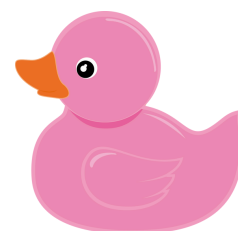


# Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me

The young people and professionals who have been working together at **Language Leaders** know there is little truth to this nursery rhyme. They know the real impact of words, when used well or with little care.

## Michelle, parent

“Words basically branded my child before they were even old enough to understand what the words meant...There were so many times I went home and wished I had asked what some words meant. Instead, I just cried”



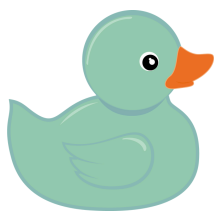
Achilles, Ciara and H are members of Language Leaders and use their lived experience of Hearings to describe the impact of language on children:

## Language Leaders

“Language and behaviour are forms of communication - body language, tone, words, all these things need to be considered. If the wrong language is used in a Hearing it creates a volatile environment and can make the child feel upset, angry, frustrated, or anxious. This affects their ability to make decisions and get across what they want; in a heightened emotional state they might end up asking for something or agreeing with something that they don't really want at all.” – H

“You change to match the label you are given” - **Ciara**

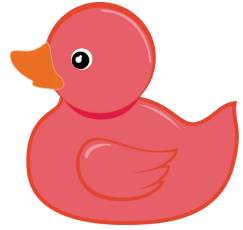
“If we change language, we can change the way children and young people feel and act in their lives. If you just hear how much trouble you are, how badly behaved, how much of a nuisance you are, it makes you feel worse about yourself and you start believing it. You also dread going to Hearings as you know you're just going to be criticised the entire time. Negative language can make a Hearing an incredibly hostile environment” – **Achilles**.



# Use your Power of Language

## Abbie, OHOV Board Member

“Today has been very emotional as we have spent the last 5 months focusing on the animation and now it’s finally out there. Watch it, take notes and bring it into your own practice. Use your power of language”



This was Abbie’s plea to the childcare professionals gathered in the CCA cinema on a wet Glasgow afternoon. They were there to see the premiere of *Articulate*, a short animation designed to change the way adult professionals and decision makers use their language, made by young people with experience of Children’s Hearings from *Our Hearings, Our Voice* (OHOV). Abbie and some of the other young people involved in making the film - Ciara, Achilles and Ash - used their power of language well that afternoon.

## If you change language, you change lots...

These words by H are backed up by what other young people testify. I feel the hope and insight in what some of the Language Leaders and OHOV Board Members, Ash, Ciara, Lewis and Abbie teach us:

### OHOV Board Members

“I’ve been told some positive things in Hearings before; they’ve talked about how much I’ve matured and grown up and that made me feel quite good about myself and how far I’ve come. When people use the right language it can make a positive difference to me, like being recognised for your efforts” – **Lewis.**

“When you use my name, you make me feel like someone, not just anyone” – **Ash.**

“Asking a child their preference is the bare minimum we can do for their dignity” – **Ciara.**

“I was at the centre - sat in the middle of the sofa, given the chance to speak, everything came back to how I felt and what I wanted.” – **Abbie.**



# What comes first, changing language or changing culture?

Most adults I meet understand this wisdom from young people and agree with them. So why don't all children experience Children's Hearings where the language follows the Language Leaders' **principles** enshrined in the young people's animation? When being spoken to in Hearings, or written about in reports, lots of children still experience language in a manner which is not personalised, easy to understand, non-stigmatising or balances their strengths against the risks they face.

The culture in which Hearings are delivered impacts the language we all use, but language plays a big part in culture change. The ambition of the young people and adults involved in Language Leaders goes beyond tinkering with words. Improving language is both an aim and a vehicle to reinforce a culture which is kinder, more personalised and which involves children fully in decisions about them.

Following the premiere of the animation, audience members added to this argument:

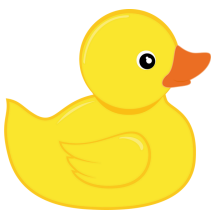
## Audience Members

It's not just about changing language; it's equally important to change our culture, attitudes, and values. When we think about the language we use and the impact it had on people, it helps us to think about what the culture of our organisation is and whether it allows children to be involved in the decision-making process" – **Bryan Evans, Children 1st**

"Language is cultural; it's the foundation of everything and fits into everything we want to achieve, moving forward" – **Fiona Perrie, Change Manager, Children's Hearings Scotland**

"When we show people this animation it's just going to be so impactful. I can see this being a huge catalyst for change" – **Ruth Kerracher, STAF and Youth Just Us**

"You cannot fail to be moved by the animation and stirred to take meaningful action to make the changes and improvements required" – **Alistair Hogg, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration**



# Real participation can become something so strong and beautiful

These are Achilles' words, reflecting co-production at Language Leaders between young people with lived experience and adult professionals with lived and learned experience from right across the Children's Hearings System. Together they have identified the words and terms that children across Scotland would like to change, worked directly with adults to support them to understand the impact of the wrong language, developed clear language principles for all adults to follow in hearings, and created their own animation to influence how adults write, speak and behave.

The impact of the animation is clear to see in the words of those that made or have viewed it:

## Audience Members

As an artist it's amazing to make art but I think the most powerful thing for me is when art sticks with someone and they go on to use it. That's what was important to me. When we sat around the table and talked to the other young people we were like 'that happened to me too!' It was great to see parts of what we said in those discussions appear in the animation" – **Ciara**

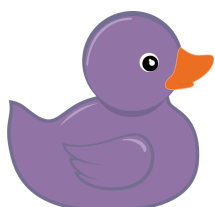
"The resources and animation are outstanding pieces of work that will really support folk to change" - **Claire O'Hara, Each and Every Child**

"It reinforces that we all need to think before we speak" - **Dorothy Combe, Panel Member**

"It has been a privilege to contribute to such an important project and work with all of you and the young people. We feel inspired by your passion and dedication" - **Darren Osborne, Braw Talent**

"Just a beautiful example of everything that is important - voice, co-production, and power. The quality of the animation is great" - **Gary Brown, National Leadership Network**

"That was amazing. I really enjoyed the style, and you can really tell that it came from lived experience and it was really nice to hear our little bits from the first meet up we had. It was really good!!" – **Ash**



## A call to action

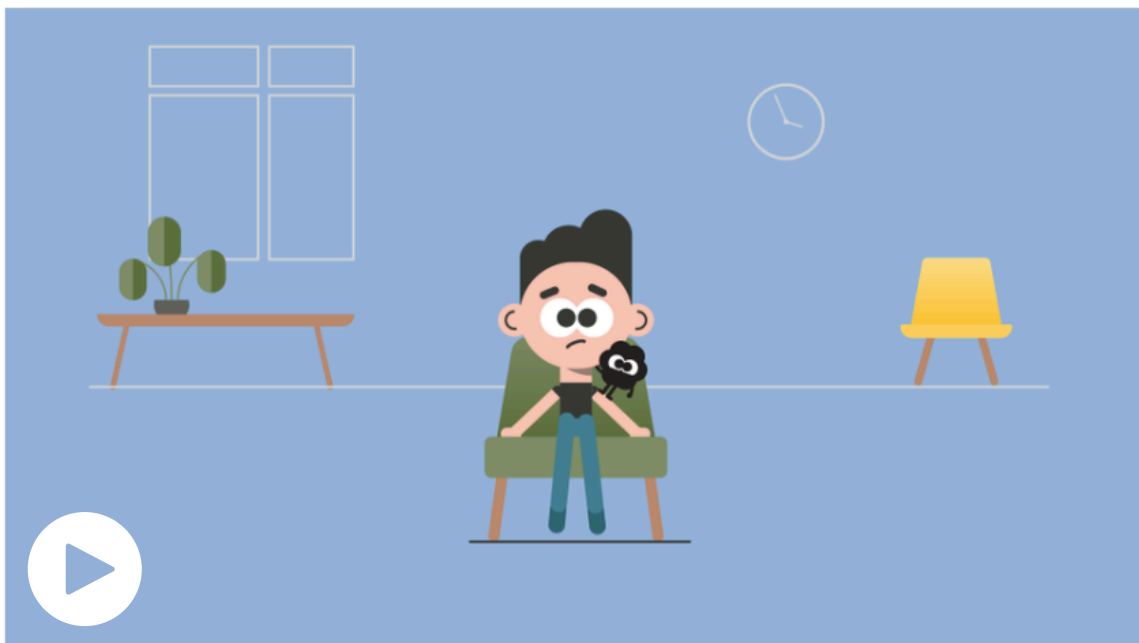
The young people and adults involved in Language Leaders, establishing the language principles and the creation of the animation urge you to watch it, share it with others and reflect on what it means for you and the children you work with. You can watch the animation below.

As Abbie asked of us: use your power of language. Achilles reinforces what young people are challenging all of us to do:

### Achilles

I ask all of you to now use your voices as we have used ours to personalise your approach to make young people feel seen in your practice. By actively involving young people in decisions that affect our lives, it can truly make a real difference ... **just lead with compassion, always lead with compassion.**

## Watch our animation



# Thank You

Thank you to the young people for their leadership and allowing us to use their words in this blog.

Gordon Main is the project lead for Our Hearings, Our Voice (OHOV) and co-facilitates Language Leaders. Our Hearings, Our Voice is an independent board for children and young people across Scotland who have experience of Children's Hearings. Our board members are young people who help scrutinise, change and lead long term improvements to the Hearings System.

You can find more detail of the latest work by Language Leaders in this [update](#).

Please get in touch if you would like to discuss any aspect of this work  
[Gordon.main@scra.gov.uk](mailto:Gordon.main@scra.gov.uk)