

Spotlight on I CAN's Talk about Talk programme

I CAN's Talk about Talk programme was the winner of SLCN Innovation Award at the 2015 Shine a Light Awards.

The Talk about Talk programme is an innovative training and tutoring programme, aiming to develop young people's communication skills. The programme enables young people to co-deliver communication awareness training to organisations either in the criminal justice system or those that may offer employment or volunteering opportunities.

Research (Bryan et al, 2007) has shown that that 60-90% of young people in youth offending teams have poor communication skills. All the reports addressing this issue emphasise the importance of a workforce that can identify individuals and recognise the support needs of young people. Whilst there is improved knowledge in this area, evidence-based interventions were lacking.

The *Talk About Talk* programme was developed in consultation with young people as part of the *Raising Your Game* partnership project undertaken by I CAN with Mencap and Nacro. The remit was to create a training course for organisations to improve their ability to identify and support young people with communication difficulties.

Talk About Talk was innovative as central to its development was the fact that young people contributed to various aspects of the training development including taking part in a survey about communication difficulties and appearing in training videos.

Central to the programme is the mentoring of young people – research shows teaching at relaxed pace, in small groups, and repeating topics and instructions can be an effective way to develop new skills. In response to this research *Talk about Talk* was developed as an intervention that can be effectively delivered by non-specialists to improve young people's communication skills through training and mentoring, and at the same time develop the skills and knowledge of the workforce.

There are three elements to the programme:

- **Starting Talk about Talk (STaT)** – a day's training for groups of young people with communication difficulties.
- **Talk about Talk (TaT)** - a two-hour interactive training course for organisations who are either involved in the youth justice system or those that offer young people with communication difficulties work or volunteer opportunities.
- **Talk about Talk Tutoring (TaTT)** – a series of tutoring sessions that build on the STaT course and give the opportunity for reflection. This training is cascaded in different areas by trained and experienced trainers that have worked with young people.

Talk About Talk was evaluated in partnership with the University of Sheffield using a mixed methods approach.

The evaluation showed that 97% of staff who attended the training said that they would change their practice and that these changes had been sustained three months after the training. It also showed that young people made significant improvements with their communication skills as rated by the adults working with them.

Due to its success *Talk About Talk* is currently being developed so that it can be utilised in 18 secondary schools over the next two years.

The *Talk About Talk Team* has been awarded the *SLCN Innovation Award* for the innovative nature of the programme, excellent involvement of young people and its independent evaluation in this area.