I CAN

helps children communicate

**_Kirstie Randle, Lead Practitioner for STEP Teaching School Alliance, Leicestershire_**

STEP primary schools recognised the significant number of children starting school with poor language and wanted to work with their local feeder early years settings to tackle the problem.

When a consortium of EYFS Local Authority Leads across the East Midlands applied for Strategic School Improvement Funding (SSIF) with a proposal to raise levels of children's language, they approached STEP as implementation lead. The project aimed to roll out I CAN Early Talk and Talk Boost Key Stage 1 in schools across the region.

The proposal was unsuccessful, but Leicestershire Education Excellence Partnership (LEEP) recognised the potential. They decided to fund the project themselves to the tune of £30,000.

13 schools across STEP signed up and each of these paired with a local feeder early years setting, selected because of a need to improve early language skills and identify children with language difficulties.

At a launch event, practitioners were introduced to the project, and to Early Talk Boost and Talk Boost KS1. The project required all settings to have a practitioner trained, and for them to run at least one set of group sessions. Schools and settings were also organised into clusters and through these would access training, networking and support. They aimed to be a vehicle for sharing experiences.

Half-way through the project, Kirstie Randle, project lead, can really see a difference.

The cluster meetings have really worked. Previous attempts to get people together across schools and EY settings had been a struggle but having something practical to focus on really prompted discussion. Practitioners enjoyed sharing experiences and ideas – and this has meant an increase in their confidence, knowledge and skill.

> **"what they talk about, every single person, is what a difference it's made to the kids"**

Kirstie speaks with all the practitioners and gathers in data. I CAN's Tracker means that schools and settings can input data before and after Talk Boost. This then gets turned into a graph which is a good way of showing the difference to children's language. It also helps in Kirstie's discussions with settings to identify children who have more significant language difficulties.

The project continues with the aim of narrowing the language gap across schools. Watch this space!