



Chris Thompson  
HM Treasury  
1 Horse Guards Road  
London  
SW1A 2HQ

11 September 2006

Dear Mr. Thompson,

### **COMPREHENSIVE SPENDING REVIEW AND CONSULTATION ON CHILDREN AND DISABILITY**

At the suggestion of Christine Lenehan at the Council for Disabled Children, I am writing with additional evidence on the cost of speech, language and communication disability, and on effective early intervention. I hope that this will assist you with your work on the Comprehensive Spending Review and the wider consultation on children and disability.

At I CAN, we welcome the work you are undertaking to determine the costs of disability and to measure some of the savings that can be made through early identification and intervention. It will be extremely important in ensuring adequate resources are attributed to this issue and that they are allocated in the most efficient way.

The impact of communication disability is significant. There are long-lasting, long-term ramifications for the individual, the family and the nation:

- As many as 10 per cent of all children and young people have some form of long-term persistent speech, language and communication impairments
- A significant group of children start school with impoverished levels of language. As one example, in Stoke on Trent, up to 84 per cent of children start school without the language and communication skills they need for learning and to underpin literacy
- Some 50 per cent of children start school lacking the communication skills that are vital for an effective start to learning. However, these difficulties can be described as 'transient' in that, with the right intervention, these children could go on to catch up with their peers
- Children with early language disorders are approximately five times more likely to have academic difficulties severe enough to be classified as learning disabilities compared to their peers
- 50-90 per cent of children with a primary language difficulty go on to have reading difficulties
- 50 per cent of the UK prison population has been identified as having literacy problems
- £4.1 billion will be spent by Local Authorities this year on children with SEN

### **Focused Early Intervention on Communication**

There is substantial evidence to suggest that early, intensive programmes of intervention and support are effective in resolving or ameliorating speech, language and communication problems. If children with transient language difficulties are supported to catch up with their peers, and children with persistent communication disabilities get the help they need early, the long term cost to the individual, the family and the nation can be significantly reduced.

**Creating a World Where All Children Have the Communication Skills to Be All They Can Be**

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I CAN's *Early Talk* programme aims to support the speech and language development of all children, with a special focus on effective early intervention for children with speech, language and communication problems. *Early Talk* has been independently evaluated and found to be cost effective.

We are presently liaising with the Department for Education and Skills to deliver a partnership programme to ensure that the I CAN *Early Talk* model can be rolled-out into all Children's Centres to ensure that all children in early years can be assessed for communication difficulties and supported where necessary. The programme also helps parents and staff to deal with those who have some form of communication disability. I enclose a copy of that proposal for your information.

Early intervention makes sense and is cost effective. At the request of the Department for Education and Skills, we have estimated the cost of integrating our *Early Talk* programme into the national roll out of the Children's Centre programme. The cost per individual Children's Centre of support from the I CAN *Early Talk* programme is relatively modest:

- Specialist and Enhanced Provision - £2,750 per Centre per year
- Universal Provision - £1,500 per Centre per year

These cost estimates are based on establishing 100 specialist or enhanced settings and 2,522 universal settings across England by 2008/9. The total cost to the system would be some £4,025,000 over three years. For the majority, this intervention will ensure that children, who would otherwise start school with impoverished language, start with the skills vital to learn. Ideally, *Early Talk* intervention would take place in all Children's Centres.

Finally, I would like to alert you to the launch of our *Make Chatter Matter* campaign on 3 October at which I CAN will publish a report on *The Cost to the Nation of Children's Poor Communication Skills*. Our report will outline the issues and costs attributable to communications disabilities for individuals, the family and the nation. The report will estimate the considerable cost to the country of not tackling speech and language issues during the pre-school years. Most importantly, the report will highlight what we know about what works in tackling communication disabilities. In addition, it will highlight the savings that can be made through early intervention.

I hope that you find this information useful. If you would like to explore further any of the issues it raises, please be in touch. The enclosed briefing should provide some more general information about I CAN and our work.

Enc. Proposal on I CAN *Early Talk* to DfES

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