

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this research project was to acquire as clear a picture as possible of the current situation of deaf people living on the Isle of Man. In particular, the aim was to discover whether they enjoy the same quality of life as hearing people and, if they don't, to make recommendations as to how to change this situation for the better.

This research was restricted to those deaf adults who are profoundly, pre-lingually deaf, plus those who attended a school for deaf children or who received other specialist education. The research focused on 10 specific areas of deaf people's lives and a total of 25 deaf people, ranging from 18 to 89 years were interviewed, plus 14 of their hearing relatives.

### **FINDINGS**

#### **The range of support currently given to deaf people by hearing relatives**

Hearing relatives are currently giving deaf people a very significant amount of support, most of which involves the translation of written or spoken English. Whilst this support is well meaning, none of these relatives are appropriately trained or qualified in providing such support. The result of this is that deaf people are inevitably missing out on a great deal of vital information - in particular in health-related situations (where their lives and health are potentially at risk as a result of a lack of communication or of miscommunication) and occasionally in situations involving the police and/or the courts (where potentially their liberty is at stake). In addition, having relatives (often parents) accompany them to a variety of appointments, severely compromises their ability to function as independent adults.

#### **Communication**

The 25 deaf people interviewed do not form a community of deaf people who are all fluent in BSL (British Sign Language). Due to lack of access to BSL early in life, or lack of the opportunity to use BSL since leaving school, only 5 are considered fully fluent and 9 fairly fluent. Nearly one third of those interviewed therefore had no sign language whatsoever.

The above has very significant implications for the provision of appropriate communication support in that simply providing the services of a qualified BSL

interpreter will not solve the problem (other than for the 5 people who are fully fluent in BSL).

## **Education**

It is clear from this research that the majority of deaf people living on the Isle of Man have received a significantly poorer education than their hearing peers. Despite this, or perhaps as a result of it, 18 of the 25 said that they wanted more education or training. Some of the types of training requested were in relation to improving their BSL and their literacy skills, but there was also a wide range of other training requested e.g. maths, psychology, mechanics, building etc.

Whilst deaf people are perfectly capable of successfully undertaking additional training, they will not be able to do so without the provision of appropriate professional communication support.

## **Work**

Of the 25 deaf people interviewed, 22 were of working age and of these, 18 were currently in work of some kind.

However, serious concerns were expressed about the lack of appropriate support from the Isle of Man Job Centre and the majority of those interviewed felt strongly that deaf people on the Isle of Man did not have the same job opportunities as hearing people.

Currently on the Isle of Man there is no system for providing professional communication support for job interviews or for work-related training or meetings and in the vast majority of work settings no flashing light fire alarm system or reliable other procedure for alerting deaf employees to the fact that the fire alarm is going off.

## **Social and/or community involvement**

Most of the deaf people interviewed were involved in a wide range of social activities. However, there is still a danger that deaf people living on the Isle of Man can become socially isolated from a range of social activities that hearing people take for granted - e.g. many of those interviewed noted the lack of any subtitled showing of films at the cinema - despite the fact that this is now the norm in the rest of the UK.

## **Feelings**

There is a very clear feeling on the part of those interviewed that they do not have the same life chances as hearing people living on the Isle of Man. In addition, deaf people and their hearing relatives perceive a negative attitude towards, and lack of understanding of, the needs of deaf people by the government, employers, service providers and the general public.

## **Isle of Man Government**

Whilst there was some awareness of some of the services that the government provides to deaf people, there was also a clear feeling that neither the government decision makers nor their service providers understood the needs of deaf people and that, as a result, there were many vital services which should be provided - but are not.

## **The Manx Deaf Society**

Around half of the deaf people interviewed were not aware of the range of services which the Manx Deaf society provides to deaf people living on the Island. Amongst some of the younger deaf people there was a feeling that the services provided were not appropriate to their needs as they were focused more on the needs of older deaf people. There was also a feeling on the part of some of those interviewed that the society was there to meet the needs of people who were profoundly deaf and used sign language and that this excluded those who have less severe hearing losses and/or do not use sign language.

## **Leisure**

Whilst deaf people interviewed seemed, on the whole, to be aware of the range of leisure services available on the Isle of Man, there were some significant concerns about lack of equal access to some of these services and about lack of deaf awareness on the part of their staff members.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the interviews carried out, it is very clear that, in many areas of life, deaf people living on the Isle of Man have a much worse quality of life than hearing people. It is of particular concern that in relation to situations where deaf people's health, lives and liberty are at stake, there is currently no system for the provision of appropriate communication support - thus placing deaf people at serious risk. The good news is that this situation can be changed for the better.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The recommendations at the end of this report are divided into three sections, those which should be addressed immediately, those which should be addressed urgently and others. Whilst all of the recommendations are important, those in the first section relate to situations where deaf people living on the Isle of Man are currently facing serious risk to their health, lives or liberty - and it is vital that these recommendations are implemented immediately. In summary they are:-

1. Assess each deaf person's individual need for communication support.
2. Make funding available and establish clear procedures to ensure that such communication support is provided in every situation where a deaf person's life, health or liberty is at stake (i.e. medical appointments and situations involving the police and courts).
3. Provide training for all deaf people in how to access and use the appropriate communication support.
4. Provide a minimum of a half day deaf awareness training course to all GPs and their surgery staff where there is currently a deaf person registered with them. Make this training available to as many hospital doctors, nurses and other staff as possible.
5. Provide a minimum of a half day deaf awareness training course to all Judges working on the Isle of Man and to a range of other legal professionals.
6. Provide a minimum of a half day deaf awareness training course to all front line emergency services staff on the Isle of Man (fire, police, ambulance, coast guard).
7. Provide flashing light/vibrating pad baby alarms and smoke detectors to all deaf people living on the Island who need them.
8. The Isle of Man Government should ensure the safety of deaf people at work by making it compulsory for all employers of one or more deaf people to either fit flashing light fire alarms or, as a minimum, to carry out a risk assessment in relation to deaf employees and to create an appropriate emergency plan/procedure to ensure their safe evacuation in the event of a fire or other emergency.
9. Specialist mental health advice should be made available to those deaf people living on the Isle of Man who may need it.
10. A post of full time champion/support worker/development worker for deaf people should be created on the Isle of Man.

Recommendations in the 'urgent' section include suggested reviews of current service provision to deaf people at the Isle of Man Job Centre and the Isle of

Man College and of the range of environmental equipment which is currently available to deaf people living on the Island. They also cover areas such as the provision of appropriate communication support in relation to work-related situations, the provision of BSL classes for deaf people and of deaf awareness and BSL classes for a wide range of hearing people, access to text phones and telephone relay services and access to written information in general. Finally in this section, there is the suggestion that serious consideration be given by the Isle of Man Government to bringing in the Disability Discrimination Act and/or other legislation which would ensure that deaf people were treated equally with hearing people.

Recommendations in the 'other' section include additional suggestions in relation to deaf awareness and BSL training, in relation to the role of the Manx Deaf Society, in relation to the provision of subtitled showing of films and the provision of interpreters at the theatre and suggestions that similar research projects should be considered in relation to hard of hearing or deafened people and to deaf children.