

“An ingenious way to provide affordable speech & language therapy to schools”

Value Talking: Project Summary

The Value Talking project began in response to local issues which are likely to be representative of the National picture. Local schools were reporting unmet speech, language and communication (SLC) need; the nearest HEI was short of placements for speech and language therapy (SLT) students and a small, independent paediatric SLT service was struggling to fit students in to their existing service model. No published data could be found relating to the costs of providing placements or the cost of developing and providing a student-delivered SLT service.

The aims of this workforce innovation project were:

- To trial a new student-delivered service to schools and share learning from the experience
- To determine the cost and effectiveness of the service
- To gain student views on whether the placement experience met their needs
- To gain service user views on ideas for improvement for a second project

Local schools were invited to apply to take part in the project. They needed to meet a set of criteria to take part, including a high level of SLC need, space for students to work and senior leadership team support for the project (Joffe & Baerselman, 2003).

Two pairs of final year students provided a service to two primary schools to top up existing public sector SLT support. The two placements were 10 weeks long and students attended one day per week. Supervised assessment and intervention was provided at specialist and universal levels. School staff attended an introductory training session on supporting children with SLCN in class. 5-10 children in each school received assessment and therapy. All targets were agreed collaboratively with school staff. The placement educator adapted supervision according to need and reduced contact with the students, over time, to remote/phone supervision.

The service was aimed at families who would not normally access independent provision.



Children's SLC outcomes were measured with Therapy Outcome Measures (TOMs) (Enderby & John, 2018). Service user (parent/carer and school staff) views were collated using the TOE Questionnaire (Baerselman, 2018). Student views as to the suitability of the placement were gathered via an existing HEI questionnaire. An approximate cost analysis was undertaken.

Results suggested the project was well-received by parents and school staff. TOMs data was indicative of positive outcomes for children, with best results for children with phonological difficulties. All students reported the placement met their learning needs. Cost analysis estimated that schools could commission a student-delivered service for under half the cost of a service delivered by a specialist SLT.

The results must be treated with caution as this was an exploratory project. Timescales were short, students had limited experience using TOMs and few parents completed the questionnaires. The cost analysis was very approximate. A longer project is currently being planned, incorporating the learning from this trial. In conclusion, this study suggests that it is worth researching student-delivered services to schools more rigorously as they could prove a useful low-cost addition to existing SLT services and provide valuable placement experience.

References

Joffe, V. & Baerselman, J. (2003). Killing two birds and plugging holes: the provision of a clinical service and student placements. Poster presentation at CPLOL conference.

Enderby, P. & John, A. (2019). Therapy Outcome Measure User Guide. J.R. Press Ltd

Baerselman, J. TOE Questionnaire. Accessed from website
<https://www.talkingoutcomes.co.uk/shop/5/5/21>