



Every Deaf Child Matters Conference 2012 *All Change: Creating Opportunities to Better Support Deaf Children*

26th June 2012
Somerset County Cricket Club, Taunton

Post-Conference Briefing

[Click here to access the report in BSL](#)

This briefing has been prepared by the steering group of the South West Every Deaf Child Matters Conference¹ to communicate to commissioners and other decision-makers the key issues and concerns discussed at the 2012 Taunton conference and to provide essential information about deaf children and young people and their needs.²

The development of language and communication lies at the heart of children's social, emotional and intellectual development, thus the risks to deaf children achieving an acceptable level of attainment and wellbeing are substantial unless they are given the right support. The 1989 Children Act and the 2010 Equality Act place positive duties on local authorities to safeguard and promote their welfare and equality and provide a range and level of services that are appropriate to their needs.

The best way to ensure services achieve best value for money is to provide consistent, coordinated support from an early age with a relentless focus on ensuring deaf children achieve their potential. Yet recent research reveals widespread evidence of poor and dysfunctional integrated children's services arrangements for deaf children and their families.³ The combination of cuts and complex SEN, school funding and health reforms risk of a steady breakdown in deaf children's support.

Key facts about deaf children and young people

- There are over 3,300 deaf children in the South West region. Around 90% are from families who have no prior experience of deafness. The majority attend mainstream schools. Some communicate orally, some use sign language and others use a combination of speech and signing.
- Deafness is not a learning disability and, with the right support, deaf children should achieve as well as their hearing peers; yet their educational attainments lag significantly behind national averages: 60% fail to achieve 5 GCSEs (including English and Maths) at grades A* to C, compared to 30% of children with no identified SEN. Even a mild hearing loss can have a significant impact on achievement.
- Over 40% of deaf children and young people experience mental health problems in childhood /early adulthood. Many live in families on a low income, and they are disproportionately likely to become unemployed themselves as young adults.

¹ This is a SW regional initiative led and supported jointly by the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS), the Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education (ERADE), NHS South of England and National Deaf Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (Deaf-CAMHS).

² By deaf, we mean any child or young person with a permanent or temporary hearing loss. This could be a mild, moderate, severe or profound hearing loss.

³ The impact of integrated Children's Services on the scope, delivery and quality of social care services for deaf children and their families Phase 2 Report
http://www.ndcs.org.uk/about_us/campaigns/england/campaign_news/protect_deaf_kids.html (Young et al., 2010).

Supporting deaf children and young people

Deaf children are dependent on multiple smaller specialist public services. These include:

Teachers of the Deaf have a specialist qualification in teaching deaf children. They work with families of deaf babies to help develop early language and communication skills, teach school-age deaf children directly and advise mainstream schools and preschools. Deaf children's access and attainment often depends critically on regular and consistent Teacher of the Deaf support. Almost all Teachers of the Deaf are employed by council-funded education services and, even though many are working to full capacity, many posts are still being cut.

Speech and language therapists help deaf children develop good language and speech skills, both of which are a serious impediment to deaf children's development, attainment and wellbeing. The therapist may work directly with a child or they may give advice to schools or families. Some speech and language therapists are employed by the health service and some by education services; both are making cuts.

Social workers help to address often complex of welfare, safeguarding and developmental needs of deaf children and their families. This requires social care personnel with a specialist background and expertise in sensory impairment and its implications. Yet only around a third of Local Authorities have specialist team arrangements containing clear lines of responsibility and appropriately qualified and experienced social workers.

SEN reforms

The Department for Education is planning a radical shake up of how children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities and their families are supported. Draft legislation was published in September 2012 and a number of local authorities⁴ have started piloting the reforms through a Pathfinder Project to prepare for the changes to come into effect in late 2014. Some of the key proposals include:

- Replacing the statement of SEN with a broader Education, Health and Care Plan, and changing the SEN Code of Practice
- Giving parents and young people the option of a personal budget to buy specialist and other support directly
- Requiring local authorities to set out and communicate a 'local offer' of what they provide for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

A number of key challenges will need to be addressed if these reforms are to improve things for deaf children:

- Deaf children have varying needs that cannot be predicted on the basis of their level of hearing loss. It will be important that none are excluded by arbitrary thresholds or barriers in the new processes and frameworks for the single assessments and Education, Health and Social Care Plans (EHSCP).
- Clear lines of accountability will be needed among the different professionals, services and funding lines involved, and transparent legal rights and appeal processes need to be maintained for parents.
- The 'market' in local support and services for deaf children is usually very limited and fragmented. Providing real and informed choices and support options will depend on maintaining and developing a continuum of quality provision that may need to go beyond the 'local offer' to include out-of-area specialist provision.

For more information visit: www.ndcs.org.uk

⁴ Including three in the South West region: Cornwall & Isles of Scilly, Devon and Wiltshire.