

**Good communication skills at an early age is key to your child's success**

24 October 2013

Developing good communication skills from an early age gives a child greater confidence and success at school and through life – this was the key message from the Now You're Talking Conference held today at the Everglades Hotel in Derry/Londonderry.



The conference, organised by the Health and Social Care Board, aimed to raise awareness of the importance of developing speech, language and communication skills in young children.

Leading speech and language expert Professor James Law, Newcastle University, delivered a keynote address on tackling the swell of language deprivation, while Janet Law, Manager of the 'Stoke Speaks Out' initiative shared experiences and innovative practices that have enhanced early communication development in children from pre-birth to 3 years in Stoke-on-Trent. Delegates also experienced Replay Theatre Company's Babble Bubble, a unique vocal wonderland that creatively uses the arts to promote speech and language development in very young children.

Addressing the conference the Education Minister, John O'Dowd said: "Speech, language and communication development significantly determines how well our children achieve in life. The ability to communicate is therefore an essential life skill and, as Minister, I am committed to ensuring that children are prepared, supported and encouraged to develop their language and communication skills.

"The earliest years of a child's life are some of the most important in terms of developing their core literacy and language skills and early years' education is therefore one of my key areas of focus. Indeed, my Department's total investment in Early Years education in 2013/14 is £213million. This funding is focused on a number of key areas and in each of these areas language development is an important element.

"I will continue to prioritise this important area of education and commend all those involved in this vital work."

Speaking at the conference, Tony Rodgers, Assistant Director of Social Care and Children, Health and Social Care Board, said: "All who cherish and care for our children need to be aware of the importance of speech, language and communication development in determining how our children achieve in life. Everyone can help and simple things can make a real difference, like talking with and listening to our children. For parents, it's about talking to your bump and spending time with your baby as these are especially formative times."

Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) Country Officer Alison McCullough MBE welcomed the focus on early years and early-intervention. She said: "It is great to be involved in this event. Equipping parents, carers and health professionals to understand the importance of promoting speech, language and communication skills early on will lay the foundations for success in life.

"Speech and language therapy transforms lives. If parents or carers are worried that their child has speech, language and communication difficulties they can use the RCSLT seven signs booklet to see if they need to seek advice from a speech and language therapist by contacting their local speech and language therapy clinic directly."

The Now You're Talking Conference is the culmination of an exciting regional campaign to promote speech and language development in children aged 0-3 years through a multi-sensory approach which includes activities like drama, poetry, song, physical play and outside play.

The Now You're Talking Campaign is a partnership initiative involving representation from a wide range of organisations. These include the Health and Social Care Board, the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, the Public Health Agency, Childcare Partnerships, local Sure Start projects, Book Trust, and Ilex together with early years learning professionals from the education sector.



Book Trust and Minister John O'Dowd present Now You're Talking frame to Ernesta Degimaite, aged 4 from Model Nursery School (Londonderry) who designed the Now You're Talking conference flyer