

Think you know about
communication in homelessness
settings?

Think again.

Leigh Andrews
Head of Speech and Language Therapy
Change Communication



Trust and discrimination

“I am truly grateful for all the advice and strategies you gave me around communicating with D. It helped me connect with him and build a trusting relationship.”

“And if there’s one aspect of a person’s identity that betrays social class above all others, it’s the way we speak.”

Rob Drummond
Senior Lecturer in Linguistics
Manchester Metropolitan University

What does a speech and language therapist (SLT) do?

Speech and language therapists:

- Provide life-changing treatment, support and care.
- Work with children and adults.
- Are clinical experts in the field of communication, eating, drinking and swallowing.
- Help people who, for physical or psychological reasons, have problems communicating.

<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/explore-roles/allied-health-professionals/roles-allied-health-professions/speech-and-language-therapist>

Misuse of title

Anyone not on our Register who uses a designated title may be breaking the law and could be prosecuted

Each of the professions we regulate has one or more “designated titles”. These titles are protected by law. This means that anyone who uses a designated title must be on our Register.

Article 39(1) of the Health Professions Order 2001 makes it a criminal offence for a person, with intent to deceive (whether clearly or by implication) to:

- say that they are on the HCPC Register;
- use a designated title to which they are not entitled; or

What we investigate

[Registered professionals](#)

Misuse of title

[Fitness to practise](#)

[Other organisations](#)

[What we cannot investigate](#)

Related links

[Professions and protected titles](#)

[Prosecution policy - protection of title](#)

SLT clinical education

Alternative and augmentative communication

Anatomy and physiology

Audiology

Acoustic phonetics

Acquired language disorders

Autistic spectrum disorders

Cerebral palsy

Cleft palate

Deafness

Developmental language disorders

Learning disabilities

Mental ill health

Mental capacity assessments

Language processing

Development throughout life

Ear, nose and throat

Linguistics

Neurology including brain injury

Phonology

Speech and language development

Dementia

Dysfluency and stammer

Dysphagia – problems safely swallowing food and drink

Motor speech disorders

Research and evidence-based practice

Voice

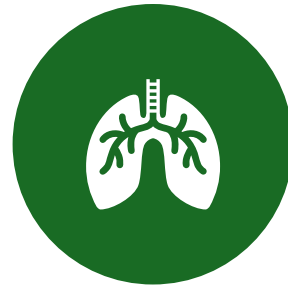
Communication issues – in real homelessness settings

- Acquired brain injuries
- ADHD
- Autism
- Cerebral palsy
- COPD
- Cognitive communication disorders
- COVID-19
- Deafness
- Dementia
- Dysarthria
- Dyslexia
- Learning disability
- Language disorder
- Mental illness
- Stammer

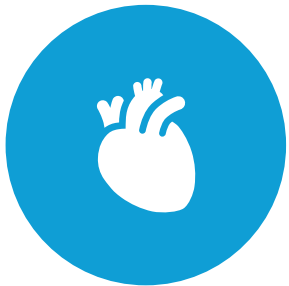
How many people are we talking about?



Brain



Lungs



Heart



Muscles

How many people are we talking about (continued)?

Andrews and Botting (2020) Communication needs amongst UK nationals rough sleeping in London are almost double that of general adult population.

Of the 11,993 people found rough sleeping in London in last year, 840 may be living with Developmental Language Disorder

More information about DLD here www.radld.org

Navigating homelessness services 1



Navigating homelessness services 2



Navigating homelessness services 3



Navigating homelessness services 4

Sharing client information

We respect that you may be required to share information with us that is often sensitive (special category data). Where we need to share this information with external agencies (such as housing services, or other charities where work in collaboration may improve someone's ability to leave homelessness for good) to help increase or progress the support available to you, we will only do this with your explicit and informed consent. The only exception to this is where we believe that someone is at risk of real and significant harm, and the sharing of appropriate information with relevant authorities will safeguard and protect them.

Navigating homelessness services 5

All the support you provide uses communication.

Verbal: phone, keywork sessions, counselling, groupwork.

Reading and writing: Forms and documents.

Cognitive communication:

You ask clients to remember their story and tell you about it.

We invite people to imagine a future goal or future.

We expect people to verbally explain complex emotional states.

Navigating homelessness services - vocabulary

Examples of words that customers said were difficult to follow:

- Apologies
- Arrears
- Debt
- Empower
- Legal
- Reduced
- Secure
- Unfortunately

With thanks to Salford City Council.

Navigating homelessness services - language



Small talk

Long sentences

Same question 3 different ways.

Jumping in too soon

Navigating homelessness services – posters and leaflets

BLOCK CAPITALS

Justified fancy text

Small fonts

Navigating homelessness services – understanding

Do you understand?

Is that clear?

Unconscious incompetence

Every homelessness job requires good communication skills. Examples:

“Ability to communicate key information firmly and persuasively both verbally and in writing.”

“Good communication skills and confidence in public speaking.”

Many people in homelessness sector do have good communication skills but they tend not to know:

- What they do that makes it good.
- What influences the communication of others.
- How to adapt appropriately.

Navigating homelessness services - legal documentation



The Law

Equalities Act 2010

Accessible Information Standard



Communication support in alcohol related brain damage

Leigh Andrews, SLT, Change Communication.

Introduction

- A Speech and Language Therapist (SLT) provided 15 people, who were sleeping on the street or living in hostels, with assessment and therapy.
- Of the 15 people 12 were change resistant drinkers (CRD).
- All 12 CRD were known or suspected of having brain injury.

Methods

- Communication and brain injury awareness training provided to outreach and hostel staff.
- Provision of communication support materials to clients and staff.
- Use of Talking Mats and Zone of Regulation strategies.
- SLT provided clinical communication reports to support advocacy by staff.

Results

Common communication difficulties included:

- Word finding.
- Appropriate turn-taking.
- Maintaining topics.
- Difficulties with organizing narrative.
- Forgetting conversations, subjects, and questions.

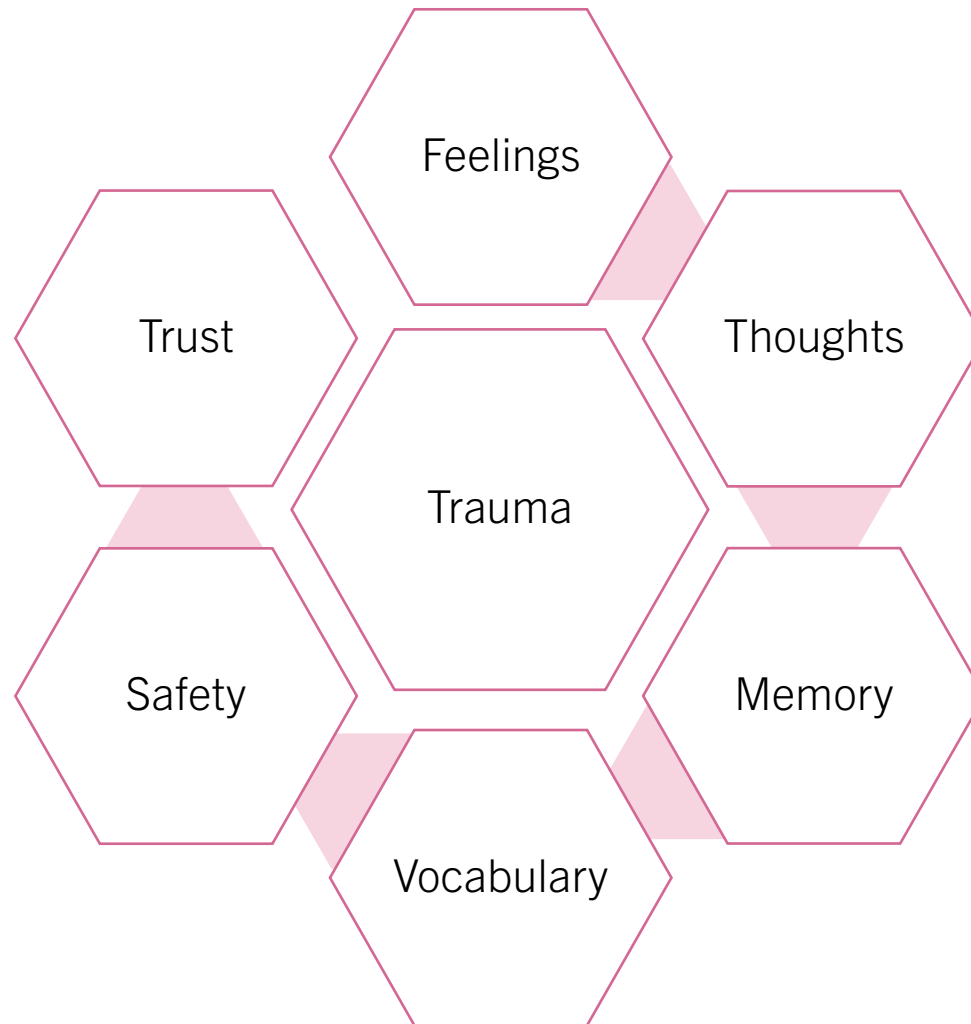
8 people had positive outcomes following intervention including access to appropriate accommodation and support.



Conclusion

- ❖ Communication assessment is possible with CRD.
- ❖ Staff training supported improved understanding of communication impairments present in CRD and the delivery of practical communication support.
- ❖ Provision of clinical communication reports supported access to accommodation and care services.

If you can't name it, how do you explain it?



Communication myths

Our understanding of communication is made up like this:

55% body language

38% tone of voice

7% word meaning

The reading and writing ability of a person is unrelated to their spoken language.

Key findings: speech and language therapy and street homelessness.

1

Speech and language therapy helped reduce rough sleeping. A promising step forward!



2

Speech and language therapy led to more inclusive support services and reduced stigma for people experiencing street homelessness.



3

Speech and language therapy supported housing staff to communicate more effectively, achieving goals together with people experiencing street homelessness.



4

Speech and language therapy helped people fully express their needs and assert their rights.



5

Speech and language therapists helped people experiencing homelessness identify their health needs and seek NHS medical support.



Ideas to use straightaway on the frontline – mostly free

- Plan for your meetings.
- Be on time, every time.
- Introduce yourself and smile.
- Create the agenda with the client and give them a copy!
- Provide pen and paper for the client.
- No distractions, no staff interruptions.
- Speak less and cut the small talk.
- ‘Signpost’ the conversation.
- Give people time and silence to think and answer.
- Use familiar words.
- Keep sentences short.
- Chunk information.
- Check understanding (see resource list)
- Use pictures and write key points down.
- Say thank you, “Thanks for telling me that. It helps me us because...”
- Short appointments

You said you
wanted meetings
to be short.



Good to see you again.





We share information with people who help you.

Sharing client information

We respect that you may be required to share information with us that is often sensitive (special category data). Where we need to share this information with external agencies (such as housing services, or other charities where work in collaboration may improve someone's ability to leave homelessness for good) to help increase or progress the support available to you, we will only do this with your explicit and informed consent. The only exception to this is where we believe that someone is at risk of real and significant harm, and the sharing of appropriate information with relevant authorities will safeguard and protect them.

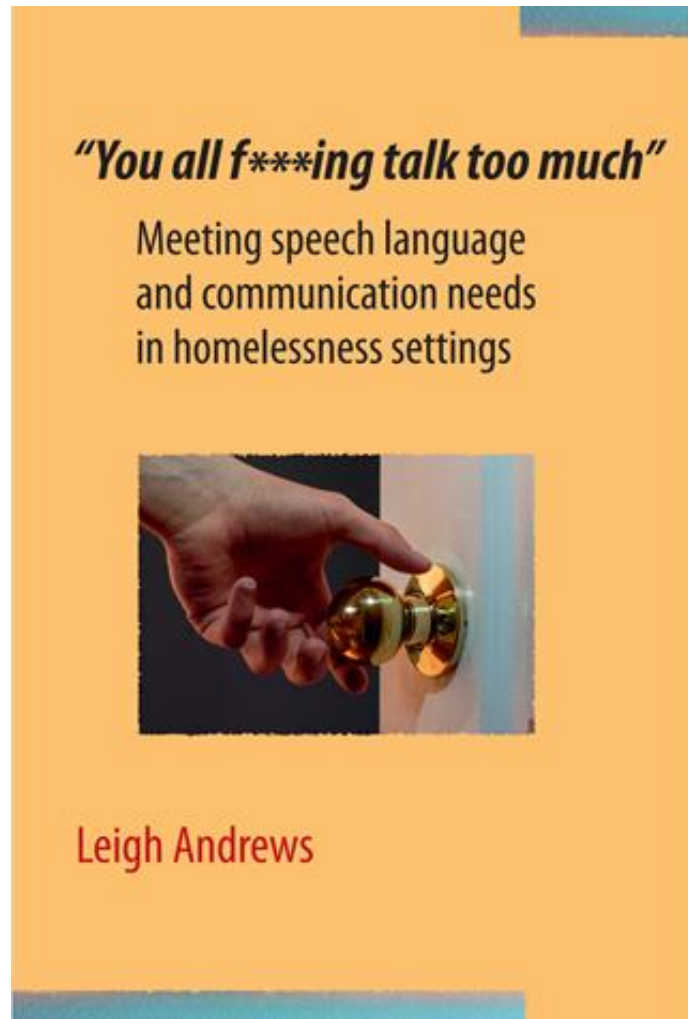
Strategic recommendations 1

- Ask people about, record, and act on speech, language and communication needs.
- Consider using a communication screening tool to measure the number and type of communication difficulties or differences in your service.
- No screening tool or staff to do it? Review your data for conditions linked to communication needs and estimate the level of need in your service.
- Use data to evidence the need for allied health provision, community rehabilitation services and accessible services and buildings.
- Face to face service provision should be the default offer, with phone and virtual options available if preferred by the service user.
- As a minimum all client facing documentation should be in plain English.
- Easier to read client facing documentation should be readily available.
- Check your website is easy to use and accessible.

Strategic recommendations 2

- Communication Access UK training and accreditation should be undertaken by your service – it's free.
- All staff should be familiar with how communication needs relate to the Equality Act 2010 and Accessible Information Standard.
- Review NICE guidance 214 “Integrating health and social care for people experiencing homelessness.”
- Review the RCSLT Speech and language therapy in homelessness policy statement.
- Consider introducing speech and language therapy roles in your service.
- If you are a speech and language therapy service, reach out to homelessness organisations to see how you can help end homelessness together.

Useful things



Podcast: Geoff and Friends: “Making SLT in homelessness better” with Leigh Andrews available on Spotify.

“My Role In Tackling Health Inequalities: A Framework For Allied Health Professionals,” published by The King's Fund.

“Speech and Language Therapy in Homelessness”, published by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists.

Research on language abilities and homelessness by Pluck et al (2020) <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1460-6984.12521>

More useful things

Research by Andrews and Botting (2020)

[The speech, language and communication needs of rough sleepers in London - Andrews - 2020 - International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders - Wiley Online Library](#)

Article from Communicourt on how to check understanding in real situations

<https://www.communicourt.co.uk/news/you-do-understand-dont-you-a-guide-to-checking-understanding/>

Short video for SLTs by Leigh on her research with Prof. Botting exploring communication needs of rough sleepers in London.

https://youtu.be/PBWyh_UaiBY

If you are an SLT or SLT student join our Homelessness CEN – contact Leigh (see final slide).

Free images are available at pixabay.com, unsplash.com, and pexels.com

Just spoiling you now!

[Traumatic brain injury among people who are homeless: a systematic review | BMC Public Health | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](#)

[The prevalence of autistic traits in a homeless population - Alasdair Churchard, Morag Ryder, Andrew Greenhill, William Mandy, 2019 \(sagepub.com\)](#)

[Homeless adults nearly twice as likely to have heart disease | UCL News - UCL – University College London](#)

[Musculoskeletal Injuries and Conditions Among Homeless Patients - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

Accessible Information Standard: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/accessibleinfo/>

[NICE Guidance 214 Overview | Integrated health and social care for people experiencing homelessness | Guidance | NICE](#)

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