



The Champion Centre
TAMARIKI TOIORA

The Dublin Street Trust

Computer Supported Learning Program

Term 4 2014

In the last report, I introduced you to Hilary, who initiated the Computer Supported Learning Programme. She is ably supported by **Penny** who has learned how to make the best use of computers with the children, and contributes many hours to making effective materials that connect with the interests of the children and support the goals they are working towards. Penny works on Mondays and Tuesdays with those children preparing to transition into school, and is able to engage them in activities that support their communication and cognitive development.



Sophie's story

Sophie has complex delays that affect her movement, thinking and communication skills. She is also tactile intolerant, meaning that she shies away from touching things with her hands. This has made it very difficult to encourage her to touch the computer screen or a switch to indicate what she understands, as she will tolerate only fleeting hand-over-hand help from Penny. However,



Sophie really likes to choose a song from a particular selection of Pooh songs, and Penny has been able to exploit this in teaching her how to make choices through pointing with her finger.

Sophie's initial way of showing her choices was through eye pointing (looking at the one she wanted) and saying "you do" so that the adult would do the touching. Using the Pooh song selection as the motivator, and waiting

as long as it took for Sophie to realise that someone else was not going to point for her, Penny has been working on encouraging Sophie to isolate her right index finger – pointing finger – and to point to the one she wants. She is now beginning to point for herself and, even better, when she points she laughs out loud and says "I did it!"

Sophie is now extending her pointing prowess to other learning activities and is actually dragging her finger across the touch screen to make music play and multiple images (butterflies, bubbles, stars, etc.) appear. She is pointing to pictures in books when she shares them with her family. She is also getting better at pressing a switch (rather than the screen) to make things happen on the screen. All of this is important as it begins to build her understanding of cause and effect.

These are little developmental steps for most children, but for Sophie, and children like her, they are huge advances that are celebrated by families and therapists alike.



Leanne is the third member of the Computer Supported Learning team. She works on Mondays with slightly younger children than Penny. These children are just beginning to be able to take advantage of the learning opportunities the computer can provide; and on Tuesdays she works with a group preparing for school. Leanne is very quick to find ways in which the new technologies can be harnessed to support the children's development.

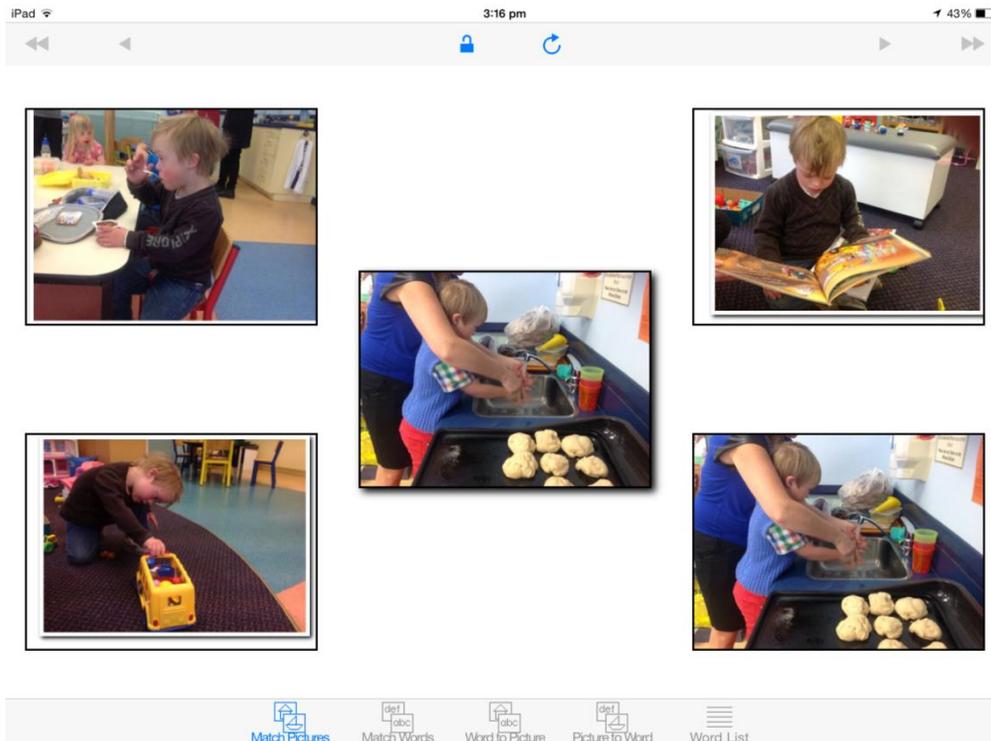
The story below comes from this second group and shows how she is able to create personal apps for children so that they see themselves reflected in the concepts and ideas that they are focussed on.

Tommy's story

Tommy has Down syndrome and will be going to school soon. He is working towards being able to use three or more words in his sentences. To help him do this, Leanne has used the iPad purchased through the Dublin Street Trust grant to create two personal apps using a programme called Special Stories/ Special Words. As can be seen in the photos below, this approach means she was able to individualise the programmes using personal photos; thus giving them more meaning for Tommy.

Each of the photos below had a sentence that went with it: "I am eating", "I am reading", "I am washing hands" and "I am playing". Leanne pointed to each picture and said the appropriate sentence and encouraged Tommy to repeat it. To further extend this she used the App, Special Words which allowed her to play Tommy a recording of the sentence and Tommy had to find the photo that matched the sentence.

Tommy's mum was most impressed with how quickly Tommy was able to use this new 3 word phrase. Although this skill is emerging we could clearly see improvement and are very pleased with his progress.



The power of the iPad

Part of the funding from the Dublin Street Trust has been put towards new equipment, including an iPad for use at the Centre.

It has become apparent that children coming to the Champion Centre have much greater access to technology than was the case even a couple of years ago. Where only the occasional child might have had some computer experience it is not uncommon now to have a parent say "He loves the iPad"- often followed by "We can't get him off it".

For many children the iPad is a tool that helps Centre staff and parents understand their children better. For some, however, the iPad can feel like a two-edged sword: helpful but dangerous because of its "addictiveness". Some parents worry that using the iPad at the Centre will feed this addiction, and will become something that is difficult for parents to manage without inviting challenging behaviour.

One child with a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder came into a multi-disciplinary Transition to School programme at the Centre from our specialist Relating and Communicating programme where he was with the same therapists throughout each visit. His parents were very concerned about his focus on technology and were fearful of how he would manage moving from one therapist to another in a regular programme.

We approached this by making his interaction with technology a different sort of experience from what he had so far had at home with his iPad. For example, instead of operating our equipment with a swipe of the finger, we asked him to use a separate brightly coloured hand-pressed switch. We also asked him to

engage in tasks which were clearly learning rather than entertainment; such as matching pictures and counting objects.

Once he had the idea of the computer as a tool we reintroduced the iPad to extend his skills using more interesting materials such as family photographs to tell a story about the child, his family and his interests. We also used it to help him write his name on the iPad screen under a photograph of himself to further anchor him in the world of his experience rather than in the experience of others via video clips on YouTube.

The iPad was also used to help this child move around the Centre as he moved from one therapist to the next during his morning. He found it frightening to go down the long corridor to his various sessions and would frequently object loudly. A book was made and emailed home to open in iBooks which involved video clips of Champion Centre staff whom he knew, popping out of doorways to greet him (including those with whom he was about to engage), and culminating in the statement that he was "holding on to Mummy's hand so the long corridor wasn't really scary at all". The iBook was read at home from the safety of Mummy's lap and a printed version was also made for rehearsal in the car prior to attending the Centre each week. Now he arrives at his sessions much more regulated and relaxed.

Thank you, Dublin Street Trust for your support of the Computer Supported Learning Programme this year. We hope you are enjoying our little reports and that you can see how appreciated and effective the work is that you are supporting.

We couldn't do it without you!

