

speech therapy

Ann Kennelly  
Regional Co-Coordinator for Disability Services  
Laken  
Dublin Road  
Kilkenny

15 May 2005

RE: Ref AK/cm

Dear Ms Kennelly,

It is with great pleasure I submit to you the overall synopsis of the Release Speech Therapy Pilot Programme.

The pilot has been an overwhelming success, with every parent involved stating their child made significant progress, would attend another session of Release and would refer a friend to the Programme.

We effectively worked with 42 children with the following speech and language disabilities: Asperger Syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down syndrome, Epilepsy, Fluency Disorders, Phonology, Articulation, Oral Motor Skills, Augmentative Communication and Chromosome X, ages ranging from <1 – 16 years.

The Programme worked so well for eight Release Parents whose children attend Ballyowen Meadows School, Beechpark Services, who, with the support of their children's teachers, successfully lobbied the school principal, therapists and Health Board to have the programme integrated into their school's curriculum.

This newly formed private / public partnership is successfully integrating into every child's IEP at Ballyowen Meadows and we are therefore able to provide the key missing component of Speech and Language Therapy for all 27 children--thereby affording each child a proper holistic therapy programme.

In addition, we have been awarded a contract with St John of Gods, Menni Services to assess all 17 of their students, with the further potential of training their staff in key areas of Speech and Language Therapy in September.

Release is in a strong position to become a pool of resource for the Health Service Executive, through providing Speech and Language Services within an integrated approach. I would welcome an opportunity to discuss the Release Speech Therapy's Programme's Pilot with the Health Service Executive's Director's of Disability Group with a view to entering into a formal Service Level Agreement.

I am looking forward to a positive response to this letter, and am looking forward to meeting with you at your earliest convenience.

Warmest Regards,

Tara J Liston  
Managing Director

CC: John O'Brien, Office of the Tánaiste and Minister for Health and Children  
Deirdre Carroll, General Secretary NAMHI

# Release Speech Therapy Pilot Analysis

## January – March 2005

**Submitted To:**

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**Submitted By:**

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15 May 2005

## Release's Accomplishments

*Our experience proves Release can be an invaluable pool of resource for the Health Service Executive by providing an integrated approach ensuring continuity in the system.*

Release Speech Therapy, began its pilot in January 2005, to

“provide speech and language therapy to parents of and children with learning and speech disabilities through group therapy at a relatively low cost.”

As the nine-weeks progressed, the programme naturally transformed into a child focussed programme, where the Speech and Language Therapist worked directly with each child's speech and communication needs and focussed each parent on skills pertaining to their individual child. This transition happened directly through the huge involvement of parents tailoring the classes to their needs, through the encouragement of Release Staff.

The Release Pilot Programme began 3 January 2005, with 52 Pre-Registered families. Of these original families, all 52 were assessed; 42<sup>1</sup> graduated from the first nine-week session by 26 March 2005. End of Session Reviews received showed 100% stated they would return to a future Release course and that they would recommend a friend.

Classes taught ranged from ages <1 – 16 years for children with Asperger Syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Down syndrome, Epilepsy, Fluency Disorders, Phonology, Articulation, Oral Motor Skills, Augmentative Communication and Chromosome X.

The classes were so successful, eight Release parents whose children attend Ballyowen Meadows School for children with Autism--with the support of their children's teachers--successfully convinced the school principal, team of school therapists, and the Health Boards to have Release brought into their school. This School Pilot is currently underway, with 18 children receiving assessments and 27 children taught in the parent, teacher and child focused nine-week course.

This newly formed private / public partnership is successfully integrating into every child's IEP at Ballyowen Meadows and we are therefore able to provide the key missing component of Speech and Language Therapy for all 27 children--thereby affording each child a proper holistic therapy programme.

Through word-of-mouth, Release has also been awarded a contract with St John of God's Menni Services to provide assessments for 17 students, as well as the further potential to provide staff training in September 2005.

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<sup>1</sup> Of the original 52, 42 graduated. Four dropped out because of long distance travel disrupting their child's week (Roscommon, Tipperary, Kildare x 2; four dropped out in the first week because “it wasn't what they expected”; the final two children were too strong for the introductory course, and were refunded their Session money. They are awaiting the start of a more advanced class.

### **Release Goals upon Start of Pilot Programme**

1. To recruit Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) and Classroom Assistants (CAs) based on need.
2. As the Programme was not funded by the HSE or any Irish Government Departments, we needed 52 parents to pay €125 Pre-Registration fee which places the parent and child on our waiting list.
  - a. All parents are enrolled on a First-Come, First Served basis.
  - b. This fee also covered all administration fees and classroom tools, so parents will not be asked to bring in supplies or pay for supplies used in the classroom.
3. To have parents pay €200 for the Release Assessment. The Release Assessment is completed in three phases
  - a. Phase I: Parents fill out the Release At-Home Assessment and / or if necessary; Rossetti Infant-Toddler Language Scale; CSBS; MacArthur-Bates Words and Sentences; MacArthur-Bates Words and Gestures.
    - i. Parents are asked to also send in copies of all previous assessments and hearing tests completed—to insure proper integration with established goals for the Release child.
  - b. Phase II: Release Therapists review all At-Home Documents previous to the actual Parent Attended Child Assessment, preparing the correct Assessment Tools necessary before the parent and child arrive. Release Therapists will explain the reasons for each test or observation to the parents, and will answer any questions the parents may have.
  - c. Phase III: Release Therapists with the parent's agreement chose which class they wanted to attend in the upcoming Session. Parents received their child's report within one month of the Assessment.
4. To have parents pay €300 for the nine-week session, equating to €33 per hour. Each parent will have agreed to the Release Rules of Conduct before being allowed into class session. These rules will be explained further below.
5. To acquire 80% of participants to say they would sign up for a future session with Release.
6. To ensure the group therapy approach worked for both the parents and children involved.

### **Pilot Scheme Successes**

Release has made significant strides in meeting these goals in its nine-week pilot. The following are examples of accomplishments:

1. The Release Programme brought about significant positive changes to every student attending the course. Two children, previously non-verbal (one Down syndrome, one Autistic) began using words.
2. Release has successfully recruited extremely qualified SLT's, and CAs.
  - a. Two of our CAs have been accepted to Trinity College Dublin and the University of Limerick's Speech and Language Therapy Programme for September 2005.
3. Release Parents were willing and able to pay all the fees to enter the Programme—100% stating the costs were well valued.
4. The End of Session Review asked parents "Was the Release Assessment Report comprehensive and did the conclusions offer positive next steps helpful to parents and teachers", on a scale of one to five, one being the lowest, 98% of parents rated the Assessment at four or over.

5. Every parent agreed to, signed and adhered to the Release Rules of Conduct—enabling the classes to work seamlessly.
6. 100% of Release students stated they would sign up for another Session with Release as well as refer a friend.
7. The Programme is in the process of being integrated into Ballyowen Meadows School's Curriculum.
8. Through parent referral and word of mouth, St John of God's Menni Services has agreed to have Release Assess their 17 students, and will have Release train their staff in September 2005.

### Focus Points for Future Sessions

1. Many teachers of our students found the children progressing; Release thereby used these opportunities to integrate the course work into each child's IEP (when available).
  - a. The major goal of Release is to be part of the HSE's IEP process for those being cared for, or currently awaiting placements on waiting lists.
  - b. At Ballyowen Meadows, Release will be integrating and participating in each child's IEP.
2. The Programme naturally transformed from a parent-centred into a child-focussed programme, where the Speech and Language Therapist worked directly with each child's speech and communication needs and then focussed each parent on skills pertaining to their individual child.
  - a. This transition happened directly through the huge involvement of parents tailoring the classes to their needs, through the encouragement of Release Staff.
3. Although 100% of the parents who enrolled in the Release pilot thought the costs were extremely good value for money, there were literally hundreds of parents who were interested in attending the Programme<sup>2</sup> who could not or were unwilling to pay for the service, as they felt this is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive.
4. The majority of parents of children with Down Syndrome preferred a system of one session on and one session off, in order to properly integrate all tools taught in the nine-week session.
5. Parents of children with Autism, want continuous sessions with only a one-week break.
6. Time commitment is the largest issue for every parent involved in the Programme.
  - a. It proved difficult for half of the families in the Programme to find the time to do the ½ hour of homework per night—however all families found the classes promoted their child's communication.

### Moving Forward with the Health Service Executive

1. Speech and Language Therapy is not a stand alone programme, and should be part of an integrated approach, to afford continuity in the system.
2. We at Release would be in favour of further integration with State-run Services in order to contribute to each child's IEP – in order to create a holistic programme written specifically for each child.
3. With the successful pilot proving the therapy works, and the current programme at Ballyowen Meadows running so strong, we at Release are convinced the HSE no longer needs to be without Speech and Language Therapy.

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<sup>2</sup> Launch records available on request. Copies will not be furnished due to data protection.

### **With a Service Level Agreement in place with the HSE, Release can:**

1. help fill the huge vacancy for Speech and Language Therapy in Ireland
  - a. through a proven level of recruitment of Speech and Language Therapists from abroad, to increase rather than reallocate the scarce resource.
  - b. through the successful group therapy approach, which enables both the child and the parent.
2. close the gap State-run Services are facing on a day-to-day basis with regards to Speech and Language Therapy.
  - a. both in the provision of services as well as recruitment
3. help the HSE provide a better service to its clients, through an integrated approach, ensuring continuity in the system.

### **Release Pilot Abridged Case Studies (names changed)**

#### **Sue**

Sue is a 12 year old girl with Down syndrome who presents with a severe mixed expressive/receptive language disorder, and significant oral motor and intelligibility needs. During her assessment, she sat primarily on her mother's lap, directed the evaluation and threw every toy given to her to play with, smiling when she was given what she wanted. She was also observed to spit not only at her parents and the examiner, but into the air. Recommendations made were for Sue to attend Release classes primarily focusing on oral/motor and picture communication therapy.

At the beginning of the therapy sessions, Sue had significant difficulties attending to directives and following routines. She was observed to spit frequently. The Release therapist worked extensively with Sue's mother on behaviour techniques to help increase her compliance and decrease throwing toys as well as spitting. Oral motor techniques were completed every week and Sue was given opportunities to communicate through verbalizations, signs and picture communication. Strict boundaries were placed on the student's expectations and acceptable behaviours.

Progress was noted by Sue's mother who told the class how the past week she had left folded laundry on a table. When Sue walked by she purposefully knocked the clothing on the floor. Her mother watched as Sue stopped, sighed loudly, and began picking up the clothes without any prompting from her mother. During sessions, Sue's throwing dramatically decreased as well as her spitting, which was markedly reduced to times when she did not want to comply **and** had excess moisture around her lower lip. Finally, Sue's compliance continued to increase throughout each session.

#### **Eoghan**

Eoghan is a six year old boy on the autistic spectrum. His therapy group focused on social skills as well as improving understanding and use of abstract concepts. At the beginning on the sessions, Eoghan was observed to be very attached to his mother and would not participate unless she was next to him in physical contact. Throughout the 9 weeks, Eoghan became more and more independent until he was able to participate fully in a group activity while his mother was in a conversation at the other end of the room. His social abilities of taking turns, verbalizing desires, using appropriate volume, identifying and using emotions words and participating in social games all increased noticeably. Eoghan's mother used techniques learned in class to work with him on an upcoming visit to the dentist, which usually causes him great distress. Eoghan's visit was successful and not stressful, as in the past.

## Thomas

Thomas is a six year old boy presenting with a more involved autism spectrum disorder. His group classes focused on increasing use of picture communication while teaching his mother techniques to support his difficult behaviours and language needs in the home. Thomas spent the majority of his first class in the hallway banging his hand against a wall and yelling. He was able to be calmed using sensory toys and slowly made his way into the classroom with the aide. Thomas initially was unable to come and sit in a chair when requested. Throughout the nine weeks, Thomas increased his use of verbalizations to get his wants met and his level of sensory behaviours decreased with the support of a sensory schedule put in place and the effort his mother put into the homework and suggestions given to her by the speech therapist. Halfway through the classes, Thomas demonstrated significant improvement in his ability to sit down wait quietly when requested. His attention when sitting increased to where he was able to participate in activities.

### End of Session Parent Review Quotes<sup>3</sup>

1. "...\*\*\*'s behaviour has improved since Class 1. He related very well to Jennifer and was pleased to see her every week. Jennifer had \*\*\* pick things up after himself, which is great improvement in his behaviour.

I feel \*\*\*'s speech has improved since he started Release. I have learned a lot of little tricks to bring on his speech further. I will continue to use these techniques and I feel \*\*\* will progress even further. I feel the techniques we have learned in the past nine weeks is enough to be going on with for a while and then maybe at a later date do another block of sessions.

Thanks a lot! I've enjoyed it!!!"

2. "Overall I enjoyed all the sessions and feel well equipped and confident in helping \*\*\* over the coming weeks. The course material etc. is very sufficient in helping me to help \*\*\*."
3. "I found this programme excellent. From the initial assessment of \*\*\*, this was an extremely accurate description of where she was, right through the full sessions. The Therapist worked really well with \*\*\*, and was extremely capable in dealing with \*\*\*'s behavioural difficulties. \*\*\* was always treated with respect and as an individual. She bonded very well with Jenny, which is something she finds difficult.

The nine sessions covered a great range of work, including sensory, speech sounds, introduction to pictures, etc. and I found this holistic approach very beneficial to \*\*\*. I am totally thrilled with \*\*\*'s progress which is so great I am overwhelmed."

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<sup>3</sup> End of Session original documents available upon request for viewing. Copies will not be furnished for data protection.

Jennifer Wetter, MS, CCC-SLP, Director of Speech and Language Therapy, also known as Jen or Jenny below.

Jessica Nemser, MS, Intern, also known as Jessie below.

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4. "I found the actual written report a bit technical at times, but overall good. One very positive thing was that all personnel had a wonderful understanding of our children and an ability to get their cooperation and interest. (I learned much myself in this regard).

The learning techniques were fun and kept \*\*\*'s interest and materials also brilliant. The handouts were very useful.

The exercises were great—I hadn't realised the importance of stimulating muscles facial and body.

I was very impressed by the thoroughness of all things connected with our children."

5. "Very few therapists have the techniques you use, which are good when at the right level."
6. "Learnt lots of new skills to practice with \*\*\*.
- The handouts were extremely beneficial, constantly refer to them at home
  - The Programme was well organised with tools at hand, during each session, ie the bouncing ball, music, sensory toys, making play dough etc.
  - 9 weeks was right amount of time. Would like a break for a while then do another session later on in the year (have lots to be working on...thanks to you guys.
  - Noticed \*\*\* is a lot more vocal and has started to sign words too.
  - Thought the small numbers in the class were ideal
  - Jenny and Jessie were wonderful, very patient and kind."

7. "I think that the initial sessions were quite difficult as we were given a lot of massage techniques without time to develop them. The pictures sent out later were very useful—it would be more beneficial to have such sessions without the young children present.

The team worked well and quickly rectified this later and I feel the more play oriented sessions were much more beneficial and the ideas for toys were great. The ideas that using everyday objects in different ways was extremely good.

I found the organisation of the classes good and that the therapist was well prepared.

I would like to thank Jenny for her friendly, positive and enthusiastic participation in the programme."

8. "I thought the course was extremely useful and got loads of ideas from Jenny. \*\*\* did enjoy coming along and was sad when the session was over each week.

He loves to sing the goodbye song at home.

I think it's a very good course for \*\*\* and learning to socialise with the other kids is great.

Jenny's fuel of ideas and enthusiasm was great with the kids. We loved the course."

9. "I am only starting out and I don't know what she needs, but found the class with Jenny excellent for ideas and information. Just now need times to put them in practice. No point in having all the knowledge and not using it!"
10. "We found the nine week experience in Release both informative and educational both for our child and us the parents. It was great to learn new skills to work with them to bring him to the best of his ability. Augmentative communication is working for him, and not taught in his special school to the extent that it is in Release. He is only receiving 1 session for 20-30 minutes per month in school which is no where near enough for him to learn it, this way he sees the symbols every day for every task and it gives him more control over his needs.

We are amazed at how much our child has progressed in just nine weeks."

11. "The Release Programme has been the best programme \*\*\* has attended. His speech has improved a lot more than any other course. He seems to be a lot happier with this course. Than any other and I think this has helped him with his speech.

The Release therapist was very good at explaining the various methods. I feel it is very important to keep these sessions going to help \*\*\*\*'s speech for when he gets older, especially as he will be shortly attending secondary school."

12. "\*\*\*\* made great progress in such a short time and had a great relationship with Jessie."
13. "I found the Release Speech Therapy Programme extremely helpful. The one hour session each week was both enjoyable and beneficial for \*\*\* who is quite a demanding and energetic two year old. In addition to this, the ideas, advice and encouragement given to me as \*\*\*\*'s parent ensured that \*\*\*\*'s sessions continued into her daily life and the impact of each class multiplied out. The nine week session gained momentum as we went along and \*\*\* made very significant progress. I found the therapists had an excellent way with the children, kind, gentle and understanding, good humoured and fun. They were full of ideas and very well prepared. \*\*\* loved the classes and so did I."
14. "Given the difficulties encountered in obtaining assessments and appropriate therapy, the services provided by Release represent a comprehensive approach to enhancing \*\*\*\*'s communication skills and our ability to reinforce that process. Have regard to the shortcomings of both the state and private sector in this area, the Programme represents a wonderful approach which we hope will continue to enjoy the support of the agencies in this area. We are thrilled with the progress made and look forward to continuing the process."
15. "\*\*\*\*'s therapy was of the highest possible. The therapist anticipated correctly all the problem areas for him and succeeded to enable him to speak the different sounds.

He has thoroughly enjoyed his sessions with his therapist and was captivated by her and her games.

No more support could be given as I say before, both my husband and I got 100% support from Jessie."

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16. “We have had a very good experience with the Release Speech Therapy Programme. It is very supportive as a parent, to have such a skilled and experienced person, as Jennifer Wetter SLT, to guide and support your work with your child on a weekly basis.

My son has progressed extremely well during this first nine-week session. This has been noted by his teachers and therapists at the school he attends.”

17. “Overall we found the sessions excellent – \*\*\* certainly enjoyed coming every week and really enjoyed the classes. The homework was great and \*\*\* enjoyed doing it—it was great to have a constant and consistent homework plan to work with.

\*\*\* and I have both learned a lot over the past nine weeks—I would very much like to continue with further sessions.”

18. “\*\*\* has come on in leaps since starting Release Speech Therapy. \*\*\* loves his friends in class and Jenny. I find Jenny has a great way with the kids. \*\*\* is talking a lot more since starting Release Speech Therapy. \*\*\* calls it his school on Saturday.”

19. “Thank you very much—thoroughly enjoyed the sessions and found them very beneficial. Saturday suited us perfectly—the other children in the group were great. Jenny was fantastic with the children and the information to parents delivered in a very easy to understand and implement format.

I would recommend the course to anyone. It has been very valuable to \*\*\* and I and we look forward to continuing it in Ballyowen.”

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**Appendix A--Results of Pilot Scheme**

Question	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Assessments</b>					
I found the At-Home Assessment relevant and helpful for the Release Assessment	0	1	2	13	15
The Release therapist was well prepared for my child's assessment.	0	0	4	8	18
The Release therapist explained the tests being performed, and worked well with my child.	0	0	5	5	21
The Release Assessment Report was comprehensive and conclusions offered positive next steps helpful to parents and teachers (where applicable).	0	0	2	11	15
<b>Totals</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Classes</b>					
Did Session 1 promote new skills acquisition?	0	1	3	10	15
Did the therapist use communication and supports systems appropriate to	0	0	3	11	17
Did the therapist spend time with you and your child for individual instruction?	0	1	3	8	19
Did the therapist implement plans designed to accomplish goals discussed at the beginning of each class?	1	0	1	5	22
The homework was well-explained and backed by useful handouts.	0	0	1	7	23
I was able to find the time to work with my child for ½ hour per day.	2	2	9	10	7
I found the therapist receptive to my ideas and made changes to classes accordingly.	0	0	3	6	19
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>Overall Session</b>					
I feel the course is well-valued at €300 for nine hours.	0	0	3	4	24
I feel nine-weeks on, one week off, is a sufficient break.	5	0	2	4	17
I would interested in the possibility of the sessions being 4 weeks on, 1 week off, 4 weeks (for the same fee of €300*). (*fee is the same as the same salaries and rent have to paid)	5	2	4	6	11
I found Session 1 to be extremely helpful to my child and to me.	0	0	3	6	20
I will attend another Session at Release.	0	0	2	5	22
I will refer friend(s) to the Programme.	0	0	1	5	24
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>118</b>