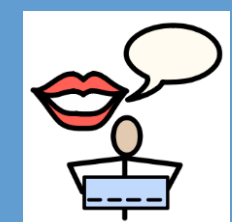




Paving the way to autonomy: Self-advocacy within a provision for children with special educational needs and beyond.

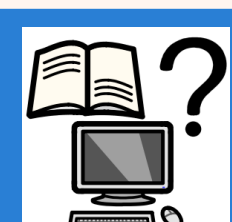
Laura Duffy and Charlotte Phillips

INTRODUCTION



- Self-advocacy is a powerful tool for all children but it is particularly pertinent for children with speech, language and communication needs who may be more vulnerable within the wider social context.
- Barriers to self-advocacy may include entrenched patterns of reliance on key aides and pre-empting and/or assuming of the needs of young people within the school, home and wider community.

RESEARCH

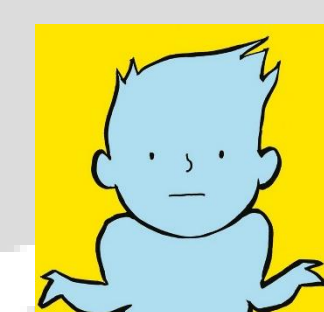


Research

- O'Neill, Light & McNaughton (2017) state the importance of participation being supported within real world interactions in familiar community settings. They demonstrated this through enabling pupils to access activities of daily living more independently by using visual high-tech supports.
- The five communication standards (RCSLT 2013) was used as a structure for this project as it is highly transferable to paediatric populations. The intervention was based upon the premise that children who have language and learning difficulties often display strengths in their visual skills (Archibold & Gathercole, 2006)

Talking Mats

- Talking Mats (Murphy and Cameron 2008) is a visual framework which enables people to share their opinions and express their views. It has strong face validity and is used widely within clinical practice. A range of small studies have been conducted with reports of improved communication and clarity of more complex tasks (Macer and Fox, 2010; Dinwoodie and Macer 2010).



Accessible Menu

- Widgit Symbols have been developed to support communication, access to information and many school curriculum subjects.



OBJECTIVES

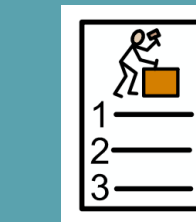


- To support pupils to generate meaningful and functional goals for therapy.
- To increase access to local leisure services by increasing pupil autonomy and educating members of the community.

Image 1. Talking Mat by student C at beginning of therapy – areas that are going well and not going well. Starred areas as ones that matched SLT's referral information as priorities for therapy from teacher.



IMPLEMENTATION

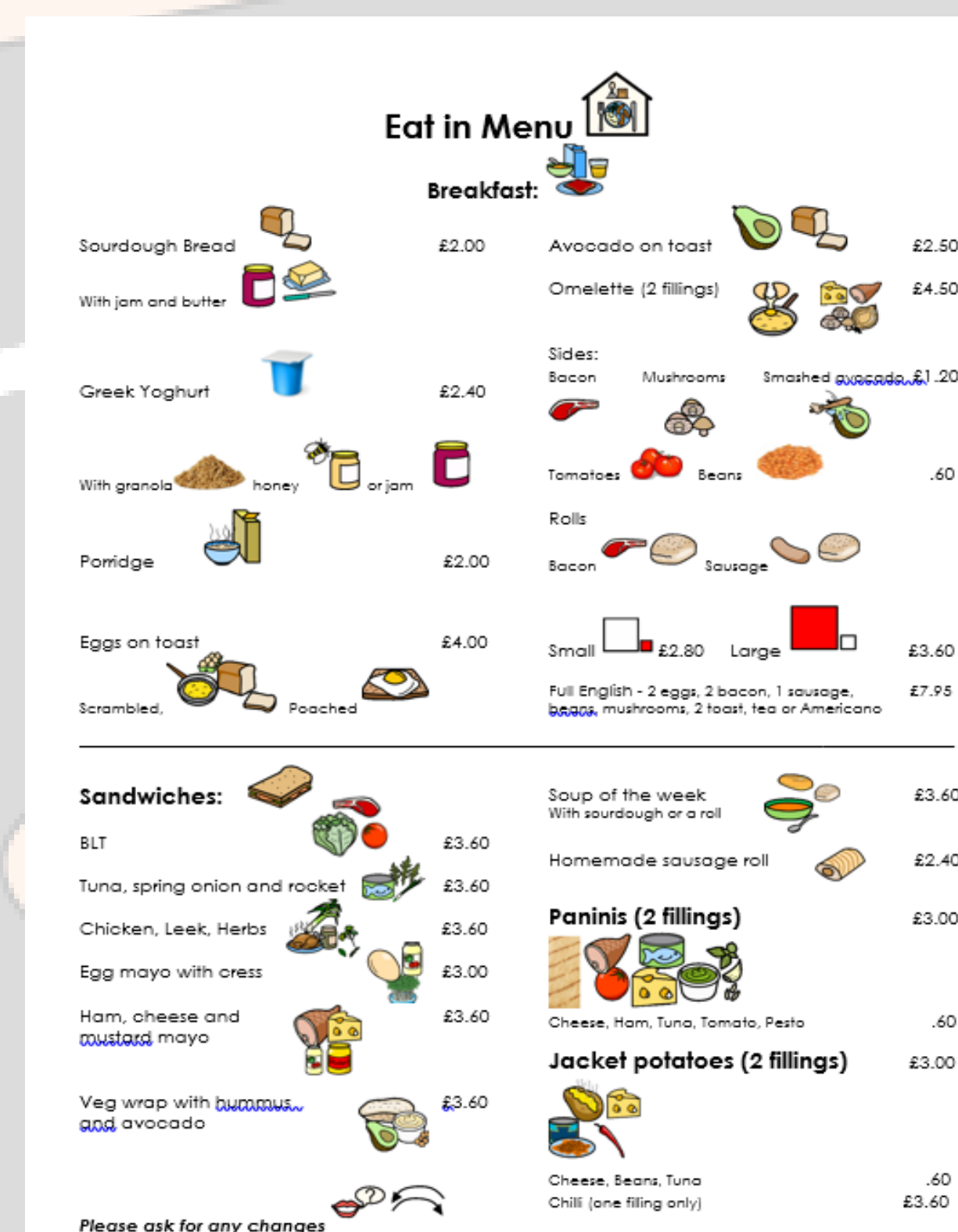


Talking Mats

- As recommended by Talking Mats themselves (Talking Mats website, 2019) Talking Mats is a tool that can be effectively used to consult children and young people in education.
- At Blossom House the Talking Mats framework was utilised at the beginning of therapy to support pupils to identify areas of their strengths and needs and develop personally meaningful goals that are associated to these areas.

Accessible Menu

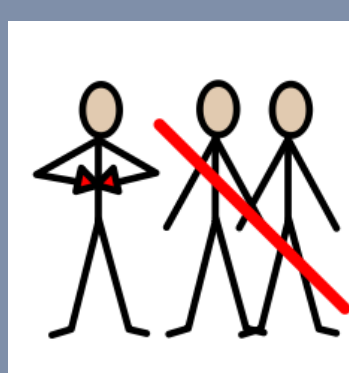
- As identified by Widgit themselves (Widgit website 2019) signs, posters and leaflets used in public places should be accessible to any member of the public, and this can be done using Widgit symbols.
- Widgit Communicate in Print software was used to create an accessible menu for a local café and to educate staff regarding best practice to ensure inclusivity.



OUTCOMES

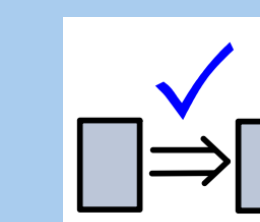


- Staff reported a change in pupil's ability to order food independently and identified that the accessible resources would also benefit other service users
- Talking Mats enabled pupils to directly participate in decision making around goal setting which previously had limited to no engagement. This was attributed to the reduced linguistic and cognitive demands.
- Talking Mats also helped staff determine students' awareness of their strengths and needs and this allowed for individualisation and prioritisation of therapy.

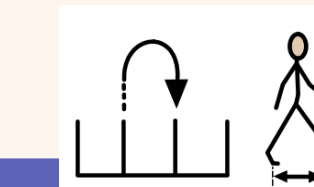


Autonomy; Advocacy; Accessibility

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS



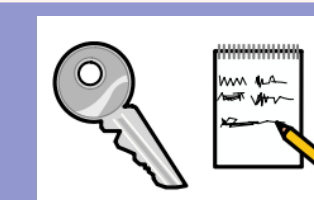
- These results indicate that visual supports are a helpful tool to enable pupils to advocate for themselves and fully engage with therapy and leisure experiences.
- Further research is required into self-advocacy within paediatric populations.
- The use of technology to facilitate self-advocacy and independence should be investigated further.
- Locally, there will be a consultation with SLTs around integrating Talking Mats into the Annual review pupil voice protocol and into therapy outcome measures.



NEXT STEPS

- Blossom and Brew – Makaton
- Provide workshop based training to staff and parents in how to use Talking Mats as a tool for conversations and to promote pupil voice.
- Share practice with pastoral staff team to illustrate how using the visual support of Talking Mats can elicit conversations around transitions and changes.

KEY MESSAGES



- The child should be viewed within the context of the wider community; an entity crucial to their future independence.
- SLTs have an important role in facilitating self-advocacy within therapy goal setting and also within the child's local community. This is crucial in order to enable the young person to take ownership for their therapy and to positively engage in leisure pursuits.
- A range of visual resources can be used creatively in order to facilitate this process. The rapidly evolving technology field should be harnessed in order to find innovative ways to promote independence and self-advocacy.

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