



Unheard Children

Championing deaf children's rights to family,
community, education and independence in
developing countries

A young girl with dark hair, wearing a red school uniform, is smiling and looking towards the camera. Her right hand is raised in a gesture, with fingers spread. The background is a blurred outdoor setting, possibly a school courtyard or street. A semi-transparent purple box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing text.

At Deaf Child Worldwide we use the term 'deaf' to refer to all levels and types of deafness and hearing loss from mild to profound. We support all deaf children and young people regardless of their level or type of deafness, or how they prefer to communicate.

Deaf Child Worldwide is the international development arm of the National Deaf Children's Society in the UK.



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We are Deaf Child Worldwide, the leading international charity for deaf children and a recognised global voice on childhood deafness. With a very clear link between poverty and deafness and with the majority of the world’s deaf children living in developing countries, we work in South Asia and East Africa towards a world without barriers for every deaf child.

“We work locally with our partner organisations to develop projects that help overcome the social and educational barriers that hold deaf children back. Our aim is to share some of these successful initiatives more widely so that they can help inform the systemic change that is needed.

With the coronavirus pandemic exacerbating the serious inequalities deaf children in some of the world’s poorest communities are facing, this change has never been more needed.

Susan Daniels OBE
Chief Executive, Deaf Child Worldwide and
National Deaf Children’s Society

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Every child deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential. So often deaf children miss out on education and training, meaning all that talent goes to waste. How can humanity reach its full potential if these children can’t.

Penny Mordaunt MP,
Secretary of State for International
Development (2017–2019)





Foreword

I want to congratulate Deaf Child Worldwide and its partners for the pathbreaking work being done to transform the lives of deaf children, young people and their families. Disability should not be a barrier to quality opportunities and outcomes for all, but Unheard Children is a powerful reminder of the unique challenges still faced by deaf children in the developing world.

The first three years of a child's life are the most important for language development and communication, and deaf children and their families are in critical need of early intervention - from support to learn sign languages, the practical provision of effective and affordable technology to help in the local community to challenge stigmas around deafness. Yet 40 per cent of children with disabilities in developing countries are not even attending primary school, and this important report reminds us of the pervading link between poverty and deafness which

continues to hold so many back. Every child has a right to education, and we need to give greatest priority to those children most at risk of being excluded from learning so unequal opportunities in one generation do not lead to unequal outcomes for the next.

Deaf Child Worldwide continues to be a world leader in championing deaf children's rights to family, community, education and independence. The new Unheard Children report will serve as a vital resource for development specialists, governments, NGOs and global institutions for years to come.

Gordon Brown

Gordon Brown
UN Special Envoy for Global Education and
Former UK Prime Minister

Introduction

There are more than 34 million deaf children in the world and the majority live in developing countries.¹ All of these children have the potential to live productive and fulfilling lives. But to realise their potential, they need the right support, right from the start.

Deafness is not a learning disability but it is an invisible disability that is frequently misunderstood. This widespread ignorance devastates the lives of millions of deaf children. Too often they do not have the same chances as their hearing peers to go to school, to learn, to be part of their community, to get a job and live independently.

Without effective interventions, cycles of poverty and abuse will continue and future childhoods will also be destroyed. More than 30 years ago the UN convention on the Rights of the Child² placed children at the centre of the development agenda for the first time. Five years later another landmark initiative followed when the global community agreed the UNESCO Salamanca Statement³ and committed to including children with disabilities in mainstream education.

Since then further pledges and progress have been made through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)⁴ which helped drive initiatives to get more children into school. The UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2006 provided an international framework for protecting the rights and dignity of people with disabilities. And the commitment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁵ to “leave no one behind” has placed people with disabilities more firmly on the development agenda than ever before. Most recently, the Global Disability Summit 2018 committed to “strive for real change through the Convention’s (UNCRPD) implementation and the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals for people with disabilities,” in its Charter for Change.

With the right commitment change can happen. In recent years we’ve seen some

significant steps towards getting girls into education. We’ve seen positive initiatives to support children in conflict situations and in fragile, post-conflict states.

But there remains a huge gap between the rhetoric and the reality which will be extremely challenging to close by 2030 when the SDGs are meant to be achieved. For example, 40% of children with disabilities in developing countries are still not going to primary school. 55% never make it into a secondary school classroom.⁶

Behind these statistics are a myriad of different stories touching on discrimination, a lack of support, stigma, sexual abuse and exploitation, and the relationships between disability, poverty, gender and the exacerbation of all of these challenges by the coronavirus pandemic. Whilst it is tempting to focus solely on the numbers not attending school, research shows that children with disabilities who make it into the classroom often do not receive a meaningful education. All of these issues are underpinned by a huge gap in funding and resources.

It is in this context that Deaf Child Worldwide was created. We want to stop deaf children being forgotten by communities, governments and policy-makers. We want to change perceptions of deafness, and we want to improve opportunities for deaf children globally.

Since 2002, we have been working with our international partners to ensure that deaf children, young people and their families get the support and information they need to realise their right to family and community life, education and independence. In most cases our work takes place in contexts where there is little understanding of deafness, where resources are scarce and the infrastructure required to support diagnosis and early intervention does not exist.

There are many things we can do to tackle the barriers that deaf children face. This report

describes some of the interventions that have proved consistently successful in a range of cultural and contextual settings. Whilst our focus is specifically deaf children, many of the interventions also make a positive difference to the lives of their hearing peers.

Key themes explored in this report include:

- Why it is so important for deaf children to acquire language and communication skills in order to build relationships, learn and be part of the wider world
- How families can play a critical role in initiating long-term systemic change
- How the wider community can unlock deaf children's potential
- Why it is crucial that deaf children and young people have the right support at school to enable them to learn
- Why it is important to consult with deaf young people and support them to acquire the knowledge, confidence and self-belief to develop healthy relationships and find meaningful employment

Successful small-scale initiatives must inform the long term investment plans of governments and policy-makers if we are to make the necessary systemic and structural changes.

Only when we all come together and deliver on the promises made over the last thirty years will we make our vision of a world without barriers for every deaf child a reality.

Now more than ever, with the unprecedented disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic around the world, we cannot let deaf children fall even further behind.

Joanna Clark
Director, Deaf Child Worldwide





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My son wasn't diagnosed as deaf until he was five, nobody would help him and no school would accept him. Up until he was 12 he understood nothing. It's only when my son was 14 and I was introduced to Child in Need, India (CINI) that I realised he could learn to communicate.”

Mother, Anita Thakur receiving support through our partner Child in Need, India (CINI)

Language and communication

For deaf children, learning to communicate is their first and most immediate challenge, and they need support with this from the start in order to thrive. The first three years of a child's life are the most important for developing language, whether spoken or signed.

Among the deaf children we work with, deafness can be diagnosed as late as six or seven years old. Families are unlikely to get support from specialists to help their child to communicate, and hearing aids can be expensive and poor quality. For these reasons, it can be very difficult for a child to learn spoken language, and families may prefer to use sign language to communicate with their child.

Despite this, in large parts of the developing world, sign languages are not recognised as official languages in their own right. There is little support for families who want to learn sign language, and even when support is in place, the quality is often poor.

These barriers to communication affect a child's ability to build relationships, share experiences and learn.

Nearly two thirds of parents (66%) said a lack of communication is the biggest barrier to deaf children getting a good education.⁷

To transform deaf children's futures, it is critical to build relationships with families in order to fill the huge gaps in knowledge and support. We believe it is important to invest in grassroots workers who will educate communities, provide opportunities to learn sign language and help families to communicate with their deaf child.





What works: early diagnosis and support

The later a child is diagnosed the greater the impact on their ability to develop language and communication. In developing countries, specialist services such as Ear Nose and Throat and audiology are either limited, non-existent or inaccessible to poorer families. As a result many deaf children are diagnosed very late and the advice their families receive afterwards is not always helpful or accurate.

Families are usually the first to realise that their child is unable to hear. Ideally they will seek professional advice as soon as they suspect their child is deaf. However, stigma around deafness in local communities can mean that families are reluctant to ask for support.

In our experience community support workers play a key role in building trust with families, and reaching deaf children who are isolated at home. They help families to get a formal diagnosis and teach them how to communicate effectively with their child.

Working with and training teachers and local schools, early education centres and health centres is also key to early diagnosis. Professionals play an important role in recognising the signs of deafness and signposting families to support.

Why early intervention is key

Since 2014, we have been working with our partner, Centre for Disability in Development (CDD) in Bangladesh to improve early diagnosis and support for deaf children. CDD works in four districts with local partners, Access to Bangladesh Foundation (ABF) in Dhaka, AID Foundation in Jhenaidah, Songshoptaque in Chattogram and Self Help and Rehabilitation Programme (SHARP) in Nilphamary.

Community support workers identify children who are suspected of being deaf and encourage parents to visit a community clinic to get a formal diagnosis. CDD has a close relationship with 15 clinics in the region, and has trained 166 health professionals in Bangla Sign Language and how to communicate with deaf people (in partnership with the National Institute of Ear, Nose and Throat). Having a close relationship with these clinics means that CDD is aware of children who have been diagnosed as deaf and can make sure that they are referred to its services and support.

Next Steps

If a child is diagnosed before the age of six, they will be referred to one of three Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres set up by CDD. These centres are a safe space in which deaf children and their families can learn language and communication, social and interpersonal skills, and how to read and write.

The ECD centres are open five days a week and sessions are run by a teacher (trained through CDD and DCW) and two assistants. The assistants are often local mothers who help with teaching while they learn at the same time. 59 children are currently getting support at three ECD centres (Jhenaidah, Chattogram, Nilphamary).

If a child is identified as deaf over the age of six, CDD works with families at home to build the foundations for them to develop language and communication, and provide education support if already in school. CDD is currently working with 77 children (36 boys and 41 girls) in this way. Over time, families are encouraged to consider sending their child to one of the mainstream schools that CDD supports.

The project works with 35 government primary schools and 17 secondary schools, offering sign language training to teachers and hearing students. It runs deaf awareness sessions within school, and project staff play an active role to ensure deaf students in school are getting the support they need in order to have an opportunity to an education equal to their hearing peers. 91 deaf children (42 boys, 49 girls) are in mainstream education and are attending primary and secondary schools.

What works: effective and affordable hearing technology

Many children in developing countries do not have access to any kind of hearing technology and, if they do, its effectiveness will depend on how well it works for the type of deafness they have. If children use any kind of technology it is most often a hearing aid. Only a tiny minority will use other types such as cochlear implants or bone conduction hearing devices.

Consistent use of hearing technology from an early age allows deaf children to develop spoken language and communication at a similar level to their hearing peers.⁸ However the benefits to a child will depend on how accurately their deafness has been diagnosed, the quality of their hearing aids, how well they are fitted, how frequently the moulds and aids

are checked, and how much support a child gets to interpret the sounds they are hearing.

For hearing aids to be effective they must be regularly checked, batteries need to be changed regularly, the hearing aid must be kept clean and it must be inserted correctly into the child's ear. In the absence of high quality health and audiology services, our community-based programmes help children, parents and teachers to understand how hearing aids work and how to use and maintain them.

We hope to see further developments following the Charter for Change commitment to “revolutionise the availability and affordability of assistive technology”.⁹



What works: communication choices

Deaf children communicate in different ways. Some use speech, some use sign language, and others use a mixture of the two. Many children will use a combination of methods flexibly – sign, speech, hearing, fingerspelling, gesture, facial expression and lip-reading (total communication).

We believe that no one method is better than another – the important thing is that it works for the child and their family.



What is sign language?

Sign language is a language like any other, with its own grammar, syntax, structure and rules. The difference is that it is communicated through hand movements and facial expressions and not through speech.

Sign languages are different all around the world, in the same way that spoken languages are. So, for example, sign language in Kenya is different to that used in Tanzania.

With the right support, deaf children worldwide can learn and use two or more

languages, and often use spoken and sign languages together.

In developing countries, deaf children most commonly communicate using local signs and a combination of communication methods. There is little, if any, support available to them or their parents to learn formal sign language, and little investment in training of Teachers of the Deaf or in training sign language interpreters. Even when support is in place, the quality is often poor and can hinder a child's development.

Tanzanian Sign Language – the need for more interpreters

Historically, Tanzanian Sign Language has not been recognised as a language in its own right, and although there are a small number of trained interpreters, there has never been an accredited qualification in the subject.

In a ground-breaking project, Deaf Child Worldwide along with partners the Tanzanian Association of the Deaf (CHAVITA) and the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) developed the first-ever university course in Tanzanian Sign Language. Our aim was to increase the number of trained interpreters and overcome some of the barriers to communication experienced by deaf people in Tanzania.

In November 2018, 27 students graduated with a certificate in Sign Language and Interpreting from UDSM. Many are already using their skills in schools, churches and public services, while 11 of the graduates are teachers in special schools with deaf units. The course is becoming an integral part of UDSM's offering and is listed as a non-degree programme in the university's strategic plan.

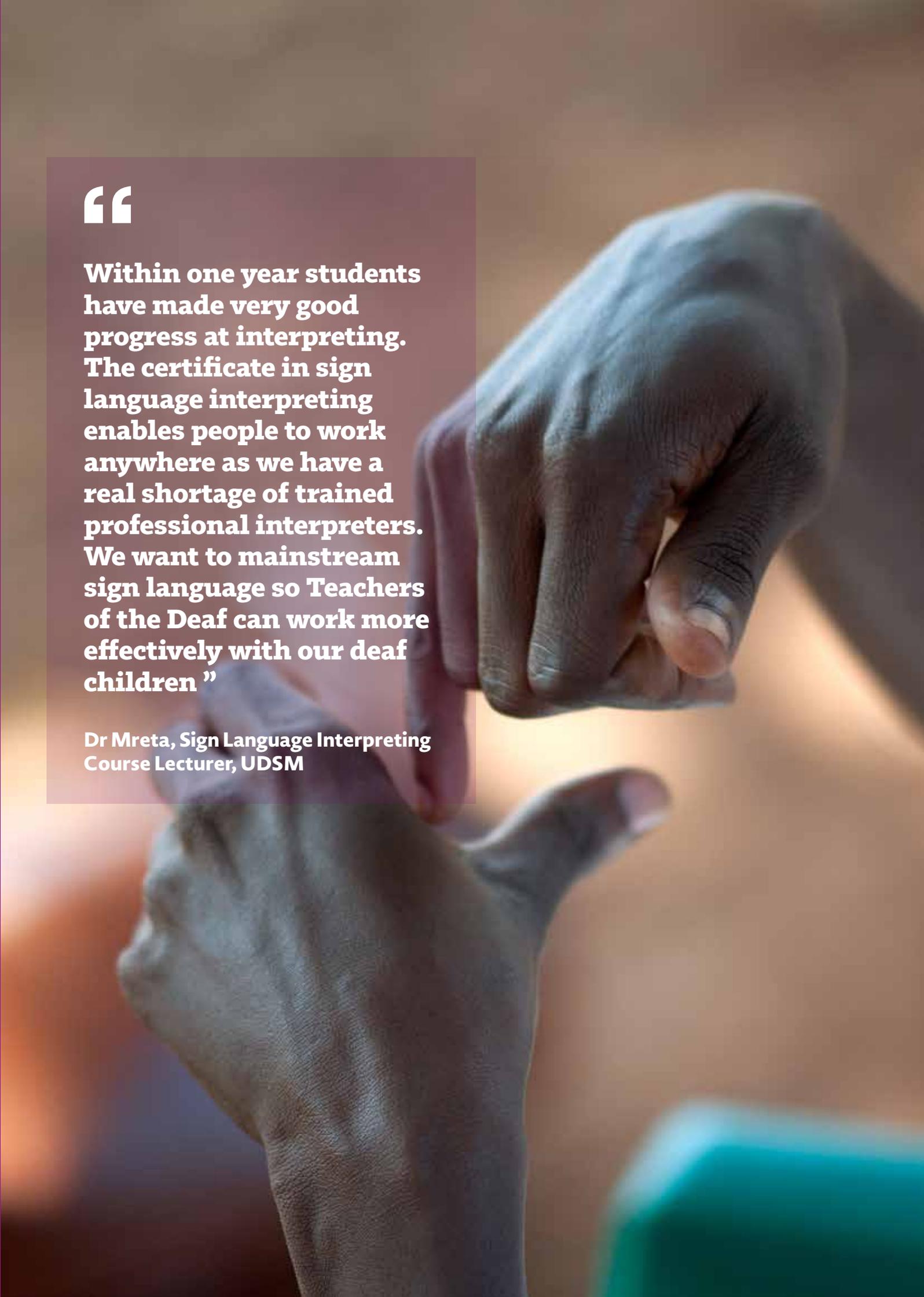
As well as supporting sign language interpreters, through partner organisations we train deaf and hearing community support workers to give basic sign language training and communication support to families and professionals.

Although families usually don't become fluent in sign language, picking up some signs from deaf adults and mixing them with gestures and words can significantly help overcome the communication challenges they face. In many cases it can give deaf children and their families the tools to communicate effectively with each other for the first time.

Recommendations for action

Governments, donors and agencies must:

- Continue to promote the importance of early diagnosis and improve access to audiology and healthcare services to ensure accurate diagnosis
- Campaign to raise awareness of the signs of deafness; improve access to support for families post-diagnosis and invest in sign language training for parents
- Prioritise supporting the development of accredited qualifications in sign language interpretation, in order to increase the number of sign language interpreters

A close-up photograph of two hands, one darker-skinned and one lighter-skinned, performing a sign language gesture. The hands are positioned in the center-right of the frame, with fingers curled and thumbs pointing towards each other. The background is a soft, out-of-focus bokeh of warm colors, including shades of orange, yellow, and brown. A semi-transparent dark purple rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing white text and a quote icon.

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Within one year students have made very good progress at interpreting. The certificate in sign language interpreting enables people to work anywhere as we have a real shortage of trained professional interpreters. We want to mainstream sign language so Teachers of the Deaf can work more effectively with our deaf children ”

Dr Mreta, Sign Language Interpreting Course Lecturer, UDSM



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After our child was found to be deaf... my neighbours and in-laws began blaming me for my child's disability. I was fed up with the censure. So the moment I heard about the support network I decided to join. Every time I visit, either attending my son's early childhood development programme, attending a parents' meeting or training session I feel a little more refreshed, a little more relieved and a little more hopeful.”

Mother who took part in our social inclusion project for deaf children in Bangladesh from 2014- 2018

Families

In the early years of life, parents and primary carers are the most important influence on a deaf child's development. For deaf children in the developing world who often grow up in poverty, a parent or family member is their lifeline to a better future.

More than 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents, and grow up in families with no experience of deafness.¹⁰ Most people have no understanding of deafness, and widespread stigma still prevails. This stigma means families often hide their deaf children away and bring them up in isolation.

Parents, especially mothers, can be blamed or seen as 'cursed' for bringing a deaf child into the world, and families often break down leaving deaf children and their primary caregivers vulnerable to abuse.

To transform deaf children's futures we must change families' perceptions of deafness. We believe it is important to invest time and resources with primary caregivers and other

core family members. We want to help them understand the potential of their deaf child, sibling or grandchild and how they can best support them.

Working with families is one of most important aspect of our work, as parents and primary caregivers often become the 'champion' for their deaf child. With the right support, parents and primary caregivers can become a deaf child's strongest advocate and key agents of long-term systemic change.



What works: early diagnosis and support

After finding out their child is deaf many parents experience feelings of anger, guilt, grief, denial and shame. The stigma surrounding deafness and disability can mean that families are reluctant to ask for help and, as a result, become extremely isolated.

Building networks where families of deaf children can come together is an important way of overcoming some of those negative

feelings. It is an opportunity for families and primary caregivers to share experiences, offer each other advice and support, and continue the process of building a relationship with their deaf child.

Community support workers play a key role in bringing people together, but it can take a long time for families to see the benefits of meeting with others and to have the confidence to join a parents' group.



Once a parent joins a group, meeting others who are experiencing the same challenges can help them to recognise their child's potential. We believe that developing a support network that will be there for deaf children long into the future will help to break the cycle of isolation. As networks grow, more parents will feel encouraged to come forward and seek support.



What works: upskilling parents and primary caregivers

Initially, parents' support groups play an important role in providing peer support, but as they evolve, many of the groups become more proactive and start to create opportunities for deaf children to socialise and learn.

Parents with more time and resources will support families who are working long hours. Parents who can read and write will help the children of those who can't. These 'resource parents' groups' have a broader remit than the parent support groups. They locate and find other families struggling in their communities and encourage them to join the group. They are trusted by other parents and family members and the knowledge they share is respected.

We support parents and primary caregivers to take on extra responsibilities by providing

training and information on deaf awareness, basic sign language and communication. Parents then have the confidence and skills to push to get deaf children into school, and to help them practise and keep learning outside of the classroom. They often develop their own learning materials and work with teachers, doctors and nurses to share knowledge. They also provide information to district and government leaders so that the voices of deaf communities are heard and acted upon.

During the coronavirus pandemic, parent support groups have also proved a vital way for families to stay connected, share information, advice and experiences. Using platforms like Whatsapp, these groups are a key way of making sure deaf children in the community get the support they need and are not left behind during this crisis.

Power to the parents

We have been working with the National Association of Parents of Deaf Children (NAPADEC) on a three-year project to improve communication between deaf children and their families in Uganda.¹¹

Dr Joyce Nalugya, Chair of Trustees, NAPADEC, Uganda, says:

“We work alongside and support 300 parents of deaf children and deaf role models that make up influential parent support groups that advocate for change. We mobilise new parents to join and we encourage parents to share experiences, information, get psychosocial support, and learn how to communicate with their children. We also conduct deaf awareness training in schools and churches, working with prominent figures such as teachers, health workers and government officials to lead on our deaf awareness efforts to break down outdated prejudices in communities.

We encourage parents from our support groups to discuss their first-hand experiences with mayors, local councils, police officers and district community development officers.

“We take the insight from the community and district efforts and we use this insight to engage with organisations like the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB), National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), Ministry of Education and Sports and higher institutions of learning like Kyambogo University.

“We are now seeing results and have sign language interpreters (who are also Teachers of the Deaf) available during exam time in primary and secondary schools. It’s important we keep pushing and challenging those in positions of power to continue to make changes so that deaf children have more opportunities to succeed.”





What works: sustainable solutions

Motivated parents' groups are some of the most effective and sustainable agents of change. They will remain long after international funders, NGOs and charities have left and they know what is best for the deaf children within their communities.

Developing long term relationships with local partners, parents and primary caregivers is critical and at the heart of everything we do. Our projects support parents' groups until they are able to continue independently. This can take years, but over time, passionate and knowledgeable parents' groups can make a real difference by fighting for the rights of their deaf children, challenging decision-makers and advocating locally and nationally for early diagnosis, better health and support services, and improved educational opportunities. As deaf children grow up, they can also play a role in these support networks and push for further change.

Catalyst for change

Since 2013 we have been working with our partner, Citizens Association For Rural Development (CARD) to support the development of parents' groups in India. In the tribal district of Ganjam in Odisha State, one of these parents' groups has become a critical source of support and advice for parents and local government.

The group regularly meets with health, education and government workers and is the key source of information on the health, communication and education of deaf children in the community. Local leaders and decision-makers respect the group and use its knowledge to help inform planning. The group's negotiating power has also led to the local allowance for deaf children being raised from 300 rupees (£3.50) to 500 rupees (£5.80) a month.

Most of the members of the parents' group are women, and the changes they have made have helped to raise their status within the community.

As one mother says: "Our confidence levels have increased and now we can interact with officials, including the disability commissioner. We can talk to everyone."



Recommendations for action

Governments, donors and agencies must:

- Understand the importance of having trained and skilled community support workers to lead on the development and implementation of parents' support groups to ensure parents' are equipped with the most up-to-date knowledge and information on deafness
- Continue to build relationships with families in order to develop more parents' support groups, and make long-term funding available to ensure these groups are sustainable
- Listen to the views of parents' support groups and make sure they inform local and national services and policies that benefit deaf communities



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As a deaf person within the workplace, I see it as my duty to be a role model. I work with parents of deaf children to overcome the fears they have about deafness, to encourage them to invest and learn sign language, and to build a relationship with their deaf child. I am a big advocate for getting all family members and the wider community educated in deaf awareness. We see first-hand the benefits this has for the deaf child.”

Peace Ikiriza, Assistant Project Manager at the National Association of Parents of Deaf Children, Uganda

Communities

Most people we support have never encountered deafness before. Anything people do know about deafness is often clouded by negative cultural attitudes and outdated myths. Even professionals such as doctors, nurses, teachers, police, religious and community leaders have little knowledge of the subject. It is an ongoing process to change attitudes and behaviours of community members and requires support and buy in from community leaders.

Deaf children rarely meet one another and few will ever meet a deaf adult. This often means that deaf children have no deaf role models to learn from and look up to and this often means they feel isolated within their own communities.

Communication barriers between deaf and hearing communities can mean that deaf children's behaviour is misread. For example, frustration at being misunderstood can be labelled as a sign of aggression or as a behavioural issue. This can lead to deaf children and young people being the target of bullying and abuse or being ostracised from community life. We believe that increasing deaf awareness throughout the community is therefore vital in bringing about change.

Working with national and international development organisations is an important part of the process. These groups will rarely have knowledge and expertise in deafness if it is not a key focus of their work. As a result, deaf children and young people often miss out on opportunities to participate in projects that could have a positive impact on their lives. To tackle this issue, we are working with our partners and a growing group of trainers to train organisations and facilitate communication with deaf children and young people.

To transform deaf children's futures we must educate professionals, practitioners, local communities and decision-makers. As these groups become more deaf-aware they will act as powerful supporters of deaf children and help to influence how their communities view and address deafness.



What works: deaf role models

Deaf role models are deaf adults, young people or children who, through their own achievements, demonstrate how some of the barriers deaf children face can be overcome. They provide support and inspiration to both deaf children and their families.

Deaf community support workers often take on this role in our projects. As many are in employment, married and living independently, they show deaf children and their communities that deafness need not be a barrier to achievement.

One of the most important roles of a deaf community support worker is to provide a link between deaf and hearing communities. They work alongside hearing staff members to ensure religious and district leaders gain a better understanding of deafness. They also help to make services and support more accessible for those deaf community members who might otherwise be neglected.

Community support workers also help deaf children and young people to improve their communication skills, self-confidence, aspirations, self-advocacy skills and positive deaf identity. They share personal experiences and practical solutions to help young people navigate the transition into adulthood and most importantly they provide invaluable information and support that a deaf child could not get anywhere else.



“I am one of four deaf employees at the Centre for Disability in Development (CDD). I am a technical officer across our project portfolio working directly with deaf children and young people across Bangladesh.

“I am being trained to be a lead trainer on deafness with expertise given through Deaf Child Worldwide. I share knowledge and insight with my colleagues, stakeholders and other organisations to improve communication between deaf and hearing communities.

“By working directly in the community, I am seen as a deaf role model. I’m often told that I am inspiring future generations of deaf children.

“The most important aspect of my work is trying to improve the environment for deaf communities now and in the future and this can only be done by engaging with those in positions of power within communities to advocate for real change. Changing perceptions of deafness takes time, but the reward is seeing first-hand deaf young people included in community life and the dramatic change this has on their life as they grow up.”

**Sarna Shah, Technical Officer,
Centre for Disability in Development (CDD),
Bangladesh.**



What works: challenging the public and professionals

We raise awareness in the community and challenge assumptions about deafness in two important ways. With support from parents, primary caregivers and our partners, we organise events where the wider community can learn more about deaf children in their villages, towns and regions. These events often include theatre productions, art competitions, dance shows and football matches – activities that the wider community may be surprised to see deaf children excelling in.

Through our training programme our partners educate professionals on deaf awareness and rights and help to transform

their attitudes. Our aim is to build advocates for deaf children so they have better access to services, support and opportunities.

The importance of this work can be starkly demonstrated through the experiences of deaf children during the coronavirus pandemic. We have seen many schools delivering lessons online or Governments using the TV to show educational videos, but these are rarely accessible for deaf children and they are left out and left behind as a result.



Educating the police force

Since 2012, we've been working with SAMUHA to improve deaf awareness among the police force in Karnataka. Our aim is for more deaf young people to report crimes, confident in the knowledge that action will be taken. By bolstering support with trusted members of society, attitudes to deafness slowly shift across communities and understanding will grow. As a result deaf young people should also be less vulnerable to abuse.

H.N. Basappa, Project Manager at SAMUHA, says: "Many police officers and sergeants lacked information and understanding of their role in harassment cases for deaf people. Deaf people would hardly ever report crimes at the police station because they couldn't communicate and the police would send them away. Often deaf people were ridiculed and bullied by the police themselves.

"We worked with the police on specific training on basic deaf awareness, importance of interpretation and Indian Sign Language, as well as helping them to understand the legal rights of the deaf community. Since the training, we now [...] get professional certified interpreters into the court rooms and we support the police for court proceedings into harassment cases that deaf members of society have put forward. The police officers that have now embarked on the training know the deaf members within the community and instead of fearing the police, deaf people are now seeing the police as allies."



What works: sharing knowledge across organisations

National and international development organisations often do not have any knowledge of deafness or how to overcome communication challenges. This means that deaf children are often left out of projects and community initiatives, including those for children and young people with disabilities.

Addressing this enormous gulf of understanding is something that we and our partners prioritise. Through our training of trainers programme we equip deaf and hearing partner staff with the skills and confidence to train local and international NGOs. The trainers we train are not only able to increase the quality of training within

the projects they work on, they also help others including children, families, teachers, local authorities, policy and decision-makers to understand deaf issues and how they can make environments and services more deaf-friendly.

A small team of deaf and hearing staff carries out the training and they also support other organisations who want to include deaf children and young people but do not have the skills to do so.

In 2019, we supported our partner World Vision India (WVI) with consultations for its Our Voice – Assembly of Children with Disabilities campaign.

“We are aiming for a 50-50 split between deaf and hearing trainees. The benefit of training both hearing and deaf staff members means we are slowly working to bridge the gap between hearing and deaf communities. This is essential for breaking down barriers that are still prevalent across East Africa and South Asia.

“By developing flexible training packages that are specific for select audience groups, we can ensure that our training is consistent and that partners are following the same policy frameworks and values as we do when it comes to safeguarding as well as improving the standard of knowledge on deafness across both regions.”

Juliet Matthews, Head of International Training, Deaf Child Worldwide



The main objective of their campaign was to find out how children with disabilities felt about the accessibility of health, education and other services, and to present these findings to local and state level decision-makers.

Jacob Devabhaktula, National Advisor – Disability Initiatives, World Vision India, says: “We have always found that deaf young people are under-represented in our consultations because of the many communication challenges. In our consultations in Jaipur and Bijapur, the Deaf Child Worldwide team was able to facilitate discussions with the deaf participants, even those who had very little language, so that they could contribute their views. They were also able to help us think about how we might include deaf children and young people more meaningfully in all our work and we look forward to further collaborating with them in the future.”

Recommendations for action

Governments, donors and agencies must:

- Consult deaf young people when designing services to ensure they are accessible and meet their needs
- Work with education authorities, police services and district leaders to improve deaf awareness and the overall environment for deaf people
- Take part in deaf awareness training and work alongside deaf community workers and role models to ensure programmes and initiatives meet the needs of deaf young people



Use of will and shall

Invitation

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tomorrow. will you Inv

all my friends are welco

all I bring my

She is also my

Our research shows that many deaf children we work with have a delay of up to ten years in developing their first language.¹²

Education

Most deaf children in developing countries don't go to school or they drop out early. Very few make it to secondary school, let alone further education. Of those deaf children who do reach the classroom, many will never get a good education.

Deafness is not a learning disability and with the right support deaf children can achieve as much as their hearing peers. In developing countries, however, there are few opportunities for deaf children to develop language at an early age. They will often struggle at school because their language abilities are so far behind those of their hearing peers.

In East Africa and South Asia, deaf children may attend specialist schools for deaf pupils. Or they may go to special educational needs schools, where they are often the only deaf child in the class. Deaf children who attend mainstream schools will usually be the only deaf child in their school too. Whatever kind of school they attend, most teachers will not know how to communicate with and teach a deaf child. It's also unlikely they'll know how to use sign language or have any deaf awareness training.

We believe a deaf child can thrive in any type of school, and progress in secondary and tertiary education if they get the right support from the start. This support needs to start at home within the family environment, so that learning is embedded into all aspects of a child's life. Parents and primary caregivers also need to be equipped with accurate information to make the right choices for their child when it comes to their education.





What works: Intensive communication

In our experience most deaf children in South Asia and East Africa start primary school with little or no fluent language – spoken or signed. This means they will not have the foundations to learn how to read and write and progress to learning learning more complex subjects like their hearing peers.

Until there is greater investment in early interventions for deaf children, they will need significant ongoing support to develop their language skills.

The best way to help a deaf child learn language is to ensure they are surrounded by and can interact with others fluent in the same language as them. Teachers also

need help to understand the language needs of their deaf students and to support them to practise and develop language skills so they can understand the wider curriculum.

For example, with our partner, Association for People with Disabilities (APD) in Karnataka, India we have brought 50 deaf children who previously went to 50 different schools together into five schools. This means that deaf students have the opportunity to communicate with each other every day. Community support workers who use sign language also come into the school to help deaf children develop their language and communication skills both inside and outside of mainstream classrooms.



Extra help in the classroom

We worked with our partner, Deaf Empowerment Kenya (DEK), to support deaf children in Babodogo School, a mainstream primary school in one of the informal settlements of Nairobi.

The project employed a deaf teacher, Mourine Aoko Odhiambo at the school to help the deaf pupils to develop their language skills and to help them learn. By having a deaf teacher at the school, perceptions of deafness slowly changed and the environment within the school became more inclusive.

Madam Mohammed was a teacher at Babadogo School, and she commented: “The deaf teacher taught us all, not just the deaf children. I learnt advanced vocabulary

in Kenyan Sign Language and lots of techniques to enhance the way I teach in the classroom. This meant the deaf students concentrated more and I became less agitated. The teaching became much more enjoyable when everyone could participate and interact together.”

Mourine Aoko Odhiambo who worked alongside Madam Mohammed at Babadogo School for four years says: “Over the four years the deaf students went from strength to strength, building up confidence in their communication and language skills to grasp difficult lessons and concepts. They all became more confident in their abilities to learn, and along the way learnt more about themselves and what they are capable of achieving.”



What works: Making secondary education accessible

For most deaf children in developing countries, education begins and ends at primary school. The transition to secondary education can be extremely challenging, with additional subjects that require students to master complex topics and new vocabulary. Teachers do not have time to adapt lessons to make them accessible to deaf children, so the achievement gap between deaf and hearing students widens, and this results in high drop-out rates for deaf students.

As topics become more complex it becomes even more important for deaf children to receive subject-based support. Across West Bengal in India, we are collaborating with and providing training for three partners, Graham Bell Centre for the Deaf, Kagenat Welfare Organisation and Children in Need Institute. We are working with several mainstream schools, giving intensive one-to-one support so that the transition to secondary school is easier. Community support workers also provide continued support to deaf children at home and small groups of deaf children get further help from volunteer community members with teaching skills and with knowledge of the different subjects that children have to master at secondary school.

While the coronavirus pandemic has made it more complex to deliver education support to deaf children, it's never been more important to innovate and deliver support in new and creative ways. From socially distanced tuition, online videos in sign language, to phone calls with parents to support them with home-learning for their deaf children, these are just some of the ways we are making sure deaf children continue to receive the education they need despite the huge new challenges emerging.

The support we believe is needed for a deaf child in primary and secondary school

PRIMARY SCHOOL

1

Support at home - Deaf children need direct access to a community support worker and deaf role models

2

Support for families - Develop skills and understanding with family members to enhance communication skills with a deaf child

3

Support at school - Teaching staff, school staff and hearing peers learn deaf awareness and deaf-friendly communication, how to adapt lessons and set up deaf-friendly classrooms

SECONDARY SCHOOL

1

Community support workers continue to build strong relationships with the deaf child and family over a number of years and encourage on-going learning

2

Our partner organisations develop strong relationships with local / authorities and head teachers /schools to support deaf children as the curriculum gets harder

3

Teachers are supported to develop visual teaching resources and learning materials to aid learning for deaf children and encourage on-going learning

4

Project teams train teachers, and hearing peers in deaf-friendly communication

5

Partners work with parents and communities to set up and support Community Resource Groups – mixed groups of parents and community members with the education, skills and time to support small groups of deaf children in their secondary education





Developing sign language skills

From 2014–17 our partner, Childreach Tanzania, worked with Moshi Technical College – a large residential college for deaf and hearing students. They trained teachers in sign language and communication skills and supported deaf students in their language and subject learning.

The head of department of special education at the Moshi Technical Secondary School said: “The deaf students have improved on performance in national exams. In Form Two in 2015, nine out of 19 students (47%) passed, whereas in 2016, 22 out of 29 (76%) passed. This is because teachers are now able to use sign language during lessons and students are also able to interact with the teachers well. There are also additional classes after 5pm for deaf children and young people.”



What works: Inclusive further and higher education

University or college is a distant aspiration for most of the deaf children we work with. Those who do get to university have often become deaf later in life and have already acquired language, communication and literacy skills. Nevertheless, they will still need to overcome significant barriers, and will either rely on other students to share or transcribe lectures, or employ interpreters.

Most deaf young people who go on to further education will attend vocational training centres or participate in projects run by local NGOs, deaf clubs or community organisations. Across East Africa and South Asia, we have worked with many partners to increase access to further education. Our partners often work with private sector businesses and governments to convince them to open up placements to deaf young people.



“I became a member of a deaf club and got involved in a project for deaf people through the Centre for Disability in Development (CDD) and Deaf Child Worldwide. I learnt Bangla Sign Language and musical choreography. I have always had a strong interest in the Arts so when CDD introduced me to another organisation called Access Bangladesh Foundation (ABF) that were offering training to learn graphic design at no expense, I jumped at the chance.

“After I completed the course, I got offered a job with ABF as an office assistant and then, when ABF organised a job fair for people with disabilities in 2017, I landed my dream position as a designer at a manufacturing and textile company.”

Mosabbir Hussain was a participant on our project, Social Inclusion of Deaf Children and Young People in Bangladesh, run by our partner, Centre for Disability in Development. (2014 – 2017)

Recommendations for action

Governments, donors and agencies must:

- Invest in training teachers so that they are equipped with the right skills and knowledge to teach deaf children
- Introduce ongoing support and assessment of language at primary and secondary levels, and provide additional support to deaf students – at school and in the community – that takes into account their specific communication requirements
- Plan and invest in provision of interpreting and communication support for those deaf students that get accepted on to university courses

94% of parents have major worries about their deaf children growing up.¹³



Independence

Preparing for adulthood and the responsibilities of independent living is challenging at the best of times. In developing countries where there is little understanding of deafness, and where unemployment is extremely high, deaf young people face huge barriers to achieving independence.

Independence is not just about finding work. It is about developing the self-esteem, resilience and skills to be part of community life, and to have the confidence and self-belief to develop healthy relationships and find meaningful employment.

But deaf children and young people rarely have the opportunity to share their views and therefore shape their lives. Communication barriers often mean that they are not consulted, even on issues that directly concern them. People wrongly assume that they have no opinions to share about their own wellbeing and future.

Because deaf children miss out on a lot of information that hearing people pick up through casual conversation, overhearing others and through radio and TV, they often have gaps in their general knowledge.

Having a narrow understanding of the wider world means that deaf young people can be ill informed on a range of topics, leaving them vulnerable to all kinds of abuse. Lack of knowledge about sexual and reproductive health issues means they can be especially vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and Aids and unwanted pregnancies.

To transform deaf children's futures we need to listen to what they have to say and empower them to understand their rights to education, inclusion and employment.



What works: Listening to deaf young people

Consulting with deaf young people and making sure they have the opportunity to work on projects and services intended for them is essential for long-term change. Joining one of our partners' projects may be the first time a young person has been encouraged to share their opinion and ask questions about issues that affect them.

Deaf young people are often left out of consultations because even organisations that work with children and young people with disabilities do not know how to communicate with them. We encourage and support organisations, businesses and not for profits to seek deaf young people's views as part of wider disability consultations.



Involving deaf young people in research

From 2015–2018, we ran an action research programme with deaf young people in India. The programme was facilitated by the Indian Institute of Health Management Research (IIHMR) in Kolkata alongside three of our partner organisations in West Bengal and Karnataka.

82 deaf young people took part in workshops, where they were encouraged to share their opinions and work aspirations. The young people told us that their career ambitions went beyond those based on vocational skills such as tailoring, carpentry and hairdressing. Some young people wanted to work for the government and the private sector, and others wanted to run their own businesses.

We visited 40 of the young people involved in the project and found out that many were undertaking low skilled, low paid jobs in the informal sector. Many of the young people felt strongly that more needed to be done to help deaf young people get paid employment in the formal sector. As a result, the vocational training programmes we support also identify and work alongside potential employers in the manufacturing and corporate sectors.

Taking the lead

67 of the deaf young people worked with their hearing peers to interview community figures including school teachers, government officials and employers to find out how much they knew about deafness and if and how they made their services accessible to deaf people. We also wanted to find out if conducting these interviews was an empowering and positive experience for deaf young people.

Deaf young people told us that taking part in the interviews had improved their confidence and communication skills, helping them to become better associated with their local community and less afraid of meeting new people.





What works: Support to make informed choices

Although there are now more opportunities to access information through the internet and smartphones, it can still be a challenge for deaf young people to use this information to make positive choices as they become adults.

In developing countries many deaf young people grow up in isolation and as a result they can struggle to build relationships. Information about rights, how to keep themselves safe and what does and does not constitute abuse is not always easily available. Responsible adults often do not communicate this information effectively if at all, meaning that deaf young people

are particularly vulnerable to abuse. This is compounded by assumptions that deaf young people are easy targets of physical or sexual violence because they are less able to report any wrongdoing.

To tackle these issues we facilitate peer to peer support networks, which offer a safe space for deaf young people to meet one another and get information and support. Focus groups are another opportunity for deaf young people to discuss sensitive topics and build an environment where they can learn together as they move into early adulthood.

Sexual and reproductive health

With our partner Signhealth Uganda we launched a project in Uganda to transform the way deaf young people access information about sexual and reproductive health. This followed a consultation with 35 deaf young people, which highlighted that communication barriers, education gaps and isolation were all impacting on their ability to find this information.

As part of the project we trained peer leaders, health workers and educators who then worked closely with sexual and reproductive health clinics to help them make their services more accessible to deaf young people and deaf young people found it easier to obtain the right information and make safer choices.

Olivia (24) was involved in the project. She leads a youth group and advises other deaf young people about sexual health. She says: “Girls in the community mostly have concerns about marriage, sex and human rights. There are cases of rape, violations, early pregnancies, abuse and forced marriage.

“I’ve been Vice Chair of my youth group for more than two years, and use the training I received from the project on leadership, teamwork, HIV and sexual health, to support other deaf young people. Without the training I may not have been as careful, as I wouldn’t have known all the ways you can get HIV. Now, I avoid risky situations.

“I often help out deaf friends who have questions about HIV, and when working in the community, I give other young people all the information I know – we can talk and stay safe.”





What works: Challenging perceptions in the workplace

Deaf young people with expertise and skills often miss out on job opportunities and work placements because of discrimination. Through our partners, we challenge governments and private sector organisations to offer the same work incentives to deaf young people as they do to their hearing peers. Our aim is to question perceptions of deafness and show how deaf young people can learn, participate in and add value across different industries.

Our partners also help vocational training centres and employers to understand deafness better so that they can make their training facilities and workplaces more accessible to deaf employees. By building these relationships we hope employers will hire more deaf young people with the right skills and expertise for the job. Employers should also have the confidence to support deaf young people in the workplace so they can perform a job to the best of their abilities.

Inclusive workforces

We are working with our partner, Deaf Empowerment Kenya (DEK) to advocate for a more diverse workforce and encourage employers to recruit and train deaf young people.

Coca Cola Beverages Africa in Kenya is one company committed to making a more diverse and inclusive workplace a reality for its approximately 2,400 employees.

John Mwendwa, Human Resources Director, Coca Cola Beverages in Kenya says: “In 2019, through their partnership with DEK, the company welcomed 11 hearing impaired employees into the workplace. This brought the total of hearing impaired youths to 18, as seven deaf youths were already employed. The youths, just like any other employee, went through a rigorous interview process and jobs were offered to those who had the most relevant experience and skills needed for the jobs available. The hearing impaired employees are working across different sites in manufacturing, as quality controllers, or in the Supply Chain department.

“Through our partnership with DEK, deaf awareness training for all staff members was conducted on four sites. This training is just the start to inform and educate staff about working with a deaf colleague while breaking down misinformation and myths about deafness that [are] still prevalent in Kenya today.

“Safety training and induction videos now include Kenyan Sign Language interpretation, and sign language booklets have been provided to employees in various departments to learn the basics on how to communicate with hearing impaired colleagues. Sign language classes will be available to any employee wishing to learn,

and four sign language interpreters have been appointed on each of the four sites for ease of communication.

“Our strategy calls for greater inclusivity at all levels of our organisation. The different employees have integrated well in the business since they joined and have brought on board valuable contributions to the respective departments in which they work. They have also been paired with a ‘buddy’ to help them learn their way around the respective sites and ensure they can have access to information and services within the company so that they can do their jobs effectively and efficiently. This is just the start and we look forward to giving more employment opportunities to hearing impaired youths in the coming years.”

Recommendations for action

Governments, donors and agencies must:

- listen to what young people say and act upon it when developing services, support and resources to help them live more independently
- work with service providers – especially health and education – to ensure that services are accessible to deaf people
- develop policy frameworks and incentives for employers to open up their recruitment policies and work placements for deaf candidates.

Concluding statement

This report highlights the specific barriers facing deaf children and young people and demonstrates a number of small-scale approaches and initiatives that have succeeded in breaking down some of these barriers.

Many of these initiatives, whilst specifically targeting deaf children, have also been shown to make a positive difference to the lives of many hearing children.

We believe that successful small scale initiatives must inform policy initiatives so that they can in turn help bring about the systemic and structural changes necessary to make our vision of a world without barriers for every deaf child a reality.

As the world has been turned upside down by the coronavirus pandemic, we have seen more clearly than ever how deaf young people can be left out, left behind and forgotten by society. But during this time, we have also seen governments around the world invest in new interventions and creative approaches to policy making at lightning speed.

As we adjust to life after coronavirus, it is important that deaf children and young people in the world's poorest communities get the right support to thrive and succeed in life. The pandemic has meant that we have all - individuals and governments - had to make changes in the way we do things. Let us work together to make this an opportunity to bring transformational change to the lives of deaf children, young people and their families around the world.

Language & Communications

Recommendations for action

Governments, donors and agencies must:

- Continue to promote the importance of early diagnosis and improve access to audiology and healthcare services to ensure accurate diagnosis
- Campaign to raise awareness of the signs of deafness, and improve access to support for families post-diagnosis
- Prioritise supporting the development of accredited qualifications in sign language interpretation, in order to increase the number of sign language interpreters

Families

Recommendations for action

Governments, donors and agencies must:

- Continue to build relationships with families in order to develop more parent support groups. Make more long-term funding available to ensure groups are sustainable in the long term
- Listen to the views of parent and family support groups and make sure their advice informs local and national services and policies for the benefit of deaf communities
- Train staff working on projects for deaf communities to empower parents with resources, and support services which allow family support networks to grow

Communities

Recommendations for action

Governments, donors and agencies must:

- Consult deaf young people in the design of services to ensure that they are accessible
- Work with those in positions of power such as educational authorities, police services and district leaders to improve deaf awareness and the overall environment for deaf people
- Take part in deaf-awareness training and work alongside deaf community workers and role models to ensure programmes and initiatives meet the needs of deaf young people

Independence

Recommendations for action

Governments, donors and agencies must:

- Listen to what young people say and act upon it when developing services, support and resources to help them live more independently
- Work with service providers – especially health and education – to ensure that mainstream provision is accessible to deaf people
- Develop policy frameworks and incentives for employers to open up their recruitment policies and work placements for deaf candidates

Education

Recommendations for action

Governments, donors and agencies must:

- Invest in training teachers so that they are equipped with the right skills and knowledge to teach deaf children
- Incorporate appropriate and ongoing language assessment and language development support at both primary and secondary levels, and provide additional support to deaf students—at school and in the community—that takes into account their specific communication requirements
- Start planning and investing now in anticipation of more deaf students reaching university in the coming years



Thank you

We thank all our partners, past and present, who are dedicated to improving the lives of deaf children globally and who are working alongside us to make sure that all these children have the opportunity to live productive and fulfilling lives.

If you would like to discuss how we might collaborate or if you would like to know more about any of our work, please email info@deafchildworldwide.org





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