The COVID-19 pandemic created an environment of uncertainty across our whole profession. As SLTs who work in schools, the news of school closures earlier in the year left us wondering how we would continue to support children when we were unable to leave our homes. Inspired by colleagues in Australia and the US, we started to ask how remote working could work for us. Remote therapy, an idea we once scoffed at, soon became our only option to achieve the continuity of care that children on our caseload and staff within our settings required.

Soon we were thinking: Teletherapy? We could give that a go. Online training? Let’s do it!

In the space of three days we had a plan. We sent letters to families letting them know what we could offer, liaised with staff to explore our options, and spent a lot of time reassuring each other that this new way of working could actually be possible. We hit the ground running the week after lockdown was announced. Through our work as associates of Soundswell Speech and Language Therapy Solutions, we are fortunate enough to work with the innovative and forward-thinking Nelson Mandela School in Birmingham.

Following discussions with the leadership team there, we decided to spend this time delivering staff CPD sessions. As any therapist in a school knows, finding time to deliver training can be difficult, but with Zoom at our fingertips we created a rolling package of weekly training sessions. In just a short space of time we delivered training on vocabulary, Blank’s levels, developmental language disorder (DLD) and supporting children with grammar difficulties.

The training was well received, and one of our proudest moments was the overwhelming response from teaching staff on their increased understanding of DLD and how it can present through behavioural difficulties. Staff have described this session as an ‘aha moment’ and have since asked for our contribution to behaviour policy and interventions across the school.

Following this success, we started to engage in other projects independently. Hayley has delivered Makaton training to a multiagency team and professionals working in the community. These included optometrists, occupational therapists, doctors, school and nursery staff, and parents.

Meanwhile, Sophia has gained a greater understanding of the barriers faced by parents and children through being in their living room virtually rather than only seeing them at school. Sophia says: “This has helped me to adapt my therapeutic approach, to sit as part of their family routine. I never thought I would be sticking colourful sticky dots to my face live on screen in front of parents. However, if the child needs to work on their expressive language for ‘body parts’, then needs must!”

Tips for working remotely

■ Ensure you have contact numbers for parents and get in touch just before the session to avoid technical difficulties.

■ When delivering remote therapy, you’ll need to get (extra) silly to keep the child engaged.

■ Working through school holidays is exhausting—make sure you have enough time off.

■ Draw the line between work and home. Try to stop replying to emails after 5pm and don’t have work emails on your phone.

Although we’re both exhausted—and we certainly have a few more wrinkles to show for it—it’s important to celebrate the positives during this challenging time. We’re still learning how to develop our technical skills every day, but now we’re excited by it rather than daunted.

The work we’ve done during the pandemic has been so valuable and rewarding—it’s something we’ll never forget.

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