

The National Lottery Community Fund
Deaf Empowerment and Fairness
Project ID number; 10321168

The first year of our project has seen us lay solid foundations and make significant developments towards our project outcomes to empower the Deaf BSL Community to become more able to self-help and to seek timely advice, where appropriate, using their preferred channel including digital platforms.

How people have been involved:

We have recruited three Deaf volunteers and one hearing volunteer all with excellent BSL skills.

We have consulted on the projects aims, and in particular what is important to the Deaf community, at our events- for more detail please see below.

We provide a variety of signed information on social media; encouraging clients to participate by uploading their own signed videos on topical issues and feeding back on service provision.

We have been involved with the roll out of Universal Credit in Sheffield raising and representing Deaf/BSL users' views on the new benefit system. We have identified barriers that BSL users face and are working with the DWP to reduce the negative impact UC is having on BSL users. The claims process for UC is either online or, in some circumstances, by telephone. Neither of these pathways are very accessible to BSL users as they require the ability to communicate verbally or in writing. Most of our clients have no speech and poor literacy associated with their deafness. The project is committed to both the upskilling of individuals' digital skills and to campaign for equality of access for our client group.

The team's supervisor is a representative on National Citizens Advice's Equality Committee and their Universal Credit Advisory Group. This provides us with a direct channel of communication to policy makers within the national service.

How have you built on people's strengths?

Everyone who works in the team must be fluent in British Sign Language. We have trained our volunteer advice assistants to become digital trainers. Building upon their existing strengths so they are confident and equipped to pass on their skills to members of the Deaf community, across a broad range of abilities and experience.

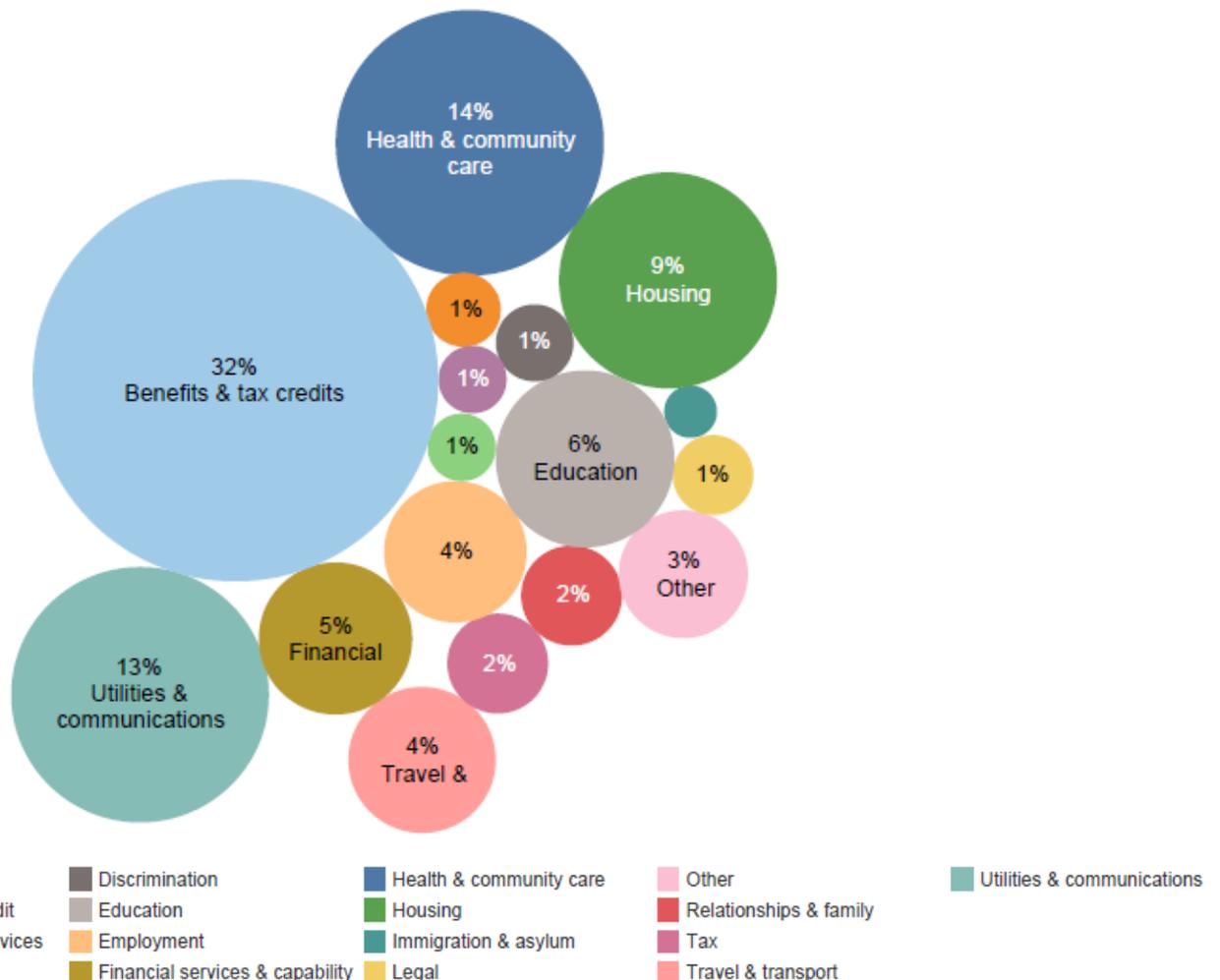
For Deaf volunteers this training and support is invaluable as unfortunately there are very few opportunities for Deaf BSL users to access training and skill building activities. We are able to develop people's skills and confidence in working on digital platforms and this in turn gives them transferrable skills which improves people's employability.

How many people have benefitted from your project?

We recruited/deployed the staff team –consisting of **3** paid workers all fluent in BSL

We have advised **195** individuals on a total of **1116** advice issues. This has created **1590** advice activities and **731** cases.

The largest area of advice is welfare benefits, health and community care, housing, utilities and communication.



As we have a specialist debt worker, who is fluent in BSL, we are able to offer debt appointments to Deaf BSL users within two days of first contact.

We have digitally assisted **40** individuals on **69** issues

We have provided bespoke one to one support to 10 clients on IT/technology issues. We based the learning on the Learn my Way online training which we tailored to be accessible to Deaf BSL users who have poor literacy. The sessions include how to set up an email address and how to use the internet safely and securely; essential for making and maintaining UC claims.

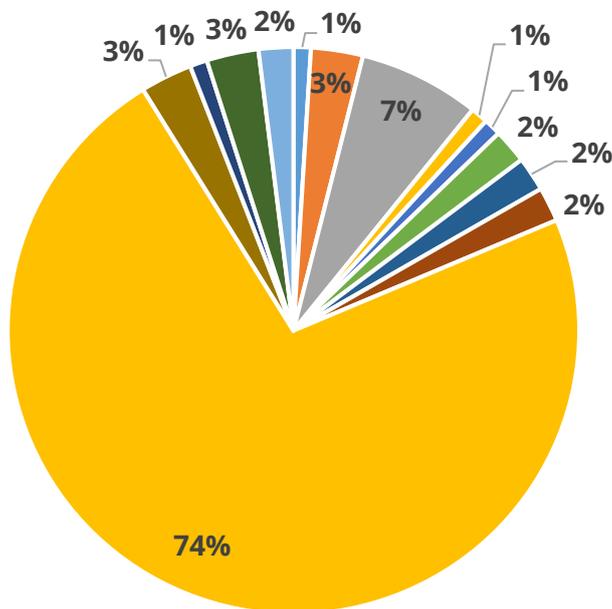
How many volunteers have been involved in delivering the project?

Six volunteers have been involved – five Deaf BSL users themselves and one hearing fluent signer. The idea is to cascade the digital advice assistant training through the duration of the project resulting in a strong team of volunteers who are able to travel to nearby towns and cities in South Yorkshire providing the digital learning and support.

Are you working with the people you had planned to?

Our project is specifically to work with profoundly Deaf BSL users. Our statistics evidence that within this target group we are working with a range of age groups, ethnicity and a generally an even split with regards to clients' gender.

How you have engaged with diverse groups of people?



- Asian or Asian British - Chinese
- Asian or Asian British - Other
- Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
- Black or Black British - Caribbean
- Mixed - Other
- Mixed - White & Black Caribbean
- Other - Any Other
- Other - Arab
- White - British
- White - English
- White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- White - Other
- Prefer not to say

As you can see from the table inserted we have worked with a diverse range of clients.

What connections have you made with other organisations, how are your partnerships going?

We provide a digital advice service to Doncaster Deaf BSL users working in partnership with the Local Citizens Advice there.

We have established a national BSL advisory social media group with a view to circulating relevant information, particularly around the UC claims and maintenance process, as well as sharing good practice.

We have been approached by Rotherham Sight and Sound (part of Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind) to provide an outreach advice service in a community setting in Rotherham. Plans to commence the new service in May 2019.

We have utilised training materials from Good Things Foundation and participated in an event they held on Sheffield Universal Credit partnership working.

We have made approaches to Deafinitions with a view to developing our relationship with them in the future.

We have provided Deaf awareness sessions for colleagues who work at Fareshare and South Yorkshire Passenger Transport. We have also presented a UC awareness session to members of the Barnsley Deaf community at one of their weekend events.

Have you been running events, talking about your project on social media, press, local MP

We held three events 20th June 18, 20th March 19 and 29th March 2019. They were well attended by a total of 82 members of the Deaf community.





The difference your project is making

Case study one

Client is a profoundly Deaf Sign Language user with no clear speech and poor literacy skills. He came to live in the UK from Poland just over five years ago. He works full time and is in receipt of Child Benefit, Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit. He lives with his partner (also Deaf) who came to live in the UK from Poland three years ago and they have a one year old child together. They are both in receipt of Personal Independent Payment. Client has recently applied for Permanent Residence.

Client has received a letter from his employer Royal Mail and asked us to explain it to him as he has poor English literacy skills, although he is able to read and write in Polish. He requires the letter to be translated into BSL (British Sign Language) in order to understand it.

The letter states that as we are going through Brexit negotiations this is an uncertain time and that he and his family may be uncertain about the future, so the letter is to inform him of the company's position on the matter. The letter goes on to state that he is a valued member of staff and that he is able to stay with them should he choose to do so.

Further on in the letter is information regarding the client applying for settled status once he has been living in the UK for five years or for pre-settled status if he has been living in the UK for less than five years.

They have also supplied an information fact sheet which states that even if the client has Permanent Residence (PR) he would still need to apply for settled status. Also children must apply and they would receive the same status as their parents. The scheme opens on the 30th March 2019 and the deadline to apply is the 30th June 2021.

We explained to the client that as he already has PR it will be free for him to apply, but his partner would need to apply for Pre-settled Status as she has only lived in the UK for three years and once she reaches five years this will then be made to settled status. She will have to pay £65 to apply and it will cost £32.50 for him to apply for his daughter.

We directed the client to the Gov.UK website (self-help) which has all the information needed. We advised the client to look at this site and when the time comes for him to apply if he is unable to make the application independently then he can return to us for further advice.

Case study two

Client is profoundly deaf, uses BSL and has poor literacy skills. She lives with her partner in Local Authority housing and claims Employment and Support Allowance /Housing Benefit /Council Tax Support and Personal Independent Payment. She is expecting twins in April 2019.

The client is expecting to have an assessment from social services tomorrow to look at her family situation before her twins are born. The client is concerned that the social worker will come on her own without the specialist social worker from the Deaf team and she wants to be sure that there is someone at the meeting to support her who is Deaf aware and is fluent in British Sign Language. This social worker for the Deaf is currently off sick but expected back at work next week.

We spoke to the allocated social worker who has agreed that she will cancel the meeting tomorrow and re-arrange it for a date when the specialist social worker is back at work. She tells us that no decisions have been made about guardianship of the twins and that is why they will assess the client's current situation and childcare history. The client will be given the opportunity to challenge any decision if she needs to and engage a solicitor if necessary. Explained this to client in BSL - she will try and contact the specialist social worker next week when she is back at work.

Success most proud of

There is evidence to demonstrate that the Deaf community are beginning to engage with the process of self-help. This is a significant cultural change as most of our clients have been disempowered for most of their lives because they are perceived as not being clever enough to be independent, or it is 'easier' to deal with their issues rather than support them to do so themselves because of the language barrier. This is an exciting time and we are eagerly looking forward to making more of a positive difference!

Challenges, changes you have made, learning

Although we have previous experience of piloting digital advice to draw upon, we should not underestimate the understandable reluctance of the community to use digital / online methods to deal with issues, contact third parties, complete online benefit claims and other online applications. We know progress will take time and it takes small steps to build encouragement and confidence. The increased value in training and supporting other BSL users to deliver this bespoke work means the project outcomes are two-fold.

Next 12 months progress - we will:

- Pilot a weekly evening digital advice session to target employed BSL users and carers who may have difficulty accessing the services main opening hours-this is likely to be a challenge due to past experience of changing the advice channel. We know that Deaf people are often not confident to use technology and prefer the traditional face to face advice method.
- Continue to provide a comprehensive, good quality BSL advice service by way of drop-in sessions and appointments.
- Roll out the 6 week digital peer supported training course to other areas of Sheffield and in Rotherham
- Increase the number of clients receiving digital assistance and support with the overall aim of providing them with the confidence, knowledge and skills to self-help at a basic level initially then building up to more complex matters.

Financial Report

2018-2019 Summary of expenditure as compared to budget

	Budget	Actual	Variance
Salaries, National Insurance and Pensions	71078	66320	4758
General running expenses	6547	10752	-4205
Training	1250	1209	41
Travel	100		100
Interpretation costs	1000	1406	-406
ICT (tablets)	1050	507	543
Building Capabilities	10000	0	10000
Total Revenue	91025	80194	10831
Total Overheads	16960	16348	612
TOTAL	107985	96541	11444

You can see from the above that we have an underspend against the budget. This is largely because we have yet to spend £10,000 granted for Building Capabilities. This has been carried forward into 2019/20 and is shown below. We have agreed that we will invest this in further development of income generation strategies and expect to incur these costs in 19/20. In addition we have a small remaining underspend of £1,444 which we have carried forward into 19/20 to support an overall increase in general running costs.

Budget for 19-20

	Budget 19/20
Salaries, National Insurance and Pensions	73002
General running expenses	6678
Training	1275
Travel	100
Interpretation costs	1020
ICT (tablets)	0
Building Capabilities	10000
Total Revenue	92075
Total Overheads	17072
TOTAL	109147