

P A R E N T C O U N C I L F O R D E A F E D U C A T I O N

Sound News

Autumn 2009

Parent Support

Language

Education

Technology

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Sound News is produced by Parent Council for Deaf Education to inform and educate families with a child who is deaf or hearing impaired.

Enquiries, comments and suggestions are welcome.

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Cover artwork by Evangeline Schumacher



President's Report

Welcome to the Autumn edition of Sound News, and with it such beautiful warm days to bask in before winter bites. Our children are growing, learning and developing at an incredible rate. My own son, Christian, 14, has grown 10 cm in one year, with a size 11 foot! Babies and toddlers also grow at phenomenal rates. As parents these mighty rites of passage signify for us endless hours of work and countless hours of nurturing, lost sleep, love, patience (or sometimes lack of), trolleys of food, hopes and dreams - theirs and ours.

This journey is amazing, however, as parents with deaf children this journey can venture into uncharted territory; bewildering and challenging. Who better to help than other parents who have had this experience. Here at PCDE a diverse group of parents with deaf children have received training in parent mentoring from the Deaf Society of New South Wales.

This training has equipped parent mentors to be open, non-judgmental, empathetic and supportive to other parents and choices that they have made. This is certainly a very exciting initiative and we look forward to working in collaboration with the Deaf Society of New South Wales on this project.

A mentor would be matched to a family that has made similar choices as closely as possible. For further information on this project, please contact Teresa Thomson at tthomson@deaf.nsw.edu.au or phone 8833 3611.

Let's hope the annual hearing impaired camp will be allowed to proceed again this year. Please remind your children to ask their itinerant teachers for the information. Proposed dates are from 10-15 May, 2009.

I hope that you enjoy this edition of Sound News and if you have any queries please contact one of the wonderful duo, Kate or Juliet.

Best wishes,

Gabrielle Hill, President

Staff Report

Well, there has been much activity at PCDE over the last few months, with one new POD group recently launched, POD Northern Sydney, and another about to be launched, POD Sydney Central. These new parent groups join POD Macarthur to provide a monthly opportunity for parents to meet over a cup of tea or coffee in their local area and to gain information and support.

I would like to thank North Shore Deaf Children's Association, which voted to support the launch of POD Northern Sydney and also Fiona Fairley, a PCDE parent who has so energetically been behind the creation of POD Sydney Central. "PODs" are open to any parent, caregiver or grandparent of a child who is deaf or hearing impaired. For further information visit pcde@bigpond.com or read "What's On".

We know that as busy parents there is always a form or survey to fill out, but we would encourage you to take just a little time to fill out two important surveys relating to your child's education. One is the NAPLAN Survey and the other relates to the support you have received since your child was diagnosed.

Our partner, Deaf Children Australia, is currently polling parents to gain insight into the status of NAPLAN (national education benchmarking) testing for deaf children, so that they can raise this issue with the Federal Government. The survey is available at www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au or fill out the hard copy included in this edition of Sound News.

Do you want to be a part of a global parent movement? GPOD is a new international parent group that is polling parents around the world on the most effective and appropriate family support practices. Visit www.aussiedeafkids.org.au/gpod-survey.html to respond online.

Cheers,

Kate Kennedy, on behalf of the PCDE team

POD NORTHERN SYDNEY

Following their inaugural meeting on 23 March, 2009, Parents of Deaf support group meetings will be held monthly at Kuring-gai Library Meeting Room, 799 Pacific Hwy, Gordon from 7-9 pm on the following dates: Apr 27, May 25, Jun 22, Jul 27, Aug 24, Sep 28, Oct 26, Nov 23. All welcome.

For more information contact PCDE on 9871 3049 or email pcde@bigpond.com.

POD SYDNEY CENTRAL

A new Parents of Deaf support group will be holding their inaugural meeting on 29 April, 2009 from 7-9 pm at The Shepherd Centre, 391-409 Abercrombie St, Darlington. The first meeting will be a taste of what is to come, with an information session delivered by a guest speaker followed by the chance to brainstorm what you would like from your POD group. All welcome. Refreshments and supper will be provided.

For more information contact PCDE on 9871 3049 or email pcde@bigpond.com.

GALLERY KIDS

The Art Gallery of NSW runs Gallery Kids at 2.30 pm on Sundays. These performances are Auslan interpreted* on the last Sunday of each month (except December).

Coming up:

- 5 April, The Arabian Nights
- 12 April, When Camels Could Fly
- 19 April, Didgeridoo Dance
- 26 April, Australian Folklore*
- 27 April, Floating on a Sea of Stories
- 3 May, The Arabian Nights
- 10 May, Cartoon your Head Off
- 17 May, Adamriginal
- 24 May, Interactive Art
- 31 May, Aditi and her Rickshaw*

For more information visit www.gallerykids.com.au.

DEAF FESTIVAL 2009

The 2009 Deaf Festival will be held on Sunday, 17 May, 2009 from 10-3 pm at Parramatta Park, Parramatta. This event will be hosted by the NSW Association of the Deaf and the Deaf Society of NSW.

For more information contact the Deaf Society of NSW on 9893 8555 or TTY 9893 8858.

PENFRIEND WANTED

Would your child like to become a penfriend? PCDE are enquiring on behalf of a mother seeking a friend for her daughter aged 13 who loves ballet.

If your child is interested, please contact PCDE on 9871 3049 or email pcde@bigpond.com.

SIGNING FRIEND WANTED

Would your child like to become a signing friend? PCDE are enquiring on behalf of parents seeking a friend for their Deaf daughter who uses Auslan, preferably in the Macarthur/Liverpool area.

If your child is interested, please contact PCDE on 9871 3049 or email pcde@bigpond.com.

PARRAMATTA GREATER UNION CAPTIONS FILMS

Session times can be found in local press and will be uploaded onto the cinema's website. Upcoming movies can also be found on Media Access Australia's captioned film schedule page.

For more information visit: www.mediaaccess.org.au.

AUSLAN TUTOR REQUIRED

We are looking for an Auslan tutor to run weekly programs across Sydney.

Auslan Coffee Shops is a great opportunity for parents of deaf and hard of hearing children to come together to improve their Auslan skills and develop their networks with the support of a native Auslan signer.

Deaf people are encouraged to apply.

For the position description or more information, please contact Kelly Norton at knorton@deafchildren.org.au.

AUSLAN COFFEE SHOP

Are you a parent with a deaf or hearing impaired child wanting to learn more about sign language? Join other parents in Menai for the opportunity to develop your support networks and learn Auslan in an environment that is encouraging and understanding.

Alternatively, you could set one up in an area near you! All you need is four family members or parents of deaf or hard of hearing children motivated to attend weekly Auslan sessions and we will do the rest!

For more information or to register contact Kelly Norton at knorton@deafchildren.org.au.

CKCP WORKSHOPS

Cool Kids Cool Parents is a great opportunity to talk about the experience of raising a deaf or hearing impaired child with your partner and other parents.

This exciting workshop is guided by two trained facilitators who may encourage discussions around topics including: Sibling Rivalry, Transition Periods, Behaviour, Taking Care of Yourself, Discipline, and The Journey.

If you would like more information or would like to register for an upcoming workshop, feel free to contact Kelly Norton at knorton@deafchildren.org.au.

YOUTH GRANTS 2009

The Youth Grants 2009 is now open to all residents of Australia who are deaf or hard of hearing and aged between 15 and 21.

The Grants promote the positive outcomes of different projects undertaken by young deaf people.

Are you a young deaf or hard of hearing person and have exciting project ideas!? Are you passionate about making a positive contribution to the community!? Let us help you make a difference!

The Grants aim to recognise ideas and achievements of young deaf people from all over Australia and highlight the positive contribution that young deaf people make to

society.

Applications close 5 pm, Friday, 1 May, 2009. Good luck!

More information about the Youth Grants and the application form can be found by visiting www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au/youth_grants.

MENTAL HEALTH AND DEAFNESS

4TH WORLD CONGRESS

Deaf Services Queensland and Deaf Children Australia are proud to be hosting the 4th World Congress on Mental Health and Deafness from 27-30 October, 2009, at the Brisbane Exhibition and Convention Centre (BECC).

The theme of the Congress is 'A Life to be Lived', which influences the program and focus of all activities, emphasising the importance of connectedness throughout life's stages, from birth to early childhood, adolescence, adulthood and the aged.

The objectives of hosting this Congress are broader than just the event alone, and aim to achieve some long-term changes.

For more information, please visit the website www.mhd2009.org or email info@mhd2009.org.

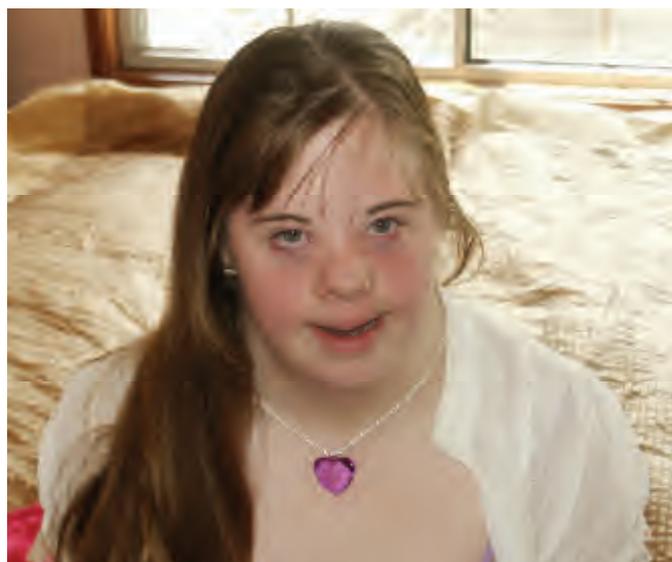
Parent Story – Sign Language in the Classroom

Hi! I'm Aileen Ryan, mother of Elysha who has Down syndrome and is hearing impaired. In the last couple of years, apart from becoming involved with Parent Council for Deaf Education and joining organisations such as AASE (Australian Association for Special Education), I have followed the struggle of many families in getting sign support in the classroom.

Personally, we have been very lucky to have teachers who are skilled in signing and working with children like Elysha who have additional needs. But we've had to push to get the best education possible for her within the public school system. Luck was with us in that the schools that were appropriate for Elysha were within a reasonable distance from us. Luck was also with us in that although I had to push here and there we ended up with an education program for Elysha that gave her the best possible outcome.

Yes, we have been very lucky but I don't understand why I should have to think this way. Surely it should have been – Elysha's needs are 1,2,3 and how can these needs best be met? I was actually told that the Department of Education always looks at what is needed for your child!

In my work I constantly meet families who are battling the education system. So few of these families get what would be best for the child they are fighting for – why? - I believe for the following reasons:



Elysha

- Families are isolated, unaware of where others are that are going through the same thing.
- There isn't a network in place to connect families experiencing similar problems.
- If we get what we want it's a one off, not to be a documented instance.
- Those who break the mould and find a way to beat the system cannot pass this information along.
- Teachers and teachers' aids cannot come into bat for your child. They are not allowed to get involved.
- We are not a majority group who can affect the outcome of votes in parliament.
- We are emotionally involved and are not considered the best judges of what would be best for our children.
- The government can take a step back, cut funding, provide inadequate education and know that in the long run it will be the parents having to cope and find solutions themselves.

We need to change all this. Whether our children are deaf, hearing impaired or have speech and/or developmental delay they deserve the best. I be-

lieve the following is necessary:

- Children are assessed on their individual needs.
- Specialised and sufficient training for teachers dealing with children with additional needs.
- A network that can inform which preschools, schools, TAFE colleges, etc are considered appropriate.
- Sign support being provided as a viable option.
- It may not be viable for all schools to offer sign support but if parents were aware of where this support was available they would have better options than are now available.
- Sign support to be at a more advanced level than that of the child.
- Understanding of other needs such as positioning in the classroom, access to note takers, etc.
- Not limiting sign language to children only with a particular hearing loss. It is totally unacceptable that deaf/ hearing-impaired children do not get sufficient sign support in the classroom. It is also unacceptable that other children using sign language as their main form of communication are not offered

sign support within the classroom. There are children who don't qualify for sign support because they have no hearing loss or minimal hearing loss BUT they are unable to speak, selectively non-verbal, autistic, have Down syndrome or cerebral palsy. These children struggle to be understood and to understand. They would benefit greatly from sign language support being included in the classroom.

The Department of Education now has two groups who would benefit from the provision of sign language support, yet we are still arguing and making little progress.

What will happen when the hearing units that provide sign language support in schools close down? What will become of the teachers who work in these units?

I believe I have given you sufficient to think about and comment upon. Please remember that the views stated in this article are mine and do not reflect upon the Parent Council for Deaf Education. In addition, my comments are in reference to sign support within classrooms for children needing and using sign language. ■

The Shepherd Centre
Giving deaf children a voice

PROGRAMS

The Shepherd Centre focuses on developing listening and spoken language in children with hearing loss. We have a number of programs for children and their families across NSW and ACT. Please contact us for more details.

LOUD SHIRT DAY

Loud Shirt Day is a fundraising initiative of The Shepherd Centre. The campaign is about having fun and incorporating colour & craziness into your ordinary day. The louder the shirt, the more support for children with hearing impairments. Register at www.loudshirtday.com.au or by calling 1800 020 030.

www.shepherdcentre.com.au 1800 020 030 (toll free)

TURN UP THE VOLUME ON LOUD SHIRT DAY
FRIDAY MAY 15

WE NEED YOUR HELP TO GET DEAF KIDS TALKING
visit www.loudshirtday.com.au to register

The Shepherd Centre

ANZCED 2009

Australia New Zealand Conference for Educators of the Deaf

July 10-12

Novotel, Brighton Beach

Real Learning-Real Outcomes-Foundations for Life

www.anzced.com

International and Australian Presenters

Prof. Mark Marschark, USA

Prof. Connie Mayer, Canada

Assoc. Prof. Alice Ericks-Brophy, Canada

Prof. Greg Leigh, Australia

Teachers, Professionals and Parents Welcome



Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children

Early Childhood Services (Hearing Impairment)
RIDBC Early Learning Program (Hearing impairment)
Located at North Rocks and a number of smaller outlets across Sydney and the Central Coast. This service provides largely centre based individual and group sessions to support children who have significant hearing impairment from birth to preschool or school entry by working with their families.

RIDBC Early Learning Program (Hearing)
Located at Lake Macquarie near Newcastle. This service provides centre based individual and small group sessions for families with young children who have a significant hearing or vision impairment from birth until preschool or school entry.

RIDBC Rocks Well Preschool
Located at North Rocks. This preschool provides a reverse integration program. The children attending Rocks Well Preschool use hearing aids and/or cochlear implants to develop listening and spoken language for communication. Children are enrolled from 3 years of age.

RIDBC Margaret Preschool
Located at Granville Park near Penrith. This service provides a reverse integration preschool. Children with significant hearing or vision impairment are enrolled from three years to school entry. Children who have a hearing impairment are taught to develop listening and spoken language for communication.

RIDBC Hunter Preschool
Located at Lake Macquarie. This preschool provides a reverse integration program. Children who have significant hearing or vision impairment are enrolled from 3 years to school entry.

Contact: Sue Beattie on (02) 9872 0217

RIDBC Roberts Reid Preschool
Located at North Rocks. This preschool provides a regular curriculum for children who use Auslan (Australian Sign Language) as their first language. Deaf children are enrolled from 2 years of age.

Contact: Jade Lenton on (02) 9872 0300

RIDBC Thomas Pattison School
Located at North Rocks, the Thomas Pattison School provides a regular curriculum for students from Kindergarten to Year 10 who use Auslan (Australian Sign Language) as their first language.

Contact: Peter Dapoline on (02) 9872 0387

RIDBC Garfield Barwick School
Located at North Parramatta, the Garfield Barwick School provides an auditory/oral program for children from Kindergarten to Year 6 who have significant hearing impairment and a consequential delay in language development.

Contact: Ann Kelly on (02) 9883 6400

RIDBC School Support Services
Part of the Garfield Barwick Centre, this service provides regular specialist teaching support for students from Kindergarten to Year 12 who are enrolled in independent schools in the Greater Sydney Metropolitan Area. RIDBC also provides a Consultancy Service to assist schools to provide appropriate and inclusive curriculum delivery to students with impaired hearing.

Contact: Ann Kelly on (02) 9883 6400

RIDBC Alice Batteridge School
Located at North Rocks, the Alice Batteridge School provides school education to children aged 4.5 to 10 years who have significant sensory impairment together with moderate intellectual impairment.

Contact: Julie Snyden on (02) 9872 0292

RIDBC Teleschool
RIDBC provides high quality education services and support to families living in rural and regional areas of Australia who have a child diagnosed with hearing and/or vision impairment. This service is provided to families using a variety of technologies such as video conferencing, telephone, email, internet and fax.

Contact: Melissa McConry on 1300 131 825 (local call cost)

Jim Patrick Audiology Centre
Located at North Rocks, this centre offers a full range of audiological services to children by paediatric audiologists.

Contact: Genele Cook (02) 9872 0872

Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children

361-365 North Rocks Road
North Rocks, NSW 2151

Phone: (02) 9872 0311
Fax: (02) 9871 2186

GPOD – A Global Parent Perspective

We need input from parents to allow us to inform professionals and policy makers throughout the world on the best ways to support families with a deaf child.

When a child is diagnosed with a hearing loss, parents and professionals need to work together in the best interest of the child and family. We are, therefore, seeking feedback from parents around the world on the most effective and appropriate family support practices available. Every family's support needs and experiences are important.

To help us understand the support needs and experiences of your family, we would appreciate it if you could take 10 minutes to complete our survey (note link below). The results of the survey will be used to produce formal recommendations for Best Practices in Family Support. This document will be presented at NHS 2010 – the final worldwide Newborn Hearing Screening Conference to be held in 2010 in Como, Italy (<http://www.nhs2010.org/nhs2010/>).

WHO IS CARRYING OUT THIS SURVEY?

Under the trees at the NHS 2008 Conference in Como, Italy, delegates from various parent groups around the world, had a meeting. We felt it was time to bring the parent agenda to the table at NHS 2010.

And so the Global Coalition of Parents of Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (GPOD) was formed with the goal of "promoting improved systemic protocols and practices which encourage informed choice

and the empowerment of families with a deaf child throughout the world."

The organisers of NHS 2010 have encouraged and supported our vision and have given parents the opportunity to inform professionals and policy makers throughout the world on the most effective and appropriate family support practices at NHS 2010.

GPOD INFLUENCING NHS 2010

"Many countries throughout the world have well-established highly successful [newborn hearing screening] programs, yet there are still countries and regions that are well behind, which need support to forge ahead...

... Still, one of the great omissions in too many intervention programs is the crucial role of parents within the process. Implementing improved systemic protocols and practices which encourage informed choice and the empowerment of families with children who are deaf or have hearing loss must be a fundamental objective to ensure the effectiveness of programs worldwide" (<http://www.nhs2010.org/nhs2010/>).

THE SURVEY

The survey is available at:

<http://www.aussiedeafkids.org.au/gpod-survey.html>. If you are unable to complete the survey online, please contact Ann Porter (contact details below) and a hard copy will be sent to you. Thank you for your participation!

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact:

Ann Porter

Aussie Deaf Kids

Email: ann.porter@aussiedeafkids.org.au

Phone 02 9956 4060 ■

Bullying – a Harsh Reality for some Children

Reprinted with permission from Deaf Children Australia.

TOM'S STORY

Tom is a sensitive 10 year old who is profoundly deaf. He attends a mainstream school in rural NSW where segregation and isolation are part and parcel of his day. His bus route to school is a nightmare; he is regularly taunted by other kids who call him 'dumb' or 'retarded' because his speech is slow. He is often excluded from conversations because he is unable to hear what his classmates are saying if they are not facing him or speaking some distance away. When he tries to join in, they regularly say: 'No, Tom. You can't play this game because you can't hear us.' The look on his face as he walks through the door after a day at school often breaks his mother's heart.

With 83% of deaf and hard of hearing children attending mainstream schools, chances are they will find themselves the only deaf child in their class or even their entire school.

Studies show that 'not fitting in' is the most common reason students give for being bullied by their peers. Students who are physically different or who are regarded as not doing as well as everyone else in the class often become the target for bullies.



Hearing aids or cochlear implants already set a deaf student apart from their hearing mates. Then there's the sign language that they may use and/or their speech which

makes them sound different.

A deaf or hard of hearing student has enough to contend with trying to keep up with what is going on at school, let alone having to worry about being intimidated by bullies. Most do not receive adequate specialist support in regular classrooms and get left behind their hearing peers, which makes them even more of a target for bullies.

Feeling isolated because of communication difficulties is a common experience for deaf and hard of hearing kids. Even with cochlear implants or hearing aids, deaf students find it difficult to hear in a large, noisy classroom or schoolyard where the background noise is high. As a result, they often get left out of conversations and activities. And of course, being alone makes them more vulnerable to being bullied.

HOW DEAF CHILDREN AUSTRALIA

TACKLE BULLYING HEAD ON

- **We aim to ensure that bullying is never tolerated**

We encourage schools to involve all staff in anti-bullying procedures, to take bullying very seriously and to take immediate and consistent action against it. Most schools now have some form of anti-bullying policy in place.

Anonymous questionnaires have been found to be very effective in helping to identify both the perpetrators and victims of bullying.

Teachers are encouraged to look for any telling behaviour in deaf children who may be reluctant to reveal what has happened to them. We assist schools to create an atmosphere of intolerance towards bullying and to ensure that anti-bullying measures remain effectual.

Peer regulation of bullying produces far more results than teachers simply 'telling' students that bullying is inappropriate. Responsibility and investment at all levels is fostered by involving the school, families and the whole community in the implementation and upkeep of an anti-bullying campaign.

- **We provide deaf awareness training**

Educating children and teachers about the needs of deaf students is a significant factor in the alleviation of bullying. Deaf children are far more likely to feel included in a classroom of children who are accepting of differences. All staff are invited to undergo deaf awareness training, to read about deaf issues and become more deaf aware. Deaf Children Australia offers deaf awareness workshops where teachers and students get to experience first hand what it is like to be deaf in a hearing world. During the workshop, participants are not permitted to speak, but have to go through everyday experiences including going to a bank, a travel agent and a counsellor, using only gestures and no speech.

- **We provide resilience training for deaf students**

Through workshops we work with groups of deaf

students to support them in building their self confidence and identity. The workshops are presented by young deaf role models who have achieved many positive things in their lives, and are inspirational to young deaf teenagers who are struggling with the challenge of being deaf. If needed, this is carried out with individual students on a one to one basis.

These workshops change lives for the better.

- **We aim to ensure that the needs of deaf kids are being met**

We assist schools to make the environment more deaf friendly for the student: for example, by introducing a soundfield amplification system into the classroom which significantly enhances sound and promotes understanding and academic achievement. Hearing students need to be made aware of the needs of deaf and hard of hearing students – such as facing the deaf student when they speak, using gestures to aid comprehension, and not blocking their mouths or turning away when speaking.

With the right support, the torment of bullying can be stopped!

We want for our children, as we want for ourselves, lives at home, at work and at play to be lives of joy and peace – Betty Williams (Nobel Laureate), Head of the Global Children's Foundation.

For more information, contact Deaf Children Australia on 1300 365196 or visit www.deafchildrenaustralia.org.au.■

What is the Difference between a Deaf and a Hard of Hearing Person?



Reprinted with permission from the National Association of the Deaf, America.

The deaf and hard of hearing community is very diverse, differing greatly on the cause and degree of hearing loss, age at the onset, educational background, communication methods, and how they feel about their hearing loss. How a person “labels” themselves in terms of their hearing loss is personal and may reflect identification with the deaf community or merely how their hearing loss affects their ability to communicate. They can either be deaf, Deaf, or hard of hearing.

DEFINITION OF D/DEAF

When we define “deaf”, the parameters of the definition should be determined. The audiological definition can be used—that is, one that focuses on the cause and severity of the hearing loss and

whether or not hearing can be used for communication purposes. Generally, the term “deaf” refers to those who are unable to hear well enough to rely on their hearing and use it as a means of processing information. Or a cultural definition may be used, as Carol Padden and Tom Humphries, *Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture* (1988) clarify:

“We use the lowercase deaf when referring to the audiological condition of not hearing, and the uppercase Deaf when referring to a particular group of deaf people who share a language—American Sign Language (ASL) - and a culture. The members of this group have inherited their sign language, use it as a primary means of communication among themselves, and hold a set of beliefs about themselves and their connection to the larger society. We distin-

guish them from, for example, those who find themselves losing their hearing because of illness, trauma or age; although these people share the condition of not hearing, they do not have access to the knowledge, beliefs, and practices that make up the culture of Deaf people.”

Padden and Humphries comment that “this knowledge of Deaf people is not simply a camaraderie with others who have a similar physical condition, but is, like many other cultures in the traditional sense of the term, historically created and actively transmitted across generations.” The authors also add that Deaf people “have found ways to define and express themselves through the rituals, tales, performances, and everyday social encounters. The richness of their sign language affords them the possibilities of

insight, invention, and irony.” The relationship Deaf people have with their sign language is a strong one, and “the mistaken belief that ASL is a set of simple gestures with no internal structure has led to the tragic misconception that the relationship of Deaf people to their sign language is a casual one that can be easily severed and replaced.” (Padden & Humphries)

People lose their hearing in various ways. The most common causes of hearing loss are:

- Childhood illnesses (spinal meningitis and rubella/German measles are the most common examples);
- Pregnancy-related illnesses (such as rubella/German measles or dependence on drugs/alcohol);
- Injury (a severe blow to the head can damage the hearing);
- Excessive or prolonged exposure to noise;
- Heredity (scientists involved with the mapping of the Human Genome Project have identified approximately fifty (50) “deaf” genes to date, and they are working on identifying the re-

maintaining 350 “deaf” genes;

- Aging (progressive deterioration of hearing in older people, which is a natural part of aging process).

DEFINITION OF HARD OF HEARING

The term “hard-of-hearing” refers to those who have some hearing, are able to use it for communication purposes, and who feel reasonably comfortable doing so. A hard-of-hearing person, in audiological terms, may have a mild to moderate hearing loss. The terms “deaf” and “Deaf” have been described above. What about “hard-of-hearing”? To answer this question, we turn to *Deaf Life* magazine’s “For Hearing People Only” article (October 1997, page 8):

“‘Hard-of-Hearing’ can denote a person with a mild-to-moderate hearing loss. Or it can denote a deaf person who doesn’t have/want any cultural affiliation with the Deaf community. Or both.

The HOH dilemma: in some ways hearing, in some ways deaf, in others, neither.”

Later in that same article, the

term is analysed further:

“Can one be hard-of-hearing and ASL-Deaf? That’s possible, too. Can one be hard-of-hearing and function as hearing? Of course. What about being hard-of-hearing and functioning as a member of both the hearing and Deaf communities? That’s a delicate tightrope-balancing act, but it too is possible.

As for the political dimension: HOH people can be allies of the Deaf community. They can choose to join or to ignore it. They can participate in the social, cultural, political, and legal life of the community along with culturally-Deaf or live their lives completely within the parameters of the ‘Hearing world.’ But they may have a more difficult time establishing a satisfying cultural/social identity.

For everyone with a hearing loss, it is a matter of deciding whether to treat it as an audiological perspective or as a cultural lifestyle. It’s all about choices, comfort level, mode of communication, and acceptance of hearing loss. ■

Can a Hearing Person ever really know what it is like to be Deaf?

This is an extract from the Deaf Parenting UK Newsletter Xmas 2008 edition and the source is the G2 'Deaf Issues', Guardian Newspaper, Friday October 10, 2008.

Sam Wollaston, the TV reviewer of The Guardian, took the challenge to live with Ramon Woolfe and his family overnight. Plunging into the deep end of living in a family where every member is Deaf, Sam writes ...

"I should have been prepared for it. I suppose—the silence. But it strikes me immediately. And, to begin with, I find it difficult. Here is a family behaving exactly as every other family in the country behaves every morning—having breakfast, getting ready for school, putting the wrong shoes on the wrong feet, and not wanting to put coats on. But someone has hit the mute button, and it is all happening in silence.

Well, not quite. After a while other, non-conversation sounds - the hum of the fridge, birdsong outside, the crunch of cereal being munched—begin to emerge out of what I originally mistook for silence. All that is missing is the conversation, the talking, whining, yelling, etc that normally goes with such a family situation. It is like a song with the lyrics removed.

Of course, there is exactly the same kind of conversation going on as any other family would have every morning. It's just that the words are being signed in-

stead of spoken verbally. I don't know sign language, though. That is why I am here: I don't really know any Deaf people, have never been exposed to Deaf culture. I am in at the deep end being a smart house on a new development on the edge of Swindon.

This is where Ramon Woolfe lives with his fiancée Louise Fitzgerald and their three children—Jasper (four), Layla (three) and Spencer (15 months). There is another on the way. All of them are Deaf. They have invited me to stay, to get a glimpse into their lives.

Later on, Ramon tells me about the first time he spent time alone with only hearing people. He was in his early 20s, and he went to Thailand to act in *The Beach*, the film of Alex Garland's book, a part that didn't make the final edit. Anyway, as someone whose family is all Deaf (they have been for eight generations), and who had always been surrounded by Deaf people, this was his first experience of having no other non-hearers around him. He found it hard to begin with: he was lonely, excluded, bored. It was the first time he properly realised that he was Deaf, he says. But then he saw that he just had to get on with it.

My situation here is hardly the same. Ramon was a long way away for three months; I am an hour or so up the M4, for 24 hours. But it is the first time I have spent only with Deaf people, the first time I have really thought about not being Deaf.

But for now, the correct shoes are on the correct feet, coats are on, and it's school time. Red Oaks primary school is just a five-minute walk away with two small roads to cross. As Jasper and Layla scuttle

about the place, Ramon and Louise, unable to get the audio clues to their whereabouts, probably have to do more meerkating than hearing parents would. Jasper, the dreamer of the family, is reminded to look both ways before crossing the first of the roads. At the second, there is a lollipop lady who signs “Good morning”.

Red Oaks is about as good as it gets for Deaf children—a new school, with an open-minded head teacher, who was especially welcoming to ideas about how to make school more inclusive for Deaf kids. A lot of the impetus came from Ramon and Louise. Now the school has a sign bilingual inclusion manager, a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter, and specialist teaching assistants. All the hearing children are given the opportunity to and are encouraged to learn BSL, as well as to learn about Deaf culture.

It’s not just the school and the lollipop ladies who are Deaf-friendly round here. On the way home, we meet a neighbour who says she is starting BSL classes next month. I get the impression that having Ramon, Louise and their kids around here has done a lot to make this small corner of Wiltshire a little less scared of Deafness.

Back at the house, we have coffee, and Louise makes a Victoria Sponge cake. I am getting used to the silence—in fact, enjoying it. Once you realise that no one says anything round here, it is actually really nice. When little Spencer bumps his head, he cries—aloud, but not loudly. If a hearing 15-month-old cries at volume eleven, Spencer is on about six. Perhaps that is the natural default level of crying and hearing kids

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just bawl louder to get more attention. There is no point in Spencer bawling any louder, and he knows it. All in all, and even with Spencer's bumps, there is a lovely peace about the house.

But communication is a disaster. Well, not quite a disaster, but it is a slow and tiring process. I am a mumbler, so difficult to lip read. And when Ramon and Louise speak, I find it hard to understand. Together, that is not an ideal recipe for a good chin-wag. They are both excellent and patient teachers, but I am slow to pick up any sign language at all, and I forget it easily. It goes in one eye and out the other. The most frustrating thing about it is that our level of conversation remains pretty basic. We are saying things that are easy to say rather than anything we want to say. That is the same with any language barrier.

Ramon takes me to his office upstairs. His Hollywood career over (for now), he jointly runs a media company called Remark that does pretty much everything, from TV production to internet design and BSL training. He is also on all sorts of boards and panels—a very active member of the Deaf community. Louise works two days a week as a senior early year's practitioner at a Deaf school in London, but she has just gone on maternity leave.

Here, upstairs, the level of our conversation picks up because Ramon has a computer in front of him: he types so that I can read on the screen. This is a bit of a cop-out, I know, but it is hard work the other way and it would be nice to say more than just "London" and "coffee". He tells me about how strong Deaf culture is, how language is essential to it—more than essential,

language is Deaf culture—and why it is vitally important to provide his kids with sign language from a young age so that they can communicate with the world naturally.

It's interesting how you get to know about things happening round at Ramon and Louise's. If they are near each other, they will wave or touch a shoulder to attract attention. But if someone is some distance away, or has their back to you, you do not want to have to walk all the way over in order to communicate. So a thump on the table or a stamp on the floor works. It can be quite startling if you are not used to it. Sometimes they flick the light switches. The sound—and, more importantly, the reverberations—of extra banging in the house indicate more people.

Aha, visitors. It is Ramon's parents, who live close by. I find Ramon's mum easiest of all to understand: when she signs for me, she does it slowly and exaggeratedly with special extra facial expressions. It is like a cross between BSL and charades. She is one of the BSL teachers at Red Oaks, so she knows a thing or two about what novices will and will not understand. Grandad sits on the floor and plays with Spencer, then cuts the grass.

It is interesting seeing all of them together over lunch. With four, the dynamic obviously becomes more complicated than with just two, and involves turning to different people, checking and bringing each other in. There is a musicality about it, like a string quartet working closely together. It is quite beautiful to watch.

I realise that these are the observations of an igno-

rant observer and could be seen as a bit crass, but an ignorant observer is what I am, so crass is what you get. Here is something they may not thank me for pointing out: Deaf people eat quite loudly, especially four of them together. Actually, they probably won't mind. Why should they care?

In the afternoon, with Jasper and Layla now home from school, it is time to go to the pool. Layla has been on about it ever since I arrived this morning. Swimming is one of my first BSL words (it is not a difficult one), and from the start she makes sit clear—with her index finger—that I am expected to participate. It seems that I am going to be in at the deep end literally this time.

At the local health club, the swimming instructor takes charge of Layla while Ramon encourages Jasper, swimming backwards up and down the pool with his son splashing after him. There is a lovely intimacy about Ramon teaching his kids stuff—because of the eye contact that is needed, the focused attention, the closeness. The results are so obvious and rewarding, and not just in the pool. He tells Layla that we are going to go to a place called The Owl to eat, and she copies the owl sign (two big round eyes, basically). Then, when we get there and she sees the carved wooden bird, she makes the owl sign and looks to Ramon for approval. Lesson learned.

It is just as impressive when he needs to tell them off. All the shouting is done in the look—he looks them in the eye and does a three-two-one countdown, to indicate how many seconds they have got to get into line. It is all about eye-contact: you could not be afraid to look someone in the eye if you were Deaf.

The learning, the chat and the eye contact do not stop in the car, either. When he is driving, Ramon can see the kids in the back in the rear view mirror, and he is constantly checking up on them, communicating, teaching. Hey, you may want to look at the road in front from time to time, Ramon (although he does explain that he has heightened peripheral vision). I ask him if he ever uses the horn. No, he says, why bother?

On the way to The Owl—actually The Tawny Owl—I am in the back with the kids. In the front, Ramon and Louise are talking away to each other. For the whole day, they have included me—not just included me, it has really been about me, and everything they have done has been directed towards me. This is probably the first time all day that they have had the chance for a little chat between themselves. And guess what? I feel left out, excluded—especially like this, with their backs to me. They are laughing, too. Maybe they are laughing at me. And saying how much they hate me, and what a nightmare it has been having me there. Oi! Hello? Hearing people like to know what's going on too.

It is a pathetic comparison to make, really, but perhaps, in those few minutes, I get just the tiniest hint of what it is like for the Deaf among the hearing, all of the time.

In the pub, we are all seated round the table, and I am the centre of attention once again. As I should be. Sam the photographer is with us now, and I feel strangely resentful that there is another hearing person around. Louise, Ramon and their kids have been so nice and welcoming and inclusive to me—maybe that

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is why I feel cross that there is someone else around to share it. Encroaching on my territory.

The kids are getting a bit tired now. Time to go home and bed for them. How do they know if Spencer or either of the others is crying, I want to know? Louise shows me an electronic device she has pinned to her. It will vibrate if someone rings the doorbell, if the house is on fire, or if one of the children is crying. During the day they do not really bother with it because the kids are always around and they just know if one of them needs something. But at night they put it on.

We have a cup of tea and Louise watches East Enders, with the subtitles switched on, while Ramon watches a film on his laptop, one that he is going to do BSL interpretation for. They can do this at the same

time, in the same room, which is nice. At one point the sound on the telly comes on—I don't know why, perhaps someone hit a button or something. It is probably at the same volume as I would normally have East Enders on in my house, but it feels incredibly loud and intrusive, and it ruins the atmosphere in the house. It is not bothering them, of course, but I ask Ramon to turn the sound off. Even after one day, I am really appreciating the silence that had worried me only this morning.

Right, that is me done for the day. It is hard work, being at the deep end, both metaphorically and literally. At least I will sleep well in this lovely, silent house.

In the morning, Louise asks me if I was woken up by Spencer crying. "No, I didn't hear a thing."■

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Launch of the Auslan Tutor: A Device to help Children and Families access Auslan

Under a crystal blue sky and the refinement of a large marquee, dignitaries, Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children (RIDBC) staff, other service providers, volunteers and parents gathered for the launch of the innovative Auslan tutor. The device has already been dubbed, “the best Auslan resource ever.”

An innovation by the staff of RIDBC, the signs are downloaded from iTunes as an application, onto an iPhone, or onto an iPod touch. There are 500 commonly used signs loaded for use. The signs are organised into a single sign, a phrase, and then a sentence, with an Auslan explanation at the bottom of the page accompanying each sign. The signs are brought to life with Alex Jones, the legendary Deaf actor, signing and smiling at you in video clips from the palm of your hand!

A mother, Sarah from Lismore, described her journey with her three children, including one son profoundly deaf. Sarah praised the device’s portability and accessibility. Sarah described how it could be extracted from her handbag in a flash to rapidly provide information on how to produce a sign on demand. A

trip to the zoo was now fun and spontaneous, with the whole family being involved in all those magic moments. Sadly, previously, parents often missed those frequent language opportunities by not knowing a sign, tragically delaying language development - but not now!

Melissa McCarthy, Manager of RIDBC’s Teleschool, spoke of how wonderful this device was for families scattered across remote parts of Australia, with no access to a Deaf community or signing classes. These families now had instant access to a baby computer, easing communication with their deaf children.

Bill Shorten, Federal MP for Disabilities, delivered an inspired and informed speech on the difficulties facing parents negotiating the road to securing quality services for their child. The Minister was committed to quality early intervention and gave the device a road test with Ronnie Lam, RIDBC’s Multimedia Instructional Designer.

Many other highly skilled personnel, including multimedia engineers, Auslan experts and early childhood specialists from RIDBC, have been involved in developing this landmark product. Visit www.ridbc.org.au/auslantutor for more information on how to purchase the RIDBC Auslan Tutor. This was indeed a very happy day; a celebration of human and technological ingenuity.

And the finale, tea and cucumber sandwiches, of course!

Gabrielle Hill
Representing PCDE at the Launch ■

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