**Using Talking Mats with children and young people with Selective Mutism**

Selective Mutism is an all-encompassing anxiety disorder that can affect all areas of communication, not just speech.

After a traumatic experience in hospital, the young person (YP) stopped speaking in most situations, was withdrawn from school and struggled to maintain existing friendships.

I met the young person at home and demonstrated a range of non-verbal Alternative and Augmentative Communication (AAC) options. Initial work to find an appropriate AAC device indicated that their Selective Mutism went beyond their spoken language and was affecting their non verbal communication and AAC use to a significant extent. I decided to ease the pressure on the young person and introduced Talking Mats.

The session

* Easy read explanation of what would happen sent beforehand with emphasis on no expectation for the young person to talk
* In school where the young person felt safe
* Familiar member of staff present

Prior assessment had led to a ‘speaking map’ for the young person. This is a technique for 'mapping out' where and with whom a child with SM will talk. Information from this was then applied to a Talking Mat.

We found out:

* Who the young person was comfortable speaking with
* What communication strategies worked best
* Where the young person felt most confident speaking. This informed the ‘Sliding In approach’ for this young person which is a key part of Selective Mutism intervention.

Due to the low-pressure approach of Talking Mats, the YP really took to the session, even making their own ‘in between’ categories and conveying more complex ideas about their communication. I was delighted when the YP used Talking Mats to say that Talking Mats was one of their favorite ways of communicating!