The impact of ECaT on children's language development is evident in a project being run in a number of Hampshire settings. By Michael Jones

Many local authorities have maintained their commitment to supporting Every Child a Talker (ECaT) projects, some with reduced funding, and others with no additional funding at all. Hampshire County Council has continued to support young children's language development through its Keep on Talking project.

The scheme involves new settings, in areas where EYFS Profile data shows Communication, Language and Literacy highlight a need for intensive support for children’s language development. I was lucky to be invited to provide training for the Early Language Lead Practitioners (ELLPs) who had been involved in the first year of Keep on Talking. This gave me the chance to hear about the progress being made throughout the county and particularly in my favourite type of settings, where staff often have just 45 minutes every morning to set up an entire pre-school from scratch.

These “packaway settings” are usually set up in church halls, village halls or community centres. The environment is often far from ideal, with infant acoustics, poor-quality lighting and limited outdoor access or facilities. Yet practitioners daily transform these unpromising premises into exciting environments where children are able to develop and learn. The key to success seems to be teamwork and the limitless imaginations of the adults.

DEUX CHATS

Deux Chats is situated in Aldershot, which was involved in a year in the original Hampshire ECaT programme. The word that is often used to describe what happens here is “transformation.” I arrived at a small, empty church hall, situated in the centre of town, at 8.15am, and by the time the children arrived practically every corner of the building had been transformed into a place that children would find stimulating.

The children and staff at Deux Chats have more need than most to be involved in ECaT because most of the children come from the families of Gurkha soldiers who have recently settled in the UK from Nepal.

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