

# Talking Together Evaluation

June 2019

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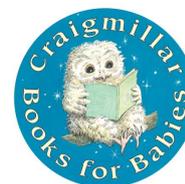
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## Foreword by Craigmillar Books for Babies

Talking Together is an exciting and innovative programme that we deliver in partnership with NHS Lothian Speech and Language Therapy. Its aim is to encourage and support parents/carers to talk with their babies and children.

When an adult responds to a child's babble, gesture or word this builds connections in the brain. It is known as serve and return. A baby serves by babbling, facial expression and gesture and the adult returns the serve by responding in a direct and meaningful way. When a baby coos and an adult interacts this creates the foundation on which all future brain development is built.

We know the first three years of life are the most sensitive period in a young child's development and in the development of attachment between child and their parent/carer. We know that sharing books, rhymes and songs and talking builds the foundations for a lifetime's future learning. The effects of early childhood experiences last a lifetime and impact on learning, relationships and health. We know parents/carers want the best for their children.

This evaluation by Iconic Consulting will help us to explore and understand what parents/carers and referral partners think about Talking Together – what benefits they have noticed to date and how we might develop and improve. It will help us think about how we work and if we need to change anything in our practice.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Ian Clark at Iconic Consulting for his work on this evaluation – his professional manner, his insights and observations, his approach when working with families in the programme and for this wonderful report.

We would like to thank all the parents/carers who took part in this evaluation exercise – for taking the time to take part in interviews and for their ongoing support of the Talking Together programme and the Craigmillar Books for Babies project.

We would like to thank the stakeholders who took part in this evaluation and gave their time willingly to be interviewed about Talking Together.

We would like to thank our Development Worker Michelle Jones and our Speech and Language Therapist Katy Gray for all their dedication and commitment to Talking Together.

We would like to thank our referral partners in the community for their ongoing support of Talking Together – in particular Sandra Clapperton our community Speech and Language Therapist, the Health Visiting teams at Craigmillar Medical Group, Niddrie Medical Practice and Mountcastle Health Centre, Greengables Nursery School and Family Centre, the Moffat Early Years Campus, Castleview Primary School Nursery Class, Greendykes Early Years Centre and Craigmillar Early Years Centre.

We would like to thank our funders, in particular the City of Edinburgh Council Children and Families department, BBC Children in Need and the Cattanach Trust for funding the work of Talking Together. We hope you find this evaluation of Talking Together as interesting, informative and inspiring as we have done and we thank you for taking the time to read it.

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This concise report presents the findings of Iconic Consulting's evaluation of Talking Together, a Craigmillar Books for Babies project delivered in partnership with NHS Lothian Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) service.
- 1.2 Talking Together was set-up in 2016 to support families from the Craigmillar, Niddrie, Magdalene and Bingham communities of Edinburgh with young children (under 4) who have been referred for targeted speech and language and early communication support. The project supports early communication and language development through individual and group work. Craigmillar Books for Babies secured funding from the Cattanach Trust and City of Edinburgh Council to deliver the project including the salary costs of a Speech and Language Therapist who is employed by NHS Lothian. The project built on previous successful partnership working between Craigmillar Books for Babies and NHS Lothian's Community SLT service.
- 1.3 Craigmillar Books for Babies was established in 1998 as a project of the Craigmillar Literacy Trust. It is an early literacy project which aims to encourage and support parents and carers to share books, rhymes and songs with their babies and young children. Using an assets-based approach the project supports and encourages parents to give their child the best start in life. Sharing books, rhymes and songs is promoted as a relevant and worthwhile source of pleasure, which enhances children's early development, communication and the bond between parents/carers and children. Every family with a newborn baby in the area is provided with free books and information promoting the benefits of sharing books, rhymes and songs. Other Craigmillar Books for Babies programmes include weekly Baby and Toddler Rhymetime sessions in Craigmillar Library, outreach to baby clinics and parent and toddler groups, the Family Support at Home programme, monthly Saturday Storytimes, Polish Rhymetimes and Thinking About Nursery events, and delivery of Raising Children with Confidence (a seven-week course to give parents/carers the chance to explore emotional well-being and how to promote it in themselves and their children). Craigmillar Books for Babies works closely with local partners particularly Health Visitors and Early Years Workers.
- 1.4 The aim of the evaluation was to assess the implementation and impact of Talking Together. A mixed-methods approach was adopted consisting of the following tasks:
- A review of key documents including funding applications, monitoring reports, and a small sample of assessments produced by the Speech and Language Therapy partners.
  - Analysis of project records on beneficiaries and the support provided.
  - In-depth interviews with four staff from Craigmillar Books for Babies and NHS Lothian.
  - Telephone discussions with seven parents/carers who had been supported by the project.
  - Telephone discussions with four local early years and healthcare professionals.
- 1.5 This report is structured as follows:
- Section 2 focuses on implementation of Talking Together.
  - Section 3 discusses the project's impact.
  - Section 4 summarises our overall conclusions and recommendations.

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## 2 Implementation

- 2.1 This section focuses on implementation of the Talking Together project over the period 2016-19. It covers need, staffing, awareness raising, referral, support, monitoring, and beneficiaries.

### Need

- 2.2 Talking Together is a needs-led project. Craigmillar Books for Babies' experience demonstrated the prevalence of delayed language and communication issues among the children they engaged. Experience also revealed how the development of early language and communication can be influenced by a myriad of issues including poverty, social isolation, low self-confidence and self-esteem, traumatic experiences, substance misuse, relationship problems, domestic violence, language barriers, mental health problems, and home environments that lacked stimulation through reading and play. Although close working with the Speech and Language Therapy service occurred, Craigmillar Books for Babies identified a need for a specialist, targeted service and this view was confirmed during consultations the organisation undertook with partner agencies including the Speech and Language Therapy service. Talking Together was developed to address this need.

### Staffing

- 2.3 Craigmillar Books for Babies' Manager and Development Worker both devote time to Talking Together, particularly the latter who is integral to project delivery. In addition, Craigmillar Books for Babies commissioned NHS Lothian to provide dedicated SLT input to the project. Although employed by NHS Lothian, the SLT is responsible to Craigmillar Books for Babies as the project lead and there was strong evidence that the current post-holder works very closely with the organisation's Manager and Development Worker. At the same time, the post-holder benefits from management, peer and administrative support from NHS Lothian. This arrangement appears to work well for all parties who are commended for their commitment to making this slightly complicated and uncommon arrangement a success. As such, we highlight Talking Together as an example of good practice in partnership working.
- 2.4 It should be noted however that the positive situation described above took some time to establish as a result of staff turnover, differing interpretations of roles and responsibilities and of the potential for joint working. The current Speech and Language Therapist took up the post in April 2018 and works exclusively on the project for two days per week. Before this, the project employed a Speech and Language Therapist and a Speech and Language Therapy Assistant. Both positions had been affected by staff turnover with two Therapists and one Assistant leaving their posts. When both posts were vacant the project partners took the opportunity to revise the staffing structure to address some challenges around the role of the Speech and Language Therapy Assistant. This led to the hours of the Therapist post being extended and the Assistant post being deleted. In the early stages of the project there were differing interpretations of the role of Speech and Language Therapy in the partnership which meant that the preventative nature of the project was not fully realised and the distinction between the project and the Community SLT service may have been less clear as a result. At this time there was less awareness of the project among some potential referral agencies, and joint working was somewhat fragmented with Craigmillar Books for Babies staff, at times, unaware of referrals to SLT or not consistently being involved in

supporting families. There were also some issues regarding the sharing of information with Craigmillar Books for Babies, on the grounds of confidentiality. As a result, uptake of the project and its impact during this period was less than envisaged and significantly less than it has been since the current post-holder took up their position. The turnaround in the project has been noteworthy and all parties involved are commended for this, particularly the current post-holder who has successfully established themselves as part of both the Craigmillar Books for Babies and NHS Lothian's Community SLT teams. Craigmillar Books for Babies staff also worked hard to ensure potential referrers such as Health Visitors understood the aims of the project, their role and that of the Speech and Language Therapist, and the referral process.

- 2.5 Consultees - both stakeholders and parents/carers - were very complimentary about the current Talking Together project staff. Stakeholders tended to have a strong relationship with Craigmillar Books for Babies staff which pre-dated the project and highlighted how the project was now adding to their positive views on existing staff and was creating a good impression of the Speech and Language Therapist. Parents/carers were particularly complimentary about staff's approach, skills and knowledge.

*"I really looked forward to the visits and [child] did too. I was surprised by how much they knew and how they just knew exactly what to do to help. The way they interact with the children, and with the parents, it's exceptional. You can see how happy [child] is, he's pulling the books out of Michelle's bag. It is amazing and I really appreciate their help". Parent/carer.*

*"They are so kind, nice people". Parent/carer.*

*"Her [Speech and Language Therapist] explanation was fantastic, and she was very understanding and welcoming". Parent/carer.*

*"They are lovely, easy to get hold off, they email you quickly, they provides loads of updates about how the families are getting on, and the reports that Katy produces are really helpful. Oh, and Michelle is so enthusiastic". Stakeholder.*

*"They are on the end of the phone and are very easy to chat to about a case". Stakeholder.*

### **Awareness raising**

- 2.6 Craigmillar Books for Babies has successfully raised awareness of Talking Together among potential referrers. This has involved the Speech and Language Therapist as well as Craigmillar Books for Babies' Manager and Development Worker. Awareness raising has involved presentations and informal discussions with a range of local early years workers and health practitioners particularly Health Visitors. Consultees provided very positive feedback on these sessions/discussions explaining that they provided an overview of the language and communication issues the project aims to address, the support available, and how to refer.
- 2.7 Significantly, Talking Together staff reported how they emphasise the distinction between the project and NHS Lothian's Community SLT service. Generally, stakeholders were able to distinguish between the two and reported there was no confusion. One consultee stated they had been slightly unsure at the outset but put this down to "a hiccup". Another noted that the Community SLT team run drop-ins for under 4s and did not know if they differed

from the project's support. In fact, the drop in service that the Community SLT team offer is for a wider geographical area and, although parents from the Craigmillar area could attend these sessions, they are likely to find Talking Together more accessible within their local area. Overall it was very reassuring to establish that consultees did not believe there was significant duplication between Talking Together and NHS Lothian's Community SLT service. They were aware of the different referral "thresholds" and the differing level of support available between the two. Stakeholders explained the circumstances that have led them to refer to Talking Together rather than the Community SLT service:

*"[Speech and Language Therapist] explained the distinction, emphasising that Talking Together aims to equip parents with the skill and strategies to improve language or communication problems, that it's a quick intervention". Stakeholder.*

*"Obviously we have knowledge of child development and speech, but it's limited compared to a SLT. So, having someone with more knowledge is a great option if you are not sure if what the child is doing is what you'd expect, or it's not too serious an issue, or they maybe just need a short-term intervention". Stakeholder.*

*"As well as concerns about language, the family environment is important like the lack of exposure to books when thinking about referring to the project. You can see it when a family that you are visiting where the child gets really excited and stimulated by books". Stakeholder.*

- 2.8 Talking Together staff emphasised the importance of the project's continuing focus on awareness raising to reinforce the message with existing staff and inform any new recruits.

### **Referral**

- 2.9 Talking Together's referral process is straightforward, quick and informal and this is a strength which encourages take-up of the project, in our opinion. There is no overly complicated form or strict criteria (other than area of residency and the child's age which is imposed by the funder). Unlike the Community SLT service, Talking Together do not require referral agencies to complete a Request for Assistance form. The project requests minimal information on the child and the reasons for referral, and referrals can be made by telephone, e-mail or in-person. In addition, the Community SLT service triages Requests for Assistance that they receive, and this is an additional route to Talking Together, as some of the requests received may be judged to be better supported through Talking Together in the first instance at triage.

- 2.10 Stakeholders provided positive feedback on the referral process.

*"It's so easy to refer which is brilliant, especially when you are so busy – all they need is a brief overview of the concerns and the project is really good at getting back to you quickly". Stakeholder.*

*"It's good that the whole process is quite informal as it makes it more accessible". Stakeholder.*

- 2.11 Stakeholders were occasionally frustrated that they could not refer some families outwith the project's specific geographic area. They understood however that this was driven by funding.

## Support

### 2.12 Support consists of the following interlinked elements:

- Early Communication Support is delivered by the Speech and Language Therapist and Craigmillar Books for Babies Development Worker to provide informal advice and support on how parents/carers could help their child's early communication and language development. Referrers can directly book an appointment slot for families.
- Observations undertaken by the Speech and Language Therapist at outreach centres (see below) to informally assess children. These visits tend to involve discussions with Key Workers to gather additional information on the child and their language/communication issues and this helps to build good relationships and enhance early years staff understanding of the project.
- Home visits by project staff to support parents/carers. This can either be to implement/model activities discussed at the Early Communication Support sessions or introduce and discuss activities if the home visit is their first engagement with the project. In all cases, the home visits allow staff to build a relationship with the child and parents/carers in their home environment. It gives the opportunity to identify positive aspects of early communication that the parent and child are already doing and use this as a starting point to develop activities involving rhymes, songs and book sharing.
- Parent and Child Groups are small groups facilitated by project staff. Initially these family groups were delivered in three-week blocks however the project found that families preferred to attend two-week blocks. In response to this, the project staff ensured that the content was revised to take account of the shorter timescale and feedback on the earlier sessions.
- Workshops and information sessions for parents/carers delivered in community settings (see below) which covered topics such as sharing books and encouraging language. Consultees reported good attendance among parents/carers which was not always the case for such sessions. Consultees also reported that feedback from parents/carers had been *"really positive, with some mentioning how they'd learnt new ideas and others telling staff that they'd used the techniques since"*.
- Training to staff in Early Years Centres and local nurseries. The training includes basics level of questioning, interactive storytelling and Early Talking Time sessions which is designed to target verbal skills such as active listening, eye contact, attention, copying, turn taking and early sound awareness. Feedback from consultees was very positive and it was reported that staff had subsequently applied the learning to their jobs.

**2.13** Joint visits involving both the Speech and Language Therapist and Craigmillar Books for Babies Development Worker were highlighted as a key element of the support. The presence of the Speech and Language Therapist ensures expert and appropriate advice is provided to families. The presence of the Development Worker ensures the advice can be implemented in subsequent visits to the family.

**2.14** Based on the evidence gathered during this evaluation, support provided via Talking Together successfully achieves a balance between content that is useful, delivered in an engaging manner via relatively short and informal inputs. It also achieves a good balance between group and individual support. These attributes are ideal, in our view, for an early intervention project working with the challenging circumstances that some families face (as

described in paragraph 2.2). In addition, families are able to benefit from ongoing support from Craigmillar Books for Babies Family Support at Home programme. As the programme is delivered by the organisation's Development Worker, who is a key part of the Talking Together team, the transition is seamless.

*"Parents are very positive about Talking Together. Believe me that (families referred to other services) is not always the case! They seem to like the fact it's a family group and it's based around play". Stakeholder.*

- 2.15 Craigmillar Books for Babies has been proactive and sought to amend elements of the support (the Early Communication Support and Parent and Child Groups) that were not working as effectively as they hoped. This responsive approach is noteworthy and has helped implementation of the project.

### **Outreach**

- 2.16 Talking Together is delivered in several community settings including: Craigmillar Medical Centre, Mountcastle Healthcare Centre, Greendykes Early Years Centre, Craigmillar Early Years Centre, Moffat Early Years Campus, and Greengables Family Centre. This outreach approach, coupled with the home visits which are such an integral part of the project, are key to engaging families who, consultees confirmed, tend to be hard to engage particularly if asked to attend appointments in health centres or similar venues.

*"The project is very accessible as its integrated with the nurseries and health centres. It makes all the difference to attendance". Stakeholder.*

*"It's brilliant that Michelle can go round to the houses. It's easier to assess the child as they get to know them and see how they are in their own environment". Stakeholder.*

*"It (home visits) are absolutely invaluable and one of the main reasons the project is such a success. A lot of families are very vulnerable and being able to say to them that you don't have to come to us we'll come to you is so good. You see the parents and child in a relaxed atmosphere and you get an accurate reflection". Stakeholder.*

*"The project sees some parents who, I'm pretty sure, would not engage otherwise". Stakeholder.*

- 2.17 Comments from some parents/carers provided further evidence on the importance of the project's outreach approach and awareness among a wide range of community-based staff.

*"It was very helpful that they came to the house to show me what to do". Parent/carers.*

*"I wouldn't have known where to turn for help or who to ask if my Health Visitor hadn't told me about it. It would have been so hard for me". Parent/carers.*

*"I've not lived here long and I don't know anybody else or where else to go for help other than asking my GP". Parent/carers.*

### **Monitoring**

- 2.18 Craigmillar Books for Babies has recorded information on beneficiaries and the support provided using an Excel spreadsheet designed specifically for this purpose. While this has gathered a sizeable amount of information there are gaps which limit the usefulness of the

spreadsheet. The following improvements are therefore recommended:

- Assigning each child a specific ID number as currently a combination of names and initials are used and there are also gaps.
- Recording the ethnic group of every child as this is not currently recorded.
- Recording the date of birth of each child as currently age information is recorded in broad terms which lacks accuracy.
- Recording the number of children and their ID numbers attending Talking Together groups as this information is not currently gathered.

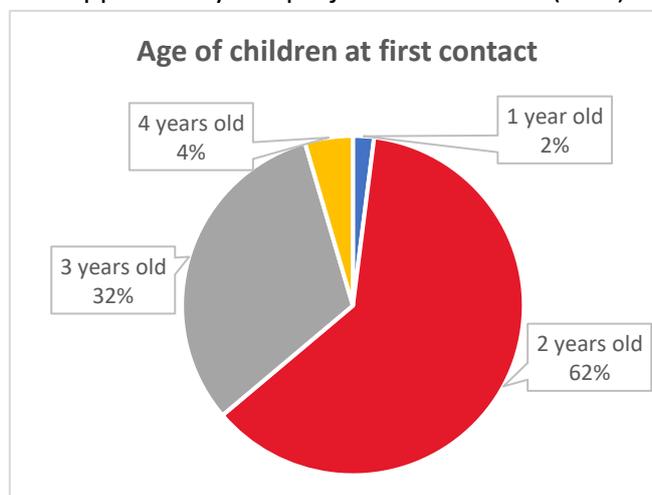
2.19 At the same time, information on beneficiaries and the support provided is also recorded on NHS Lothian’s existing SLT database. Although we understand there are IT challenges in using a single spreadsheet/database, there is nonetheless a duplication of effort on the part of the Speech and Language Therapist. We therefore recommend that Craigmillar Books for Babies and NHS Lothian use a single system that meets the needs of both organisations.

### Beneficiaries

2.20 The following analysis utilises information gathered by Craigmillar Books for Babies and is subject to the data limitations described above. A total of 70 individual children were identified from the Talking Together spreadsheet. The project will have supported more children as the spreadsheet contains information on participants but no means of identifying them as individual beneficiaries. Earlier data sharing problems is also a factor and the earliest intervention recorded on the spreadsheet is April 2017. NHS Lothian provided additional information on ethnic group, gender and languages spoken although this was only available from April 2018. The key findings are shown below.

2.21 There were many more male (65%) children supported by the project than female (35%).

2.22 As shown opposite, the majority of children supported were two years old at their first contact with the project. Approximately a third were three years old, with a small percentage of four year olds. Only one child was recorded as being under two, and this child was one year and 11 months old at their first contact. The figures show the project is engaging its target group.



2.23 The majority of children were White British (71%). However, the diverse make-up of the local community is reflected in figures for White Other (12%), Black (12%), and Asian (5%). This diversity was further demonstrated by information on the range of languages spoken, in addition to English, which included Polish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Spanish, French, Turkish, Punjabi, Arabic, and Twi.

2.24 Health Visitors were responsible for almost half of the initial referrals (47%). Other referrals emanated from Key Workers (19%), SLT (11%), Early Years staff (10%), and Craigmillar Books for Babies (6%). The referrer was not recorded for 7% of children.

2.25 As shown opposite, over half of children were initially referred due to concerns around delayed language. Approximately 1 in 6 referrals were to support early communication. A range of issues led to other referrals. The reason for referral was not recorded for 6% of children.

| Reason for referral                      |     |
|--|-----|
| Language delay                           | 53% |
| Support early communication              | 16% |
| Unclear speech                           | 7%  |
| Not recorded                             | 6%  |
| Build confidence of parent/carer         | 6%  |
| Build knowledge & skills of parent/carer | 6%  |
| Recent diagnosis of autism               | 4%  |
| Language barriers                        | 1%  |
| Reluctant speaker                        | 1%  |

2.26 The majority of children (70%) received one-off support from the project. In addition, 7% benefitted from two sessions, 16% from three sessions, 6% from four sessions and 1% from five sessions. The figures demonstrate the short-term nature of support the project aims to deliver.

2.27 Activities to try at home was recorded as the follow-on activity for approximately half of children (49%) at the end of their initial engagement with the project. In addition, just over a quarter of children were signposted to the Talking Together Parent and Child Groups (27%) where further information and support was available from the project. The follow-on activity was not recorded for 14% of children.

2.28 The spreadsheet also shows that five of the 70 children were signposted to other Craigmillar Books for Babies activities and four were referred to NHS Lothian's Community SLT service.

## 3 Impact

- 3.1 In this section we identify the impact of the Talking Together project as early speech and language therapy intervention, early years development, parent/carers mental health and wellbeing benefits, and knowledge transfer.

### Early speech and language therapy intervention

- 3.2 Talking Together has undoubtedly supported children with delayed language or communication issues at a younger age, in general, than they would have otherwise been seen by NHS Lothian's Community SLT team. With Talking Together there is no waiting list, unlike the Community SLT team where at the beginning of 2019, there was a 12 week waiting time for new referrals. Supporting children at this earlier stage in their development is intended to reduce future demand for SLT support from these families.

*"It's early intervention – that's exactly what it is. Children are seen quickly, you can usually get an appointment the next week unlike appointments for other professionals. There's no need to pacify parents which is great and it's good for the parents too as it provides reassurance". Stakeholder.*

*"You might have a child that before you'd not be quite sure whether to refer them to Speech and Language. Now you can refer them to Talking Together and you know they'll be seen quickly and assessed, and if need be referred to the community (SLT) service". Stakeholder.*

*"If the project wasn't here some children just wouldn't be referred to Speech and Language, some would and would probably have to wait a while to be seen. In any case, they wouldn't receive the home-based support that the project provides as they'd probably be asked to attend groups at the health centre, and they might not get the ongoing support that Michelle from Books for Babies provides to families. You can see how it (Talking Together) makes all the difference". Stakeholder.*

- 3.3 It was reported that the presence of Talking Together benefits the Community SLT service as it has freed up SLT staff time that would otherwise have been needed to process referrals, assess and triage cases.
- 3.4 Significantly, stakeholders highlighted the added value that this early intervention approach brings to the area.

*"It's support that is not being provided elsewhere. It's an excellent service". Stakeholder.*

*"I've worked in other areas and they don't have this elsewhere. I'd really miss it if it wasn't around". Stakeholder*

### Early years development

- 3.5 Several parent/carers and stakeholders highlighted the project's impact on early years development and this is a significant impact as, ultimately, it is what the project set out to achieve.
- 3.6 The majority of parents referred to improvements in their child's language and communication following support from the project.

*"[Speech and Language Therapist] gave me advice on what things to do and to ask [child] questions instead of doing what I was doing before. They've also really encouraged me to read books with [child]. I've seen a huge difference in [child]. He wasn't saying much and it was difficult for me to know what he knew. Now he knows his colours, the names of animals, there's more interaction with other kids. There's been a great change. They've done a wonderful job – it's a miracle". Parent/carer.*

*"I was shown how to help my daughter by repeating things to her, looking directly at her, making eye contact, playing with her and reading together. It was very reassuring and gave me confidence in knowing we could help her. We've definitely seen the benefits and one of the workers at the nursery said they'd noticed a big improvement in her language too and just with little things like her eye contact". Parent/carer.*

*"The best thing for me was learning ways of speaking to [child] and strategies like giving him options and pointing at them when asking a question like: would you like milk or juice? His speech has come along a lot". Parent/carer.*

*"She [SLT] told us to add a couple of words to what we say to [child] to build up her vocabulary... it is working as she's been coming up with new words". Parent/carer.*

*"I attended two Talking Together groups. At the groups I spoke with the Speech and Language Therapist who gave information and advice on communicating with children. They also let the kids interact with each other which was great. The groups were useful to speak to other people about how they deal with their children's speech - it was a good chance to meet others". Parent/carer.*

*"She [SLT] told me how to communicate with him and give me tips. For example, repeating words so that they will stay in his mind. Although his speech has not changed much, now when I talk to him, he knows what I am saying". Parent/carer.*

### 3.7 Significantly, these views were supported by comments from stakeholders.

*"One little boy who was referred to Talking Together with quite a significant language delay, attended the groups and Michelle saw the family at home. His eye contact has improved, he's more settled and he responds to questions much better". Stakeholder.*

*"It is lovely to see the parents grow in confidence and play or read or even sing with their kids. I love the visits I do with them (Talking Together staff), the role modelling they do with the parents, and it's all very relaxed and natural and nurturing. It's lovely to see". Stakeholder.*

### **Parent/carers mental health and wellbeing benefits**

#### 3.8 One of the most striking aspects of our consultation was the positive impact the project had on the mental health and wellbeing of some parents/carers. Several parents/carers explained how the project had reduced the anxiety and worry they were experiencing regarding their child.

*"[child] was so quiet before I was really scared that something was wrong and at one stage, the professionals were thinking there was something serious as well. It was really stressful. I couldn't sleep. I feel so much better now that I know it's nothing like that". Parent/carer.*

*"I was really, really worried and scared. I'd panic about [child] but I feel less worried*

*now, it's helped me understand that there is nothing wrong with [child]". Parent/carer.*

*"It has really helped me. I was stressed and couldn't sleep - I was waking up in the middle of the night worrying about [child]. It's been good for us (as a couple) as I'm worrying less and feel more confident that it will work". Parent/carer.*

*"I was worried for my son's English. He is not speaking English like the other children and I did not know what to do. I was scared that he might have autism. They [SLT] asked me lots of questions. Now, I feel so relieved that he does not have autism. I was so worried. This is the biggest thing for me. His English will hopefully improve with time". Parent/carer.*

*"It's been very helpful because it's given us confidence that we're doing the right things". Parent/carer.*

- 3.9** It is possible that the mental health and wellbeing of some of the parents/carers could have deteriorated in the absence of the project if they had not been reassured by the support they received. In such circumstances they may have required support from mental health services; although not quantified in this report, there could potentially be significant savings.

#### **Knowledge transfer**

- 3.10** Consultation with the Speech and Language Therapy and Craigmillar Books for Babies staff highlighted how they had benefitted from knowledge transfer from their involvement in the Talking Together project. There was a mutual respect and greater understanding for their respective roles and an appreciation of the complementary nature of their skills, knowledge, attributes and experiences. Similarly, interaction with Key Workers in the outreach settings was said to have enhanced their knowledge and understanding of language and communication issues.

## 4 Conclusions

- 4.1 Overall this evaluation has shown that Craigmillar Books for Babies and NHS Lothian have overcome some initial challenges to successfully deliver Talking Together and this has led to the benefits which have emerged, most prominently, in the last year or so. The partners have shown genuine commitment to reach this point and all of the staff involved deserve great credit given the initial difficulties as the project was evolving.
- 4.2 Our review of the implementation of Talking Together demonstrated that Craigmillar Books for Babies and NHS Lothian SLT service have developed a need-led project that utilises a range of complementary group and individual support which is accessible to families and delivered by highly skilled and very committed staff who work in genuine partnership. Broad awareness raising and extensive community outreach have ensured that young children with delayed language and communication issues are engaged. Although the monitoring information has some limitations, it demonstrated the project had engaged a cross-section of local families, including those who would otherwise be difficult to engage. Improvements to the monitoring systems were recommended to enhance the information available to the project.
- 4.3 The evaluation demonstrated that Talking Together has delivered interventions to families who would otherwise not be supported or have to wait for support from the Community SLT team because of their limited capacity. This has led to both parents/carers and stakeholders reporting improvements in children's language and communication and this was highlighted as the project's most significant impact as it was, essentially, the aim of Talking Together. Improvements in parent/carers' mental health and wellbeing were also highlighted as an important impact. It was also clear that staff had benefitted from knowledge transfer as a result of their joint working.
- 4.4 At such a crucial time in a child's development, it is important that parents/carers support for their children is recognised and valued. Talking Together highlights the fact that parents/carers will access support that aims to provide the best start in life for their children.
- 4.5 In conclusion, Talking Together has evolved into a valuable and integral part of Craigmillar Books for Babies which benefits hard to engage families with children with delayed language or communication. It is a good example of the third and public sectors working together to deliver early intervention.