

*For immediate release -*

## **Extension of Early Support Programme gets backing from 40 strong communication coalition**

The Communication Trust, a consortium of 40 voluntary organisations with expertise in speech, language and communication, has today welcomed the announcement of a new three-year phase in the Early Support Programme.

The successful programme, which currently supports families with children aged 0-5, is being extended to include older children and young people, and The Communication Trust are part of a consortium – led by the Early Support Trust – that is tasked with taking this work forwards.

The Early Support Programme helps parents from the moment their child is diagnosed, particularly if they are identified as having severe or complex difficulties. Each family is allocated a key worker who helps them to navigate the system, as well as providing help and advice on the specific difficulties the child has.

Anita Kerwin-Nye, Director of The Communication Trust, said: “The Communication Trust is delighted to be part of the Early Support Programme consortium. We have lobbied hard for the successful 0-5 programme to be extended even further so more families can benefit from timely information and intervention.

“We have a particular interest in ensuring the needs of parents of children with speech and language impairment (SLI) are met because they are too often ‘invisible’. Around 7 per cent of five-year-olds have SLI. These children are bright and full of ideas, but they struggle with speaking and understanding language. They are suffering from a lack of recognition and understanding so early support for these families is particularly important. Without it, these are the children that become very adept at masking their difficulties or the difficulties they present at school gets confused as poor reading or writing.

Kerwin-Nye continues; “We will be supporting the Early Support team in creating models for SLI working alongside one of our founding members Afasic, leaders in this field. Speech, language and communication difficulties are pan-disability. Because of this, we will be embedding the breadth of expertise of our 40 organisations and parent facing services as part of our strategic input into this work.

“The Trust’s contribution to the Early Support Programme builds on our existing work over the last five years and that of the *Hello* campaign. Through *Hello* we have developed information and resources to improve awareness of how communication ‘typically’ develops, how to spot if a child is struggling and where to go for help and support.”

During 2011, The Communication Trust has been leading *Hello*, the national year of communication, in partnership with Jean Gross, the Government’s Communication Champion. The national year was originally called for by John Bercow MP who led a review of *Services for Children and Young People with Speech, Language and Communication Needs* (SLCN) in 2008.

As part of *Hello*, the Trust commissioned Afasic and I CAN to develop ‘The SLI Handbook’ which is packed with advice and information about recognising the signs of speech and language impairment and where to get help. For more information visit

<https://shop.ican.org.uk/node/22>

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*For more information, contact Lynne Milford, Press Officer, on 0207 843 2564 or email [lmilford@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](mailto:lmilford@thecommunicationtrust.org.uk)*

#### **Notes for editors**

- The Communication Trust is a coalition of 40 leading voluntary sector organisations and an advisory group which includes the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, Association of Educational Psychologists and the General Teaching Council.
- *Hello* is the national year of communication – a campaign to increase understanding of how important it is for children and young people to develop good communication skills.
- The campaign is run by The Communication Trust, in partnership with Jean Gross, the Government’s Communication Champion. Together we aim to make 2011 the year when children’s communication skills become a priority in schools and homes across the country.