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by Damarah Gayle

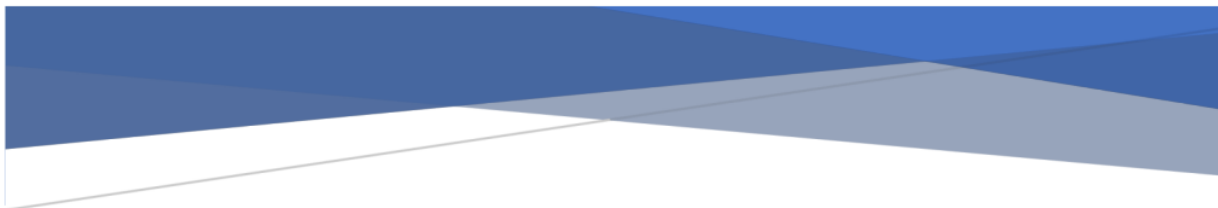
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Contents page

Introduction.....	2
Deaf community.....	2
Needs and issues in the community	4
Aims for health and social care improvements	5
Current initiative	5
Conclusion	6
References	8

Introduction

8

"Some people think they are in community, but they are only in proximity. True community requires commitment and openness. It is a willingness to extend yourself to encounter and know the other."

- David Spangler

A community is often defined as a group of people who live in the same place and share similar viewpoints or have particular characteristics in common (Simon, 2018). It can vary in regard to socioeconomic class, race, gender, age, ethnicity and culture (MacQueen et al, 2001). Community is an essential source of social ties and may help bring individuals together by providing them with a sense of belonging (Wray-Lake, Christens and Flanagan, 2014). The focus of this report is to provide additional support to the assessment one presentation which identified the health and social needs of the Deaf community in Birmingham. This paper will outline the community's primary features, demographics and social care requirements. It will further examine regulations such as the Care Act 2014, Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act 1996 to discover how the deaf community are safeguarded within society. Theories such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Social identity theory and social capital, will also be explored to acquire a better understanding of how belonging to a community can have positive impacts on individuals. Deaf Awareness Week has been chosen as the initiative to investigate further and see whether it has been beneficial in its aims.

Deaf community

In the United Kingdom, there are approximately 12 million people who have a type of deafness ranging from mild to profound (World Health Organisation, 2023). As aforementioned, the Deaf community within the Birmingham area is the focus of this report, there are 152,000 people within this city that live with a type of deafness (Birmingham City Council, 2023). The Deaf community is considered to be closed, meaning that members within the community must either have a partial or full loss of hearing. They also share similar life experiences and are able to communicate freely with one another with the use of British sign language (BSL). The deaf community includes people from many areas of life; anybody may become deaf, whether they are born that way or develop it later in life. Deafness is not limited by race, gender, age, or socioeconomic status (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, 2021).

It has been noted that there may be difficulties to increasing social capital in the deaf community (Cawthon et al., 2016). Social capital is characterised as social interactions,

trustworthy connections, and shared beliefs that benefit society as a whole. Social capital is classified into three types:

- **Bonding** - Individuals in the deaf community who interact with one another using sign language are bonding, these are the deep relationships that have developed within that group
- **Bridging** - This occurs when connections are created outside of the community. It can refer to health and social care professionals who need to communicate with a deaf person, by contacting someone who can translate by sign language they can obtain the correct information.
- **Linking** - Defined as relationships between people with different levels of social authority that can assist with resources that would not be available without the connection. Past support and provisions are instances of linking. It can provide deaf people with employment, education and other services.

Despite the fact that creating social capital in the deaf population is challenging owing to the communication barrier. When that barrier is overcome, social capital has a demonstrable beneficial influence on promoting quality of life in a community and can boost agency, which Frie (2008) defines as the ability to initiate social changes and act freely.

Social identity is also very important within a community. It encourages the way they see themselves and communicate with others. When a person feels like they have become a part of a group they feel validated which leads to a sense of belonging and a positive view of their identity. McLeod (2023) suggested that there are 3 stages of how individuals behave and communicate within a group.

1. Social categorisation – where we naturally place objects in categories to identify them
2. Social identification and this is when we find the category that we would belong to
3. Social comparison where a person starts to compare their group (US) to other groups (THEM) and this is where possible prejudice and discrimination can take place because of the constant competition to maintain self-esteem.

For many years, communication hurdles existed between the hearing and deaf communities, posing a daily difficulty (Abou-Abdallah and Lamyman, 2021). Communication is essential in the deaf population since it is how they share and receive information. Communication is a core human right under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and according to Attard (2022), it is a psychological need that is the cornerstone of all relationships and is critical for mental health and self-satisfaction. Communication and digital technology advancements

have considerably improved the lives of deaf individuals. Education, entertainment, and socialising have become more accessible as a result of technological improvements such as video relay services (VRS), which allows deaf individuals to make phone calls through a sign language interpreter, and social networking, which allows for real-time connection regardless of location. The media has also grown more accommodating to the deaf population, with subtitles, closed captions, and sign language interpretation available (Omoso, 2023).

Needs and Issues in the Deaf Community

The biggest issues within the deaf community are communication, lack of knowledge, societal attitudes and the lack of access to language or assistive equipment, particularly in healthcare settings (Musau, 2021). There are many ways in which people can communicate with Deaf people, but unfortunately, there has been reports that due to decreased deaf awareness, this has been a cause for concern and has been known to contribute to poor mental including stress and frustration (University of Leeds, n.d.). Inadequate communication has also resulted in inequities in health care and the dissemination of erroneous information.

Deaf patients believed that they should be able to refuse to have a family member interpret for them, and that their privacy should be valued. According to Mencap (n.d.), the government implemented The Accessible Information Standard (AIS) in 2016, which required the National Health Service (NHS) to provide information in a way that all people with disabilities could comprehend. Despite the fact that this was adopted, deaf charity SignHealth (2022) revealed that five years later, 37% of healthcare personnel had gotten neither training nor resources to carry out the support. Due to this, deaf patients have reported that their needs were rarely or never met, and they have been put at risk of misdiagnosis, missed appointments and inadequate medication information. According to Morisod et al. (2022), deaf people experience worse health outcomes than hearing individuals and are at greater risk of high blood pressure, diabetes and developing chronic illnesses.

Another issue that the Deaf community faces are discrimination and negative societal attitudes also known as audism, which claims that one is superior depending on their ability to hear (Berke, 2020). There has been a clear link between stigmas and poor well-being in the Deaf community as the world has been designed for the hearing population (Mousley and Chaudoir, 2018). It has been reported that biases are the cause of educational attainment and gaps within employment. Currently, in the United Kingdom, 65% of deaf people are in work in comparison to 79% of hearing people (British Academy of Audiology, n.d.). Also, it was found

that on average, in comparison to hearing people, Deaf people were paid £2000 less per year and they are currently facing inequities within the workplace.

Goals for Health and Social care improvements.

Many deaf people may not believe themselves to have a disability because they can do everything a hearing person can except hear. However, under the Equality Act of 2010, deaf people are protected and should not face discrimination (National Deaf Children's Society, 2023). This legislation addresses issues such as giving deaf persons with a government-funded grant known as access to work, which assists companies with the expense of making changes to guarantee deaf employees have equal access to perform their job duties.

Not only does equality protect deaf people, but the Care Act 2014 assures that all public services are offered to deaf people without violating their human rights (CQC, 2022). Furthermore, the Human Rights Act 1988 empowers individuals to protect their rights ensures that they are treated fairly, equitably, and with dignity (UK Government, 1998). Unfortunately, deaf people's rights are often disregarded owing to social stereotypes and wrong preconceptions.

The goals within the deaf community are to be recognised as equals and to be empowered. Health and social care goals, pertaining to the deaf community is based on effective communication so their health needs can be validated and effectively met.

Current initiatives

Currently, the main focus is spreading awareness about the deaf community, allowing hearing individuals to learn ³² and gain a better understanding of deaf culture and promoting inclusivity. As previously mentioned, the largest barrier in the deaf community is communication. There are currently 24, 000 persons ³⁰ who use British Sign Language (BSL) as their first language (Luton, Allan, and Kaur, 2021), and there are 300 kinds of sign language used globally (National Geographic Society, 2022). Sign language is a method of communication used by the deaf population to communicate with one another or with someone who is hearing but has learned to sign.

A government act was approved in 2022, making BSL officially acknowledged as a language in England, Wales, and Scotland (Legislation.gov, 2022). Although there would be no immediate improvements, this method will enable equal access alternatives in health care and education over time. The impact of the sign language act is unknown because it was not

implemented until 2022. However, research indicates that sign language communication is the key to overcoming the existing restrictions that the deaf population faces (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Because to the passage of this legislation, many businesses have made significant modifications to make their services more accessible to the deaf population, as well as to introduce innovative concepts that promote diversity. A few examples include the television network ITVX, which debuted a channel that only utilises signed material and is projected to develop and supply more content in the future years. Also, if successful, BSL might become a recognised GCSE qualification, with implementation beginning in 2025 (Kosse, 2023). While these developments are great, more commercial establishments must guarantee that they are implementing modifications that give assistance to deaf people from the outset, rather than as an afterthought.

In the UK there are also events such as deaf awareness week and sign language week, that take place each year to raise awareness about the deaf community. These events can build confidence in the hearing community when communicating with deaf people and highlight the barriers so they can be better understood and combat discrimination (RNID, 2023).

Conclusion

Overall, throughout this report, it has been established that the deaf community have faced many hurdles within society. They have faced discrimination and negative societal biases that have caused a divide within the hearing and deaf communities. The quality of health care services has not met their needs and the lack of communication adaptations has caused health, education and employment disparities. Through the implementation of the BSL bill in 2022, there are many changes to come that will promote inclusivity within the deaf community to eliminate the barriers that they are currently facing and provide accessible health care.

This report proposes that more business establishments make the necessary changes to accommodate deaf employees, although this will require funding for training and adaptations, the overall aim of closing the gap between the hearing and deaf community will be beneficial to society.

15

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