

Deaf Focus Group

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HEALTHWATCH SANDWELL | WALKER GRANGE, CENTRAL AVENUE, TIPTON. DY4 9RY



Background

Healthwatch Sandwell (HWS) are the independent voice of the public in health and social care services. We collect feedback about people's experiences of using health and social care services in Sandwell and use that feedback to work with service commissioners and providers to look for ways to improve services.

One of the ways that we do this is to carry out projects that focus on particular services or groups of people using services in Sandwell. On this occasion in partnership with Sandwell Deaf Community Association (SDCA), HWS facilitated a focus group with adults who are deaf and hard of hearing.

The aim of the focus group was for people to share experiences of health and social care in Sandwell. This took place on Tuesday 10th December 2019 at 2pm at the New Deaf Centre, Summer Street, West Bromwich B71 4JA. The session was attended by 14 people.

Feedback from the focus group

There was a general discussion about people's experiences of health and social care in Sandwell. The group shared positive experiences and expressed appreciation of the National Health Service.

The group gave feedback about their experiences which has been divided into 3 headings:

1. Communication issues
2. Appointments with General Practitioners (GPs)
3. Experience at Accident and Emergency Department (Sandwell General Hospital)

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Finally, the focus group collectively offered advice to commissioners and providers of health and social care services on how to improve services for deaf and hard of hearing people.

1. Communication Issues

The participants recalled numerous experiences, where they have been a patient for years and the healthcare provider knows that there is need for a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter, however one is **not** organised. The group expressed their frustration with this as it was a regular occurrence and it meant that another appointment has to be booked. The group described how difficult it is to get an appointment in the first place (see heading 2). This situation adds to an already stressful situations, i.e. feeling unwell.

When deaf patients persevere with the consultation without a BSL interpreter it invariably results in misinformation and then misdiagnosis. People gave experiences of having to write down what their symptoms were due to no interpreter being present. The group described how English is difficult for deaf people who use BSL.

It was felt that healthcare professionals including GPs do not understand the role of BSL interpreters and would benefit from training.

Also, it was raised that there needs to be a choice of interpreter especially in relation to gender.





The effectiveness of some BSL interpreters was raised, some interpreters arrive late and miss the appointment, or don't turn up even when booked. The group suggested that they would like to give feedback on the quality of interpreters both positive and negative. They recommended that only yellow badge¹ interpreters (Level 7) are utilised. See appendix one for details of levels of registration.

The group suggested that there should be more videos with sign language interpreters explaining information e.g. TV with sign language or sub titles in health and social care settings. There is also a need for a system so that the deaf person knows it is their turn to be seen, not names being called out as they invariably miss the appointment due to not hearing the instruction.

2. Appointments with GP

The group identified that there were GP practices where it is difficult to obtain an appointment, sometimes with a 2 to 3 week wait. A person described being asked to arrive at the surgery at 8.00 am and there were over 30 people waiting outside, when they reached the front of the queue there were no appointments. Sometimes they have to hang on the phone to get connected, which is also frustrating. Some were concerned that when they visiting the surgery to make an appointment the surgery is empty and yet they cannot get an appointment.

¹ National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD) list two categories of registered Sign Language interpreter <https://www.nrcpd.org.uk/>

Some people have been advised to book appointments via the internet and some said that there no appointments for 3 weeks. This is a national issue for the general public as well as those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

3. Experience at Accident and Emergency Department (Sandwell General Hospital)

There is a loop system/accessible system which is useful for those who people who use hearing aids.

The participants described difficulties with the booking process, it was felt that the staff have little knowledge of their own systems. One participant identified the New National Commissioning-Framework for Hearing Loss Services² which was launched in July 2016 and commented that the NHS staff are unaware of this framework.

One participant described an experience while experiencing asthma attack at A & E at SGH. The receptionist misheard the word 'dead' instead of 'deaf'. This person was pressurised to give personal details but due to her communication difficulties offered to write it down, but the receptionist declined, and the patient was embarrassed.

A patient described a consultation with an on-call A & E Doctor who agreed to e mail their GP about what had occurred and what treatment was required. When the patient visited their own GP, no e mail had been sent which meant that no treatment was given. The patient had



² A new guide to help organisations responsible for planning and commissioning local hearing services for deaf people and those with diminishing hearing is launched by NHS England .



to re tell their story and a diagnosis had to be sought from GP, although they had gone to A & E as an emergency.

The law, deaf and hard of hearing people and service provision.

The Equality Act 2010 is a law which protects people from discrimination. It means that discrimination or unfair treatment on the basis of certain personal characteristics, such as disability which included deafness, is unlawful.

Employers and providers of goods and services to the public are legally required to make reasonable adjustments to assist people with disabilities in recruitment, employment and to allow them to access goods and services.

For deaf people and hard of hearing people, reasonable adjustments might include providing communication aids or services, such as a British Sign Language interpreter (BSL)³.

Advice and Recommendations to commissioners and providers of health and social care services

- Put yourself in patients' shoes and empathise, try and understand how difficult and challenging life can be. Perhaps commissioners of services and Senior NHS Bosses need to meet deaf people at SDCA.
- Please be more accountable to and transparent the deaf community especially how money is spent.
- A British Sign Language Interpreter to be booked in advance and

provided at each consultation with a medical and social care professional.

- Only engage Registered Sign Language Interpreter (RSLI) – Yellow Badge as recommended by National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People.
- Healthcare and social care professionals including GPs and receptions to understand the role of BSL interpreters.
- Commissioners and staff to be familiar with the National Commissioning Framework for Hearing Loss Services (2016) and to implement its recommendations.
- People who are hard of hearing or deaf need extra time for a consultation, 10 minutes is not enough at the GP.
- Consider different ways of having an appointment e.g. SKYPE with sub titles.
- Ensure that there are adequate and timely GP appointments.
- Use videos with sign language interpreters and/or sub titles explaining information in reception areas.
- Add individual needs to patient records, especially the need for a BSL interpreter.
- Ask the deaf community for feedback on effectiveness of BSL interpreters.
- To understand the service that is be commissioned, talk



³ BSL Interpreting is the process of transferring a spoken or signed language into another spoken or signed language to ensure that effective

communication takes place. S/he usually interprets simultaneously, i.e. at the same time as the language is spoken or signed



to Sandwell Deaf Community Association.

- Provide better hearing aids (NHS), as they don't last very long.

CONCLUSION

The focus group were appreciative of being able to meet and share their experiences.

Examples were given whereby providers of health and social care services were not meeting their legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 i.e. provision of a British Sign Language interpreter.

The groups experiences of health and social care were varied, with some positives. The key issues related to the need for an effective BSL interpreter during appointments/consultations and staff training.

The group agreed to meet quarterly and to invite key health and social care professionals to the meetings.

For more information:

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Appendix one

British Sign Language Interpreters

Registration

Qualified BSL interpreters should be registered with a professional organisation, such as the National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD) or The Regulatory Body for Sign Language Interpreters and Translators (RBSLI). This means the interpreter has to agree to adhere to the code of conduct, as stipulated by the organisation with which s/he is registered. <http://www.bsl-link4comm.co.uk/information/working-with-bsl-interpreters.html>

Categories of BSL Interpreter

There are two categories of registered Sign Language interpreter with the NRCPD <https://www.nrcpd.org.uk/>

- Registered Sign Language Interpreter (RSLI) – Yellow Badge

A RSLI is a BSL interpreter that has met the recognised standard of competence and professional practice through the successful completion of a formal qualification. Once qualified, interpreters are allowed to use the initials RSLI to indicate their professional status.

- Trainee Sign Language Interpreter (TSLI) – Purple/Blue Badge

As stated by the NRCPD, TSLI status is available to people who are undertaking an approved sign language interpreter training course or an approved development plan leading to registered status; (this usually requires the TSLI to have achieved BSL skills of Level 6 or equivalent)

