

# ANNUAL REPORT



**2024-25**

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# CHAIRS REPORT – JO NICOLLS

Another year has passed already! Deaflink continues to provide invaluable support to the D/deaf communities in the Northeast.

Starting on a positive note, the BSL Act 2022 is beginning to have an impact, and the first GCSE will be available in some schools very soon. We may have a generation of people who can sign.

Many people do not appreciate or understand how hidden the D/deaf communities are. As we have moved to a world of digital and automated services it is increasingly difficult for us to have our say, to engage or explain what their needs are and therefore we continue to be ignored. Without Deaflink we would fall through the gaps.

It is wonderful news that the Newcastle and Northumbria Hospital Trusts have committed to 3 years funding to our Health Navigator work, supporting BSL users on their hospital pathway at very difficult times in their lives.



I am pleased that this report shows some of the ways that Deaflink engage and work with the various communities. It is encouraging to read the feedback from clients; it helps us identify the reality of hearing loss and how important it is to share our experiences with others.

Finally, thank you to the dedication and commitment of the people who make Deaflink tick – the volunteers, the trustees and the staff. Well done on another successful year.

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I stepped into this role six months ago and have had the pleasure of continuing the fantastic work of **Louise McGlenn**. It's been a rewarding experience getting to know our clients and supporting them through this vital project.

### What We've Been Working On

The Hard of Hearing work has been focussed on groups and reducing the isolation that hearing loss can bring. However, for several years we have seen a steady increase in referrals from audiology services and individuals seeking help with replacement devices. This has meant we have had to divert some of our resources to helping clients who have been told to contact us by the local Audiology Service.

We've also built strong partnerships with equipment providers, helping clients access solutions more quickly and efficiently.

In this year we supported 123 people, 82 of these were sent to us by Audiology. For many people, hearing aids and assistive technology can feel overwhelming—and this often impacts mental health and confidence. But with the right guidance and support, lives can be transformed. Clients gain the tools to adapt, reconnect, and participate fully in life.

*"I feel more confident and ready to begin the day today with use of a hearing aid."*

# HARD OF HEARING WORK

Rosie Davison  
HARD OF HEARING  
INFORMATION  
WORKER

*“The speakers at the meetings are always interesting and informative. I enjoy their talks.”*

## THE HEARING LOSS SUPPORT GROUP

Our Hearing Loss Support Group has grown steadily throughout the year. Many individuals who have received one-to-one support are now participating in group sessions to stay informed and connected. These events feature guest speakers, Q&A sessions, and social opportunities, creating a welcoming space for learning and peer support.

### Looking Ahead

I'm excited to continue delivering **inclusive, supportive services** through our one-to-one work and group sessions. By focusing on **connection, education, and empowerment**, we can help more people embrace hearing technology and feel confident navigating life with hearing loss.

Thank you to all who have contributed, participated, and supported this work. I look forward to what we'll achieve together in the year ahead.

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Above is guest speaker- Clair Seago, Audiology, NuTH



Hearing Loss Support Group – Grace Pinson Bradley from Phonak explains equipment.



# REGULAR BSL GROUPS



## WALKING GROUP

Once a month, we organise a walking group that explores a variety of intriguing locations. This year locations have ranged from the sandy shores of Tynemouth beach and the Ouseburn, bursting with creativity and culture.

We also marvelled at the towering Angel of the north. Penshaw monument offering panoramic views. The botanical gardens were very relaxing and the Victoria tunnel, where stories of the past echoed.



## DROP IN CHAT GROUP

Those who attend the sessions often say how enjoyable it is to meet with friends using their preferred language, British sign language (BSL).

The laid-back atmosphere creates an ideal setting for a social gathering, where there is much laughter and lively conversations. Many attendees have mentioned their excitement for the next drop-in, eager to continue building connections and sharing experiences in this welcoming environment.



## DEAF FORUMS

Deaf forums are held four times a year at Brunswick methodist church on Saturday mornings for two hours.

This year we had discussions on domestic abuse led by Lou Redpath from sign health, BSL accessible apps presented by Charles Murphy, first aid and CPR training by Loveness Scott from NEAS, and fire safety tips from Louise Coulthard.

Thank you to the volunteers for your help – we couldn't do these without you.

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## Michelle Perrie



# KNITTING, PATCHWORK & CROCHET GROUPS

The knitting, patchwork and crochet groups taught participants new skills.

Those who attended reported that these activities helped them get out of the house, connect with others, and engage in a creative pursuit that they found both calming and satisfying.

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# CHRISTMAS EVENTS



## CRAFTS

This group embraced the festive spirit with Deaflink by creating handmade decorations to add a personal touch to their Christmas celebrations.

Everyone created some special memories and wonderful decorations. It did take us several weeks to get rid of the glitter!



## CHRISTMAS LUNCH

Thirteen people attended the Christmas lunch at the Sambuca restaurant on the quayside. The atmosphere was lovely and relaxing.

To our surprise, the staff demonstrated a strong understanding of communication techniques. When asked, they informed us that their chef is deaf. He came over to introduce himself to the group.



## THEATRE

We arranged to attend the performance of 'A Christmas carol' at Northern Stage.

What truly set this experience apart was the integrated approach of the BSL interpreter, who skillfully accompanied the actors on stage rather than remaining in a traditional corner. This allowed us to engage fully with both the performances and the translation, creating an atmosphere that heightened our enjoyment of the performance.



# HEALTH NAVIGATORS

**Claire Hoggeth  
& Fahmi Syeda**

“I can't thank you enough for taking the pressure off me and sorting interpreters for him 😊” – family member of a BSL user who was admitted to a hospital.”

“If it were not for Deaflink I would be lost, I really appreciate that Deaflink was set up and I hope it continues. I feel Deaflink is my support link, they are very reliable, I can rely on them, and they never let me down. Deaflink are amazing, really amazing and I want to say a big thank you for their help. I really appreciate them and think they are wonderful, thank you.” Health Navigator client, March 2025

The Health Navigator project has now been running for three years! In that time, we have worked tirelessly with our partners from Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospital Trusts (NUTH) and Northumbria Healthcare Trust (NCHT) as well as the wonderful BSL interpreters to ensure that BSL users are able to access healthcare services in a way that are both accessible and beneficial, according to their specific needs.

We have a steering group, a team of people from the various hospitals involved in this work. This gives us a valuable opportunity to put share information, discuss the gaps in services and to better understand that challenges that are faced by the hospitals and the Deaf communities.

It is widely established that BSL users have poorer health outcomes, compared to hearing people. That is precisely why our project is vital to the BSL community because we act as a bridge between the hospitals and the community. We do not just support our clients with their health-related issues, we also support them with benefits, housing, employment etc. We continue to embrace and foster a holistic approach to improve their health and wellbeing.

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# 57 BSL USING PATIENTS SUPPORTED.

# 1356 CONTACTS.

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## Some of our achievements this year



**Information and Greater understanding** – with the hospital staff and with the BSL patients.



**Interpreter Agency** – working together to ensure interpreters are requested for appointments.



**Training and Support** – creating D/deaf awareness eLearning modules that will hopefully become mandatory.



**Emergency interpreter** – working with the hospitals to find interpreters for unplanned visits.



**Accelerate issues** – to have a clear pathway to address concerns

# Mental Health and British Sign Language Users Conference

In May 2024 Deaflink were part of a team who delivered a conference trying to raise awareness of the issues affecting BSL users when trying to access mental health services. The conference was attended by over 100 people who work in GP practices and hospitals in the North East.

In the morning, we had some great speakers Margaret de Feu talked about Health and Barriers to Deaf Access, Chris Rowlands, CNTW did a great job bringing the Equality Legislation to life. There were 2 BSL Users who shared their own experiences. Our Advice and Support manager Claire Hoggeth talked about Deaf awareness and cultural issues of deafness. Finally, CNTW talked about the Mental Health and Deafness Service. The afternoon was used to explore a case study and asked participants to think about a BSL users' pathway through health services and the various people they will have contact with.

**The learning that was shared was consistent:**

- Communication passport.**
- Need to have better flags on records.**
- Raise awareness levels in practice.**
- Double time appointments.**
- Need to provide accessible communication methods.**
- Family members shouldn't interpret.**

**'Why is this the first time I am having this conversation in 20 years of nursing?'**  
Psychiatric nurse at a GP Practice.





*"It was nice to chat with other members of the group and find out how they deal with the problems we all face."*



# DEAFLINK 2024-25

- 67 GROUPS, 599 ATTENDED
- 252 ONE-TO-ONE CLIENTS

# STATISTICS



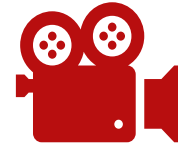
252 Clients (and this involved ...



Contacts  
2473



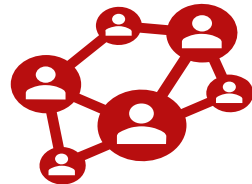
Home Visits  
99



Video Meetings  
689



Deaf Centre drop in  
81 queries



Staff also attended 91 meetings with other organisations

# FINANCES

**INCOME £139,882**

**SPENT £118,054**

Thanks to our funders and contributors - Newcastle Fund, the Trustees of Samares, Hospital of God, Barbour Foundation and various organisations who have bought our D/deaf awareness training.

We also received funding from the 2 hospital trusts - NuTH and NHCT and the Health Foundation to help us to deliver the Health Navigator programme. We are grateful to CNTW who continue to provide our office space.

THANK YOU for the wonderful donations from members of the public. We would like to thank Jo Nicolls, Julie Stephenson, Sheila Shirley and Mary Craig.

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# To everyone who helped in 2024-25



- **Board Members**
- **Volunteers**
- **Staff**
- **Partners**
- **Funders**
- **Communication Support professionals**

To Louise and Jo who have moved on to new challenges, we wish them both good luck.

**Partners include: Northumbria, Newcastle and CNTW Hospital Trusts; Newcastle Deaf Centre; Shearers Bar**

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