

Notes of a meeting with the Profoundly Deaf Service User Group for Somerset County Council Adult Social Care.

Tuesday 1st April 2008. SAIN Offices in Taunton.



PURPOSE OF THIS MEETING

The group was consulted on a number of topics put forward by Adult Social Care (also known as Social Services):

- Topic 1: Response from Social Services to previous Consultation in 2007
- Topic 2: User expectation of Social workers/social services
- Topic 3: Social Service Standard Equipment List for Hard of Hearing service user.
- Topic 4: Perceptions of Day Services
- Topic 5: Other issues



INTRODUCTION

Only one participant is in contact on a casual basis with a Social Worker. in the last 12 months. The group also talked about their contact with Social Services and extracts of what people said is outlined below:

- “We had a new Social Worker but it wasn't successful. I think I talked to her Manager. She literally just texted to other people in the deaf community...that is a private number and she should have sent a letter to introduce herself and ask if she could use their numbers...we

were surprised that she was using private numbers....the new Social Worker used her files to contact deaf people via their personal mobile numbers without asking for permission...”

- “No, I am not. I don't feel comfortable having a Social Worker involved with me, I prefer an Interpreter”
- “I have always had good contact with them. They sign basically like me. So no problem. I don't need them at the minute”
- “Some of them [social workers] in my area can't sign fluently.. They need to improve themselves in better communication.. It isn't good enough for us.. that is my opinion”
- “I feel they are not reliable. They never contact me if I have problems. We wait for a long time. We rang up about 3 months later and they say the same thing. I have lost patience with them...I have to pay for my own equipment. I have had quite a lot of problems with the Social Worker and I think Social Services are always going to be the same and will never change”.



Discussing the Response from Social Services based on the last consultation

The group were invited to comment on the response from Social Services to the previous consultation in 2007. Comments included the following:

- “I was very very shocked.... reading about having 8 workers with BSL level 1, 4 workers with BSL level 2 and one worker with BSL level 3..when I read that letter I was amazed at what I read, having 8 workers with BSL level 1 etc.. is that in that area? Somerset ?”
- “I have never met any aid worker with fluent sign language. I have never met any Social Worker in the Somerset area who can do level 3..”
- “There is one Social Worker for the deafwe have had problems with... And with some of the others, they said they would provide an Interpreters.. I thought there were plenty who had sign language, it is wrong that there is only one.. it is absolutely not enough. if a Social Worker can't sign there will be no communication at all”
- “If a Social Worker wants to work with deaf people why can't they learn sign language.. it should be part of their job specification”
- “I don't believe some of what is in the report”.
- “the discussion is fine but when you go back to Social Services - the feedback you get from them doesn't touch the issues and isn't relevant to what we want.”



Expectations today of what Social Services should provide.

Participants explained their current expectations of social services. Comments included:

- “I don't know how I would have contact or what they could do for me”.
- “ to be honest I don't really know who social services is there for”
- “I think there are no deaf awareness training courses on offer for social workers”
- “I think that it's difficult for Social Workers. I have heard that they train themselves in deaf awareness...I am not criticising them but how can they teach themselves ... it would be better for a deaf person to teach them.. it could be a monetary issue”
- “They should provide help with whatever the problem is, the needs, listen to what people want and provide those needs.. If deaf people have problems Social Services don't help. Deaf people go to CAB and they get support there.. I think Social Services should provide some of that support”
- “Social Services should have more involvement with the deaf community, go to deaf club and pub - anything to gain confidence in sign language - Same with Interpreters.. they gain confidence with deaf people in doing that.. we can't force them. It is up to them to take a step forward.. without that they won't have confidence in their signing abilities”
- “ I am happy with what I have had because I have been hearing recently maybe I

understand and don't have a problem with communication”

- “I have to say for deaf people it is CAB where we would go. They are very helpful there. Social Workers are lazy and can't be bothered to help, it isn't good enough.
- “The Hospital is my point of contact, they are very good”
- “I think when the person requires the assistance then and there, not in Social Services time but in the client's time. For example, letters come in and appointments are made and people need to attend quickly and there isn't enough time to get Interpreters...one deaf person recently where we had to go to a meeting said they didn't want a Social Worker involved... they said they would sort out a replacement Social Worker - this person has waited 2 months... the person has big problems with her children... she has waited 2 months..what is that all about.”
- “if I needed anything I would ask and they would visit me”
- “the Council don't provide anything for deaf people.”
- “The website is confusing, difficult to find services.. it expects you to spell the service you want to get you to the link and my spelling isn't up to scratch.”
- “I am sure the Council provide things for deaf people but not in all the different departments”



Equipment

The group were asked to comment on the Adult Social Care Standard Equipment List for people that are profoundly deaf. Key points from this discussion were that:

- The group had little to add to the main list except for a fax machine and text telephone,
- Participants were also unclear about the purpose of some items listed, such as personal communicators
- Participants were also concerned about the availability of equipment
- Participants felt that all items listed should continue to be available for loan including low cost items and those available in the shops.

Extracts from participants comments are outlined below:

- “It should be a comprehensive list of all the equipment that deaf people might require”
- “I have tried a few but they don't work for me. Maybe the range could be widened.. Smoke alarms for example: I live in a very old building and it is difficult to make a lot of these things work. I don't hear smoke alarms, that range is outside my hearing.. so the place could quietly burn down around me.. I have them for insurance purposes but they are no use to me.”
- “maybe you could have a pager that is linked to the door bell, smoke alarm, fire alarm.. you could have a system with 4 different alarms in one pager.”
- “If he contacts the fire service because he has an older building they may help.” The reply was “Nothing happens I contacted them 6 months ago and am awaiting a further visit” Another said, “You could go to Social Services and ask for a pager system which has, as you mentioned...”
- “[the Fire service] used to have an officer for the deaf - one person for the whole county or something..”. (please see notes at the end).
- “Some equipment is very expensive and out of people's price range.. but cheaper equipment you can afford”
- “I think if it is cheap a deaf person would consider buying it themselves”
- “quite often the waiting list is quite long and if you want something quickly you would buy it yourself”
- “I have a pager from Social Services”
- “it should be on affordability.. if you can afford it, buy it, if not, they should be available.. not sure how they would work out if you can afford it. The fire alarm thing should be for free because that can be dangerous.”
- “they are ordinary fire people and are not trained to deal with deaf people”
- “Social Services should be responsible to make sure deaf people are safe. The fire service could link up with Social Services and make sure the provision will match the person.”
- “Bridgwater college had a meeting where the fire service attended and they said they understood about the need to provide smoke alarms.. it seems that Social Services need to get together with the fire service.. it is a wider issue.. people don't know what is

available”

- “ if you are involved in the deaf world, you can get often from other deaf people and from the deaf community before you get it from Social Services because deaf people are very linked up and share information etc..”
- “ also some of the equipment Social Services provide is very very old, we would want something more modern.. Some of the equipment is ancient.. 10 or 20 years old.. very old fashioned.. The technology now is advanced and changing all the time and Social Services uses old equipment”
- “I think mini-coms are very important and I have seen new ones that are very compact that you can take anywhere.. but Social Services would give you a very old table top one.. too old.. out of date equipment”
- “the problem is we don't know how many deaf people are in the area and how many are reviewed for equipment.. if there are only a few they could afford to buy expensive equipment but if there are many 100's they might not be able to afford to”
- “Okay, what I understand if a percentage comes from them and percentage from me... if the equipment breaks down who is responsible for the equipment - No, I think it equipment should belong to Social Services.”
- “I would like a video phone then I can communicate with hearing and deaf people....but I know it is very expensive. About £800..”
- Should Social Services provide a contribution to it, so it becomes yours.. that money would need to come from somewhere else..
- Faxes are important for Deaf people.

Other equipment related comments included

- An internet service called 'skype'. Skype is a software program that allows users to make calls over the Internet to other Skype users free of charge. Calls to landlines and cell phones can be made for a fee. The Bristol deaf studies use it



Day services

Participants discussed their perceptions of day services:

- “I thought day services were voluntary organisations”
 - “I think they may be for pensioners or disabled people.. I have never seen one myself.”
 - “I feel much more at home in the deaf club...”
 - “if there is something available to me...”
 - “A lot of deaf people are independent..”
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- “I think pensioners or disabled people would go and maybe if they went to day services they would be shown what equipment would benefit them”
 - “I have a hearing friend who was interested in meeting deaf people to learn to dance.....her friend wanted to teach deaf people how to dance.”
 - it is the same with pensioners and disabled people, they go to a day centre to relax.. you should be able to go and be informal and relax.
 - “it could be that you want to access activities like dance or football, whatever you are interested in. How would they contact deaf people to find out if they want to access activities.”
 - “I think the deaf should go out more, I go line dancing and I can't hear a thing.. I wear this and I tell people that they can learn the ABC while they are dancing”



Social Integration

Participants talked about whether activities should be organized within the deaf community or in the wider world. In particular participants said,

- “I would prefer mixed. We are still people living in the same world.. I feel we should be mixed.. if hearing people don't understand sign then the deaf people could help them, it would be more fun and more lively.. you could meet more people.. hearing and deaf people may be shy with each other.”
- “I agree.. we must get out more.”
- “I think we should mix more.. but it could be that deaf people have a problem with communication but we should try and help each other.”
- “there are things I would like to do but I don't because I can't participate.. I would be interested in going to lectures but there isn't a loop .. I just tend to avoid crowds....I don't participate much.”
- “about 10 or 15 years ago.. you could organise a day trip for deaf and hearing.. they have stopped now, I don't know why.....It would be nice to do again and it would be easier to communicate with people”
- “Particularly those learning sign language - they don't get involved? good question - I have been trying for a long time.. emailing the local college, deaf clubs...”
- “I think the teachers who were teaching BSL didn't want the students to go the BSL pub to learn different signs - but if the students mixed with deaf people they would pick up the signs more quickly but the teachers didn't like it in case they picked up different

signs.”

- “it has been especially difficult for me because I can't understand english because I can't hear and people don't understand, and it is difficult sometimes to understand the deaf if they sign too quickly for me, they have to slow down.”
- “ between the two.. not in the hearing world or deaf world, I am isolated, although I go out to dance and swim.”



Other issues

- In future participants are keen to meet a senior representative of Adult Social Care, in particular the officer responsible for deaf services.
- Sign Health is a national charity that works to improve the health of deaf people. It has a website with video footage signed in BSL. <http://www.signhealth.org.uk/>
- Contact details for a Home Safety Visit with the Fire Brigade are; www.fire.gov.uk or you can TEXT the Information Line on 0780 00 02476.
- The need for more local information in the area as the RNID are in Bath