

## **An Investigation into Pre-School Family Support Groups for children who are d/Deaf**

### **What are Pre-School Family Support Groups?**

These are groups for children aged 0-5 years, who have a diagnosis of deafness, and their families. In this research, only groups run by Teachers of the Deaf working for Sensory Support Services were involved.

### **What does the term d/Deaf refer to?**

The term d/Deaf refers to all levels of deafness from mild to profound, including Unilateral losses, and includes those who identify as deaf or Deaf.

### **Why was this research needed?**

There is currently no research about Pre-School Family Support Groups in the UK. Therefore, we don't know what typically happens in these groups or what families and professionals feel are the benefits of attending. There is also no guidance to support professionals and families to know what a good group should look like.

### **What were the aims of this research?**

The research had 3 key aims:

1. To find out what the benefits of attending a Pre-School Family Support Group are, from the viewpoint of both families and professionals.
2. To find out what typically happens at Pre-School Family Support Groups in the UK.
3. To see if it is possible to develop UK-wide guidance about the content and delivery of these groups to support families and professionals.

### **What did the research involve?**

8 Support Services in England, Wales and Northern Ireland were involved:

- 7 of these services were visited and the activities taking place in their Pre-School Family Support Group were observed.
- Professionals completed questionnaires about the groups they provide.
- Families completed questionnaires about themselves and their d/Deaf children.
- Professionals and family members were interviewed to find out about the groups they provide or attend in more detail.

This information was then analysed to identify common themes.

## **Results**

Family members and professionals identified many benefits including:

- Family to family contact, for mutual support and sharing of experiences.
- Opportunity for professionals to provide families with information, advice, coaching and modelling.
- Opportunity for d/Deaf children to socialise with other young d/Deaf children.
- Opportunity for increased contact between the family, Teachers of the Deaf and other professionals.

## **Challenges**

Several challenges were identified including:

- Maintaining numbers of families attending the group.
- Supporting families to attend and access the information in the sessions.
- Training for Teachers of the Deaf who will run the groups in the future.
- Involvement of d/Deaf adults in the sessions.
- Input from other professional groups e.g. Speech and Language Therapy, Audiology.

## **Conclusion**

Pre-School Family Support Groups perform an important role in supporting families of young d/Deaf children. The families who attend find the groups beneficial for themselves and their children and report high levels of satisfaction. Professionals recognised that the groups are an important part of the package of support available to the families and demonstrated flexibility and sensitivity to the needs of families.

## **Recommendations**

Whilst families are very satisfied with the groups they attend, some things could be even better including:

- More involvement of d/Deaf adults in planning and delivering the sessions.
- Improved use of BSL within the sessions.
- More specific training for Teachers of the Deaf working with very young d/Deaf children.
- Improved funding to support families who need help with transport and interpretation.
- More involvement of other professionals who are important in the supporting the development of young d/Deaf children e.g. Audiology staff.
- Increased recognition by those commissioning support for young d/Deaf children of the importance of these groups.