

The Deaf Health Charity SignHealth

THE DEAF
HEALTH
CHARITY
SIGNHEALTH

Overview

Reference: 12

Location: Nationwide

Target Group: Deaf
people

Initiative type:
Information and
technology

Contact

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Top Tip

Make information accessible by adding subtitles as a minimum and using a British Sign Language interpreter wherever possible. Be creative and make the most of the opportunities that technology affords to increase accessibility.

Why is this important to us?

At SignHealth, we are dedicated to improving deaf people's health and wellbeing. When the pandemic hit, the barriers to accessing information and services only increased for the deaf community. Many services became telephone-based, the introduction of facemasks prohibited lip-reading, and much of the information released about COVID-19 was complex and jargon-heavy. Subtitles alone are not enough to make this information accessible. The high prevalence of language deprivation within the deaf community, the limits to what text can convey, and the differences between hearing language and British Sign Language (BSL) mean that translation is required. We knew that the consequences of this being overlooked could cost lives, yet we were not seeing recognition, targeted funding or action to address it. We had to act quickly to support our community to stay safe and informed.

What are we doing?

We have translated whatever information we can into BSL, including every government information briefing since the pandemic began, FAQs about the vaccine, and vaccine fraud information. Our Director of Communications and Fundraising has appeared regularly on 'BBC2's See Hear' to raise awareness around COVID and the vaccine. Crucially, in April 2020 we launched BSLHealthAccess, a free app providing immediate 24/7 access to BSL interpreters for healthcare purposes. We then released a video of a Black, female, sign language user using the app during her vaccine appointment and talking about her experience of having the vaccine. This is one of several stories we have filmed, and next we want to create a video dispelling myths about the vaccine to continue supporting the deaf community, including our social care staff, to access reliable information and make informed choices.

Who is involved?

We are a very small team who, between us, have done almost everything ourselves. We have worked with freelance deaf interpreters, actors and consultants to create the content. A small amount of our work has been government-funded for a five month period, but as a charity we have spent everything we have to deliver these initiatives.

What works for us?

We share everything on social media: Facebook to reach the grassroots deaf community and Twitter to target healthcare professionals and other deaf organisations to help spread the word. We have learned that our community respond better to real or dramatised stories than to simple translation of information. **People have really appreciated the BSLHealthAccess app; our films have around 30,000 views each and our briefings reach 3000 people a day.** There is more work to be done but the response so far has been very positive.