

# Breaking down the barriers



**Reaching out to Deaf people  
and their organisations:  
A guide for the Third Sector**



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# Acknowledgements

This guide has been written by members of Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Deaf Forum on Interpreting (The Forum) at Nottinghamshire Deaf Society in collaboration with the National Equality Partnership.

## The National Equality Partnership (NEP)

NEP supports the third sector to challenge inequality and promote equality and human rights. It is a three-year project, (2008-11) funded by Capacitybuilders, under the Improving Support Programme. The national programme covers the whole of England.

NEP believes that people with direct experience of discrimination are best placed to develop solutions to address it, and aims to ensure that all work on equality, diversity and human rights in the third sector is done with the close involvement of equality organisations.

### What do we do?

We offer training, information and one-to-one support to umbrella organisations to help them challenge disablism, homophobia, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination and human rights abuse. We enable organisations to increase their voices so that inequality is tackled effectively. All of our work promotes collaboration and partnerships, sharing expertise and encouraging long-term relationships between equalities organisations and the wider third sector.

Our work is closely informed by our reference group encompassing all equalities sectors as well as generalist organisations. The partnership of NEP is made up of:

- » Women's Resource Centre (WRC)
- » Voice4Change England
- » Consortium of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Voluntary and Community Organisations
- » National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA)

Women's Resource Centre is the lead partner with core staff based at our London office.

### National Equality Partnership

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## **Nottinghamshire Deaf Society**

The Nottinghamshire Deaf Society set up the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Deaf Forum on Interpreting (The Forum) in 2006 to bring together Deaf users of interpreting services, employees of the Nottingham Sign Language Interpreting Service (NSLIS) and local freelance interpreters to provide a cultural exchange on the perspectives and experiences of users and providers in a relaxed, respectful, honest, constructive and positive atmosphere of dialogue.

Currently, there is a core membership of twenty Deaf users, five freelance interpreters and representation from NSLIS. The Forum also enables the local Deaf community to engage in policy changes to the interpreting service and identify the training needs of Deaf users and interpreters.

### **Nottinghamshire Deaf Society**

Email: [NDS@nottsDeaf.org.uk](mailto:NDS@nottsDeaf.org.uk)

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# Introduction

This guide aims to give organisations working in the third sector an insight into Deaf people's lives, their experiences and ways to involve Deaf people in the services you provide. The guide examines the barriers to effective participation experienced by Deaf people and provides examples of good practice.

Within the guide are case studies, exercises and checklists to help you improve the way you reach out to the Deaf community.

It is important to note that while some of the guidance given will apply equally to Deafblind, Deafened and other Deaf people, who do not use British Sign Language (BSL), this guide has been written from the Deaf cultural perspective of BSL users.

# Information about the Deaf community

The British Deaf community is formed of Deaf people who use BSL as their first or preferred language. The community exists across the country with a national cultural life, strong coherence and a sense of common identity. Deaf people have established centres, social clubs and societies in their local towns to facilitate interaction, access services, hold religious services and social gatherings.

The community is proud of its heritage, rich culture and language (BSL). It has sought over the past three decades to achieve a sense of equality within the mainstream of society. However, it is clear that the Deaf community remains marginalised. It is rare to find Deaf people engaging at any level within local and national communities.

## Why a capital 'D' in Deaf?

The capital 'D' is used to describe culturally Deaf people who are members of the Deaf community. The other form of the word 'deaf' is a generic, medically-based term used to encompass all deaf people, although the particular needs of Deafened and Deafblind people are often given emphasis by mentioning them in addition to Deaf people. The term 'Deaf' is used to refer to a particular cultural and linguistic group rather than to the physical condition of deafness.

## How Deaf people see themselves

Deaf people do not see themselves as lacking hearing and therefore as disabled, but instead as having Sign Language and an "attitudinal Deafness" brought by sharing a positive Deaf identity, a common language, cultural heritage and life experiences (Baker and Padden, 1978).

In 1981, disabled people were beginning to develop what was to become the social model of disability, identifying negative attitudes, environmental factors and social structures, rather than their medical conditions as the barriers to disabled people's participation in society. At the same time, Deaf people were making demands to be recognised as an 'ethnic body with their own language, culture and mode of thinking' (Dimmock, 1981).

Parallels can be made with ethnic minority groups who have established centres across Britain for members of the community to meet, worship and celebrate their cultural life.

## The historical oppression of Deaf people

Deaf people identify their oppression as 'oralism', a philosophy rooted in the medical model of disability that has been compared with colonialism (Ladd, 2003).

Historically, Deaf people have seen the education system as the source of their oppression.

For most of the last century, the focus for Deaf children was on the development of speech rather than knowledge of BSL. This focus is seen by the Deaf community as detrimental to linguistic development, educational, social and employment opportunities.

Oralism denies access to BSL and many Deaf people give personal accounts of the abusive treatment they have experienced as punishment for using BSL (Taylor & Bishop, 1991).

The medical model of deafness – seeing deafness as a deficit in hearing rather than as a cultural and linguistic heritage – is another example of oppression felt by the Deaf community. It is this difference in the lived reality of deafness that is at the heart of Deaf people's hostility to the cochlear implantation of children. This device is portrayed in the media as a 'bionic ear', transforming deaf children into children who hear normally, rather than a surgically implanted hearing aid. It is a symbol of society's wish to change Deaf people into speaking and hearing people, rather than recognising BSL users as a minority group.

In common with other minority groups, Deaf people are also able to identify their oppression. Arthur Dimmock, in his writing, identified the parallels with other groups in Britain, using languages other than English.

In 1976, the linguist, Mary Brennan, recognised that BSL was often as complex as spoken languages in its ability to express sophisticated thoughts and emotions. Following her observations, the British Deaf community campaigned for over twenty years to have BSL recognised by the Government as one of Britain's indigenous languages alongside Welsh, Gaelic and Cornish.

The campaign finally achieved its goal in 2003 but it could be argued that this recognition has yet to be implemented. There have been few changes in practice, and Deaf people often remain invisible on television and in other spheres of national and political life.

## **Civil and human rights**

A resident of any country will have difficulty participating as a full citizen if they are unable to gain information and engage with current debates. Deaf people struggle to gain access to many areas of life including:

- » education
- » medical and social provisions
- » participation in political and democratic processes
- » activities in their local communities
- » employment

As well as face-to-face communication, Deaf people experience difficulties in using the telephone, and obtaining information provided in the media, especially through television, radio, newspapers and the internet. The rarity of interpreters on national stages and particularly on television, gives some indication of how marginalised and socially excluded the Deaf community remains.

Often it is assumed that because Deaf people have limited access to information conveyed by speech, this can be circumvented by providing written information such as a handwritten note, a leaflet or being directed to a website. However, research has shown that Deaf people often have a lower than average reading age. For example, Deaf people, who left school in 1975, had an average reading age of nine years. Twenty-five per cent of school leavers, who were described as 'less deaf' (hearing loss below 85dB) had no reading comprehension and 50% of school leavers with deafness greater than this were also illiterate (Conrad 1979).

These school leavers will now be around the age of 50. Currently only a third (32.9%) of deaf children achieves good results at GCSE compared to over half (57.1%) of their hearing peers (source: [www.ndcs.org.uk](http://www.ndcs.org.uk)). Research does not suggest that the literacy levels of deaf people aged over 50 or between 19 and 50 will be higher than these averages (Boddis 2007). Without doubt, Deaf people have difficulty accessing information.

***“We lag behind on information on a daily basis. I feel like it’s a constant catch-up game with the hearing community. We just have a lack of up-to-date information.”***

*(Eckhardt 2005)*

# Deaf people's experience of accessing services provided by the third sector

When Deaf people try to access a service provided by a local and community voluntary organisation, they often struggle. Some don't know they have a right to ask for an interpreter. Generally, people only have access to sign language and community support if they go to a Deaf Centre. They don't have that access elsewhere. This is a major source of social exclusion for Deaf people.

To illustrate Deaf people's experiences, we have included three case studies of Deaf people accessing services. These are followed by exercises to help third sector organisations to understand these experiences and think about ways to overcome barriers to effective support for Deaf people.



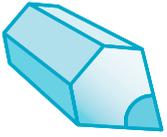
## Case Study 1

"I've got a Deaf son who attended football coaching provided by the Foundation Football Club at his school, we had an interpreter for that and he loved it. He felt equal with the other children. Then budgets were reduced, and they had to stop the interpretation provision.

"They said to me that as a parent I could apply for a government grant, which is available, to provide support for any disabled person with access needs e.g. an interpreter. I got help to fill in the application form, but was told that I had been unsuccessful because they were not prepared to pay to meet the needs of just one child although they were prepared to help a group. But if there is only one Deaf child living in the area we would have to go further away to find other children who may be interested in football coaching, in order to get support. My child has experienced the same problems with Cubs and Scouts. He's given up going now as he can't attend the social events.

"He's tried going with somebody who's got Stage 1 skills in BSL, but that's not high enough. It's better than nothing, but someone at Stage 1 can't pass on all the information that other children are saying in the group.

"Communication's fine at home and at the Deaf Club. But out there in society as a whole, there's no access. And it's a budget issue for other services. The school budget does not have the capacity to pay for interpreters for after-school services; they're not funded to provide for his social life. And if I want to attend school functions as a Deaf parent it's difficult, as again, it's an issue of budgetary considerations."



## Exercise

Referring to the case study above, please consider these questions:

1. How might a child feel if they were involved in an activity and then, they were excluded?
2. How would you feel if you had helped someone to fill in an application and you then learned that they had been unsuccessful?
3. What would be your next step in this situation?

As this case study demonstrates, the issue is not just about budgetary considerations, but structures and attitudes.

If a group wants to include someone who is a BSL user, and it is committed to social inclusion, the group will find a way to break down the barrier that excludes the person, by providing accurate advice about funding and finding effective ways to provide support.



## Case Study 2

A second Deaf mother gave an account of difficulties her daughter, Mary, experienced attending the Brownies and Girl Guides.

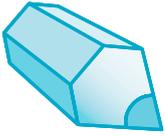
The family was encouraged by parents at their children's school to join the Rainbows. Jane, the leader, had known them for a long time and could use BSL. When the child was ready to move to the Brownies, it was fine as Jane was the Brown Owl (leader of the Brownies' group). However when Jane left, Mary's involvement began to fragment. Even though, Ruth, a member of the school staff stepped in to provide communication support, this was not ideal.

Mary's mother has never been given the full story of what happened, but she suddenly received a message from Mary's teacher to say that her daughter had been banned from attending the Brownies because of her behaviour.

She then discovered that Ruth had not been at the Brownies for four weeks, and although Mary's mother tried to get an explanation, she was unable to contact the Brown Owl directly, with all communications coming to her via the teacher. The mother explained her feelings:

"I'm so angry because they see it as all my responsibility and they have the cheek to award a badge to Brownies for communication with Deaf people."

The school said that they could not help any further because they had, unknown to the family, paid for the support through the Children's Fund and this had now been exhausted. The mother was also incensed because in order to keep Mary involved in social activities she now had to apply to Social Services for money to add to the payments she made for communication support.



### Exercise

Referring to the case study above, please consider these questions:

1. How would you feel if you were Mary's mother?
2. How could the Brownies have handled this situation better?
3. What should be the next step in this situation?



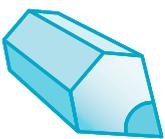
### Case Study 3

Peter has an ambition to run 100 races before he loses his sight due to retinitis pigmentosa, a condition which, combined with deafness, is called Usher.

In order to find a running partner – someone who will run just ahead of him to increase his safety – Peter decided to write to as many sources of possible help that he could find. He wrote fifty letters to voluntary organisations, the police, the army and Deaf organisations. He did not receive a single reply from this or from a website, which finds running partners.

Peter approached five running clubs in his city but all of them met in the evening, the wrong time of day for someone with poor night vision. He found a running club that met on a Sunday morning and they suggested he turn up and run with them.

Peter needed to be reassured by meeting a member of the group beforehand. He wanted some time to get to know and trust other members of the group and to know that they had some level of understanding about deafness.



### Exercise

Referring to the case study above, please consider these questions:

1. How would you feel if you were Peter?
2. Peter needed an interpreter to assist with these first steps, but where would the funding come from to pay for this service?
3. What would be the next step in this situation?

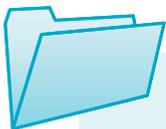
# Deaf people's experiences of volunteering

As well as being 'service users', Deaf people often want to volunteer in order to contribute their skills to the wider society. However, some are worried that their deafness will be seen as a barrier. The issue of funding for interpreters is often a problem. Sometimes a voluntary sign language interpreter can be engaged but it can be difficult to match the time they are available with the Deaf volunteer's requirements. In addition to this, voluntary sign language interpreters are often people learning to sign so the standard of interpretation can vary.

A hearing person with Level 1 BSL (equivalent to the skill a tourist may have in a foreign language), is welcomed as a volunteer for the Deaf community, even though they can barely communicate with Deaf people, but it doesn't work the other way around for Deaf volunteers. Deaf volunteers can't just turn up.

**“It involves extra work because you have to explain the need for an interpreter, keep pushing for an interpreter, and IF there is funding then you end up being responsible for booking the interpreters.”**

The next three case studies are examples of Deaf people volunteering.

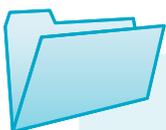


## Case Study 4

A woman who does voluntary work for the Deaf Children's Society and voluntary Deaf Awareness training for schools, as well as preparing Scouts, Guides and Brownies for their finger spelling badges.

She finds it difficult volunteering at some schools or Scouts groups when they have no idea how to try to communicate with a Deaf person.

“I feel uncomfortable, they're all hearing and don't know how to talk with Deaf people.”



## Case study 5

A volunteer interpreter who gives police cadets insight into the Deaf community. She said that she feels able to participate fully:

“I really enjoy myself! I like the challenge that voluntary work with the police brings and I value the opportunity to bring them face-to-face with the full force of Deaf culture.”



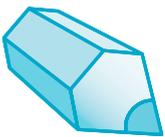
### Case study 6

A woman who had been keen to get involved with a local group that had received government funding to develop a support and advocacy service for parents of disabled children:

“I volunteered as I am a parent myself and I thought my experience would be valuable to the organisation and to parents of disabled children, especially the parents that had mental health difficulties and others who had learning difficulties.

“The first problem was that that they did not have funding to include me in the information and training sessions for volunteers. I wasn’t very happy about this as I knew they provided an interpreter for another Deaf person who was on their Management Committee. However, I was very keen to be involved so I managed the training by reading all the written information, lip-reading and bringing a hearing friend to interpret some of the sessions. They said they would pay him but they never did.

“Then I became aware that all the other volunteers were being matched with families but there was no offer of work for me. Eventually I was told of a family but then told that they had pulled out. In the end I was so busy with my own life and volunteering at the Deaf Centre that I put it behind me, but it was a shame.”



### Exercise

Referring to the case studies above, please consider these questions:

1. How do you feel about the experiences of these volunteers?
2. Are non-Deaf people, particularly disabled people and parents of disabled children, missing out if Deaf people cannot share their experience and expertise?
3. If Deaf volunteers work only in the Deaf community, how best can they be given support and training for the many kinds of issues they may be confronted with?
4. How can Deaf people be supported around issues that they may be unaware of (e.g. Health and Safety, working alone, domestic violence, child protection procedures, vulnerable adult policies and legal matters).

# Actions for third sector organisations

## Understanding the Deaf community

It is important to remember that:

- » Each Deaf person is an individual with a range of other identities and communication needs
- » The Deaf community mirrors the wider community with its ethnic mix and includes old and young Deaf people, middle aged people, gay men and lesbians, Deaf people with illnesses and disability, people with mental health issues and learning difficulties, and many others
- » Each individual will have their own sense of identity and place in society formulated through their own life experiences
- » The knowledge and exercise of their rights varies between Deaf people
- » Not all Deaf people know of their right to ask for an interpreter or act on this right, in particular those with additional needs and also those with limited language skills
- » Deaf people who have been segregated into the learning disability services may never have been given access to BSL or have been introduced to it comparatively late in life

## Reaching out to the local Deaf community

If your organisation is not aware of local Deaf clubs or groups you need to identify:

- » Who provides services for Deaf people
- » Where you can book an interpreter
- » Where Deaf people meet
- » An internet search using the name of your local town and the words 'Deaf Club' will probably be sufficient to make a first contact. You could also try the members list of the UK Council on Deafness ([www.Deafcouncil.org.uk](http://www.Deafcouncil.org.uk)) or typing the word 'deaf' into the search facility of your local council's website
- » Local Deaf sports and social clubs often link to national Deaf sports organisations and to the British Deaf Association (BDA). The BDA publishes a monthly magazine giving an insight into its current activities and concerns. Local activities are often featured
- » You could make contact with your local Deaf service, Deaf Centre or Deaf Club to offer your support and to identify local needs and concerns

## Raising staff awareness of Deaf people's needs

- » In order to provide an equitable service which promotes the social inclusion of Deaf people, organisations must ensure that they have a commitment both to the training of all staff in communication with their service users and to the development of an organisational understanding of the needs of the Deaf community going beyond the legal requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act

- » Make sure that your organisation is accessible in the first stages of reaching out to the Deaf community. For example, when you are planning public meetings it is important to consider how to encourage Deaf people to attend. If you are starting a volunteer recruitment drive, think about how to include Deaf people. And obviously make sure any services you provide are accessible
- » If one person in the organisation is sympathetic and knowledgeable about Deaf issues, then a Deaf person's experience of accessing the service will be improved, even though in many cases the staff member may not reflect the expertise of the organisation. However, it is not enough to have one member of staff with BSL skills as this is an unsustainable approach to an organisation's service delivery

Bren Davies, Chief Executive of Community Concern Erewash says that she and a colleague had some BSL skills and were able to support a Deaf volunteer. She feels that currently BSL is treated as a luxury 'add on' and not as a fundamental part of provision. She makes the case for free access to BSL training, arguing that this should be a part of the capacity building programme for voluntary organisations.

## **Improving Deaf awareness**

- » The CEO and governing bodies of infrastructure organisations need to ensure that they receive and deliver diversity training
- » There needs to be a focus on disability equality within diversity training and specific attention needs to be given to Deaf awareness

*Actions for third sector organisations*

## **Accessing services: Reviewing your external communications**

- » Make sure you can respond to calls from the text relay service (Typetalk)
- » Be aware that Deaf people may seek to contact you by fax and email
- » Consider access by sms
- » Obtain a copy of the Good Practice Guide from the UK Council on Deafness – see Resources
- » Ensure that your publicity is not only accessible to the Deaf community, but reflects the image of Deaf people
- » If you have a booking form for meetings, ask people to specify their access needs, and include BSL interpreter as an example of an access need
- » If you want to invite particular Deaf people to a meeting get in touch with a local interpreting agency to discuss this

## Consider the physical environment of your organisation

- » Is it easy to find?
- » How do people enter your premises?
- » If there is an entry phone, how will a Deaf person be able to alert you to his/her presence?
- » How will he/she know that you have responded?
- » On entering the building, is it easy to find reception?
- » Is the reception open and well lit?
- » Will the Deaf person have to communicate through a glass panel?
- » How easy is it to find the way to meeting rooms, toilets etc?

## Learning how to meet and greet a Deaf person

- » If you are meeting a Deaf person, or a Deaf person makes contact with you, you should respond in the first instance using spoken or written English. They may ask you to use an interpreter
- » If they do not ask for an interpreter, and it is obvious that communication is not straightforward, you should raise that with them, and ask them how they like to communicate. Remember that Deaf people would rather you attempt to communicate through notes, gestures and facial expressions, than turn them away
- » When a hearing person asks a Deaf person a question, sometimes they will nod and pretend everything's understood. It's the same for hearing people: sometimes smiling and nodding is used to cover up embarrassment. A nod or a 'thumbs up' should not always be taken at face value
- » The ideal situation for Deaf people is to find that someone who works in the organisation is either Deaf themselves or has a sufficient level of competence in BSL to provide the information or assistance required

**“Where Deaf people work,  
Deaf customers go.”**

**“It is only when you have an  
established Deaf contact that  
Deaf people are likely to get  
involved in the more social  
aspects, such as user groups.”**

## *Actions for third sector organisations*

### **Interpreters – Booking an interpreter**

- » To find an interpreter, you can ask your local Deaf Centre or search the National Register of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind people ([www.nrcpd.org.uk](http://www.nrcpd.org.uk)). The Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI) ([www.asli.org.uk](http://www.asli.org.uk)) also lists their members
- » Ask about their qualifications and experience in the type of meeting or project you have planned
- » Get a quote from an interpreter and include this amount in the budget for your meeting or project
- » It can be difficult to get an interpreter at the last minute, so always provisionally book one, and make sure you know about their cancellation requirements
- » Your organisation may need to create a specific budget for interpreters, if it does not already come within a budget used to meet access needs under the Disability Discrimination Act, e.g., to pay for material in Braille or information in Easy Read, or funding to cover translation into different spoken languages
- » It is good practice for organisations to take responsibility for funding an interpreter for each occasion that communication takes place

### **Learning about the role of an interpreter**

- » The role of the interpreter is to facilitate the communication between the Deaf user of BSL and users of English. Interpreters will use their knowledge of the two languages to pass messages from one language into the other. The skill with which they do this demonstrates their training, the level of professionalism and many years of exposure to both cultures and languages
- » As with other professions, they are expected to maintain confidentiality and abide by the profession's Code of Conduct ([www.asli.org.uk](http://www.asli.org.uk))
- » You need to bear in mind that while the hands and faces of interpreters look very busy, even more work is going on in their heads as they extract the meaning of each message and find the best way to express it in the second language
- » As with any other language that is interpreted, there is not always a direct translation for each word or sign and each language has its own grammatical structure
- » Sign language interpreters have a crucial role to play in bringing information into the Deaf community, and enabling individual Deaf people access to participate in the life of the local community

## Working with an interpreter

- » You should plan where the interpreters and Deaf people will sit so that they can see each other clearly with any other visual aids you are intending to use. There should be plenty of light. It is best to check with the Deaf person if the positioning meets their needs
- » Direct your speech to the Deaf person, not to the interpreter
- » Make sure, through firm chairing, that the meeting is disciplined and that people do not speak over each other. The interpreter can only translate for one person at a time so good facilitation of competing contributions in meetings will need to be exercised
- » Sometimes the interpreter will have to stop the speaker (or signer) to ask for repetition or clarification of what is said to ensure accuracy. If the meeting is intense and is likely to last beyond twenty minutes, two interpreters may be needed or breaks built into the meeting to enable the interpreter to ensure a consistent standard
- » Be aware of the time delay in the interpreting process. The Chair should ensure that Deaf people can respond to others' contributions and not be excluded by being left behind in the discussion
- » Don't block the view. The Chair should make sure that people who are moving around the room don't walk in front of the interpreter
- » Be conscious that the interpreter's job is to translate and not to engage directly in the meeting, so do not direct questions to them during the meeting
- » Only engage interpreters in personal conversations during the comfort breaks or after the session, if they are willing to do this, as you need to remember that interpreting is mentally challenging work and therefore the interpreters may need a break
- » You should seek feedback from the Deaf participants after the meeting to find out if anything could be improved upon. If you or the Deaf people involved have not been happy with the standard of the interpreter, you should take this up with the agency that supplied them or with NRCPD or ASLI (see Resources)

## Help with advocacy

If a Deaf person has difficulties accessing an interpreter because of a lack of funds, it may be necessary for an advocate to work on their behalf. The advocate would be able to work as a 'middle person', challenging any lack of interpreting support and ensuring the Deaf person played an active role in their own support.



## Case study 7

In January 2009 Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Deaf Forum organised a meeting on interpreters. It was an opportunity for a hearing worker to meet with Deaf members, and to learn about Deaf people's experiences accessing services from community groups.

The facilitator of the meeting explains:

"It was my first experience facilitating a meeting of predominantly Deaf people and I found myself encountering the delay effect that I have heard many Deaf people talk about (this happens when receiving someone's spoken word via BSL). Deaf people are often playing 'catch up' at events and meetings if facilitators or speakers do not allow for this delay. This is a common occurrence.

"I was looking at the Deaf person signing, hearing the interpreter relay what was being communicated, and by the time the interpreter had finished the sentence of one Deaf person, another Deaf person (who had received the information before me) was already signing their response.

"Until the interpreter started verbalising what was being signed, I didn't know whether the next person's contribution was relevant or not. By then, the individual was in full-swing.

"As my facilitation style predominantly occurs verbally, initially I didn't think to use my hands. In a hearing environment, I would not think to raise my hand in a stop gesture as this would, quite possibly, be considered offensive."

### *Actions for third sector organisations*

#### **Facilitating meetings with Deaf people**

- » When facilitating a group of Deaf people, establish with them what methods you should use to keep them on track and to time. For example, should this be by using a 'stop' hand signal when you required a pause, in order to keep up with what was being said
- » It is worth having some discussion with Deaf people attending a meeting to ensure culturally appropriate signals are established
- » When including Deaf people in 'mainstream' meetings, different cultural rules would apply. Do not to expect Deaf people attending to give you Deaf awareness training during the meeting
- » Consider whether it is useful to have a brief Deaf awareness session at the beginning of meetings and events to ensure everyone is conscious of strategies and a process for inclusion

- » It is important to remember that while other members of the audience may be able to read PowerPoint presentations and hear a running commentary, Deaf people cannot take in information from two sources simultaneously. You will need to give time for any written information to be read, and for the Deaf person's gaze to return to the interpreter before you speak



### Case study 8

The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) provides a four-minute advice video for the Deaf community on YouTube. The video which is sub-titled and signed in BSL by a Deaf CAB advisor, gives a basic introduction to the CAB, how Deaf people can find their local CAB and describes how they can help advise on debt or discrimination issues.

“This video is an important step in reaching the Deaf community, who do not necessarily get access to advice from broadcast mediums such as radio and TV. We made this film because we wanted to make sure the CAB service had a presence on the internet and specifically for the Deaf community.”

The video refers to the difficulties Deaf people experience in getting advice, particularly on discrimination:

“A lot of Deaf people have no prospects of promotion – they spend many years in the same role. Very often I see Deaf clients who are frustrated in the work place. They face discrimination, as employers often refuse to provide a sign language interpreter. Some Deaf people do not know it is their right under the Disability Discrimination Act that an employer should provide access to meetings or training courses.”

### *Actions for third sector organisations*

#### **Providing accessible information**

- » Deaf people often face a combination of unemployment, low income, debt, poor housing and discrimination. Deaf people are also more likely than other people to need advice, but will have much more difficulty obtaining that advice, often due to the lack of interpreters
- » Information in plain English benefits all of us. There is a wide range of individuals and groups who struggle with literacy. People with learning difficulties and people who use English as a second language may not be able to read information that uses complex legal terms or jargon is used

- » When information is illustrated with photos and other visual imagery, it can be easier for all of us to understand. Organisations, such as Change ([www.changepeople.co.uk](http://www.changepeople.co.uk)), work with people with learning difficulties, and would be able to provide advice and guidance about producing written information in easy to read words and pictures. For some Deaf people it may be the only way to understand leaflets and booklets
- » Sending information through email is useful, but you need to remember that not all Deaf people have English as a first language. This can be particularly problematic when the information uses complex legal terms or jargon
- » If it is appropriate, think about creative ways of presenting information, for example, illustrations, cartoons and videos with subtitles or BSL interpretation

## **Supporting the Deaf community to gain funding**

- » If Deaf groups are experiencing difficulty completing funding applications, they may not be aware that other groups have been successful in meeting potential funders face-to-face. For example, Islington Deaf Campaign (IDC) has asked funders for help in completing application forms. A Deaf representative of IDC sits with the funder, providing the answers to their questions either directly or through an interpreter. You could suggest your local group follows this example
- » The Deaf community needs to be made aware of any funding mechanisms that can help to provide access to interpreters etc

## **Campaigning for Deaf people's rights**

- » Deaf people are often not aware of their rights and when they know their rights, they usually don't feel assertive or 'comfortable' about complaining
- » The implications of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995 are often not fully understood by the Deaf community and that is why there are few cases we can learn from. It is seen by some Deaf people as a nice bit of paper that has no power to change Deaf people's lives
- » An important role for infrastructure organisations is to be aware of, and assist local organisations to understand the specific requirements of the Disability Equality Duty under the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 which sets a legal requirement for public bodies to involve disabled people in their decisions
- » Local Deaf communities may benefit from your organisational knowledge and experience in these and other areas. Is there training you can offer about the 'reasonable adjustments' that agencies must provide in order to provide equitable services to the whole community, including Deaf people?
- » Are there case studies that could be used as model of good practice?
- » Can you assist local people with the processes of finding legal advice and supporting them to work through civil court cases to implement the Disability Discrimination Act?
- » Can you offer a mediation service, or negotiate with local agencies that deny Deaf people an accessible service?

## Provide training targeted at Deaf people's organisations

- » Deaf people need to develop confidence and be assertive enough to tell the hearing society, and their MPs, that they need a better service, and more funding for interpreters. This could be achieved through assertiveness training, enabling Deaf people to campaign for change
- » Hearing people listen to the radio, watch television, read the papers and have access to information in English, as a first language. Lacking adequate access to English, Deaf people will be less confident and unable to campaign for their rights
- » Organisations that provide assertiveness training need to work more closely with local Deaf organisations
- » Infrastructure organisations should consider providing specific courses for the Deaf community on managing a group, organising meetings, chairing and managing speakers, political processes and campaigning



### Checklist

Make sure your organisation:

- » has made contact with the local Deaf community
- » is accessible to Deaf people (e.g. physical space and written material)
- » is improving diversity awareness among staff and volunteers
- » reviews external communications
- » helps Deaf people and organisations with advocacy, funding, training and access to rights
- » has a basic understanding of the needs of BSL users
- » understands that the best person to ask for advice on an individual's needs is the person themselves
- » has knowledge of interpreting services and when they should be used
- » identifies funding to pay for interpreters
- » has access to BSL training courses
- » has clear roles and procedures for volunteers and staff and that these are applied equally to Deaf people working within your organisation

# Resources

## Organisations

British Deaf Association ([www.bda.org.uk](http://www.bda.org.uk))

Change ([www.changepeople.co.uk](http://www.changepeople.co.uk))

National Deaf Children's Society ([www.ndcs.org.uk](http://www.ndcs.org.uk))

National Register of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind people ([www.nrcpd.org.uk](http://www.nrcpd.org.uk))

Plain English Campaign ([www.plainenglish.co.uk](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk))

The Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI) ([www.asli.org.uk](http://www.asli.org.uk))

UK Council on Deafness ([www.deafcouncil.org.uk](http://www.deafcouncil.org.uk))

## Publications

British Deaf News, British Deaf Association ([www.bda.org.uk](http://www.bda.org.uk))

Council on Deafness ([www.deafcouncil.org.uk](http://www.deafcouncil.org.uk))

Forest Books ([www.forestbooks.com](http://www.forestbooks.com)) Good Practice Guide: providing access to public services for Deaf people 2001, UK

## Videos

What we do and how we help – a 4-minute video by Citizens Advice

([www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/aboutus/what\\_we\\_do\\_how\\_we\\_help.htm](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/aboutus/what_we_do_how_we_help.htm))

## Deaf Studies

There is a range of courses across the UK, from beginners Sign Language to post-graduate courses on Deaf studies, culture and history. Bristol, Durham, Wolverhampton, City University (London), Heriot-Watt and Central Lancashire offer a range of courses in Deaf Studies.

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# Breaking down the barriers



**Reaching out to Deaf people  
and their organisations:  
A guide for the Third Sector**

