



Language
Leaders

“All children have needs and the language they experience impacts on their wellbeing, sense of self and ability to thrive.”

 www.chip-partnership.co.uk/language-leaders/

Language Leaders Update May 2024



Children's Hearings
Improvement Partnership



ar n-èisteachdan, **ar guth**
our hearings, **our voice**



"We've all experienced language in Hearings that is judgemental, labelling, stigmatising, or confusing and we want it to stop. Language is so important. The way people behave and feel and even the atmosphere in the Hearing itself can all be improved with the right language"

(H, Language Leader
and V.I.P. Group member)



Who and what are we?

Language Leaders have now been working together since November 2022. All our work is co-produced by young people with lived experience of Hearings, and adult professionals with lived and learned experience of the Hearings System. Those professionals come from social work, advocacy, children's rights, Children's Hearings Scotland (CHS), Scottish Children's Reporter Association (SCRA), CELCIS and, more recently, Sheriff David Mackie, chair of the Hearings System Working Group.

The group is facilitated by Our Hearings, Our Voice (OHOV) and the work of Language Leaders is supported by and accountable to the Strategic Children's Hearings Improvement Partnership (CHIP). You can read more about [Language Leaders](#) on the CHIP website.

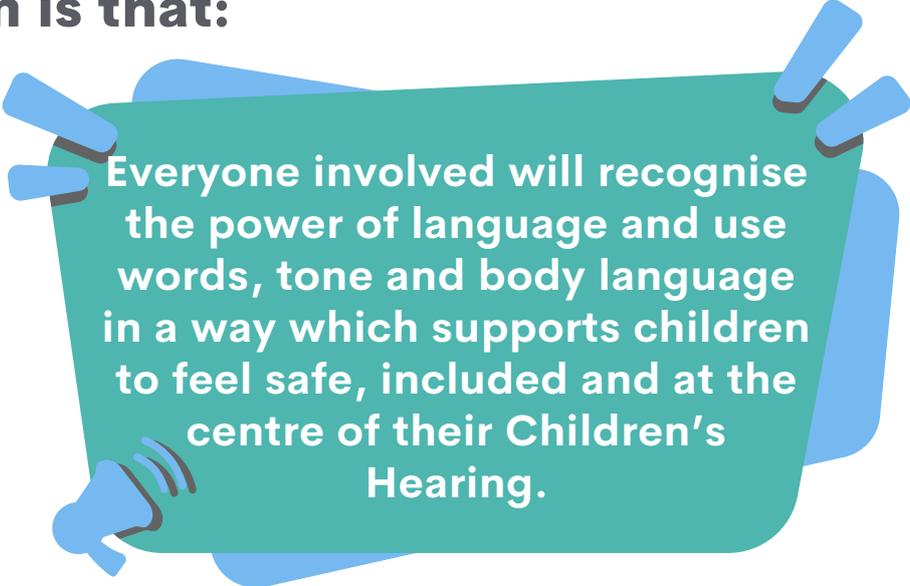


"I love getting involved in Language Leaders as part of OHOV because it's something tangible - I can see the change happening in front of me; I can see the things I want to change actually starting to happen. I love that there's a good mix of people from different backgrounds and lots of us are care experienced too."

(Ciara, Language Leader and OHOV Board Member)



Our overall aim for language in the Children's Hearings System is that:



Everyone involved will recognise the power of language and use words, tone and body language in a way which supports children to feel safe, included and at the centre of their Children's Hearing.

Early attempts at word busting

The initial work we did at Language Leaders focused on the words children experience in paperwork and when attending Hearings. After identifying those words within the group and through engaging with other organisations, the young people involved had a desire to reach out to children and young people across Scotland to gain a broader sense of how children across the country were experiencing language in Hearings.

In order to achieve this, Language Leaders created an online word bin in March 2023. Children and young people could visit and bin words they had encountered in the hearings system and wanted to get rid of. A year later, the bin has been used over 2000 times, with more than 100 individual words and phrases binned in total. You can see a full table of all words that have been binned over time by visiting the virtual bin and navigating to the **'results'** page.



"Putting the words into categories shows that we're putting a lot of thought into words and not just binning things and wiping the slate clean. We're considering different experiences and outlooks on how the words are used"

(Abbie, Language Leader and OHOV Board Member)



Next, we considered the types of words that have been thrown in our virtual bin and identified 12 different categories of binned language, including technical, confusing, cold, judgemental, blaming, and impersonal language. Of course, some language could come under more than one category. For example, 'sibling' could be seen as cold, technical or impersonal. We also recognised that language is subjective and personal so different children could choose to bin the same word but for different reasons. We eventually took our big list of categories and used it to devise and inform our four language principles.

Taking a principled approach

We quickly learned and believe that changing the words we use is not enough; categorising our language or suggesting new words or jargon will not meet children's needs over time. The language we use reflects the culture of our organisations, systems and the people involved. Only through adopting each of these principles can we change our culture and our words:

- Words will be personalised to meet the individual needs of the child, including taking account of the child's own wishes and use of language
- All language used will be clear, easy to understand and will support children to be involved in decision making
- Reports, letters and discussions will reflect the strengths and positives in children's lives, ensuring they are balanced against any challenges and risks
- Only language which is non-stigmatising and protects children from blame or distress will be used

The language principles interact with each other and have equal importance, as can be seen in the language diagram below:



What use are principles without action?



"Being part of Language leaders feels like a very unique experience where us, as the young people, have said what the issue is and have been given the resources to be able to fix it. It feels like something that we have said is a problem is actually being given full focus. We have the opportunity to actually do something to make it better. We're part of the solution. Our work gives us a prime spot to say what we've experienced and it's not just empty promises, we're seeing that change happen in real time"

(Achilles, Language Leader and OHOV Board Member)

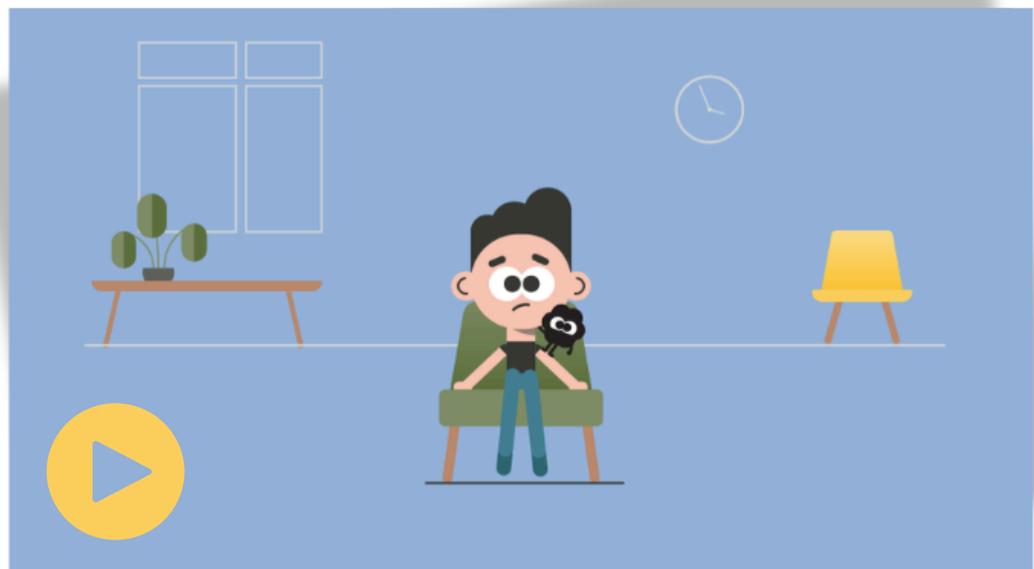


Language Leaders was set up to drive change in the language children experience in their Hearings. To do this, the principles need to be backed up by coordinated action. Here is a snapshot of what has been happening lately and ongoing to embed the principles across the Children's Hearings System:

- **SCRA** and **CHS** have both underlined their commitment to changing the language children experience. This month they jointly launched language guides to transform the language used by their staff and volunteer panel members.

- Young board members at Our Hearings, Our Voice (OHOV) have been delivering awareness raising sessions on how it feels to experience stigmatising language. Organisations and teams can use their resources for themselves at this [link](#).
- The Language Leaders aim and principles were embedded in the [Hearings for Children report](#) to government and the need for a coordinated approach to improving the language experienced by children has been given Ministerial approval.

Finally, young people from OHOV have been involved in bringing the language principles to life in a short animation, co-written, designed and voiced by them: [Launch of Articulate Animation](#). This will be used to influence and train adults right across the Children's Hearings System and beyond. You can watch the film by clicking on the image below:





"Anybody engaging in the system, who works in it or who's a decision maker in it, will benefit from seeing the animation...they'll learn from it, and will take that learning into their work"

(Sheriff David Mackie, Language Leader and Chair of the Hearings System Working Group)



**Gordon Main, OHOV Project Lead
29th May 2024**



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