

The Communication Trust: A Cost Saving Coalition

The Communication Trust, a coalition of 38 non-profit organisations was formed in 2007. I CAN, the children's communication charity, recognised that the profile of the speech, language and communication cause was prohibitively low and that the scale of increasing understanding amongst the children's workforce was more than one organisation could do alone. A £30,000 grant from VCS Engage enabled I CAN and other founding partners Afasic, the Council for Disabled Children and BT to explore what working together more closely might look like.

The Communication Trust was set up to ensure that professionals can access the training and advice that they need to support the children they serve, to act as a conduit between professionals and providers and to generate greater efficiencies in the sector. The Trust has grown to become the 'hub' of communication expertise, giving voice to all organisations with an interest in this area. Presenting as an effective coalition, we successfully engaged government in the importance of children's communication skills and the Trust has played a pivotal role in developing government policy in this area. Moreover, by working as a consortium, we have increased the reach of the funding that is available and increased the funding available to the sector.

The Trust is hosted by I CAN; they hold the legal and financial responsibility for the Trust. I CAN delegates the responsibility of the Trust to an independent Chair, who is a co-opted I CAN Trustee. The Chair manages a programme board which governs the Trust's entire programme of work. The Board consists of our founding members, the Trust's senior management team and two elected members from our consortium – who each serve a 12 month term with one member staying on for an additional 12 months to ensure continuity. All member organisations that sit on the board are paid a competitive rate for their contribution.

Anita Kerwin-Nye, Director of The Communication Trust, leads a small core team that manages the Trust's growing network of stakeholders. The team is responsible for the day to day delivery of work and it commissions additional input from within the consortium. All consortium members are paid for any contribution they make to a project.

Membership of The Communication Trust is free other than the cost of staff time. We build the costs of managing a consortium into our fundraising activities and distribute the costs to our members accordingly.

Many of our members have competing services. Several run events, marketing and activities targeted at the same audience. Working together has reduced costs, increased reach and supported

the end user to get a more 'joined up' service. For example the Trust attends over 30 conferences each year, where we promote all our consortium members services at no cost to them.

The Trust is testing approaches to joint fund raising and joint bids to public contracts with some early wins in both areas. The Trust has recently won a contract to deliver a national awareness raising campaign on the strength of a consortium bid.

In addition, we recently won a contract from Children Workforce Development Council- to consult with children and young people with Special Education Needs (SEN) and disabilities. Rather than setting up new focus groups or meetings, we reached out to our members and attended existing meetings, reimbursing them for their costs. Thus achieving our objectives and supporting our members to build their capacity.

The Trust will continue to uphold this core principle for the duration of our existence.