



I-Sign press release

For release: 25 June 2009

Government invests £800,000 in future provision of sign language for deaf children

Deaf charities lead largest ever sign language project focused on the needs of deaf children

A consortium of deaf charities and educational establishments has been awarded almost £800,000 by the Government to ensure the future provision and improve the status of British Sign Language (BSL) for deaf children in England. Parents of deaf children and Diana Johnson, Parliamentary under Secretary of State at the Department for Children, Schools and Families, today celebrated the launch of the *I-Sign* project at a family event at NCVO, in central London.

With the funding the consortium will run the two year *I-Sign* project to help families with deaf children who use BSL learn the skills they need to communicate effectively; improve the BSL skills of people working directly with deaf children and their families; develop a higher level qualification for communication support workers who assist deaf children in the classroom and increase the availability of BSL teachers, courses and interpreters.

Until now, the communication needs of deaf children using BSL at home and in school have been overlooked. There is currently no national framework for children and families to learn BSL. And in the home setting, a lack of suitable family focused BSL training courses for families has left too many parents struggling to communicate with their deaf children.

In the education system, communication support workers, who are employed to support deaf children in the classroom, often do not have an appropriate level of knowledge of BSL to work effectively with deaf children. Yet, deaf teachers, who do have knowledge to

share, are unable to access a qualification framework in a format that enables them to teach those that require their BSL skills. On top of this, the current dearth of BSL interpreters is exacerbated by the fact that there is no recognised qualification framework for educational communication support workers.

The consortium, which includes the BDA, Signature (formerly CACDP), Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education, Merseyside Society for Deaf People (MSDP), the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS), RNID and UCLAN, will work to rectify the vast lack of sign language provision and will aim to raise greater awareness of BSL as a communication option for families with deaf children.

Susan Daniels, NDCS Chief Executive says:

“The *I-Sign* project will make a huge difference to the lives of deaf children who use British Sign Language (BSL). At present too many deaf children are excluded from so much in both their home lives and at school, because they can not communicate with those around them. Families with deaf children and the professionals working with them are also left frustrated and upset that they don't know how to communicate effectively with them to help them learn, develop and feel valued and included.

“This project will pilot work at a number of different levels to help deaf children who use BSL access the world around them when they are at home, at school and as they grow up and enter the work place. At every stage of their lives the communication support deaf children need should be available so that they are able to get on with their lives without any fear of communication barriers”.

Simon Wilkinson-Blake, BDA Chief Executive adds:

“As a community united by the use of British Sign Language, our members know only too well from personal experience the very significant communication barriers currently felt by deaf children, their families and the professionals working with them. Consequently, the BDA is delighted to have this opportunity to work with *I-Sign's* partners in delivering new services to overcome some of these barriers. We also hope that this project leaves a lasting legacy of benefits, not only for this generation of deaf children, but for future generations as well.”

The consortium represents a unique partnership of national and regional organisations, each one bringing a great deal of experience and expertise to the project. All partners have excellent links throughout the deafness field and with education professionals.

-Ends-

Notes to editors

Photos available on request

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About NDCS

- NDCS is the national charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people. We represent the interests and campaign for the rights of all deaf children and young people from birth to independence.
- NDCS believes that the family is the most important influence on a deaf child's development. NDCS supports the deaf child through the family as well as directly supporting deaf children and young people themselves.
- Three babies are born deaf every day and 90 per cent of deaf children are born to hearing parents with little experience of deafness.
- There are 35,000 deaf children in the UK.
- Parents with concerns about their child's hearing can contact the NDCS Freephone Helpline on 0800 800 8880 (voice and text) or email helpline@ndcs.org.uk open 10am – 5pm Monday to Friday, or access the website at www.ndcs.org.uk

BDA Notes to editors

- The BDA is the largest Deaf organisation in the UK that is run by Deaf people. It represents the Sign Language community, which is united by shared experiences, history and, most importantly, by British Sign Language (BSL).
- The BDA wants to see a society where Sign Language users have the same rights, responsibilities, opportunities and quality of life as everyone else. BSL was recognised as an official British language on 18th March 2003, but it still does not have any legal protection. This means that Deaf Sign Language users do not have full access to vital information and services, including education, health and employment. The BDA wants to see an end to this.

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RNID Notes to editors

RNID is the largest charity working to change the world for the UK's nine million deaf and hard of hearing people. We do this with the help of our members by campaigning and lobbying, raising awareness of deafness and hearing loss, providing services and through social, medical and technical research.

For further information about RNID or to become a member, visit www.rnid.org.uk, contact RNID's Information Line on 0808 808 0123 (freephone) 0808 808 9000 (textphone) 0780 0000 360 (SMS) or email informationline@rnid.org.uk.

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Signature notes to editors

Signature promotes excellence in communication with deaf and deafblind people so our vision of a society in which deaf people have full access can become a reality.

We encourage greater understanding of deaf and deafblind people and the languages and communication methods they use; offer accredited qualifications in relevant subjects like British Sign Language, which you can study at more than 700 locations across the UK and Ireland; and administer the National Registers for Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind people.

We are a charity registered in England and Wales, and Scotland.

www.signature.org.uk