



The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT)

Communication Strengths Project

A Speech and Language Therapy project with

Appropriate Adults in Scotland

End of project report

March 2019

In Scotland appropriate adults help people who are in contact with the police, for example during investigations and interviews. They support people who have difficulties understanding or getting their message across because of mental ill-health, learning disability or a long-term condition. The people they support might be victims, witnesses or people accused of crimes.

An appropriate adults primary role is to facilitate communication between the person and the police. They help the person to understand the police and to get their message across. Appropriate adults are independent from the police.

What is the Communication Strengths Project?

RCSLT was asked by Scottish Government to be part of a working group set up to help establish a statutory Appropriate Adult service in Scotland. As well as contributing to work relating to the statutory service, RCSLT suggested it could help to develop a tool to assist Appropriate Adults in their role. Scottish Government asking RCSLT to work on a project to meet this aim.

RCSLT then asked a team of speech and language therapists (called the project team in this report) to work on a project to:

1. Develop a communication support tool to help appropriate adults so they could quickly and easily find out:
 - what helps the person to understand what is said to them in police interviews
 - what helps the person get their message across in police interviews, if they want to talk.
 - If they need a more detailed assessment and advice from a speech and language therapist.
2. Develop training for appropriate adults on how to use this communication tool. The training would be available on a website.

The project team was made up of;

Susan Gowland - an advanced SLT who has worked for several years in a specialist forensic ALD post with people detained in a secure hospital and those involved with CJS in the community.

Claire Green - a SLT with prior experience delivering social work funded projects for people with LD, ASD and Mental Health issues, including those involved in the CJS.

Jan Green - a Consultant Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) specialising in youth and criminal justice.

Aileen O'Hagan - a highly specialist SLT and Registered Intermediary with experience in youth justice system in England where she led a project identifying the speech, language and communication needs of young people within the South London Young Offenders Team.

Dr Ann Clark - a SLT and senior lecturer at Queen Margaret University with special research interests in speech, language and communication needs in young offenders.

Dermot Fitzsimons - a SLT and lecturer at Queen Margaret University who has recently completed his PhD research on young offenders' views about their own language and communication abilities.

The project team planned to do these steps:

1. Find out which communication tools are already available. Decide whether any of these are suitable for this project.
2. Develop a first draft of a communication tool. Ask appropriate adults and other people working in the criminal justice system what they think of it. Ask people with communication support needs what they think of it.
3. Use what these people say about the tool to make changes.
4. Try out the tool in one area with a small number of appropriate adults and the people they are supporting. This would be a "pilot" of the tool.

5. Use findings from the pilot to change the tool. Make a tool for appropriate adults across Scotland to use.
6. Develop the website and online training.
7. Upload the tool to the website. Tell people about the website, tool and training.
8. Measure how well the tool is working and what people think about it 6-12 months later.

What did the project team do?

The project team had a look at the tools that were already available. They found out there was nothing like the communication tool they were looking for available.

The project team made a communication tool called “The Record of Communication Strengths” or ROCS for short.

The project team talked to lots of different people about the ROCS. They talked to:

- Appropriate adults from across Scotland
- The Scottish Appropriate Adult Network
- Police Scotland
- The Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service
- The Law Society
- People with learning disability in the SOLD Network (Supporting Offenders with a Learning Disability)
- Autism Network – autistic people
- Headway - people with head injury

- Support in Mind - people with mental health conditions
- Speech and language therapists

The project team listened to these people and made changes to the ROCS. The project team also wrote a guide on how to use the ROCS.

The plan was to pilot the ROCS in early 2019, however, it was not possible to do this as a few issues came up.

. The issues were around how appropriate adults would use the ROCS for police interviews. The problems were:

- **Data protection:** how to make sure people's personal information on the tool is kept safe.
- **Production of evidence:** would using the ROCS tool mean appropriate adults are asked to be witnesses in court more often? Will they be asked about the ROCS in court?
- **Use of pictures:** could a picture be used as part of the ROCS to find out about someone's communication skills? Would this affect the police interview? Could pictures be suggested as a way of supporting communication?
- **Fit with current guidance:** Did the ways of supporting people fit with the guidelines police have about interviewing people?
- **Skills and training:** Would police and appropriate adults need extra training on supporting communication?
- **Communication specialists:** How could police request and receive advice from a speech and language therapist or other specialist?
- **Finding a pilot site:** Choosing the best place to try out the ROCS with a small group of appropriate adults and people they support.

Unfortunately the project had to finish at the end of March 2019 and the issues were not solved by then. This means that it has not been possible to try out the ROCS, measure how well it works or to develop the training for it.

What did the project achieve?

1. The project team developed the communication tool called the Record of Communication Strengths - ROCS. ROCS enables all appropriate adults to use the same approach to finding out about a person's communication strengths- that is what they can understand and how they get their message across. As the ROCS Tool and Guidelines have not yet been tested in a real world situation RCSLT would ask and advise that they are NOT circulated, shared or used until otherwise advised
2. The project team developed a guide on how to use the ROCS. This includes information on how to choose strategies to support communication. It also includes information on when to request a speech and language therapy assessment.
3. The discussions about using the ROCS made it clear that people feel there may be difficulties using any communication tool in police interviews. The Scottish Government hosted a working group to discuss these issues.
4. The project team have started the early work needed to develop communication training for appropriate adults so they can get the most out of ROCS. They have started finding out what training is needed, made contact with an experienced media company and have interest

from people with communication support needs and experience of the criminal justice system.

Reflection on the Communication Strengths Project: Challenges and Good outcomes

The following issues were difficult for the project.

- **Staffing-** The project team had 7 people at the start. During the project 4 people had to leave the project or take a break. This meant there were fewer people working on the project so work took longer.
- **Holiday times-** The project ran across the summer, October and Christmas holidays. Fewer people were free to meet at these times. The project team tried to offer meetings at times people were available. This meant it took longer to talk to everyone.
- **Attendance at meetings:** The project team worked with lots of different groups of people. Most meetings were well attended but sometimes there were difficulties in getting all the right people together at the right time. .

Sometimes the project team could not meet with people and had to rely on sending emails to try to ask people about their views.

- **Bringing together many different views:** There were lots of different ways of working. There were lots of different ideas for the ROCS tool and how to use it. Some people wanted advice from more senior people in their organisation.

The project team offered to meet at times that suited everyone, including evening meetings. Being flexible with meeting times, meeting with lots of people and waiting for people to get extra advice meant that it took longer to speak with everyone and gather everyone's views.

- **Developing the ROCS tool:** The project team made the ROCS tool and took it to other groups of people to ask what they thought of it. It might have been better to ask appropriate adults, police and people who have used an appropriate adult to work with the team from the start of the project to develop a communication tool together.

Although it has not been tried out, the team have developed a communication tool and guidance for using it that could be tried out in the future.

The project team to learned more about the variety of ways communication difficulties are managed by police and appropriate adults.

- **Members of the SOLD Network (Supporting Offenders with a Learning Disability) said** that not all appropriate adults provide the same support.
 - They said some appropriate adults are good at understanding and supporting communication.
 - They said some appropriate adults did not understand their communication skills or support them enough.
 - They said that appropriate adults should clearly explain their role to people they support.
 - *“One was good, a personal touch. She noticed I was struggling and stepped in, asked for a break”*

- *“Another was not good. I was there as a stat. They waited for me to say, ‘I’m not understanding’. That’s hard to do. They gave me mixed messages ... ‘take your time’ then ‘the sooner we get this done the quicker we can go home’”*
- Both appropriate adults and people who have used the service said appropriate adults need more time and a quiet place to meet the person and find out about their communication.

Role of an appropriate adult

- People did not agree about whose role is to find out if someone has communication support needs and to pass this on to police and / solicitors.
 - Some people think appropriate adults should do this.
 - Some people think police or custody nurses or doctors should do this.
- Some appropriate adults and solicitors want solicitors to understand more about what appropriate adults do. They would like to build links between solicitors and appropriate adults.

Appropriate Adults’ training and skills

- It was apparent while speaking to appropriate adults that there is currently not a consistent approach to identifying people’s communication strengths and needs in place.
- Many appropriate adults said that they are already able to find out about a person’s communication skills and know how to help them.

- Some appropriate adults have training about supporting people with speech, language and communication needs, some don't.
- Appropriate adults usually work with people who can talk. Appropriate adults report that they do not have training to work with people who use communication aids, for example pictures, signing or a high tech aid.
- People from SOLD said that people in criminal justice services need to understand and support communication needs better.

What we suggest:

1. Scottish Government, appropriate adults, police and other people working in the criminal justice system could work together to solve the issues with appropriate adults using ROCS.
2. After these discussions, make any changes that are needed to the ROCS.
3. When the ROCS is ready, run a pilot project for a small number of appropriate adults to try out and test the ROCS.

What next?

1. RCLT have developed a website with information about this project:
(website address)

2. There will be a meeting with Scottish Government, RCSLT and people working in the criminal justice system to talk about how appropriate adults could use a communication tool and solve the issues that came up in this project.
3. RCSLT would propose a project to run the above pilot and to develop an online learning resource. This would involve working with people with communication support needs and people working in the criminal justice system to develop training around using ROCS and understanding and supporting communication skills.
4. RCSLT will continue to contribute to Scottish Government work relating to appropriate adult services in Scotland.

For more information on the project, in the first instance please contact

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