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Talking Matters! Speech and language training for staff makes significant impact on children’s receptive and expressive language

An independent evaluation of Elklan’s *Talking Matters* programme, undertaken by the Department of Human Communication Sciences at the University of Sheffield, has shown dedicated training for early years staff makes a statistically significant impact on children’s receptive and expressive language skills.

Children who received *Talking Matters* support progressed by an average of seven months in their language development, whilst children in the control group progressed by two months. Differences could be seen in both the children’s ability to understand (receptive language) and their ability to use and combine words (expressive language).

Elklan, the speech and language trainers for education staff and parents, developed the *Talking Matters* programme to improve practitioners’ knowledge and confidence and to improve outcomes in children’s speech, language and communication.

Practitioners reported a significant statistical increase in their understanding of, and work to facilitate children’s speech, language and communication. Practitioners rated themselves before and after *Talking Matters* on 13 questions showing improvements in all areas, with mean scores increasing from 26.21 to 37.27, an increase of 42%.

The trial resulted in practitioners using new strategies they hadn’t used before participating in *Talking Matters*, such as modelling (nearly 40% increase), waiting for the child to talk (37%), focusing on verbs / action words (30%), using short words and sentences (27%) and focusing on describing words (23%).

Dr Judy Clegg, Senior Lecturer at the University of Sheffield, said: “Training pre-school practitioners to facilitate young children’s language development is a crucial component of early years provision. The study showed that *Talking Matters* does have a positive impact on young children’s language development.”

Henrietta McLachlan, Director at Elklan, said: “We were delighted to see that *Talking Matters* has had a significant and positive impact on the children involved, as well as the practitioners. We know that many early years settings do not feel they have the training and knowledge to support young children at this crucial ‘golden period’ of development.

“There is a big demand for training to be delivered by speech and language therapists to empower staff to be more effective in their support of children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). This evaluation highlights the real difference high quality, accredited training for early years staff makes on children’s language development.”

Talking Matters, funded by the Department for Education, was conducted across 128 nurseries, pre-schools and children’s centres in six areas of England and reached 8,964 children.

101 practitioners received accredited training provided by Elklan to support them to work with children aged from one-and-a-half to three years who then went onto cascade training to another 1,329 staff. The programme built on the Early Language Development programme.

13 settings across four local authority areas were involved in the evaluation undertaken by the University of Sheffield. Nine out of the 13 settings received the *Talking Matters* programme, whilst the others acted as controls.

A total of 126 children, aged 16-35 months were assessed prior to *Talking Matters* of which 87 children were available and reassessed approximately six months after the end of the trial. The Department of Human Communication Sciences at Sheffield University investigated the outcomes for children using a face-to-face, direct-play-based assessment of language comprehension and expression, the Pre-School Language Scales 5th Edition.

The feedback from *Talking Matters* has since been used to develop **Elklan's Communication Friendly Settings Programme**, an evidence-based, value for money intervention for children from nought-five years.

A key component of *Talking Matters* was the accredited 'Speech and Language Support for 0-3s' course. Practitioners across the UK have attended this course and as a result have completed the first step towards gaining Communication Friendly Setting status for their setting.

For further information on **Elklan's Communication Friendly Settings Programme**, visit www.elklan.co.uk/information/commissioners-schools/0-5yrs/becoming-an-elklan-communication-friendly-early-years-setting

Further information on **Elklan's Speech and Language Support for 0-3s' course** is available from www.elklan.co.uk/courses/practitioners/speech-and-language-support-for-0-3s

Find out more about the *Talking Matters* evaluation at www.elklan.co.uk/talkingmatters

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For Further Information

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Notes to Editors

About Elklan

- Elklan 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).
- Since 2001, Elklan has trained over 1,400 speech and language therapists as tutors and 714 specialist teachers as co-tutors.
- Most of the trainers work in the UK but in recent years Elklan has an increasing number of tutors in Ireland, Australia, Luxembourg and The Falkland Islands.
- Elklan's hugely successful *Train the Trainer* programme has enabled training to be cascaded to over 50,000 staff working in pre-school, primary and secondary education in both mainstream and specialist settings as well as parents.
- Elklan is a member of The Communication Trust – a coalition of over 50 voluntary organisations with expertise in speech, language and communication - and are involved in the EU PINECL project – a project being developed by a consortium of eight partners representing

Ireland, Cyprus, Romania, Italy, UK, Austria and Finland to develop training, support and social network frameworks.

- For further information visit <http://www.elklan.co.uk/>
- Follow Elklan on Twitter <https://twitter.com/elklanTraining> or via Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Elklan-108319019286790/>

About University of Sheffield

- With almost 27,000 of the brightest students from over 140 countries, learning alongside over 1,200 of the best academics from across the globe, the University of Sheffield is one of the world's leading universities.
- A member of the UK's prestigious Russell Group of leading research-led institutions, Sheffield offers world-class teaching and research excellence across a wide range of disciplines.
- Unified by the power of discovery and understanding, staff and students at the university are committed to finding new ways to transform the world we live in.
- Sheffield is the only university to feature in The Sunday Times 100 Best Not-For-Profit Organisations to Work For 2017 and was voted number one university in the UK for Student Satisfaction by Times Higher Education in 2014. In the last decade it has won four Queen's Anniversary Prizes in recognition of the outstanding contribution to the United Kingdom's intellectual, economic, cultural and social life.
- Sheffield has six Nobel Prize winners among former staff and students and its alumni go on to hold positions of great responsibility and influence all over the world, making significant contributions in their chosen fields.
- Global research partners and clients include Boeing, Rolls-Royce, Unilever, AstraZeneca, Glaxo SmithKline, Siemens and Airbus, as well as many UK and overseas government agencies and charitable foundations.
- For further information, please visit www.sheffield.ac.uk
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