

AYJ Conference 2019

The role of speech-language pathology in the Queensland youth justice system

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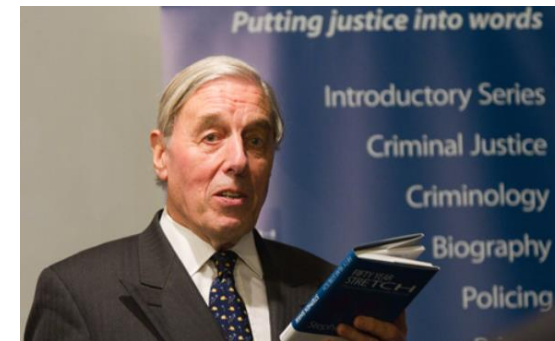
Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women

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“I have to admit that in all the years I have been looking at prisons and the treatment of offenders, I have never found anything so capable of doing so much for so many people at so little cost as the work that speech and language therapists carry out.”

- Lord Ramsbotham, Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales 1995-2001



How did we get SLPs in Queensland Youth Justice?

- Independent Review of Youth Detention– Queensland
- Identified the need for systemic improvements to practices pivotal to the safety, wellbeing and rehabilitation of young people:
 - cultural services and support
 - program delivery and evaluation
 - positive behaviour management and incident prevention
 - **mental health and therapeutic support**
 - incident footage and investigation
 - oversight.

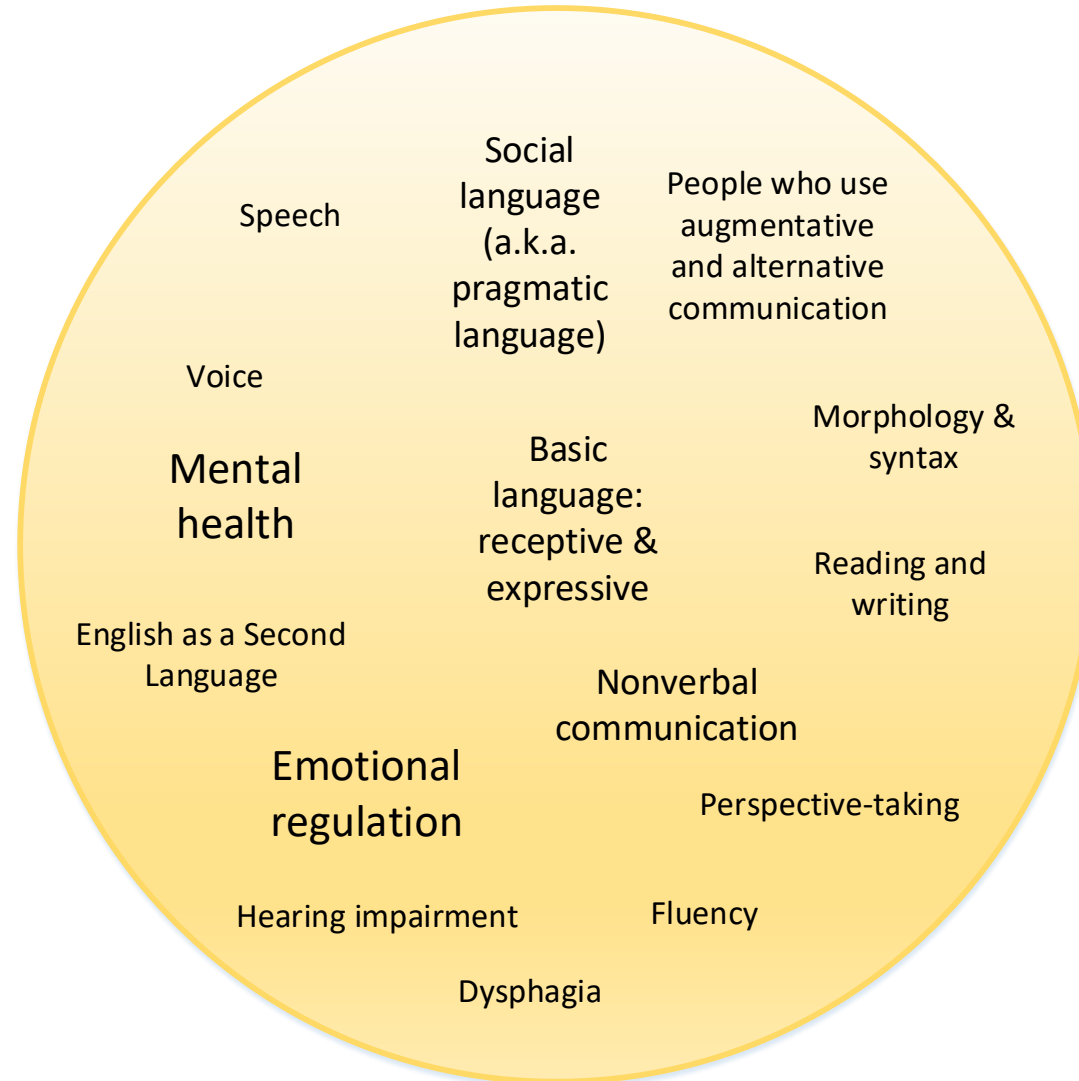


Structure

6 full-time positions:

- 1x Senior Practitioner (SLP)
- 2x full-time SLPs: Brisbane Youth Detention Centre
- 2x full-time SLPs: Cleveland Youth Detention Centre (Townsville)
- 1x full-time SLP: Southern Queensland Region

We work on more than speech...

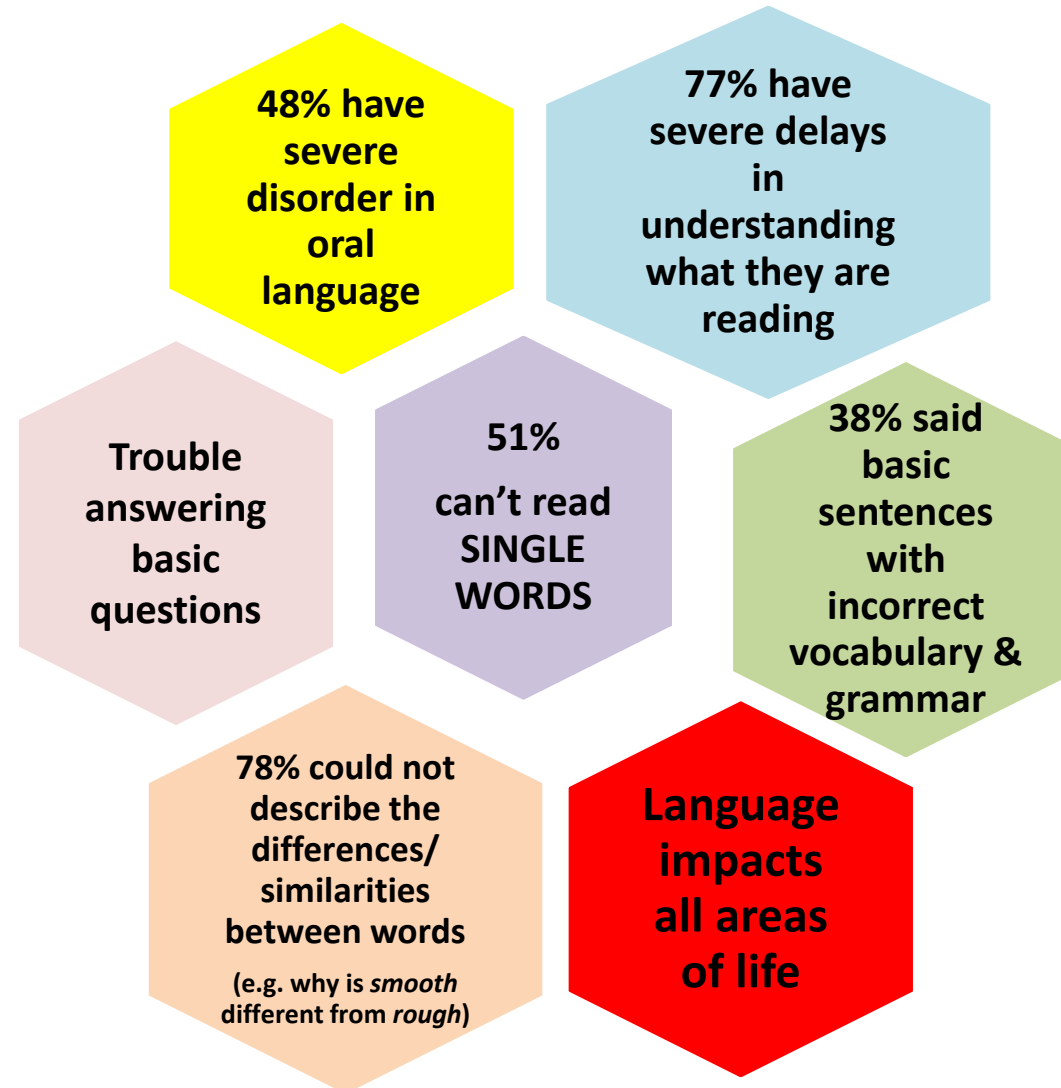


Prevalence of language difficulties

Prevalence of young offenders with communication difficulties	Source
64% of young people in custody had language delays	Lount et al., 2017
48.7% of young people have severe language delays	2015 NSW Young People in Custody Report
60% of 7000 young offenders had speech, language and communication difficulties (n=4,200)	Bercow Report, 2008
60-90% of young offenders have a communication disorder	Bryan, Freer & Furlong, 2007: Hughes et al., 2012



Prevalence of language difficulties



References:

2015 NSW Young People in Custody Report; Bryan, Freer & Furlong, 2007; Rucklidge et al., 2009



Exposure to complex trauma & poor attachments

Most children exposed to DV will have difficulty in reading and learning how alphabet sounds go together (Blackburn, 2008)

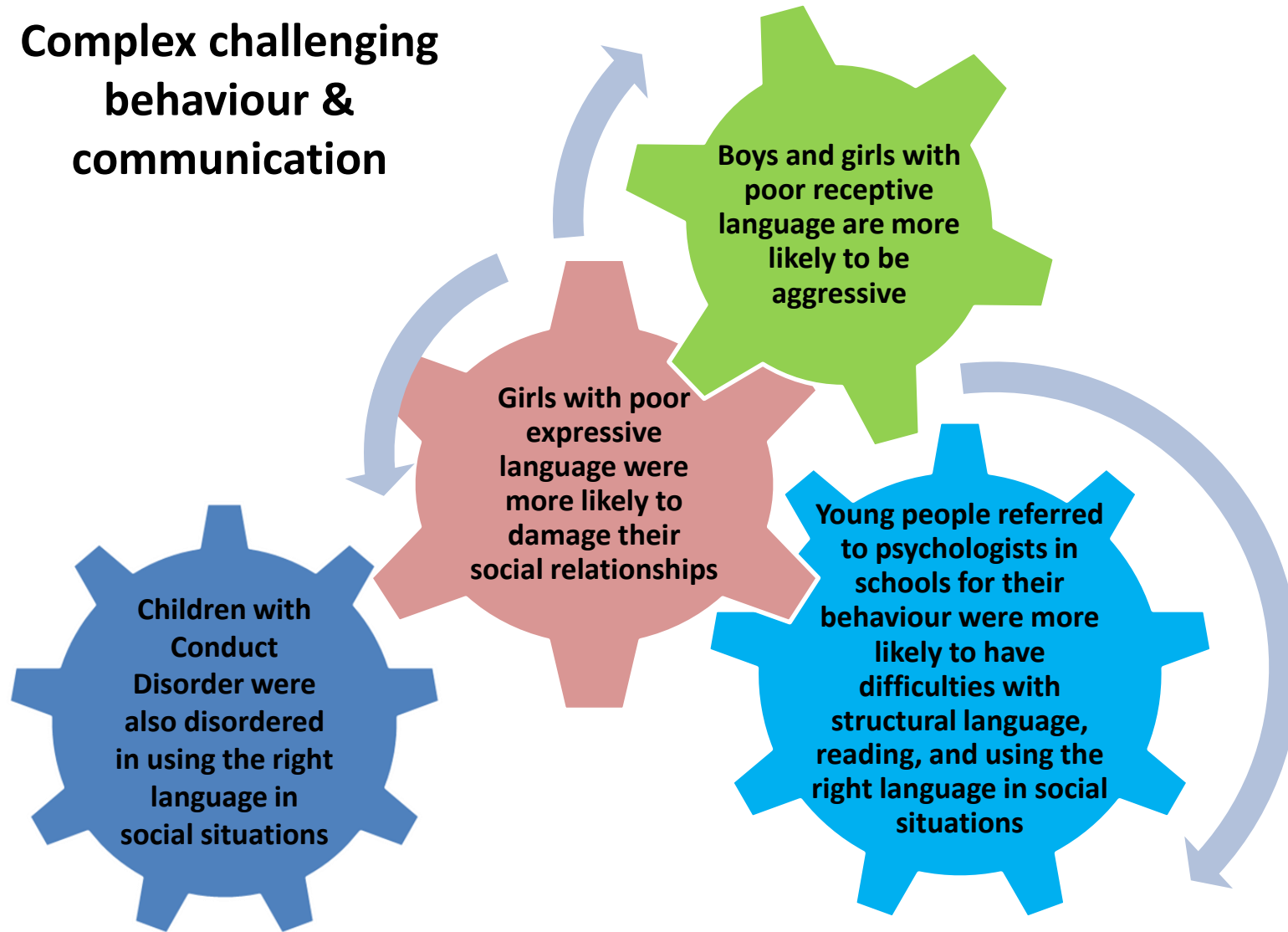
Females with language disorders experienced more severe and frequent sexual abuse compared to those without language disorders (Brownlie et al., 2017)

Many children on welfare were also found to have 1 positive statement and 11 negative statements per hour compared to children of parents working as professionals, who experienced 32 positive statements and 5 negative statements per hour (Hart & Risley, 2003)

Maternal responsiveness strongly predicted better receptive, expressive and overall language skills at age 3 & 4 years old (Hudson et al., 2015)



Complex challenging behaviour & communication



Impact on education, employment and programs

A larger proportion of adolescents with developmental language disorders were employed in service and unskilled occupations whereas typically-developing adolescents were more involved in skilled and professional education and occupations (Conti-Ramsden & Durkin, 2012).



Impact on ability to engage in primarily verbal mediations – RJ Conferencing, appearing in court, counselling appointments, work programs (Bryan, 2004).



Moseley et al. (2006) found that offenders gaining oral language skills through communication interventions were **50% less likely to re-offend** in the year after release than the national average.



**Real examples of
communication and literacy skills
of young people in
Queensland Youth Justice**



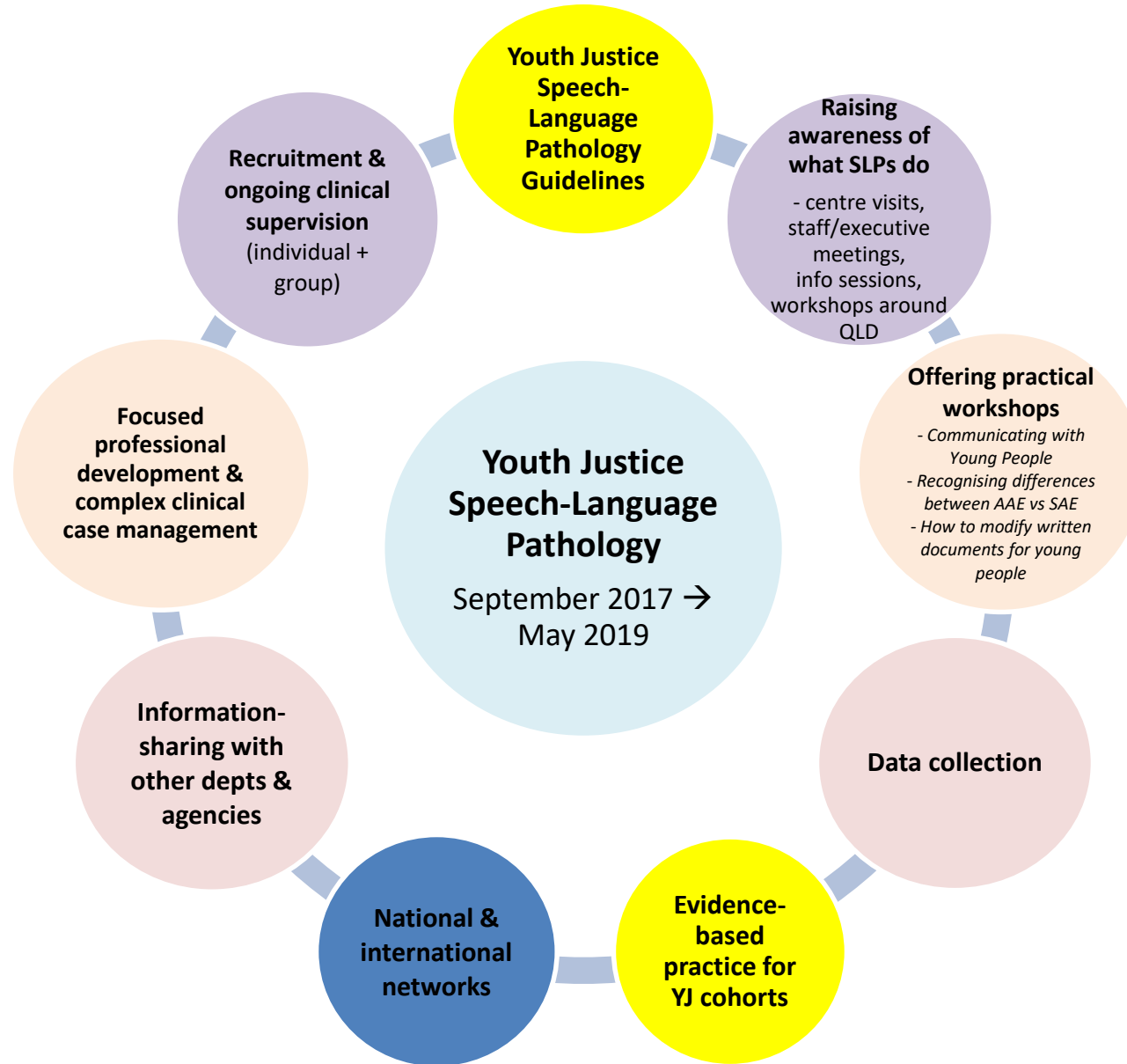
- Cannot follow 3-step instructions
- Difficulty using *instead of, without, although, because* (prepositions)
- Mixes up past and present tenses (says *is*, not *was*)
- When telling a story, they describe poorly and forget to mention how the story finishes.
- Cannot predict what happens next in common situations
- Poor 'world knowledge'



Legal vocabulary

Word	Able to read?	Definition	Example given?
Comply	No	"For bail and that."	No
Appointment	No	"Don't know."	No
Victim	No	"Don't know. What's a victim, miss?"	No
Magistrate	No	"Like a court to the magistrate."	No

Word	Able to read?	Definition	Example given?
Bail	Yes	"You did something bad."	No
Curfew	Yes	"Six to six curfew."	Yes
Appointment	No	"Don't know. You do what you do."	No



Collaborative partners

- Young people, families, caregivers
- Foster parents, residential care workers
- Child Safety

Youth Detention Centres:

- Behaviour support team – psychologists & SLPs
- YJ staff – caseworkers, youth workers, programs staff
- Dept of Education
- Forensic Child and Youth Mental Health Service
- Primary medical services (GP, Dentist, Nurse)

Community-based:

- YJ staff – caseworkers, youth workers, Restorative Justice convenors
- NGOs supporting specific services – Integrated Case Management; Supervised Care Accommodation
- First Nations Action Board members

External services:

- Courts
- QLD Police Services
- QLD Corrective Services
- Legal Aid QLD
- Griffith Youth Forensic Service
- NDIA



The impact so far...

Youth Justice staff:

- **look for communication difficulties first** before blaming it on behaviour.
- can better **identify signs of communication difficulties** (including masking strategies) and have strategies to respond to this.
- are aware of the prevalence of low literacy in young people.
- have the tools to **modify documents for young people with low literacy.**
- have an increased awareness that many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people speak an Australian Aboriginal English dialect instead of Standard Australian English → is not 'bad English'.





Future directions

- Evaluation of SLP in Youth Justice
- Scoping of reading and writing programs in QLD – link young people to continue learning.
 - Provide reading intervention for YP → link to reducing recidivism
- Research projects: internal and external
- Work with intermediaries/communication assistants



Questions?



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