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SIENA CASTELLON WINS NATIONAL ACCOLADE FOR CHANGING THE LIVES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES

Winners of the seventh annual Shine a Light Awards revealed by British comic actress and writer, Sally Phillips with special performance from Britain’s Got Talent winner, Lee Ridley (Lost Voice Guy)

Sixteen-year old neurodiversity advocate, Siena Castellon, from South Kensington in London, who is challenging negative perceptions about special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), has won the coveted **Child/Young Person of the Year Award** at the UK-wide **2019 Shine a Light Awards** organised by learning company Pearson, in partnership with The Communication Trust.

The Shine a Light Awards, which took place at Pearson’s headquarters in London, celebrate innovative work and excellent practice in supporting children and young people’s speech, language and communication development. They also recognise the hard work and determination of children and young people who have some form of long-term and persistent speech, language and communication needs (SLCN).

The awards were hosted by British comic actress and writer, Sally Phillips, whose eldest son, Olly, was born with Down’s Syndrome and was the inspiration for her acclaimed documentary *A World Without Down’s Syndrome?*

Siena, who is autistic, dyslexic, dyspraxic and has ADHD, has recently signed a book deal with Jessica Kingsley Publishing to write a survival guide for autistic teenage girls which she hopes will be a practical, useful and informative guide.

In October 2018 she launched a new, nationwide campaign to change the negative perceptions most people have about autism and learning differences. Siena’s neurodiversity celebration school campaign seeks to flip the narrative so that schools go from focusing only on the difficulties and challenges that SEND students face to also recognising the many strengths and talents that come from seeing and experiencing the world differently.

With the backing of 22 national charities and organisations, including the ADHD Foundation, Anna Kennedy Online and the British Dyslexia Association, Siena already has over 135 schools and over 120,000 students taking part in her campaign. Siena is aiming big and would like to have every school in the UK take part in her campaign week (13-17th May).

In total, 11 winners across 12 categories were recognised for their incredible contributions across the UK with one also receiving the Pearson Outstanding Achievement of the Year Award. In addition, ten finalists received Highly Commended accolades.

Siena Castellon said: “I am thrilled to have my neurodiversity advocacy and Neurodiversity Celebration Week campaign recognised. Winning the Young Person of the Year award has given me an opportunity to shine a light on an issue that I am very passionate about. Much too often children and young people are defined by their special educational needs (SEN) and their challenges. My campaign aims to remind schools and teachers to look beyond our challenges by also recognising our many positive attributes, talents and strengths. Our disabilities and challenges should not define us and with the appropriate support, they should not stand in the way of us achieving our dreams.”

Siena has developed a successful mentor and support website, QL Mentoring, which provides online resources, tips and tricks for young people with SEN. Outside of her website, speaking at national events and planning her campaign, Siena has served on the Diana Award National Anti-bullying Youth Board and spoken at various events, including one at Downing Street. She is a valued Youth Ambassador for the ADHD Foundation and for Anna Kennedy Online, a UK autism charity.

Sally Phillips, Host of the 2019 Shine a Light Awards, said: “Siena is such an inspirational young lady. As a nation, it is vital that we ensure that all children have the opportunity to express themselves, particularly when this ability has a profound impact on our future life chances. It is fantastic to know that there are young people like Siena who dedicate their own time to supporting and championing others.

“The amazing winners and highly commended finalists of the Shine a Light Awards prove what a difference we can make if we become informed, impassioned and engaged in the speech language and communication needs of those around us. Siena isn’t just changing the lives of those in her community but also for individuals across the UK. I have seen for myself the huge difference expert intervention and support provides for children, like my son, Olly, particularly at a time where we face a nationwide shortage of speech and language therapists.”

Sally was joined by Britain’s Got Talent Winner, Lee Ridley (known as Lost Voice Guy) who performed at the ceremony. Lee has cerebral palsy and uses AAC, via voice software on his iPad, to communicate and express himself.

Lee Ridley (known as Lost Voice Guy), who performed at the 2019 Shine a Light Awards, said: “I may not be able to speak but I most certainly have a voice. I know first-hand that with support, determination and a sense of humour you can achieve what others may think is impossible.

“I was thrilled to perform at the 2019 Shine a Light Awards and to meet inspirational children and young people like Siena who like me don’t let their disability or challenges rule their life and define them. We take for granted in this country our ability to talk and express ourselves but for many it’s not easy. With different strategies, technology and support available, children and young people can realise their dreams. It is heart-warming to know there are so many teams and individuals across the country that are dedicated to ensuring children and young people’s voices are heard. I am thrilled Siena was recognised at the awards.”

Robert Reilly-Craig, Head of Clinical Assessment at Pearson, said: “Congratulations to Siena for her well-deserved award. We are proud that the Shine a Light Awards have become a key event in the speech, language and communication communities’ calendar. Pearson has supported these Awards for seven years to ensure that recognition and accolade is given to a sector that does not enjoy the same public recognition as other issues, such as literacy or numeracy.

“It is critical that we understand the challenges faced by those who have speech, language and communication needs, as well as the solutions that can help them. These Awards enable us to showcase best practice and inspire others to improve their practice.”

Maxine Burns, Speech and Language Advisor at The Communication Trust, a coalition of over 50 organisations dedicated to supporting children and young people's speech, language and communication, said: “Well done to Siena for all her hard work and dedication to improving other children and young people’s communication skills and for her incredible campaigning work. We partner with Pearson annually on these awards to ensure there is a powerful platform available that can showcase best practice and innovative work in the field of speech, language and communication.

“This fundamentally matters as the Bercow Ten Years On review on the state of provision for children’s SLCN in England showed that we still need to tackle poor understanding of SLCN and insufficient resourcing impacting children and young people’s educational outcomes.”

One in 10 children and young people in the UK have a long-term speech, language and communication need (SLCN). This can impact on their academic progress, social skills and future job prospects however with the correct support, children and young people can flourish.

For further information about the Shine a Light winners and highly-commended finalists, visit www.shinealightawards.co.uk and follow us on Twitter #awards_SAL.

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For further Information

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Notes to editors

Further details on the winners and their achievements can be found in the Shine a Light winners synopsis document.

The full list of winners and highly commended finalists is as follows:

Award	Winner	Highly Commended
The Katie Rough Memorial Award	Anna Biavati-Smith, Edinburgh <i>Speech and Language Therapist, Word Steps Speech Therapy</i>	Joanna McHugh, Coventry <i>Speech and Language Therapist, NHS</i>
Child/Young Person of the Year Award	Siena Castellon, London (aged 16)	Beatrice Cadman, Lincolnshire (aged 15) Benedict Middleton, Worcester (aged 18) Charlotte Seth, Skipton (aged 9)
Communication Champion of the Year Award	Jules Whicher, Nottingham, <i>parent</i>	Beccy Timbers, Stockport <i>Speech and Language Therapist, The Seashell Trust</i> Abed Ahmed, Birmingham <i>Maths teacher and Lead Practitioner at Washwood Heath Academy</i>
Youth Justice of the Year Award	Sandwell Youth Offending Service, Birmingham	Gloucestershire Youth Support Team, Gloucester
Early Years Setting of the	Battledown Centre for Children and	Little Squirrels at Redgate Community

Year Award	Families, Cheltenham	Primary School
Primary School of the Year Award	Longmoor Primary School, Leicester	Abbey Catholic Primary School, Birmingham
Secondary School/College of the Year Award	London South East Colleges, Bromley	
SEN School/Group of the Year Award	St Giles School, Derby	Abingdon House School, London
SLCN Innovation of the Year Award	London Bubble Theatre Company, London	
AAC of the Year Award	The Seashell Trust, Cheshire	
Journalist of the Year Award	Special Children Magazine	

About the Shine a Light Awards

- The Shine a Light Awards are sponsored and organised by Pearson in partnership with The Communication Trust, a coalition of over 50 organisations dedicated to supporting children and young people's speech, language and communication.
- The Awards are designed to promote and celebrate good practice in speech, language and communication for individuals, groups and settings that work with children and young people, particularly those with SLCN.
- The Shine a Light **Awards** have grown in popularity since their launch during the National Year of Communication in 2011 (known as the *Hello* campaign). To date, the awards have celebrated the work of over 150 teams and a wide range of individuals, including young people with severe and complex SLCN.
- The awards form part of the legacy of the National Year of Communication (*Hello* campaign) and have become a key event in the speech, language and communication and healthcare communities calendar.
- The judges involved in the 2019 Shine a Light Awards were:
 - Bob Reitemeier, CEO of I CAN
 - John Parrott, Chair of Communication Consortium at NAPLIC
 - Jonathan Douglas, Director of National Literacy Trust
 - Kamini Gadhok, MBE, CEO of Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT)
 - Malcolm Reeve, Managing Director of Firmament Education Ltd
 - Peter Sutcliffe, Editor of SEN Magazine
 - Vicky Roe, Deputy Chair of SMIRA
 - Zoe Peden, Co-founder of Insane Logic
 - Della Bolat, Director, Consilium Communications
 - Pip St John, Independent Education Consultant and previous Shine a Light Awards winner
 - Libby Hill, Speech and Language Therapist and previous Shine a Light Awards winner
 - Nicky Cox, Editor, First News
 - Marie McLaughlin, Youth Justice Manager, Manchester
 - Cerys Griffiths, Creative Director, BBC Learning
 - Anna Reeves, CEO, Ace Centre
 - Professor Sonia Blandford, Founder and CEO, Achievement for All
 - Lisa Morgan, Senior Lecturer, De Montford University
 - Loic Menzies, Chief Executive, LKMco
 - Anna Theakston, Co-Director, Lucid
 - Vicki Joffe, Professor, City University
 - Guthsna Khan, Deputy Head Teacher, Children's House Nursery and previous Shine a Light Awards winner
 - Dr. Adam Boddison, CEO, NASEN
 - Tania Tirraoro, Director, Special Needs Jungle
 - Jane Powell, Chief Executive, British Stammering Association
 - Robert Reilly-Craig, Head of Clinical Assessment, Pearson
 - Michelle Morris, Consultant Head of Service, NHS Teaching organisation
 - Marie Watson, The Award for Excellence in Special Needs Education – Pearson Teaching Awards

About Pearson

- We are the world's learning company with more than 24,000 employees in nearly 60 countries and a mission to

- help people make progress in their lives through learning.
- We combine world-class educational content and assessment, powered by services and technology, to enable more effective teaching and personalised learning at scale. We believe that wherever learning flourishes so do people.
 - Pearson's Clinical Assessment group offers innovative and comprehensive products and services to meet various needs of psychologists, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, and SENCOs in a variety of settings, including both education, health and clinical settings (private practice, hospital/medical and justice).
 - Pearson's Clinical Assessment group have been noted for gold-standard assessment contributions in cognitive/ability, memory, neuropsychology, behaviour, personality/psychopathology, achievement and speech/language.
 - Pearson have sponsored the Shine a Light Awards since their launch in 2011, as part of the *Hello* campaign (National Year of Communication).
 - Learn more at Pearson.com and follow us @Pearson

About The Communication Trust

- The Communication Trust is a coalition of over 50 leading voluntary sector organisations, which raises awareness, influences policy, promotes best practice among the children's workforce and commissions work from its members.
- The Trust's mission is to ensure that every child and young person is supported to communicate to the very best of their ability.
- The Trust works towards its mission by working in partnership to build, skills, knowledge and confidence in the children's workforce, based on a foundation of good practice, robust evidence and effective policy and legislation.
- For more information about the Trust visit www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk or follow @Comm_nTrust