

'Talking Trouble NZ' Newsletter

Issue 2: October 2013



Communication difficulties and youth in the legal system: research and development project.

International research has demonstrated a high level of oral language difficulties experienced by children and young people involved with the legal system. The *Talking Trouble NZ* project is concerned with the implications of these findings for young people and those who work with them in New Zealand. For more background on this project, please see page 8 of this newsletter. Our newsletters contain information about our own work on this project and highlight significant information from others within NZ and from overseas.

Pamela Snow's visit to Auckland

The *Talking Trouble NZ* team is delighted to be hosting a visit from Associate Professor Pamela Snow from Australia at the end of October. Pamela is a leading international researcher and practitioner in the area of oral language competence and children /young people who are involved with the law. She is both a speech language pathologist and psychologist and her research and presentations have contributed considerably to raising awareness of the language needs of children and young people who have become involved in the justice system and those who are within care and protection systems.

During her visit to Auckland Pamela will be collaborating with *Talking Trouble NZ* in meetings with key agencies involved with children and young people, discussing existing and future research projects, and will be presenting at two free *Talking Trouble NZ* events at Tamaki Campus (see below for details). Please RSVP to attend either / both events: talkingtroublenz@gmail.com

Event for professionals involved with vulnerable children / young people:

“Oral language competence, young speakers and the law: Lessons learned from young people in the child protection and youth justice systems.”

Wednesday, 30 October 2013 3.00 – 5.00pm

The University of Auckland, Tamaki campus, Morrin Rd, Tamaki. Building 730, Room 220

Event for speech language therapists:

“Oral language competence in early life: lessons learned from child protection and youth justice populations”

Thursday, 31 October 2013 4.30 – 6.00pm

The University of Auckland, Tamaki campus, Morrin Rd, Tamaki. Building 730, Room 220

Talking Trouble NZ workshops for NZ Fire Service staff

In November 2012, the *Talking Trouble NZ* team gave a presentation as part of a 'Youth Justice Practice' Forum at The University of Auckland. In this presentation we talked about the need for professionals working with vulnerable children to receive specialised training to recognise language difficulties which can be hard to spot and develop strategies to make communication more successful.

This resonated with one of the other presenters at the forum, Peter Wilding who heads the NZ Fire Service's Fire Awareness and Intervention Programme (FAIP) which NZ Fire Service staff carry out with children and young people who have been involved in setting fires.

The *Talking Trouble NZ* team developed a 6 hour workshop tailored for the NZ Fire Service's FAIP team. This has been rolled out so far in 4 centres across NZ (with one more to go) with very encouraging feedback.

The workshop uses practical tasks and videos to help participants become more aware of how language difficulties may be masked and how using specific language strategies when talking with children can result in a more effective intervention.

Some other professionals who work closely with the FAIP team were invited by them to attend these workshops, such as Officers from the Police Youth Aid Section, and Family Group Conference Coordinators from Child Youth and Family.

Talking Trouble NZ workshops for others

We are currently in discussion with a range of different professional groups and agencies about about delivering Talking Trouble NZ workshops for specific agencies or professional groups.

Email talkingtroublenz@gmail.com to discuss developing a Talking Trouble NZ workshop for your staff.

New NZ research

A key aim of the *Talking Trouble NZ* project is to establish a sound research base into the language and communication needs of children and young people involved with the legal system in New Zealand. We are delighted to report that a number of undergraduate and postgraduate projects are underway at the University of Auckland.

Two projects exploring NZ teenagers' knowledge of vocabulary relating to the law are near completion by Psychology student, Keith Ho and Masters in Speech Language Therapy student, Emma Cooke.

A PhD project in Speech Science is being carried out by Sarah Lount at The University of Auckland. It is investigating the hearing and language skills of youth in some of Child Youth and Family's youth justice facilities in NZ. This project will also look at perceived needs concerning oral language on the part of staff working with these young people

Two new projects slated for commencement in 2014 involve gathering data on the oral language skills of young people in care and protection residences, and also on oral language skills of the younger members of an adult prison population.

A cohort of up to 4 ongoing research projects are planned for the 2014 Masters in Speech Language Therapy students. Specific topics are yet to be decided.

We are currently developing a list of potential research projects and discussing future collaborations with other international researchers. We need to find out more about the the language profiles of particular groups of vulnerable children and young people. We also need to explore the efficacy of interventions for young people themselves and for interventions such as training for professionals working with them.

We are keen to hear from speech language therapists or other professionals interested in pursuing postgraduate research in this area. Please contact Dr Linda Hand or Dr Clare McCann to discuss research options.

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Involving MPs

The *Talking Trouble NZ* team have initiated meetings and correspondence with MPs across the political spectrum to discuss the implications of the growing research on language difficulties experienced by vulnerable children and young people who are involved with the law.

David Clendon, Green Party MP, met one of the Talking Trouble NZ team, Sally Kedge, at a JustSpeak forum about youth justice in Auckland. David is a member of the parliamentary law and order committee and holds the Green spokesperson role for Justice as well as Corrections and the Courts. Clare McCann and Sally Kedge met with David in September 2013 to explain the aims of the Talking Trouble NZ project.

Invitations have gone to relevant MPs for the forthcoming events with Pamela Snow (see page 1 of this newsletter). These generated a high level of response across the political parties. Several have asked for a video of the presentations, further meetings and to be kept informed of the project by our newsletter.

Website and logo

Talking Trouble NZ has started developing a website:

www.talkingtroublenz.org

Samantha Emberley helped us get this website started with great enthusiasm and we are very grateful for her work. Samantha spent several months as an intern in the Discipline of Speech Science at the University of Auckland and supported the Talking Trouble NZ project with work on the website as well as gathering a database of academic publications relevant to the project.

We are keen to develop the website as a resource for professionals and are seeking funding for this project.

Talking Trouble NZ is also very pleased to be using our new logo.



Talking Trouble NZ presentations

The *Talking Trouble NZ* team have spoken to a wide range of audiences over the last 12 months. We have welcomed the opportunity to discuss issues of oral language difficulties and vulnerable children and to develop our networks. There has been a very encouraging response to our presentations and the issues clearly resonate with those working with children and young people.

- We presented at a 'Youth Justice Practice' Forum at The University of Auckland to a wide audience of practitioners in November 2012.
- Linda, Sally and Clare delivered a paper to fellow speech language therapists at the New Zealand Speech-language Therapists' Association's National Professional Development Event in Hamilton on 22 May 2013.
- On 10 July 2013 Linda presented a public lecture about *Talking Trouble NZ* at The University of Auckland's Centre for Continuing Education's Winter Week on Campus 2013.
- On 23 July 2013 Sally presented at The University of Sheffield, UK to a group of Speech and Language Therapy researchers and those working as Registered Intermediaries in the UK justice system (see page 5 for more detail).
- Clare and Sally formed part of a panel of presenters at *JustSpeak's* Youth Justice evening on 28 August 2013.
- After being invited to give a short presentation at the 2012 SYHPANZ (Society of Youth Health Professionals Aotearoa New Zealand) conference, we were invited back in October 2013 to give a practical 1 hour workshop which generated a great deal of debate amongst health staff working in youth justice.

We welcome the opportunity to present to a range of audiences about Talking Trouble NZ issues. Please contact us to discuss.
talkingtroublenz@gmail.com

UN Rights of the Child NZ submission

In June 2013, *Talking Trouble NZ* made a submission on Aotearoa New Zealand's performance on children's and young people's human rights. As part of the preparation of this report, we consulted with others in the field and sent a representative to a workshop on the Universal Periodic Review supported by the Human Rights Commission in May 2013.

We are grateful for the help of Alayne McKee and Professor Suzanne Purdy in the submission preparation. Please contact us for a copy of *Talking Trouble NZ's* submission.

UK visit: Sheffield

In July this year Sally took time out of a family trip to the UK to visit Dr Judy Clegg and colleagues in the Department of Human Communication Sciences at University of Sheffield in the UK. Dr Clegg's research and practice on language and vulnerable young people, including those experiencing social deprivation is very highly regarded, and she is involved currently in the supervision of a PhD student who is exploring the language profiles of young offenders who are incarcerated.

Dr Clegg invited Sally to give a talk about the *Talking Trouble NZ* project to a group of researchers and practitioners who included a number of Registered Intermediaries who work with vulnerable witnesses in the courts. Some have also experience of providing intermediary services for defendants.

There was a productive discussion about the way the skills of SLTs are being utilised in the UK legal system currently and Sally was able to learn about the training and practice of the Intermediaries. We also discussed culture and bilingualism and the need for developing effective, culturally sensitive and appropriate ways of working.

Future collaborations with colleagues from Sheffield are being discussed. Linda will be spending part of a sabbatical in 2015 in the UK and is already planning to learn more from colleagues about the research and services that have been established there.

International news

Northern Ireland training for youth justice staff

In April 2013, the UK's Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) released a report on a pilot project carried out in Northern Ireland using the RCSLT's criminal justice e-learning tool which provided professional development for staff working with young offenders to help them to recognise communication needs in their clients.

The RCSLT has an excellent, comprehensive section about their youth justice work on their website:

http://www.rcslt.org/about/young_offenders_and_criminal_justice

Pilot Intermediary scheme in Northern Ireland

In April 2013 another initiative began in Northern Ireland where a pilot Registered Intermediary scheme was launched. This provides communication support for vulnerable witnesses, victims and defendants going through police and court processes. Although there have been Registered Intermediary schemes in England and Wales provided for in the statute since 1999, these services cover witnesses and victims, not defendants. In England and Wales, intermediaries can work with defendants if the case pays for their services but they cannot undertake this work through the Registered Intermediary scheme.

In New Zealand we do not currently have intermediary services for vulnerable victims, witnesses or defendants. There has been a pilot project researching possible models for this in NZ, outlined in Hanna, Davies, Henderson & Hand (2012) *Questioning Child Witnesses: Exploring the Benefits and Risks of Intermediary Models in New Zealand* *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law*. doi:DOI:10.1080/13218719.2012.726148. The NZ government cabinet accepted such a system in principle in 2011

<http://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/alternative-court-processes-child-witnesses>). However no further movement has been detected on this in 2013.

Information about the pilot NI scheme:

<http://www.dojni.gov.uk/ford-to-pilot-new-schemes-for-vulnerable-victims-witnesses-and-defendants>

Information about the UK's Registered Intermediaries scheme:

<http://www.rcslt.org/about/young-offenders-and-criminal-justice/registered-intermediaries>

Resources

The following resources are a few we have become aware of from the UK where there appears to have been huge amount of investment into raising awareness of the communication needs of vulnerable young people. We are highly aware of the need to develop NZ specific resources and training materials and this is something the Talking Trouble NZ is currently planning. Funding is required for this.

Sentence Trouble

The excellent film, training booklet and website from the Sentence Trouble project by The Communication Trust in the UK are extremely recommended.

<http://www.sentencetrouble.info>

Language Builders for Vulnerable Young People

This newly published book provides practical suggestions and advice for detecting language difficulties and supporting young people and has been designed for staff in the youth justice sector.

<http://www.elklan.co.uk>

NACRO Youth Crime Briefing Paper

Nacro is a UK crime reduction charity and their 2011 paper titled Speech, language and communication difficulties: young people in trouble with the law provides a very readable overview of research and practice with links to other useful project reports.

<http://www.nacro.org.uk/data/files/nacro-speech-language-comm-diffs-yp-919.pdf>

The Advocates' Gateway

This highly practical website provides comprehensive support for legal staff to help support communication with clients in legal contexts.

<http://www.theadvocatesgateway.org>

Positive Practice, Positive Outcomes

KeyRing's training resources to support staff working with young people who have learning difficulties who have become involved in crime were written in partnership with the UK's Department of Health.

<https://www.keyring.org/cjs-training>

The RALLI Campaign

This series of videos by a group of Speech Language Therapists aims to 'raise awareness of language learning impairments'. One of the videos, Looking Behind Behaviour explores the language profile and related behavioural profile of a school aged child.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=WTySmn-X8o

Inaugural Australasian Youth Justice Conference

In May 2013, the first Australasian Youth Justice Conference – “Changing trajectories of offending and reoffending” took place in Canberra. NZ presenters were well represented, with a keynote speech by Principal Youth Court Judge, Andrew Becroft. Pamela Snow also presented on oral language issues and youth justice at this conference.

Many of the slides from presenters are available on this link:

<http://aic.gov.au/events/aic%20upcoming%20events/2013/youthjustice.html>

SLT employed in a NZ Care and Protection residence

Kingslea School, based in Christchurch, is responsible for providing education programmes for a number of Youth Justice and Care & Protection residences across the country.

<http://www.kingslea.school.nz/>

Kingslea has recently employed the first speech language therapist in such a facility in NZ that we know of. (If you know of any others, please let us know).

This is an exciting move. It is just starting at the time of writing, so look out for further bulletins on progress and developments.

What is Talking Trouble NZ?

The 'Talking Trouble' NZ Project is a collaboration between three speech-language therapists (SLTs) passionate about improving New Zealand's response to the communication difficulties experienced by many youth involved with the legal system. The 'Talking Trouble' NZ Project has been established to raise awareness of these issues, investigate the extent of the problem in New Zealand and develop interventions appropriate to Aotearoa. The Talking Trouble NZ team is Sally Kedge, Dr Linda Hand and Dr Clare McCann.

The problem

Oral communication difficulties have been identified in over 60% of young people in the criminal justice system in Australia and the UK (Bryan, Freer and Furlong, 2007, Bryan et al, 2004, Snow, Powell & Sanger 2012). This poses many problems for youth and their whānau, but also impacts on the services working with them. Both sides can have problems with communication.

Young people may misunderstand what is said by police, lawyers, youth justice staff, CYF staff and many others. These adults may believe the young people understand and therefore adopt a communication style which is too complex. It can also be difficult for young people to clearly explain what they mean. This is often judged to be reluctance, obstructive or unmotivated behaviour or a lack of intelligence. Young people may not be aware of their own communication problems, or may be aware but cover them up. These difficulties with communication may go undetected and are often not obvious to either side.

Consequences

Poor communication skills impact hugely on young people's involvement in the youth justice system.

Consequences can be:

- poor interactions with the police and other community services resulting in arrest
- inability to give a good account of themselves resulting in a charge
- poor understanding of legal process and instructions e.g. appointment requirements, court orders, remand and probation arrangements
- poor interaction with youth justice staff
- inability to benefit from intervention programmes as most of these involve talking.

Plans for the future

The Talking Trouble NZ Project is growing networks of interested professionals, developing NZ specific training workshops and tools, carrying out NZ research and building international research and practice collaborations. Funding is an urgent need.

How can I be involved?

Email to join our mailing list / become a friend of the Talking Trouble NZ Project

Send this newsletter on to others

Disclaimer: *This is not an official publication of The University of Auckland. The 'Talking Trouble' NZ Project does not at this point offer any assessment or intervention services so cannot accept referrals or comment on any individual cases. To the best of our knowledge the information in this newsletter is up to date and accurate.*

Contact us

talkingtroublenz@gmail.com

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