most impact on developing children's vocabulary:



- Which strategies they used to help young children to understand things they say that they didn't use before attending Elklan training?



- Which strategies they used to help children to develop their talking skills that they didn't use before attending Elklan training?



Discussion

Unfortunately, not as many responses were received after the programme completed as there were prior to learners starting it, 44 compared to 135. However, by analysing the responses according to the percentage they represent of the total number received it is possible to draw some conclusions.

Practitioners reported increased confidence in identifying and supporting children with, or at risk of, SLCN after taking part in the programme. They responded to nine questions regarding this, covering identification, a communication friendly environment, interaction, and support, working with parents and specialists, and assessment. The mode of the responses, to all nine questions, moved from *'Reasonably confident/I feel there are some gaps in my knowledge/skills'* to *'Confident/I often feel that I support children effectively in this area'*.

No respondents reported having no confidence, or a little confidence in these areas after the programme, whereas approximately 30% did before the programme.

Following revisions to the original project plan no training and support was provided to practitioners in delivering targeted interventions to small groups of children. Not surprisingly, therefore, there was negligible change in the percentage of practitioners who reported these being delivered in their settings.

Work with parents and carers was necessarily, largely, suspended to comply with social distancing restrictions. The only group work possible was undertaken prior to March 2020, and resources for one to one work with families was limited. It would therefore not have been surprising to find work with parents had decreased over the course of the programme, whereas, in fact, it slightly increased. There was also a qualitative change with the focus of parent work being very strongly on delivery of the Elklan parent courses in which practitioners had been trained.

Practitioners who responded to the post programme survey were able to identify the changes they had made to their practice, and the strategies they were using as a result of training, and to say which had impacted on children. There was considerable consensus on this with the following being rated most highly:

- Wait long enough for the child to act, vocalise or talk-10 second rule!
- Giving children time to think and respond
- Planning which vocabulary to specifically target
- Knowing about Blank so you know how to change the level of language you use
- Modelling as taught on the Elklan course

Comments from respondents to the post-programme survey:

"This has been one of the most useful training courses I have been on during my 29 years of teaching"

"I absolutely loved the whole course and accreditation..... Our setting has benefitted so much from this course and our new way of working"

"Elklan has supported my knowledge of how I can best support children I care for along with supporting practitioners too with developing their practice."

"The course was great for developing my understanding of children's communication, it has helped me to become more confident in my role and now I am able to deliver the Elklan Program with family I am working with."

"I really enjoyed the course and having new skills has helped me grow in confidence as a Practitioner."

"I found it hard to pick just one change in my practise that has had the greatest impact on developing children's vocabulary and encouraging children to communicate more. I believe all of the points learned on this course are effective..."

"The Elklan level 3 and communication setting courses have been thoroughly enjoyable and great for revisiting techniques and working as a team to ensure we are provide high quality interaction and promoting communication with in the setting."

10.Sustainability and the future

As the programme focus has been on developing the knowledge and skills of the workforce, so they are better able to support the children they work with, longer term impact is built in; all cohorts of children that the trained practitioners work with going forward can potentially benefit from their enhanced knowledge, skills and confidence.

10.1 For individual practitioners engaged in training within the programme

The practitioners who have gained accredited awards for their Elklan training (at level 2, 3 or 4) have been required not just to attend training sessions or undertake e-learning modules and to take part in webinars, but also to complete Learning Logs. Doing this requires them to reflect on their practice. Outside of the pandemic context and, where possible within it, practitioners have needed to try the strategies they have been taught with the children they work with and record the outcomes of this. In the exceptional circumstances that the Herefordshire learners have encountered they have been permitted to utilise historical experience, their own children, or hypothetical situations. This implementation of learning, reflection, recording, and the subsequent discussion with peers at future course sessions serves to increase the likelihood of learning being remembered and embedded in practice.

Those learners who have not progressed in the *Speech and Language Support* courses to the level of gaining accreditation will still have undertaken part of this work and could, reasonably, be predicted to have benefitted from it. Should these practitioners have, for example, been unable to complete their work due to pressures resulting from the pandemic, Elklan will be able to credit them for their learning to date if they want to complete their courses after the Elklan/ Herefordshire programme ends, and within two years. They will be able to access e-learning modules and attend webinars remotely with groups of early years practitioners drawn from across the UK.

10.2 For other practitioners

All staff in settings which have been accredited as *Communication Friendly* will have received a 5-session training course *Communication Counts*, delivered by their Lead Communication Practitioner. This person is trained and equipped to deliver to further cohorts of staff as required. It is recommended that settings programme this delivery annually so that any new starters or staff who missed the original course due, for example, to maternity leave, can benefit.

Elklan is mindful of the high turnover rates of staff in the early years sector and would recommend consideration is given to an annual budget to train replacements for LCPs who leave their settings and to enable the programme to reach settings who were unable to take part or complete their involvement as a consequence of Covid.

10.3 For Settings engaged in the programme

The process for settings gaining Communication Friendly status ensures that learning is shared across all setting staff and that it is embedded into practice, increasing the likelihood of long-term change.

Those early years settings and childminders who have achieved *Communication Friendly Setting* or *Communication Friendly Home Learning environment* awards will have needed to reflect on the outcomes of their audits and develop future action plans during their training. With support and monitoring to ensure these are implemented these settings should undergo further development.

Accreditation, for settings and home environments lasts for three years, after which it is renewable. Renewing acts as refresher for the LCP and requires:

- All staff to have had further training (initial training for new starters) in *Communication Counts*.
- Submission of a report regarding the actions the setting has taken in order to continue to be Communication Friendly.
- Reciprocal audit visits to another setting.
- The payment of a fee to Elklan (£175).

In order to maintain interest and motivation in regard to accreditation it is recommended that publicity is sought, perhaps for the innovative CFHLE programme which has been implemented more extensively in Herefordshire than elsewhere. Elklan would collaborate with Herefordshire in writing a piece for submission to a relevant journal.

10.4 For other settings

A number of practitioners in Herefordshire have completed accredited training at Level 3 but not progressed to Level 4 awards and their setting being awarded Communication Friendly status. Similarly, a few childminders who have gained awards through the Speech and Language Support courses have not progressed to the Communication Friendly Home Learning Environment award. These practitioners and childminders can still take this next step, initially by engaging with online webinars, outside of the programme timeline and funding and should be encouraged to do so, subject to resources being made available by the Council, their setting or by practitioners themselves.

Elklan would also anticipate that staff from those settings and childminders which have achieved Communication Friendly awards would act as ambassadors for the programme to settings which have not been involved to date.

Elklan recognises that some practitioners are not able to meet the demands of working towards an accredited award, specifically giving sufficient time to reflect on their learning and complete a Learning Log. For these learners, participation in a non-accredited training programme, such as 'Building on Success', the Department of Education funded extension of the Early Years professional Development Programme, may be more appropriate. (Elklan is a delivery partner for this programme, assuring the quality of materials and delivery).

One of the outcomes, for Elklan, of Covid-19 has been development of remote learning opportunities; e-learning modules, live training sessions, live webinars and remote Tutor support make training more accessible for individual practitioners who no longer need to identify a group of learners locally to train with, and have a greater choice over the times and days when they wish to undertake training. Costs for travel and backfill are also reduced.

10.5 For Work with Parents

The LCPs who have been trained to work with parents have been trained and equipped to deliver *Let's Talk with Under 5s* and/or *Let's Talk at Home* indefinitely, subject to an annual

payment of an Elklan Tutor License fee. Given the difficulties in implementing the parent work during the programme timeframe Elklan has already funded the extension of licenses for a year or until January 2022, whichever is later.

During the Covid-19 pandemic a number of Children's Centre staff have delivered *Let's Talk at Home* remotely, Elklan would propose that such staff are provided with a platform to encourage other practitioners to do the same.

10.6 For Evidence Based Practice

Elklan did not have the opportunity to train equip and support setting staff to deliver evidence based small group interventions to children during the programme. Elklan would be pleased to look to doing this in the future.

10.7 For the Network

Whilst beneficial in its own right, as a means of providing peer support and sharing good practice, Elklan considers that the Network is also key to sustainability of the programme. The Network provides an invaluable opportunity to maintain an awareness of the need for high quality speech and language support within the early years sector. It can also be used to promote ongoing involvement in the journey towards becoming Communication Friendly to settings not previously involved or those who were unable to complete their journey during 2020/2021.

During the programme the Network was required to become virtual after the first three face to face meetings. However, there have been benefits to this with webinars and the dedicated Facebook Group being shown to be valuable tools. Elklan would recommend that these elements are retained even when face to face meetings become possible again.

Feedback from the current programme shows that Network meetings, whether face to face or virtual, are best received when a specific topic or focus is identified in advance. Initial suggestions might be discussion of action plans going forward for accredited settings and remote delivery of parent work.

10.8 For the Toolkit

Whilst the Toolkit is currently being refreshed (September 2021) there is recognition that this is a continual requirement, links need checking and updating and new information and activities need to be added to keep the kits fresh for visitors. The recently accredited settings and childminders could usefully contribute to activities sections. All pages require marking with the date of their last review or refresh and a named person made responsible.

10.9 Resources for sustainability

Key to all the above sustainability and continuation activity is the identification of a key person to coordinate activity and link speech and language support to current issues and priorities.

An estimate of the time requirement for this coordinator role in the first year is as follows:

| Activity | When this should happen or frequency | Approximate time requirement |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| Follow up with Level 3 and 4 learners who have not completed to accreditation and would like to, leading to enrolment on Elklan catch up activities. | Spring 2022 | 3 days |
| Ensuring Communication Counts is delivered regularly in Communication Friendly Settings | Annually | 2 days |
| Identifying and organising training for replacement LCPs to allow for staff turnover | Annually | 2 days |
| Network events on focused areas including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and supporting settings as they implement action plans • Accredited settings acting as ambassadors for CFSe/CFHLe to others. • Promoting parent work as group work becomes more feasible. | Termly | 1 day per term =3 days per year |
| Renewal of CFSe and CFHLE status, reminder system | Annually | 1 day |
| Maintaining Facebook Group | Fortnightly (termly) | 0.5 hrs a week = 15hrs (2 days per year) |
| Updating Toolkit and soliciting and moderating contributions from settings | Termly | 1 day per term =3 days per year |
| Unspecified time to support project | | 2 days |
| Total annual time requirement | | 18 days (1.5 days per month) |

An estimate of the time requirement for this coordinator role in subsequent years is as follows:

| Activity | When this should happen or frequency | Approximate time requirement |
|---|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Ensuring Communication Counts is delivered regularly in Communication Friendly Settings | Annually | 2 days |
| Identifying and organising training for replacement LCPs to allow for staff turnover | Annually | 2 days |
| Network events on focused areas including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring and supporting settings as they implement action plans • Accredited settings acting as ambassadors for CFSe/CFHLe to others. | Termly | 1 day per term =3 days per year |

| | | |
|--|----------------------|--|
| • Promoting parent work as group work becomes more feasible. | | |
| Renewal of CFSe and CFHLE status, reminder system | Annually | 1 day |
| Maintaining Facebook Group | Fortnightly (termly) | 0.5 hrs a week = 15hrs (2 days per year) |
| Updating Toolkit and soliciting and moderating contributions from settings | Annually | 1 day |
| Unspecified time to support project | | 1 day |
| Total annual time requirement | | 12 days (1 day per month) |

Settings will also require resources, excluding any backfill for staff attending activities, these include the following:

| Activity | When | Cost to settings or practitioners |
|--|----------------|--|
| Elklan training/support for Learners who have not completed to date to gain awards | By autumn 2022 | Up to £350 per learner (varying dependent on work to complete) |
| Identifying and training replacement LCPs to allow for staff turnover | Annually | Up to £500 per replacement LCP dependent on whether they have had any prior training |
| Renewal of CFSe and CFHLE status | 3-yearly | £175 |
| Resources for parents attending courses | | £15 per family |

These costs could be significantly reduced if training is delivered by an in-house, or local speech and language therapy department, Tutor.

Other sources of funding include voluntary funding (particularly for parent courses), existing training budgets, Best Start and Covid-19 recovery funding.

Should Herefordshire determine to sustain the work undertaken within this project the planned celebration event could be used as a launch event for the permanent initiative, which Elklan would be pleased to support.

11 Conclusion

Elklan Training delivered a programme of work intended to develop the capacity of the early years workforce in Herefordshire to support children's speech and language development. The work was delivered under a contractual arrangement resulting from a tender exercise

and was intended to take place between January 2019 and March 2021. This time period was extended by six months as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The original target outputs from the programme were amended during 2020 and 2021 in response to the restrictions resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic and to reflect Herefordshire Council's evolving approach to early years provision.

The programme resulted in:

- 89 early years practitioners gaining accredited awards in supporting young children's speech, language and communication, and a further 55 having had some training in this area, without reaching the level for accredited awards.
- 51 early years settings gaining Communication Friendly Setting status.
- 21 childminders achieving Communication Friendly Home Learning Environment status.
- 32 early years practitioners receiving additional training in working with parents.
- Web based toolkits for parents/carers and professionals being developed and launched.

96 % and 95% of learners on the speech and language support courses gave the training maximum ratings for content and quality of teaching respectively.

Of course, for training to be effective it has to be used and embedded in the learners' practice and in the settings in which they work. This was evaluated by asking learners, after both individual courses and the programme as a whole, about their knowledge and confidence in supporting children's speech, language and communication needs, their use of specific strategies which facilitate this, and the impact of their knowledge on their colleagues.

- 93 % of learners gave courses a maximum rating for effectiveness in helping them learn new skills.
- 90% of learners gave courses a maximum rating for effectiveness in changing their practice.
- Learners reported an increased use of all specific strategies taught with their course.
- Practitioners' confidence in developing children's listening and attention, understanding, expressive language and social skills all improved.
- 86% of learners had shared knowledge from courses with their colleagues who went on to use it.

Whilst the participants of training courses were, chiefly, unable to provide numerical data on children's progress they did so anecdotally, with 79.5% of respondents stating that children had made better than expected, or much better than expected, progress since staff had received training.

One of the requirements for settings to gain Communication Friendly Setting status practitioners is for a lighter touch training to be cascaded by Elklan trained practitioner to all other staff in their setting. The participants in these cascaded courses also found their training to be effective:

- 93.57% of respondents said that the course was effective or very effective in changing the way they talked to and supported children to develop their language and communication.
- 100% of respondents reported their setting having changed to make it more communication friendly, including 67.14% who considered this change to be 'considerable' or 'significant'.
- More than 86% of setting staff reported that children's progress was better than expected as a result of the programme.

The Communication Friendly Home Learning Environment programme (CFHLE) provides an appropriate route for childminders to ensure they are providing support for children's speech and language development. It was introduced within Herefordshire relatively late in the Herefordshire/Elklan work. Despite this it has been a success, with all respondents to a post programme survey reporting confidence of 4 or 5, on a scale of 1-5, in offering a CFHLE, and being able to report positive changes they had made to their child-minding settings.

Work with parents was necessarily suspended due the social distancing requirements imposed nationally in 2020. However, 32 practitioners are now trained, licensed and equipped to deliver groups for parents, and some were run prior to the pandemic. Feedback from the parents involved in these practitioner led courses indicates they were effective in improving parent/carer confidence and knowledge in relation to supporting their children's speech, language and communication development.

The results of the evaluations of each course were echoed in a pre and post programme survey of practitioners which demonstrated significant increases in practitioner confidence, knowledge and skills in supporting children's language development.

Despite the difficulties posed to the Herefordshire/Elklan programme, by floods and a national pandemic, targets have been met, practitioners have gained and embedded new practices and outcomes for children and families have improved. It would appear that the 'Early Years Workforce Development: Speech and Language Support' project has been a success. Elklan has made a proposal for maintaining these positive changes over time, and in the face of staff turnover, which are extremely low cost in relation to their positive impact on young children in Herefordshire. It is sincerely hoped that Herefordshire Council will support the continuation of this successful project especially at a time when so many children need the opportunity to catch up following Covid.