



The Oxford Diocesan Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODCD)

Profile

'This profile brings alive something of the diversity of the deaf and hard of hearing community across the Diocese of Oxford. These stories show a depth of passion and faith that the wider church needs to connect with, deeply. These faith journeys are crucial to our explorations of discipleship and how we nurture it, and to our concept of mission, and how we pursue it. Churches grow when they are caring, inclusive and outward-facing. This chaplaincy role is an exciting opportunity for someone to be pastoral, reflective and prophetic.'



Alison Webster, Deputy Director of Mission (Social Responsibility)

Background and Vision

In recent decades, considerable technological and sociological changes have taken place which have affected the deaf and hard of hearing community. Not least is the introduction and now common use of cochlear implants for the young profoundly deaf, giving a modicum of hearing for most profoundly deaf people of working age or younger. This coupled with a change in education has led to a broader use of lip-reading amongst the young, bringing more integration with those outside the deaf community. However, ODCD has historically served the BSL using community. Many of those currently served by ODCD have therefore grown older with ODCD, and very few younger deaf people have been reached in this new environment. Our recent experience in working with deaf youngsters has revealed young deaf people who were overjoyed to meet with other similarly deaf people, as 'I have not met another deaf person my age before'. We need to reach out to all deaf and hard of hearing people, not just those who depend on BSL, including those who may already be integrated into parish churches or society at large. In addition to supporting those we hold, this requires new thinking. It is recognised that to extend the work to the deaf and hard of hearing of under retirement age adults and children will be innovative and may require time-consuming work in a specific pilot area or areas within this geographic 'area of ministry' in the first instance. This new work and pastoral care to existing deaf and hard of hearing within this 'area of ministry' will be a high priority.

Our aim is for a ministry which will be flexible enough to encompass deaf and hard of hearing people of all ages, whatever their favoured method of language and communication. We have a number of volunteers who can assist in this. To this end we aim to develop greater understanding of the needs of deaf people within the mainstream churches through education and support, and to encourage provision of appropriate communications and technology within churches to facilitate this. As this would be in addition to the established services for deaf people, we recognise that this will take up resources of personnel, time and energy. These may not be readily available at present, but as new roles become established, we envisage that within the next five years some progress will be made towards this.

Current Priorities

ODCD is centred on its work with the deaf and hard of hearing throughout the Diocese of Oxford.



Though we aim to do more for the young deaf, our main communities of welcome to worship and study are currently in Maidenhead, Oxford, Reading, and Slough with our flagship of good parish practice being at the Cross and Stable Church Milton Keynes, where the services particularly cater for the deaf and hard of hearing each month, with signed services in their main Sunday worship. Shown below, deaf church member George is signing.



George writes,

I live with my parents in Milton Keynes. I'm 23 years old and I'm the eldest of three, with a younger brother and younger sister.

I was ten years in mainstream school, learning English, Maths, History and Geography as well as taking special lessons in BSL which I passed at Level 1 and 2. I enjoyed learning new things and I made a lot of deaf friends, and some hearing friends as well. I wasn't very happy after my move to secondary school as some of my friends weren't that brilliant, but I concentrated on my lessons as I wanted to make progress and get ready for my future.

I was at Milton Keynes College for about 4½ years. In the first two years I did English and Maths and Life Skills (like money and community and how to get a job). Then, I moved on to 2 years doing I.T. That was excellent. I really improved. My last course was in Media and Film, which was quite hard for me. I did several work experience placements while at school and college: Newport Pagnell Library and the Co-op in Newport Pagnell, and an office work placement at the college. They helped me to learn how businesses work and to decide what job I'd like to do in the future.

When I left college I started looking for work. It took me about a year. I did volunteering while I was looking, helping at signing classes and at the Job Centre. I did work experience at Morrison's and learned about health and safety and how a supermarket works. Then the Shaw Trust helped me get a job in Sainsbury's café. That's a real-life job and it's been brilliant for me. I've received certificates and awards at work including 'Best Colleague of the Year'. That was a real shock! I thought they were teasing but it was for real. Next year I'm going to London for another work award.

I help at Cross & Stable Church as part of the signing team. I sign hymns and readings as well as the Lord's Prayer and the responses. At Christmas I will be doing carols and I'll help people feel welcome. I first came to Cross & Stable Church when I was young, but I got involved again about 4 years ago when Sue Baines (a BSL teacher) told me about the signing team and persuaded me to join. I love it.

In the past I've been part of a drama club. I was involved for 10 years. I've done sign acting as well as BSL interpreting for the Christmas panto. There were some changes at the club and since starting work I've needed to concentrate on that, plus saving money and hopefully getting ready for living independently.

At times I find it hard to join in the deaf community, as sometimes I don't get to hear about deaf events and I don't want to force the situation. Also some things happen in work time and that takes priority. These days I'm concentrating on work, and enjoying being part of the signing team at Cross & Stable. We also reach out to churches and deaf communities throughout the Diocese of Oxford, and have arranged days for children who are deaf or hard of hearing, so that they may meet together.

Another member of that church Elizabeth, shared an interview with her vicar:

Elizabeth is a member of Cross & Stable Church, Downs Barn in Milton Keynes, which she attends with her husband Les. Elizabeth was born and grew up in Western Kenya by her mother. Elizabeth was part of a big family, with three brothers and sisters and lots of half-brothers and sisters and other mothers in the family. Elizabeth learned to sign at her primary school, which was a boarding school for the deaf started originally by Dutch missionaries and a good hour's journey from home. Kenyan sign language has a number of differences from BSL. The alphabet, for instance, is one-

handed, American-style. Elizabeth is multilingual in all sorts of ways, including signing. Secondary school was a deaf vocational school and Elizabeth did a nursing and caring course connected to a local hospital. It was at the hospital that she met Les. He had come from England to work as a volunteer teacher at a boys' polytechnic and one of his friends was working at the hospital as a volunteer matron. Les was invited to a birthday party and Elizabeth was a fellow guest.

Elizabeth and Les began their married life in Kenya but then moved to England, where their two children, Christopher and Joanne, were born. Chris is in the throes of university applications and hopes to do PPE at Oxford. Joanne is in Year 9 and is starting her GCSE courses. They're both hearing but good signers. "Joanne learned to sign very young", says Elizabeth. "One of her first signs was 'ice-cream'!" Elizabeth is a determined learner. When she told her family in Kenya she wanted to be a copy typist, they said, "You can't do that", but she points out, "I went to a hearing teaching college and succeeded in qualifying".

Here in England she has learned to swim and to cycle, and she enjoys driving. She passed her test first time in 2005. The biggest challenge had been to find a teacher. She had to search and search to track down a good teacher willing to take on a deaf pupil. Elizabeth likes to be busy. Her priority is home and family, but mornings and evenings she works as a cleaner. She enjoys opportunities to meet up with deaf friends and has a number of craft skills. At one time she was part of a deaf sewing group.

Elizabeth first found out about Cross & Stable Church when a lady at Homestart told her about the signed services there. That was back when Chris was just a toddler. Like many Mums, Elizabeth has known the isolation of caring for infants at home while her partner is having to be out at work. But she still describes one of her greatest joys as family and seeing the children grow up and thrive.

Being deaf has had its frustrations, like people who tell her she can't do things which she knows she can, or the lack of understanding by Government departments at times (DVLA included), but, says Elizabeth, there are advantages like being able to switch off sometimes!

And new technologies can be a great help in communicating with friends around the world – by text, Skype or Facebook. They've helped Elizabeth to keep in touch with her oldest son Kenneth, who's doing development studies at university in Nairobi, and catch up with friends in Germany and the USA. For Elizabeth it's 'total communication'. She is used to living with hearing people and is a good lip-reader, but she loves the chance too to be part of a signing community.

Pat, a member of Cox Green Church says:



I am in my sixties, and live in Slough. I am now retired, but worked for over twenty-five years with people who had various disabilities, helping them on work placements, including teaching them how to use the bus, how to shop, how to find work and other "ordinary" life skills. Now retired, I am doing voluntary work in Slough, and volunteer at Oxfam locally. My hobbies are doing cross-words, computer games, and learning about different religions from documentaries. I would like to travel all over the world, and have booked to go somewhere warm over Christmas!

I am a member of the Roman Catholic Church and I regularly worship at the monthly Cox Green Deaf Church Service run by ODCD. My local Roman Catholic Church has a link with the Church of England. The reason I come to the Deaf Church, is

because it is easier, because it is in the sign language I understand. The Catholic Church only gives services in spoken English, with no interpreter, but I have very little hearing, and so do not know what they are saying, especially in the sermon, so I just recite the rosary to avoid daydreaming. I did have a friend who interpreted a little bit, but she died some years ago, and no one else is available. I have asked my local church, but they only provided some signing during the Mass, but do not sign after the Mass service is over. That is why I like to come to Deaf Church, because all the service and the preaching is signed in BSL, and I can get a full picture of what the priest or lay preacher is signing in the sermon.

My Christian faith means a lot. When I go to church, I feel an inner peace within me. I understand God better every time that I come to Deaf Church, because I can understand better: it helps me to improve and gives me strength and confidence. I feel much better when I come to Deaf Church: it is really good.

I would like a chaplain who could sign BSL, and make me feel comfortable without worrying about being a Catholic, but would accept me as I am, so I could come and take communion. The Catholic Church does not really approve of you taking communion in the Church of England, but I feel they are both the same, so, what does it matter?

I would like to say to other Christians, "Respect each other, respect that we're all one church. Whether we're Jewish, Hindu, Catholic, Church of England, we are all equal. The church should welcome anybody. If they believe in God, that's fine, we're all equal. It doesn't matter if they don't believe in God, as they are all welcome to God."

One of our Licenced Lay Ministers, and Council member, Ken writes,

I retired six years ago, and now volunteer for church visiting, and am an LLM with the Deaf Church of ODCD. I am also on the executive committee of Reading Deaf Centre, and Secretary to it. My main hobbies are sailing and cycling, which I definitely enjoy. I have two adult children with three grandchildren between them. They live between North Oxfordshire and Essex, so living in Reading, I have to do a lot of driving backwards and forwards, visiting!

Within the deaf community, I enjoy all the talking we do in our own sign language: sign language is good for telling stories, and they can be very funny! The difficulties of being deaf are those of communication. For example, when driving to north Oxfordshire, I stopped off for food, and was asked what I wanted, but because of the background noise, people could not hear me, and I could not speak above the noise.



As a Christian, I believe that my life comes from God. I owe God everything, and I have to give something back: it saved me from depression when I was young, so it is important to me. I would like the hearing church to take more interest in the deaf church. Before, we tried to go to a hearing church, but we stopped, because we could not understand. The deaf church is a small group. The hearing church should be more aware, Roger Williams (the previous chaplain) tried in the past, but it's difficult making the hearing church aware of the deaf church. I would like to see more chaplains to the deaf, especially chaplains who are deaf themselves (there are several), but few deaf people have enough education. We need a chaplain who would welcome the young deaf and bring them in.

My main message to the churches, is that a lot of people don't understand what Jesus said, they need more education, and to read for themselves. Deaf friends often have the wrong idea: recently deaf people were arguing about whether Jesus was a Jew or not – they have no idea! Deaf schools are declining. They used to teach religious education, but now, they don't – it's a problem for the hearing churches as well."

Ben, our part-time chaplain to the deaf writes,

I have been a chaplain with deaf and hard of hearing people for 21 years. Before then I worked in two parishes in different parts of the country. What drew me to this form of ministry was that it was different from other forms of ministry I had experienced, I relished the challenge of learning a new language, and getting to know deaf people, to be among them, to see their slant on the world. It has been a challenging and deeply rewarding experience. At the moment I work part time for Oxford Diocesan Council for the Deaf. This is a charity and works with deaf and hard of hearing people to meet their spiritual, social and general needs, and to help give them a voice in church and society.

The work I do is not of course limited to sign language users. There are many more who experience hearing loss who lip read to a greater or lesser extent. Some lip read as an alternative to sign language. These people may be profoundly deaf and manage to integrate into the hearing world. Others experience hearing loss due to their age. Some people overcome their hearing loss by making use of hearing aids which are a great help. But the amount of help depends on the degree of hearing loss and they do not give back hearing to the degree of 'normal' hearing – they do not for instance help the user detect the direction a particular noise is coming from. And they not only amplify particular sounds but all sounds around the user so that in large gatherings, as with many church meetings and services, holding conversations and hearing people properly can be difficult. Another barrier to using hearing aids is the perception that they are something to be ashamed about (unlike glasses) some people just like to complain that "people are mumbling" and cope as best they can.



There are an estimated 2000 people in the Oxford Diocese with a total or severe hearing loss, and up to 70 of these are currently active members of the deaf worshipping communities. One in seven members of the population are reckoned to have a significant hearing loss, and their needs and potential contribution are not generally recognized in the hearing communities.

I work within a team of lay and ordained persons. And I work across the Diocese. In the same way as parochial clergy have oversight over people in a particular geographical area, so I think of myself as having concern for deaf and hard of hearing people who live in Oxford Diocese. I take services in Sign, and support deaf people through pastoral problems, I take funerals in sign, as well as being with deaf people at happier occasions like Baptisms and weddings.

I would very much like to encourage clergy to get involved in the deaf Church, to come and work with us, to get involved in this unique form of ministry.

So, what we all would like to say is,

Please join us in an exciting opportunity for nurture and mission. You will be involved in pastoral care and a pioneering element potentially across all churches in the Diocese as we look to the future. This chaplaincy post is radically different from parish ministry. Though many pastoral needs remain the same, deaf people have particular needs in a hearing dependent church and society. As chaplain you will have an important role of priestly guidance, care and support, creating an environment in which to appropriately share faith within and beyond the deaf and hard of hearing communities. This post attracts Housing Allowance or enhanced stipend, and will require travelling. The job is to lead the chaplaincy team in the support of the deaf and hard of hearing community across the Diocese of Oxford. You do not need to come with prior knowledge of signing, though it is expected that you will undertake training with us in the first years to bring you up to BSL level 3 so that you may communicate effectively with those for whom this language is key.

You will have a leading role of support and nurture with the assistance of a small chaplaincy team. You will be involved directly with worship and pastoral care sensitive to the needs of the deaf and those who support them, including a team of volunteers. This team work will include liaising with those responsible for places of Anglican worship who need guidance in providing appropriate facilities for the deaf and hard of hearing. You will take the lead in the pioneering work of reaching out to every church in the Diocese of Oxford in a measured and balanced way. This is so that, in particular, the young and working age who are deaf or hard of hearing may be offered the opportunities of the chaplaincy. This is important in an age where recent strides in technology, particularly cochlear implants and speech recognition, have enabled increased independence, but isolation from others who share an outlook focussed on communication to the deaf.

In this large geographical area, we are very fortunate to have a committed team of volunteers visiting isolated deaf and hard of hearing people. These volunteers are willing to respond to requests for pastoral need via the chaplains. Such requests come from our good relationship with each of the county Social Services within the Diocese, and of course the churches.

You are being invited to be part of this commitment of the Diocese to a community where communication is key, and every member matters. Deaf and hard of hearing people have a lot to offer to the Christian community in their depth of fellowship and desire to communicate the Gospel convincingly across a variety of communication avenues.



If this could be you, please consider applying for this exciting post using the application form supplied or on our web site: <http://www.odcd.org.uk/>

Please also feel free to ask me any questions or explore the idea further with me, Rev'd Tim Edge, Chair of ODCD by telephone on 01993 773438, or by email to tim.edge@talk21.com.

We look forward to hearing from you.