



## Personal Outcomes Stories during COVID: Learning from practice

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**How have you been able to keep a focus on what matters to people during COVID?**



I am writing my story as a Deaf woman who uses two hearing aids, lip reading and British Sign Language. I am also connected to the Deaf community and my main job is youth outreach with children and young people who are deaf. I am married and my husband and daughter are both hearing. On a personal note, furlough has given me the time and headspace to reflect on my own life and work. I have achieved many things I have put off over the years. Unfinished crochet projects are complete, I have got over my fear of sewing machine instructions and a lifetime's photos are in albums.

From the perspective of the Deaf community, covid has brought a whole new set of experiences to navigate where communication and accessibility are concerned. Although I am well versed in jumping these hurdles, there are many in the community who bear the scars of an inaccessible, audist world. We also contend with societal views where words like 'deaf' and 'tone deaf' are used to mean ignorance or being unwilling.

Personally, in my work with deaf children and young people (CYP), families and professionals, engagements have traditionally been face to face, with a total communication approach, using interactive and creative learning approaches. I have kept in touch with some service users who are at key transition stages (moving out of the family home and getting uni results/applying for postgrads), signposting them to all available services (via mobile). I keep in touch with colleagues, informing them of any changes to services/ provision for deaf CYP in my area to ensure people can respond to those who ask, although I worry about those who don't or can't.

More broadly, regards accessibility, I've seen huge kindness in the interpretation, electronic note taking and other communications support community. They volunteered time, skills and technology to make real-time note-taking and verbal communication accessible and fast. Assistive tech is becoming much more person-centred too and this can be life changing. When I was a teenager, it was huge hearing aids and a radio aid and that was it (black boxes, grey wires and lots of beige...). Now there's the opportunity to stream, have directional and personalised sound and auto subbies on a zoom chat

**What have you had to do differently and what made this possible?**

Again on a personal note, women have shouldered the burden of ensuring families get through covid with their wellbeing intact, a story that is being told worldwide (WomenDeliver.org,2020). I have found myself forming natural support groups with other mums I know, and we have shared concerns as well as tips for survival. Ease of access has made this possible, I have my phone, laptop and most importantly my streamer. My streamer is a Bluetooth device that works off the 'loop' system and connects sound from my i-phone and i-pad straight to my hearing aids. It is a life changer.

**What have you noticed that has been better?**

In developing and delivering accessible campaign programmes for deaf CYP, our work pre-covid was centred on meaningfully connecting young activists and families with local government responsible for implementing and mainstreaming the BSL act. *Despite* the raft of supportive policy and legislation, progress in changing wider perception of the capabilities of deaf people has been too slow. During covid a lot of the unnecessary bureaucracy has been taken out of things that were an absolute waste of time. Some of the changes I see, boosting my own confidence and motivation to continue include:

BSL Visibility: the speed at which the Scottish Government (and others eg NZ) responded to making their communications accessible for BSL users has been well noted and received. It is my second language. There are caveats to deaf tech, including amplification of everything and the spoken word has to compete with background noise. Many of us lip read and watch subtitles simultaneously. When there is a lag with the subbies it's a real skill to follow what's being said. Given the choice I watch an interpreter.

Also through covid, there has been awareness of issues for lip readers. Seeing people make clear panel masks and badges makes a potentially challenging barrier and anxiety much smaller.

In a wider sense I see a political realisation that more time off, happier people and relationships doesn't mean a poorer economy. The 4-day week is *not* radical economics.

**How did this make you feel?**

I feel accepted, heard and that my lived experiences as a Deaf woman are validated and considered. I feel hopeful for change but also apprehensive as it's easy to slip back into old habits especially when they can be more comfortable.

**What have you learned through this?**

As a campaigner I have learned the importance of linking up with other groups with a similar aim. Previously our target was mainly other Deaf communities, but I have learned the value in linking and sharing stories with other communities facing similar barriers. Through making those connections we can aim for a post-covid world that harnesses all the positive change that's emerged

**Anything else you want to tell us?**

Returning to my personal experience, the mental load has increased in my home, as it has in others. As many will know, there is the extra work with managing covid risks for family members of different ages, maintaining contact with people through diverse routes, and trying to keep a three-year old entertained and well. My husband contributes in his own way and we share parenting but I still carry most of the mental load... I would love to see more men and partners do more.