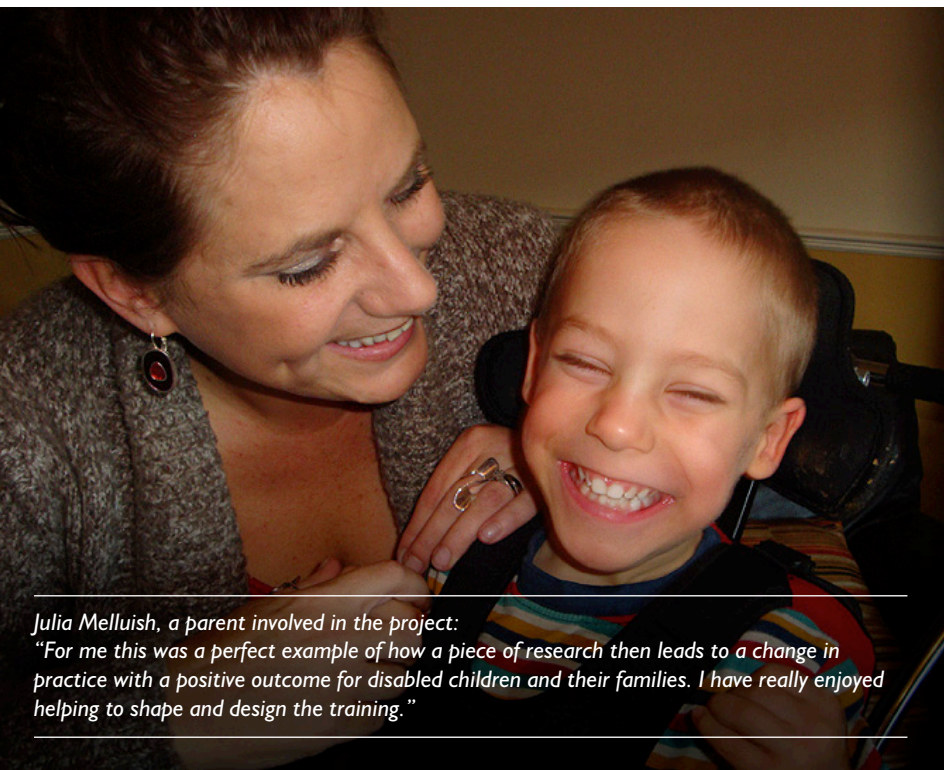


Communicating with disabled children and their families in hospital



Julia Melluish, a parent involved in the project:

“For me this was a perfect example of how a piece of research then leads to a change in practice with a positive outcome for disabled children and their families. I have really enjoyed helping to shape and design the training.”

Children with neurological conditions tend to be admitted to hospital more frequently than other children. Many of these children will have difficulties with communication. The aim of the project was to work in partnership with families to improve how staff communicate with disabled children when they are in hospital, so that the experience is less stressful for children and families. Improving communication would also enable staff to better manage the treatment children receive.

A training package for hospital staff was developed by clinicians, researchers and parents of disabled children. The training was trialled and developed with staff from the paediatric ward at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital. This training involved encouraging empathy through understanding the child's perspective, alongside key practical tips, with the benefit that better communication might actually save time. Students at a local community college designed a poster to put up in the ward to remind staff of key tips for communication.

What Happened Next?

The research found a number of reasons why communication with disabled children might not be as good as it could be. These include: not having enough time, shift work patterns, communication not being seen as a priority and information not being shared between parents and staff.

Communication was improved when: staff took time to learn about a child, built a relationship with the child, good relationships existed between staff and parents, communication aids were used and when a family-centred approach was adopted.

The next steps will be to test the training package in other children's hospital wards to see whether this changes staff behaviour and makes a difference to children and their families' experience while inpatients. The aim is to make it possible for staff on other hospital wards to undergo the training and to review whether they are following the relevant hospital policies and NHS care standards for patients with learning disabilities or other additional needs.



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Useful Links:

clahrc-peninsula.nihr.ac.uk/research/hospital-communications

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