

Lost Spaces 2015-2016

Impact on the Bristol Deaf Community

Report prepared by Deaf Studies Trust, Bristol

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In summary

In 2008, the Bristol Deaf community was a thriving, active and integrated community of sign language users. By 2014, it had lost its centre, all its services, all of its staff and had fragmented into small interest ad-hoc groups meeting in varying locations. The Lost Spaces project team in conjunction with the Deaf Studies Trust, set out to analyse the remaining community feeling and to repair the damage of the previous years. In order to do this, events were arranged and an action team formed which met regularly between Easter 2015 and December 2015.

By early 2016, much had been saved and the Centre for Deaf People (the core charity) had formed an action plan, created a budget, begun the process of re-networking and had drafted a new Charter.

This report describes in a more detail these events and offers a prognosis.

Background

The Centre for the Deaf – Bristol was established in 1876 to provide a means of social inclusion, a meeting place and a service centre; it has continued to do this for over 100 years. Unfortunately, in recent years, the Charity has suffered by virtue of a combination of:

- poor management
- the downturn in the economic climate; and
- a mounting deficit in the Avon Pension Fund.

As a result, the organization with an annual turnover of over £400,000, a centre building worth over £700,000 and financial reserves of over £300,000, has been reduced almost to nothing in the space of 6 years. The centre building has been lost, the Board of Management and staff have had to be replaced and all services and support to the community have been placed in jeopardy. By careful negotiation with the Pension Fund, some financial capital has been preserved to the extent that it can form the basis of a new Centre and a new plan.

However, in the meantime, the Deaf community without a base has become completely fragmented with ad-doc sub-groups meeting in a range of non-deaf locations. Loss of the centre has meant loss of heritage.

However, while the centre location has been lost, the deaf community continues to exist. The task has therefore been to re-establish the sense of heritage and to lay the basis for a new development which integrates the community once more.

In this context, the Lost Spaces became an action research project: participating, stimulating and analysing.

Events

Following discussions in the early part of 2015, a series of integrating events were planned. These were broadly targetted on the concepts of Deaf Past, Deaf Present and Deaf Aspiration for the future.

(a) *Deaf Past*

This was configured as a participation evening with performance, displays and artefacts (see Appendix 1). Bristol Deaf Memories (June 2015) collected materials, cuttings, photographs and even videos of the community as it was. Participants were invited to dress in period costume and to recount their own stories stimulated by a historical pageant acted out in sign language. The event was advertised by email, Facebook and by direct contacts. Symptomatic of the dispersion of the community, in the end attendance was of 40 individuals and the older age group and the younger age group were not well represented. Nevertheless, it was considered to be a success and a good deal of personal

data was collected from interview.

(b) ***Deaf present***

(i) Two weekend workshops were set up: one to develop skills in video editing and film-making and the other to explore sign language poetry. Still struggling with the fragmentation, the registration was poor leading to the first being curtailed and the second cancelled altogether. The other factor was that the workshops were set up in August at a time when many people would have been thinking of holidays.

(ii) ***Deaf Showcase Event*** (see Appendix 2)

This event (7th November 2015) was designed to build Deaf confidence and to allow the community to show to each other what they were doing. Nearly 30 groups came and set up a stall and over 100 people attended the all-day event. This was the first major step forward in re-integrating the community and it was an opportunity to explain what had happened and to offer a business plan for 2016 and beyond. Interview data was collected.

(c) ***Deaf Aspiration*** (see Appendix 3)

A public march (21st November 2015) was organised and took place through the streets of Bristol to demonstrate that the Deaf community was still alive and still expecting to contribute to society in general. On the back of the march, a new Bristol Deaf Charter was devised and is being taken forward in 2016 as part of the community planning.

The march was addressed by representatives of the Bristol City Council, the police as well as the Board of the new Deaf Centre organisation. The Lost Spaces Project was again represented and explained.

A follow up meeting with the Lord Mayor's office and discussions with political representatives has led to a re-affirmation of a council contract for environmental aids into 2017.

Outcomes

There is little doubt that the Bristol Deaf community has experienced a severe disorienting trauma leading to fragmentation and loss of heritage. The intervention of Lost Spaces has created a platform for re-energising Deaf people in the area.

One major development has been the Lost Spaces-funded, collection and cataloguing of the artefacts of the old Centre, leading up to a Deaf Bristol exhibition in late 2016. This comes conveniently on the 175 anniversary of the creation of the first Deaf community/school in 1841.

Additionally the new Bristol Deaf charter has been discussed and will be launched after the local elections in May 2016. This charter is not a plea for the disabled but rather a commitment to integration with and contribution to the community as a whole. What is being built is a new forward-looking organisation which will become self sustaining and protective of its own language, culture and history.

Appendix 1:

**DEAF STUDIES TRUST
& LOST SPACES PROJECT**

Part of a programme to renew the Deaf Community in Bristol
June 18th 2015, 7pm to 10.30pm
at Clifton Hill House, Lower Clifton Hill Clifton, Bristol BS8 1BX





Matthew Robert Burns – First
Deaf Headmaster of Bristol
Deaf School 1841



Bristol Deaf Club 1884

Bristol Deaf Memories

A special evening of video, pictures, memories;
All participants in old-time dress
from 18th, 19th, 20th century.

The programme
7.00 pm: Welcome drink and light buffet
7.00 – 8.00pm look around the exhibition and complete the quiz on what you know about Bristol Deaf people in the past
8.00 – 9.00pm: Film show, new poems, various clips and answers from quiz
9.00 – 10.00pm: Your chance to share stories and memories of Deaf-Bristol

REGISTER at
<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/bristol-deaf-memories-tickets-17251970107>



Appendix 2: Deaf Showcase

Plans for Deaf Showcase Event: 7th November at the Vassall Centre

Aim of the event:

To bring Deaf people together to show their work and activities; to explain about what has happened to the Deaf Club and what is planned for 2016 onwards, to explain about the BSL Law in Scotland and about the march through Bristol on 21st November

Showcase

10:00 until 16:00: Tables available to the invited groups to display and explain their activities. Provide leaflets, cards, posters or video ... or just chat.

(organisers please arrive by 09.30 to set up; there is Internet access, and power supplies – you may need to bring an extension lead.)

09:30 to 10.30: coffee/tea available

12:00 onwards – light lunch available

12.30: Presentations:

What is Lost Spaces? (the sponsors for the event).

Why Scotland has a BSL Law and what does it mean?

What's happened to the Bristol Deaf Club?

What is the new Deaf Club and what is planned for 2016 ... and beyond.

How can the Bristol Deaf March on 21st November, help to re-build the Bristol Deaf Community.

13:30: Discussions and Questions

14:30: more time to find out about what is happening in Bristol

16:00 close

- BSL/English interpreting from 11.30 to 14.30
- Computer note-taking from 12:00 to 14:00
- We are also clearing some stock of computers, pagers, flashing lights and other equipment – at really rock bottom prices.

Any questions: contact Hilary@hilarysutherland.co.uk or jim.kyle@bris.ac.uk

Appendix 3: The March

NOVEMBER
21



DEAF-BRISTOL MARCH

21ST NOVEMBER 11.00AM

from KING SQUARE to ANCHOR SQUARE

BE THERE ! BE SEEN! BE PROUD!

**WE ARE STILL
HERE!**

No Deaf Club

No BSL Forum

No Deaf Equalities Officer

No sign language on Bristol City Council website

No commitment from public services and business in Bristol area

BUT

we are not invisible!

we want access!

we want to be part of the community

FOR MORE INFORMATION: contact info@centrefordeaf.org.uk
or check out www.centrefordeaf.org.uk