

Sabina Iqbal, Chair/Founder of Deaf Parenting UK: Warm Welcome to the Deaf Parenting UK conference 2010



A warm welcome to Deaf Parenting UK conference 2010!

As you know, Deaf Parenting UK is unique as the first ever charity and small national organisation run by Deaf parents for Deaf parents, representing the needs of all Deaf parents in the UK.

We, at Deaf Parenting UK, are delighted to host our **Deaf Parenting UK Conference 2010: Are We Equal?** The theme of the conference will focus on the three key areas: Health, Social Services and Children's Education, putting the needs of Deaf parents in UK into the heart of Deaf Parenting UK and the Government's agenda.

As we all know, the support for all Deaf Parents are vital for Deaf Parenting UK so all Deaf parents and parents to be know that they are not alone in their experiences/ difficulty in accessing to information about their rights and parenting services.

Although, 90% of Deaf parents are likely to have hearing children, accessing to health services, social services and their child's education (especially in the mainstream) are proving to be the major battles for many parents especially:

- Health – accessing to health services for Deaf parents' own health aswell as their children's health. This ranges from maternity care, children's health and women / men's health.
- Social Services – accessing to social services for family support to prevent family breakdown. This ranges from Early Years support, children & families services and Adult services
- Education – accessing to nurseries, primary and secondary school.

The start of 2009 saw Deaf Parenting UK receiving requests via our helpline of which huge proportion of 57% were for parenting supports to deaf parents/ families. We also received 22% request from parents and professionals to provide legal advice/ representation where Deaf parents were at the crisis stage. Those two highest figures is a staggering huge part of our work aswell as DPUK helpline which is manned by our DPUK coordinator working 7 hours a week.

Looking at our history of supporting Deaf parents and professionals, we have identified patterns over the years and previous conferences 2008 looked at Enabling confidence, empowering and supporting Deaf parents which became Deaf Parenting UK's motto in delivering our services. Previous Conference 2009 looked at Education, Education, Education, challenging the Government as to the importance of our children's education but access for Deaf parents were limited. This brings to our next conference 2010: Are We Equal? in accessing to health, social services and our children's education. Our organisation will be 10years old next year in 2011 but how far have we come in improving access for Deaf parents? This year conference would be interesting and challenging for all of us especially with the new changes in Government of Con-Lib coalition and the huge budget cuts that are affecting all services including health, social services and children's education. Will they be engaging well with us and consider the needs of Deaf parents or will they be reviewing all of their policies and cut us out of the loop. There are lots of news in the media about the huge cuts would in turns affect all disability and families services across the country including tax credit, welfare reform. It is a worrying time for all of us.

With the hard times ahead of us, we need to look at the future, drawing on the strength we all have and to support one another and to give our best shot at the Conference 2010 as well as engaging with the Government. This is not the time to give up and we need to unite more and fight harder. Our hard work will continue to focus on reaching out more Deaf parents and professionals aswell as providing services to meet their needs.

For many Deaf parents, those access are limited and patchy across UK and even some simple things that many take for granted becomes huge barriers for Deaf parents. For example:

Health Services

Many Deaf parents reported difficulties in accessing to health services including:

- Refusal from GP/ clinics/ hospital to provide BSL interpreters and relying on hearing children/ family members to interpret instead

- Not aware of child development or healthy eating when their children go through each stages from early years to teens and adulthood
- Lack of access to make informed choices on health for themselves or their children.
- Lack of parenting support

Social Services:

Many Deaf parents reported difficulties in accessing to Social services including:

- Lack of awareness of the support that are available from Children & Family Services and Early Years services
- Refusal to provide BSL interpreters as well as lack of Deaf awareness, lack of specialism on Deaf needs made it difficult for Deaf parents to benefit fully from the services on offer
- Lack of clarity as to the definition of 'child in need' for hearing children of Deaf parents
- Lack of parenting support to prevent family breakdown
- Being frightened that involving social services would lead to child(ren) removal from Deaf parents.

Education:

Every Parents Matter and *PEAL* confirmed that every parent have the right to be involved in decision making of their children's educational future but how can they if they are unable to access to information and choices?

However recent case of Deaf parents is in battle with local nursery for refusing to keep parents informed by SMS especially in emergency. The nursery insisted on email or contacting by phone to 3rd party (ie: member of Deaf parents' family). Some other Deaf parents have positive relationship with nurseries/ school where SMS is acceptable so inconsistency in standards is a biggest frustration for all. Last year Conference Education, Education, Education called for a Deaf Parents Friendly Charter of which we have put it forward to DCSF (Department of Children, School & Families) but due to changes in Government Departments in light of recent election, we will keep putting it forward to Department of Schools.

Attitudinal barriers and lack of Deaf awareness among health, social services and children's education are very much widespread and most Deaf parents through our consultation days express their wishes for a easy and straightforward way to communicate with those service providers with no barriers at all and that all Deaf parents should be accepted for who they are, not excluded because they are Deaf.

This is also a fantastic opportunity for all of us as Deaf parents and professionals to have a debate on what should happen to ensure the needs of Deaf parents are met and enable them to be 'equal to any other parents in accessing the services'. To enable Deaf parents and service providers to put forward questions to the panel members on the subject of accessing Health, Social Services and Children's Education who can in effect put in positive changes.

The conference provides an exciting programme of speakers and crèche with fun activities for children of Deaf parents. This is also an excellent opportunity for you all to meet with other Deaf parents, families and professionals, to work together of how we can move forward toward equality for Deaf Parents.

I hope you will have an enjoyable stay at the conference and benefit greatly from the day, take from what you learn at the conference and most of all, this is your opportunity to ensure Deaf parents are empowered, enabled and supported in accessing to Health, Social Services and children's educations without barriers.

We hope to mark our 10 years anniversary in 2011 with a difference by celebrating our achievements as well as presenting awards to those deserving individuals / organisations who made differences to the lives of Deaf parents. We need your support to make it happen. Watch this space.

Your support counts! Let work together to ensure Deaf parents enjoy their family life and participate to their children's education to the full.



Sabina Iqbal

Chair/Founder of Deaf Parenting UK