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SW Every Deaf Child Matters 2013

South West Every Deaf Child Matters Conference 2013

Meeting Needs and Fulfilling Potential
Post Conference Report

BSL version available at: <http://swedcm.weebly.com/2013>

The third *South West Every Deaf Child Matters Conference* took place on 2nd July 2013 in Exeter with 110 delegates in attendance. The event once again provided a fantastic opportunity to bring together a range of professionals from across the region and all sectors to exchange ideas, share concerns, build relationships and talk to parents about support for deaf children and young people and their families, and to look together at new challenges and developments in the sector. 93% of delegates said they would attend the conference again, and everyone who answered said they would recommend it to a colleague.

Chair of the Conference, Brian Lamb OBE says:

"This conference has become an important national as well as regional event. It is at the forefront of bringing together leading speakers to share the latest thinking about the National context but also blends this with regional knowledge and practical understanding of local implications. The conference is always fizzing with new ideas and approaches and an essential means of keeping up with latest developments in constructive and helpful atmosphere."

What was the learning from the Conference?

To read more about each of these learning points, click on the link to go to the full text:

- [More joint working and greater awareness of the vulnerability of deaf children and young people.](#)
- [Ensure that deaf children are not excluded by arbitrary or inappropriate service thresholds and criteria.](#)
- [Promote a spectrum of provision within the 'local offer' to meet the individual needs of deaf children and young people.](#)
- [Tackle the health commissioning pathway – raise awareness of deaf children's specialist service needs.](#)
- [Listen and engage with parents as partners in provision.](#)
- [Lead multi-agency practice, don't wait to be asked. Placing deaf children and their families at the centre of the process and working together.](#)
- [Placing deaf children and their families at the centre of the process and working together.](#)
- [Improve professional to parent communication.](#)

Find out about the themes and date for the [2014 Conference](#).

We use the term 'deaf' to include all deaf children, with all types and levels of deafness and hearing loss, from all cultures.

What was the learning from the Conference?

The speakers, workshop sessions and plenary debate all underlined that, in the midst of reforms and many difficult cut-backs, there is both a shared responsibility and new opportunities to work together to safeguard deaf children's wellbeing and improve outcomes in all areas of their lives. 'Integrated commissioning' 'seamless services', 'joined-up working' are now familiar catch-phrases, reflecting a recognition that, with limited resources, it is only by working more effectively together that the gaps and problems that currently leave many deaf children and young people vulnerable and that impede their inclusion and success can be addressed and overcome. The challenge is to turn the rhetoric into reality.

- ***More joint working and greater awareness of the vulnerability of deaf children and young people.***

David Miller from the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) opened with a hard-hitting appeal for action to tackle the still unacceptably high protection risks that many deaf children and young people are exposed to, with far higher-than average rates of physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect. Deaf children are at significantly greater risk of social exclusion and isolation, poor self-esteem and bullying, and many lack communication skills or understanding to seek help, or lack trusted sources of support with relevant communication skills that they can turn to for help. The failure to make information and confidential advice accessible to them, inappropriate support thresholds, lack of co-ordinated multi-agency working, narrow or fragmented assessments, professional skills gaps and the failure to recognise specific risks that deaf children and young people face are some of the common problems that contribute to continuing gaps in their safeguarding and their disproportionate exposure to risk. You can see David Miller's presentation [here](#).

- ***Ensure that deaf children are not excluded by arbitrary or inappropriate service thresholds and criteria.***

The government's new *Working Together* guidance to improve children's safeguarding calls for greater focus on the needs of the child, more effective early intervention and high-quality professionals using their expert judgment and sharing information in a timely way. These are now very familiar goals, but still as important as ever. Yet, according to Chris Kang-Mullen from NDCS, the obstacles to achieving them for deaf children and young people have never been greater. Many non-specialised children's services or disabled children's teams lack any expertise in recognising and addressing the risks and problems facing deaf children, resulting in often unclear or ad hoc arrangements to fill the gap with sensory support professionals from adult services who lack the appropriate safeguarding and other training necessary to support children and young people, while nearly half of local authorities fail to recognise deaf children as 'children in need' as they should under the Children Act 1989, and the majority use eligibility thresholds and criteria that effectively exclude the majority of deaf children and young people from accessing appropriate social care assessments and support. You can see Chris Kang-Mullen's presentation [here](#).

- ***Promote a spectrum of provision within the 'local offer' to meet the individual needs of deaf children and young people.***

Under the Children and Families Bill, the duty from 2014 for Local Authorities to publish a Local Offer of services for disabled children and introduce single assessments and EHC Plans to replace SEN statements may offer new opportunities to improve support and reduce the risks to deaf children, but only if these are seized by all who should care about deaf children's wellbeing across education, health and social care, and only if all are committed to working together more effectively. You can see Brian Lamb's introduction on the Local Offer [here](#).

Delegates were invited to highlight the priorities that they would identify for the local offer for deaf children and young people that local authorities will be required to publish and deliver from September 2014. Key issues included ensuring that deaf children can access language effectively with a spectrum of provision and support that encompasses English and BSL, that prioritises the early years and that equips parents to communicate with their children and provide a language- and communication-rich home environment. Continuity of provision across education, health and social care and across the age range from 0 to 25, and good quality provision that includes skilled classroom support, availability and access to technological equipment and to specialist speech and language and other therapeutic intervention and support to ensure deaf children and young people's communication and language skills and social and emotional health and wellbeing. This spectrum of provision must include qualified teachers of the deaf, specialist social care professionals and appropriately skilled classroom support.

Delegates expressed concern that the current postcode lottery in support might continue with different LAs continuing to offer different things in different areas, and that what is really on offer to support and enable deaf children and young people might suffer from public spending cuts and by demand outstripping supply. Delegates also expressed concern about how the local offer will assure quality of the services included.

- ***Tackle the health commissioning pathway – raise awareness of deaf children's specialist service needs.***

According to Adam Beckman, President of the British Academy of Audiology and Head of Audiology at Plymouth Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, a raft of structural reforms being introduced across the NHS means that working together in the health sector has probably never been more challenging than it will be in the years ahead. The new frameworks for commissioning, funding and delivering audiology, ENT, SALT and other key specialist and other health services for deaf children and young people will make any joint working a complex navigational challenge for all involved. Even the earliest care for a baby with a hearing impairment from 6 weeks to 6 months is likely to involve a range of commissioning and provision pathways from initial and specialist screening through to diagnostic and continuing care that depend on complex arrangements between Public Health England, NHS England and its Area Teams and Clinical Commissioning Groups. On the provider side, many local specialist health services in the South West may not be considered specialist enough in the future if their patient numbers don't reach a critical threshold to justify the specialist label. Providing highly specialised services through regional network arrangements may provide an answer, but this model is far from being realised across the majority of services as things stand. You can see Adam Beckman's presentation [here](#). You can also read Adam's blog post on the event on the [BAA President's Blog](#) from 5th July 2013.

- ***Listen and engage with parents as partners in provision.***

Parents are crucial partners in making the links work between professionals and services to ensure that their children are properly supported and cared for. Charlie Martin and Katie Thomas from Optix Solutions presented with Devon parents, Vanessa Pestrige and Rachel Goswell, on how parents and professionals across the South West region could link up much more effectively through social media. A new closed Facebook group, 'South West Deaf Children Matter' (www.facebook.com/groups/swedcm) was created in real-time in the session and a number of delegates signed up during the course of the day. Through this new virtual group, parents will be able to support one another on any local issues affecting their deaf children, ask questions and raise concerns with local professionals and organisations, and keep one another informed of events and information that might interest them. Brian Lamb welcomed this initiative as an important vehicle to make the Local Offer

work for deaf children and young people and their families in the South West. You can see the presentation for this session [here](#).

- ***Lead multi-agency practice, don't wait to be asked.***

John Shaw, Head of Operational Governance for Devon's Children's Integrated Services, outlining Devon's progress with the SEND pathfinder project, explained how participation of parents, carers, children and young people, transparency, good communication and good evidence, and joint working between health, education and social care are all integral to the new *Devon Assessment Framework* which is to start replacing current CAF, health and social care assessments and statutory SEN assessments and statements in Devon from autumn 2013. Multi-agency engagement in a single child- and family-centred framework will define the new system. You can see John Shaw's presentation [here](#).

- ***Placing deaf children and their families at the centre of the process and working together.***

Workshops in the afternoon also highlighted in different ways the overarching importance of joint working. Gwen Carr, National Programme Lead for the Newborn Hearing Screening Programme (NHS England) led a workshop looking at effective practice in early years support, emphasising the important distinction between outputs and outcomes and stressing that achieving good outcomes is likely to depend more on achieving 'well-seamed' rather than 'seamless' services across education, health and social care, with families reporting that a major positive factor in their experience with professionals is when professionals work in a truly multi-disciplinary way.

Lynda Holland from the Ear Foundation led a discussion of how education support and specialist hearing support services can ensure that they meet best practice. In addition to collecting benchmarking data and developing best practice guidelines and standards, a key element repeated through the discussion was the need to involve parents – to inform them about relevant quality standards and enable them to communicate with professionals and hold services to account for the quality of support and provision. You can see some useful resources on Quality Assurance [here](#).

Lindsey Rousseau from the National Sensory Impairment Partnership (NatSIP) led a discussion of what are the key attributes of good Education, Health and Care (EHC) assessments and EHC Plans (EHCP) for deaf children and young people. With representation across education, social care, voluntary organisations and professional training, the group agreed that the purpose of the EHCPs is to bring together all involved and have the child / young person and family at the centre, and that the quality of the EHCP would depend on the quality of assessments that inform it. There was optimism that the new EHC assessments and Plans will improve transparent and joined-up working, albeit tempered by concern about effective implementation in a context of diminishing resources. You can see the materials from Lindsey Rousseau's session [here](#).

- ***Improve professional to parent communication.***

Delegates had the final say in a plenary session chaired by Brian Lamb OBE, focused on identifying the greatest challenges and priorities for improvement. The number and variety of issues raised reflected the extent and range of concerns among professionals and parents alike. What all agreed upon was the need for professionals and parents to communicate better with one another, and for parents to be informed and empowered to ensure that everyone is working together and doing their bit to meet their deaf children's needs and to help them fulfil their potential.

Savings and Return on investment: reasons to hold the date for SW EDCM Conference 2014?

At a time of unprecedented complexity in commissioning and providing support for deaf children and young people, the value of learning, networking and keeping up to date with all the changes cannot be underestimated, particularly in a region where opportunities for dialogue, debate and collaboration are often scarce.

The evaluation feedback to the 2013 conference indicates a high level of satisfaction and impact among conference delegates: 93% of responders indicated that they would attend the conference again and everyone who responded to the question indicated that they would recommend the conference to colleagues. Comments from delegates about what they found the most useful things that they would take away from the conference included:

“An improved understanding of issues in SW.”

“A view of the wider landscape for funding and commissioning.”

“Talking to different people from different agencies. Importance of working as a team with the main objective of addressing the needs of the individual.”

“Information from Pathfinders.”

“Chance to speak to parents - hear their views.”

“Feedback from parents - what they would like offered and how to include them.”

“Create awareness of the myriad of changes and developments in support deaf children and families.”

“The opportunity to network with others.”

“Allowed me to concentrate on this important area.”

“Firmer knowledge of the Education, Health and Care Plan”

Themes for Every Deaf Child Matters 2014

Based on the 2013 conference discussions, key themes emerging for 2014 include:

- SW Challenges for Commissioning of Deaf Children and Young People’s Services.
- Core Offer and SEN Changes – One Year On.
- A Spectrum of Support for Early Years and School Age Children, Post-16 Provision – Transition, Employment, Access to Work.
- BSL Environment.
- Proactive Joint Working.

The steering group are planning to ensure the most useful and relevant content for next year’s conference. We are setting up a new virtual reference group to help us ensure the best possible sector knowledge is fed into the conference programme. We will be approaching a range of engaging and expert speakers to make the event the best value for money. We are pleased to announce that Brian Lamb OBE will once again provide us with an expert Chair for the event.

Actions & Planning Ahead

- Please hold **Tuesday 24th June 2014** in your diary for next year’s conference to be held at the Rougemount Hotel in Exeter. Remember to identify the cost in your training budget. There will again be an early bird delegate rate.

- Look out for updates about registration, content and speakers in the New Year.
- Let us know your ideas and suggestions – the SW EDCM Steering Group will contact you to ask you for your input.
- Let us know about the impact this year’s conference had on improving practice – what actions did you take away, what did you share with your teams and networks? You can contact us on professionals@ndcs.org.uk.
- Please feel free to circulate the report with the session presentation links, and ensure that as many professionals and parents as possible are able to access the information and learning from the conference.