

Spotlight on Stoke Speaks Out

Stoke Speaks Out, based in Stoke-on-Trent, was the winner of the 2018 SCLN Innovation Award and the Outstanding Achievement Award at the Shine a Light Awards. These awards recognised the impact of their innovative Early Communication Screen (ECS) in improving the school readiness of children aged two to five.

Commissioned by the Local Authority, and written by Clinical Lead Speech/Language Therapist Janet Cooper and her team of speech and language therapists from Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Partnership NHS Trust (SSOTP), the ECS is designed to be used by Early Years practitioners who are trained by SLTs in a one-off ECS session, as well as through ongoing support. The screen is designed to identify early language delay and measure children's progress over time. As a result, practitioners can plan appropriate and targeted interventions.

With almost 7,000 children screened to date, and taking just 5-10 minutes per child, this is a landmark strategy to identify Early Years speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), and is empowering practitioners not only to administer the screen, but also to interpret the results. Childminders and practitioners outside the Stoke area are showing increasing interest in the ECS, adding to more than 1,800 regional practitioners who have already trained to use it.

With around half of children in Stoke-on-Trent starting nursery with delayed language development linked to social deprivation, the potential impact of the ECS on wider social outcomes is huge. The judges noted that practitioner feedback so far has been overwhelmingly positive, reporting improved recognition of language delays and increased skill in selecting the appropriate interventions for young children.

The Shine a Light judges were brimming with praise for Stoke Speaks Out's ECS, with judge Jonathan Douglas, Director of the National Literacy Trust, describing it as "an excellent approach to screening very young and Early Years Foundation Stage children...[which] can be rolled out across any setting with the correct training."

Fellow judge Wendy Lee, Director of Lingo Speech and Language Therapy and Consultancy, agreed, describing the package as "very powerful". She added: "no other service has done this at population level".

Stoke Speaks Out was specially selected for the Pearson Outstanding Achievement Award in celebration of its regional, strategic approach to issues of SLCN: one that truly stands out as a model and beacon for other Local Authorities.

For further information about the 2018 Shine a Light Awards visit www.shinealightawards.co.uk and follow us on Twitter #awards_SAL