



## Speech Bubbles National Programme Report 2022-2023

Speech Bubbles CIO has been in operation for two years as an independent charity, taking over the direct running of the Speech Bubbles programme which has been in schools for fourteen years. This second year started with us reading a report from Speech and Language UK stating that 1.7million children are struggling with talking and understanding words in school, a 20% reported increase since pre-pandemic. With that bombshell we began the year, and what a year! Schools were disrupted by high levels of absence of staff and pupils, industrial action and additional bank holidays. It appeared that this was having a negative impact on school staff stress levels and morale.

Whilst the Speech Bubbles practitioners are affected by this we aren't so immersed in the ongoing daily pressure. In that context we felt it was ever more vital to be joyful, play some games, tell some stories and have some fun!

In this year we have:

- Worked with more schools and children than ever before
- Trialed a 'Small School Programme' in four rural primaries
- Developed a CPD session for teachers 'Drama Tools for Great Communication.

We also added training resources to support all practitioners to deliver Speech Bubbles in a way that promotes Linguistic Justice, the right to be heard, for every child.

**Main programme. Achievements**

We worked with:

- 2300 children
- 133 schools

We were aiming for 80 schools, however local authority funding in Kent allowed us to expand, to support a locally identified need.

*Of the participating children:*

- 33% were eligible for pupil premium
- 33% were identified as having English as an additional language
- 55% were boys and 45% were girls

*Schools report that of the children taking part*

- 83% showed improvements for speaking and listening with 43% showing a clear to striking difference
- 84% showed improvements for emotion and conduct behaviour with 39% showing a clear to striking difference
- 89% showed improvements back in class with 60% showing a clear to striking difference

*K is developing into a very confident boy. Speech Bubbles has allowed him to make great strides in his social development.*

*E is more able to concentrate for extended periods of time on activities. Thoughts appear to be more organised when communicating with others.*

*X has really grown in self-confidence and is much more willing to communicate with adults and peers.*

**Class teachers comments on end of year assessments.***Learning and next steps*

It has been a deeply challenging year for schools and both budgets and staffing have been negatively affected. Speech Bubbles makes demands in terms of staff time and this year we have seen increased difficulties in schools providing consistent staff support, completing assessments and sending TAs out to reflective sessions and evaluations.

The ability to offer the full programme (for 24 weeks with 20 children), as well as having a 'bounce back' programme (with a second start later in the year and running for 18 weeks, with 16 children), enabled us to be flexible and responsive. In both versions of the programme every child has the opportunity to tell two stories for acting out by their peers. That means in total there were over 4500 unique stories told and acted out!

Here is just one of those stories for you!

*The boy and the flower by Holly*

*Once upon a time there was a little boy and he lived with his mother and then he went for a walk through the park and then he went back home and he went to bed. But the next morning his mother wasn't in bed, instead there were flowers on her bed and there was also a note and it said I have kidnapped your mother if you don't find me the magic flower on top of the Everest mountain I will keep her forever. So he got his coat and hat and boots and some snack and he went to climb it to find the magic flower. But when he was half way up a storm came and then he found the magic flower and then he ran down the mountain and then he ran home and then he put the flower on the bed. There was a portal and his mother came and the flower sucked in the portal as it closed.*

*The End*

To support the smooth running of the programme in schools in 23-24 we will:

- Provide more resources online
- Provide more resources direct to class teachers
- Adapt the requirements for support staff to attend all in-person events

### **New partners** *Achievements*

Bounce Theatre and Mercury Theatre joined the network and delivered successful programmes in schools in Wandsworth and Essex. Both of these new partners are committed to staying in the network. We are also very proud to announce that Nottingham Playhouse and Herts Inclusive Theatre are joining from September.

*We are proud to be partnering with Speech Bubbles to deliver their hugely successful intervention programmes for children with additional communication needs. Nurturing creativity, confidence and wellbeing through interactive storytelling has always been at the heart of our provision for young children, and this well-researched and evidenced programme for primary schools will complement our ever growing schools offer.*

*Sarah West Valstar, Nottingham Playhouse*

Whilst we have managed to maintain and expand the partner network, there is a feeling of a greater level of vulnerability and challenge in growing the number of schools that each partner reaches. Funding is tighter and already stretched organisations need more support. In the year ahead we will review the partnership model and where possible streamline all processes.

### Small school model Achievements

Working with Mercury Theatre, the RSA and the ROH bridge we developed a Speech Bubbles model for small rural schools. It supports a wider group of children to take part in the creative activity in each school whilst maintaining the impact for referred children. The feedback from the schools was wholly positive and the Braintree Local Cultural Education Partnership are considering continuation funding.

*The programme definitely benefitted all pupils, not just those that would have received referred support. In fact, some of the children who benefitted the most would be children that would not have been referred under the normal guidance!*

*Headteacher St Margarets Primary, Braintree*

### Learning and next steps

The small school model is now available across the partner network, and as well as supporting rural schools to take part it is being taken up by urban schools that are struggling with considerable falling roles.

### Continued Professional Development (CPD) achievements



Following extensive consultation with school staff, drama folk, speech and language therapists and children we devised and launched 'Drama Tools For Great Communication' a 1.5hr certified CPD session and resources.

- 64 Drama Practitioners have been trained to deliver the session
- 63 CPD sessions have been delivered reaching staff from 73 schools

*The feedback from staff was really positive, they found the session really useful and engaging. They are already implementing what they learnt which is great for us to see!*

*SENCO, Fenstanton Primary*

### Learning and next steps

The school feedback has been very positive and early feedback suggests that teachers have immediately begun to use the games and activities in their classrooms. The evaluation of the first year will be completed in September and will inform the future development. The consultations will

continue and we will develop a part 2 CPD for schools that had part 1 this year. Additionally we are now offering the CPD to degree level courses: applied theatre, speech and language therapy and initial teacher training, we have four booked so far and will seek out more.

The feedback from drama practitioners has been extremely positive, although many were nervous delivering the CPD has built their professional confidence and has increased their understanding of the theoretical foundation of the practice.

### **Training Achievements**

In addition to the ongoing Speech Bubbles recruitment and training we offered a paid training module to 13 practitioners with global majority identities and those with lived experience of communication needs. This has supported new practitioners in London and Manchester

*I can't wait to get started!*

*Drama Practitioner with lived experience of communication needs*

10 practitioners were supported to complete trauma informed practice workshops with Kazzum Arts.

All attendees at the Induction days received a video input on Linguistic Justice from Warda Farah (SLT). This highlighted the positive impact of listening and accepting children's home speech patterns and supported the Speech Bubbles practice of collecting children's stories verbatim.

- 60% of attendees reported increased confidence in working with children's home speech patterns,
- 30% reported that they were already confident in this area
- 10% still lacked confidence.

The comments emphasized the importance of the subject, the connection with Speech Bubbles practice, and the support needs of practitioners.

### **Learning and next steps**

We will continue to emphasise the central Speech Bubbles practice of collecting every child's story verbatim.

There is an increasing interest in Oracy education and this connects closely with the Speech Bubbles practice and the notion of Linguistic Justice. Voice 21 are leading on this practice and have developed an oracy framework that is being taken up by their 900 connected schools, we will examine the framework and match Speech Bubbles practice, including the CPD to it.

### **The business** *Achievements*

We worked with a consultant from the Cranfield Trust to review our business model and complete their Journey to Excellence framework. We showed marked progress in all four areas:

- Performance and Impact,
- People management,
- Leadership and development,
- Financial Management.

### *Learning and next steps*

The consultancy highlighted the need to build organisational capacity, we are addressing this by training eight senior Speech Bubbles practitioners to lead the induction days and collaborative learning sessions.

The consultancy also identified the need to develop a longer term business plan based on a newly developed theory of change and logic model. This has been taken on by the board of trustees as a task to be completed by March 2024.

### **In conclusion**

In a volatile year we have been able to support more children than ever before, we have developed new ways of working and we have continued to make a difference to children's confidence to communicate.

For this year's curtain call please put your hands together for....

- The Drama Practitioners
- The school staff
- The Children!

And behind the scenes

- The Board of Trustees
- The Advisory Group
- The Staff
- Freelance specialists: speech and language therapists, designers, illustrators, film makers, evaluators, accountants and IT support.

And the funders:

- PHF
- Communication Trust
- Garfield Weston
- Foyle Foundation
- The RSA
- Cranfield Trust (Pro Bono)