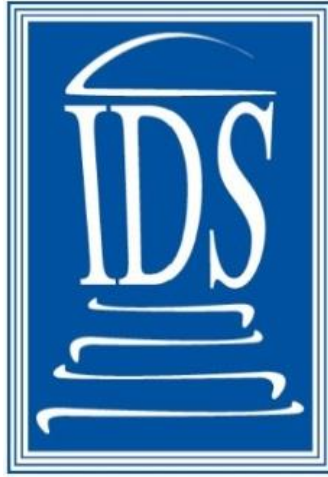


Guide for Parents Of Deaf Children

An introductory guide for parents who discover their child is deaf. This guide contains useful information, tips and advice.

"Being Deaf is no barrier to successful achievements"

Dr. John Bosco Conama, 2011



Guide for Parents of Deaf Children

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** Please note: a capital "D" is used to describe a person that is part of the Deaf community and has grown up in that culture. The lowercase "d" is used when speaking about a person's audiological ability to hear.*

Foreword

I am delighted to be writing the foreword for this guidebook. As a Deaf child of hearing parents, I understand that they may have had many questions such as; should they learn Irish Sign Language? Where to send me to school? And also if I would have the capacity to be a full and active member of society. I am delighted to say that with the support of my parents and family, I feel I have succeeded.

This guidebook would have been very valuable for my parents when I was younger, it gives a positive outlook on Deaf people and the Deaf community and at the same time answers many concerns you might have.

The guidebook may not be able to answer each and every question you have but it will provide a good guide for both you and your child.

Now as an independent Deaf adult, my parents, whilst they still see me as their child, have taught me to explore life, take on new challenges and always ask questions.

The Irish Deaf Society actively welcomes questions, concerns or any issues you may have that need answers, they are living proof of a community that has thrived and not let themselves be held back.

This guidebook would not have been possible without the kind and generous funding from the St. Stephen's Green Trust and with the help and support of the staff and committee members from the Irish Deaf Society. I would also like to thank the parents who were involved in writing this guidebook.

Kevin G. Mulqueen.
Chairperson,
Irish Deaf Society

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GETTING TO KNOW YOU

First of all, we would like to thank you for taking the time to read this booklet. We do realise that the news that your child is deaf could come as a shock to you but this feeling is probably shared by all parents of deaf children.

You may have concerns that your child won't be able to hear and have worries that you may not be able to communicate with them. You may never have met a Deaf person before and have no idea what to expect.

Having found out that your child is deaf can often come as a relief because you may have been suspicious as to why your child was not reacting to your voices or sounds around them. Finally with identification, you can begin to provide the adequate support that your child may need.

This guide is intended to reassure you that your child will grow up to be successful, happy and strong adult and will be able to communicate with you and live life as full as the next person.

Within this booklet we will try to answer your questions with regards to the following topics

- **Early Intervention** - The sooner intervention begins, deaf children can develop language skills that help them to communicate freely and learn actively. You can read more about Early Intervention on page 9.
- **Language & Communication** – Your child should have access to as many languages as possible. It is essential that they acquire a signed language as early as possible as they have a natural capability to do so. You can read more about this on page 26
- **Assistive Technology** – There are a large variety of technological aids to possibly improve your child's hearing. Before you decide on the best option for your child, you should seek advice from both medical professionals and from those who have experienced deafness first-hand.
- **Get Support** –, We advise that you seek support from other parents of deaf children. Get in touch with your local deaf organisations. If you are unsure where to start, have a look at our 'Useful Contacts' list for help in finding an organisation near you.

Learn from Deaf people themselves – Most Deaf people would be willing to answer your questions and will offer you honest and practical advice about how to communicate with your child at home.

Listen To Your Child – It is very important that you include your child in any major life changing decisions that may affect them. As they grow older, observing their development will help you to decide what is best for them.

Did you know?

90% of deaf and hard-of-hearing children are born to hearing parents most of whom have never met a Deaf person and would know very little about the Deaf Community

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EARLY INTERVENTION

What exactly is Early Intervention?

When you have discovered your child is deaf, you may hear the words 'early intervention' and wonder what this means. In this case, it's to deal with your child's deafness from a very young age.

You may be feeling pressured or unsure of what services to avail of; we would recommend that you do as much research as possible to help you make informed decisions about your child's future. This may be with regard to assistive technology, educational development, etc.

Why intervene early?

Early intervention can mean that appropriate support can be given to ensure that your child reaches its maximum potential. Early intervention will;

- enhance the child's development
- increase greater language and literacy skills
- raise general academic achievement
- help parents and their children understand each other

Effective early intervention can enhance learning especially during the child's early years.

People Who Can Help

A Deaf Person – They can tell you of their experience with early intervention services and what it was like for them.

Irish Sign Language Teacher - They can teach you and your child Irish Sign Language (ISL), so that you can communicate with each other. This will also enrich your child's development.

Audiologist – They will keep track of your child's hearing levels, fit your child's hearing aid and can answer questions you may have with regard to their hearing loss.

Speech & Language Therapist – They will give speech therapy classes if they are needed.

Special Educational Needs Organisers – The role of the SENO ensures that a child with special educational needs receives the supports they are entitled to.

Parents Support Organisations – There are organisations who offer parent-to-parent support.

Visiting Teacher Service – They will work with pre-school children to provide guidance for parents of deaf or hard-of-hearing children.

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EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS

Being a parent is challenging, you obviously want the best for your child especially when it comes to making decisions about their education. Deaf Education is continually improving and teaching methods are changing throughout the world.

There are some research papers by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) which is on the 'Recommended Reading list' on page 47. The papers offer good advice and information about the education of deaf and hard of hearing children in Ireland.

Bilingual Education

Bilingual Education is method of teaching a child through two languages, in this case, Irish Sign Language and English. This method of education is the preferred approach by the Irish Deaf Society as it means that a deaf child is taught in their natural language. They will be inclined to read expressions and body language and so will acquire Irish Sign Language much quicker than they will a second language such as written English.

The main benefits of bilingual education are;

- receiving education in a language which is accessible to them
- increases cognitive development and has a positive effect on intellectual growth
- helps with literacy skills and assists in being successful in examinations and tests

Early intervention (page 9) is important to ensure that there are no delays in your child's language as this may have a serious effect on their literacy skills as they get older.

Pre-School Education

Currently in Ireland there are limited choices to where you can send your deaf child to pre-school. There is just one pre-school that specifically caters for deaf children; The Mid-West School for the Hearing Impaired based in Limerick.

If you are unable to send your child to this school and want to ensure your child is acquiring a language before entering primary school, you can avail of the Home Tuition Scheme.

What is the Home Tuition Scheme?

The Home Tuition Scheme means that a children with Special Educational needs can avail of up to 20 hours of tuition a week while awaiting appropriate educational placement. This scheme can be used to teach your child ISL and improve their literacy and vocabulary development before they enter Primary education. You can apply through the NCSE - details are located in the 'Useful Contacts' list on Page 49.

Schools

There are three main schools that cater for deaf and hard of hearing children in Ireland, it is here that their ISL skills will develop more fully.

Dublin – Cabra

- St. Mary’s School for Deaf Girls, Cabra, Dublin
- St. Joseph’s School for Deaf Boys, Cabra, Dublin

These schools have been in place since the mid-19th century. They offer boarding facilities so that students from outside Dublin can stay at the school midweek and go home at the weekends and holidays.

Limerick – Rosbrien

- Mid-West School for Hearing Impaired Children

This school was set up to offer those from the Mid-West region education from pre-school to post primary level. It has been in existence for over 25 years.

Deaf Units in Mainstream Schools

These units are located in various schools around Ireland. They may have only a few deaf children enrolled at any given time. Children of mixed ages may be grouped together and taught simultaneously. You can see the locations of these units below. This list does not cover all Deaf units around the country

Munster

Douglas Community School, Co. Cork

St Columba’s GNS, Co. Cork

Ennis Community College, Co. Clare

Holy Family Junior National School, Ennis, Co. Clare

Mounthawk Secondary School, Tralee, Co. Kerry
Conn- Presentation Primary School, Tralee, Co. Kerry

Leinster

Geashill Unit, Co. Offaly

Ulster

Darley National School, Cootehill, Co. Cavan

Mainstream

It is understandable for a parent to not want to send their child to a school that is far away from their home and it is for this reason that they may opt to enrol their child in a local mainstream school. Mainstream education means the deaf or hard of hearing child is integrated into a classroom of hearing children.

It can be challenging for a deaf child to be in a mainstream setting where there can be more than 20 hearing students and they may not get the extra attention from the teacher they require. There may be a need for additional support in the form of a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) or a Visiting Teacher who regularly has one-to-one sessions with your child.

Important factors to consider when placing your child in mainstream education.

- Ensure they get adequate supports in the classroom such as SNAs, extra tuition, loop systems (a device which amplifies sounds through a hearing aid), Visiting Teachers etc.
- Teachers in mainstream schools may not be qualified to teach children who are deaf or hard of hearing so it is important that you make them aware of the additional support that your child may need
- Your child may need extra support around social inclusion to avoid isolation. They could be the only deaf child in the class or the school. It is important that the school and class teacher are Deaf aware and have a positive attitude to the needs of your deaf child

Third Level Education

Supports for third level education are always improving and many Deaf people have achieved undergraduate, postgraduate and doctorates degrees. The 'Disability Access Route to Education' (D.A.R.E) and 'Deaf Support in Third Level' (DS3) can help to ease the transition between secondary education and entering third level for the first time.

It is important that your child registers with the college or university's access or disability officer who will carry out an assessment and provide additional supports. This may be in the form of interpreters, note-takers, one-to-one tutorials, extra time in examinations etc.

Did you know?

The Irish Deaf Society believes there are no limits to a Deaf person's capacity to learn. We have many members who have succeeded in third level academic life in colleges and universities such as Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin

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**IMPROVING YOUR CHILD'S
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

There are many things you can do as a parent to maximise the chances of your child fulfilling their potential.

Reading With Your Child

You are encouraged to read as much as you can with your deaf child to help improve their language development and here are some suggested tips:

- 1.** Sit in directly in front of your child making eye contact rather than sitting side by side. This means the child can see you clearly.
- 2.** Always keep yourself and the book in view of the child. If your child is distracted and looks away, don't be afraid to wave your hand in front of their child's eyes so that their attention is drawn back to you.
- 3.** When you are signing the story with your child, you can point to words and pictures that relate to the signs. For example, the story of the "Three Little Pigs". You can sign the word 'pig', point to the written word 'pig' and show your child a picture of it. Your child will now have seen what a pig looks like, knows the sign for it and can also recognise the written word for it.
- 4.** Make sure you engage in conversation with your child; point to pictures and ask them what it is. If they do not reply, sign to them again until they reply.
- 5.** Remember, have fun with your child! Don't treat it as a classroom lesson. Keep it fun but yet still educational.

The same tips can be applied to everything in the child's environment. While you are feeding your baby, show them the signs of the food they are eating. You can also do this while you are clothing your child, bathing your child etc. Sign the words that relate to the activity.

Pictures & DVDs

It is not unusual that a deaf child will love bright colours and visuals props. Buy flash cards with pictures of different objects or animals. This is a good way to spend a journey in a car or a bus. You can even make your

own flashcards that are related to your family life at home. You can have pictures of siblings, parents, grandparents, close friends and neighbours with their names or relation underneath it. This increases your child's vocabulary and memory!

When your child is watching cartoons or television programmes, you can put on the subtitles which means that the English word will come up on the screen. This exposes your child to the English language and can increase their literacy skills as they might become familiar with a word that is used frequently.

It is vital to maintain this kind of development and it is recommended that you start reading and signing with your child as early as possible so that they can have the best head start in life.

Meeting Up

It is a good idea to encourage your child to mix with other deaf children. It has no negative effects on your child's development; in fact it will improve their social skills. This will also give you a chance to talk to other parents of deaf and hard of hearing children as you are both going through the same experience.

You can read more in Chapter 7 – 'Further Support', for information on organisations that can provide you with any additional support you need.

Did you know?

Children can recognise images of up to 500 words and signs when they are as young as 6 months old!

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**THE DEAF COMMUNITY AND
IRISH SIGN LANGUAGE**

Who/What is the Deaf Community?

The Deaf Community is a group of people who share the same interests, experiences and language. The community consists of those who are Deaf, children of Deaf parents, parents of Deaf children, family, friends, etc. The Deaf community do not see being deaf as an obstacle but work towards full and equal access in all aspects of life.

How do I get my child involved in the Deaf Community?

A vital part of being involved in any community is the ability to communicate with its members. It is usual that a member of the Deaf community would be able to use and understand Irish Sign Language and go to Deaf events.

Remember, the best way to improve you and your child's ISL is to continually use it. Being involved with the Deaf community is an ideal way to do this.

Deaf or hard of hearing children who attend mainstream schools can also be part of the Irish Deaf Community if they learn to communicate using ISL.

Getting Involved with Local Deaf Groups

There are many Deaf organisations and groups that cater for all tastes

- Drama – Dublin Deaf Drama
- Sports – Irish Deaf Sports Association
- Youth – Irish Deaf Youth Association
- Scouts – 191st Dublin Deaf Scouts
- Local & Regional Community Organisations

A lot of these organisations are run voluntarily and by Deaf people themselves. They always welcome new members as it means more diversity for the Deaf Community. It means both you and your child can benefit from the experiences and invaluable knowledge that other Deaf people have.

Going to Deaf Events

The Deaf community is very active and there is always something going on. You can go to fundraisers, BBQs, bingo nights, social nights, hill walking, workshops etc. It is a good idea to talk to a member of the Irish

Deaf Society who can inform you of events that are on in the Deaf community.

Irish Sign Language (ISL)

Irish Sign Language is the main language of the Deaf community in Ireland. Cued Speech, Lámh and Signed English are not forms of ISL but are language support systems based on English. ISL is a more natural language for a Deaf person as it uses the entire body, hands and facial expressions.

Is ISL a language?

Yes it is. ISL is a visual language which has its own grammar and syntax. You cannot use speech when you are signing in ISL as this will influence your signs. It would be like trying to speak French while speaking English at the same time. ISL is still not recognised as an official language of the state, but representations are being made to change this.

Should I learn ISL if my child is deaf or hard of hearing?

The answer is simple, yes.

Research has proven that learning signed language does not affect speech, cognitive or intellectual development, if anything, it increases them.

If hearing children are encouraged and applauded for learning signed language (baby sign), why can't deaf children learn signed language when they have the in-built ability due to their loss of hearing?

We encourage you and your family to learn ISL as soon as possible and to sign with your child as much as you can.

Did you know?

Only 30% of ISL is understood through hand-shapes, the rest of it is understood through your facial expressions and movement which gives tone and emphasis.

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COMMON FEARS AND QUESTIONS

Can my child's hearing be improved?

The loss of any hearing cannot be cured, regardless of what the media or medical professionals say. However with the use of hearing aids and cochlear implants, your child's hearing may be improved. Each child is individual, and results may vary.

How will my child communicate with me?

We encourage you to use ISL with your child. If you wish to improve communications with your child, we recommend that you use a bilingual approach at home i.e. ISL and English. A lot of families have created their own signs and this is known as home-sign. This is where families have their own specific signs which aid communication in the home environment.

Does my child have a learning difficulty?

Being deaf does not affect your child's learning ability. It only affects being able to hear. This is a common question as a lot of focus can be on the child's deafness whereas sometimes there can be additional difficulties that may not be identified. If you feel your child has a learning difficulty, you should bring them to your GP where they can arrange appropriate aptitude tests.

Will my child grow up to be normal?

Yes. There is nothing wrong with being deaf. As we have mentioned, being deaf merely affects your child's hearing. It does not affect their social skills or their academic development. With the love and support of their parents and family your child can lead a full and happy life.

Why do some deaf people have a low literacy level?

A lot of Deaf people have been identified as having low literacy skills. There are various reasons for this such as the late identification of deafness and the inability of the child to acquire a language in the most vital stages of its development.

Other reasons include a poor educational experience where Deaf people were not taught through the bilingual approach but rather through what was known as the oral system where Irish Sign Language was not encouraged and speech was forced.

There are supports available at the Irish Deaf Society to combat low literacy skills in areas such as English, Mathematics and Personal Development.

If my child learns ISL, will it affect their speech?

No. It won't. Research has shown that learning a signed language will not affect speech development. Hearing children's speech is not affected when they learn baby signs. The deaf child's use of signed language can develop far quicker than their vocal skills but will not affect them in the long term.

Do I need to learn ISL?

It is strongly recommended that you and your family learn ISL so that your deaf child can be better understood and feel part of the whole family. It also improves communication and strengthens the family bond.

Why are their different forms of ISL?

There are different forms of ISL such as regional variations. For example, there are differences between signs in Limerick and Dublin. This is also true of age and gender. In the past, deaf girls and boys were educated in different schools and due to not mixing with each other, different signs were naturally developed.

What is Signed English?

Signed English is a language support system. It is a form of manual communication which is used to teach various subjects through English. Signs were developed to show suffixes (which are the endings of words, "ing", "ed", "es" etc.) so that a deaf child could learn different tenses. This is not considered a language by the Deaf community as it can be difficult to use.

How long will it take for me to learn sign?

It varies from person to person. Some people can learn basic ISL within a few weeks; others may take longer but everyone can learn ISL.

How do I find an ISL course in my area?

The ISL Academy offers ISL classes. They use fully qualified ISL teachers who have graduated from Trinity College Dublin. There may be other teachers around the country that can offer ISL classes but it is

recommended to only go to a class accredited by the Irish Deaf Society. Contact the ISL Academy for more information on classes in your area where you can undertake classes with a FETAC Level 3 or 4 qualifications in ISL.

Which should I choose? Hearing aids or cochlear implant?

Hearing aids are small electronic devices that are worn behind the ear and amplify sounds.

Cochlear Implantation is a small electronic device worn externally with a second portion surgically placed under the skin behind your child's ear. Sounds bypass damaged portions of the ear and the implant sends auditory signals to the brain.

These are both devices to aid and possibly improve your child's hearing. However there is a misconception that they may cure your child's hearing loss. There are no guarantees which one will work for your child.

It is recommended that you seek advice from both medical professionals and Deaf children/adults who may wear hearings aid or cochlear implants.

The Medical Perspective on Deafness

The medical profession views being Deaf as something that needs to be cured and may discourage the use of Irish Sign Language. However research has shown that language acquisition is vital for a child's development.

Doctors and Nurses may not be familiar in the area of language acquisition or linguistics in relation to the Deaf community and are not the appropriate people to advise you on this. Your doctor may advise you to get a cochlear implant for your child but you should not feel pressurised to do so.

Why is it important to ask Deaf people about their experiences?

It is extremely important to ask Deaf people about their experiences as they will have gone through similar things themselves. i.e. attending hospital appointments, speech and language therapy, getting their hearing tested and working with visiting teachers and SNAs. They can also offer you first hand advice about being Deaf and discuss how it felt when using Irish Sign Language was discouraged.

What can I do to make sure other people working for my child are deaf aware?

You can contact the ISL Academy who offer Deaf Awareness Training.

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FURTHER SUPPORT

Sharing the Journey is an independent parent-to- parent association established following in-depth consultation and research. Its members are all parents of Deaf/hard of hearing children.

Sharing The Journey Aims;

- Provide parent-to-parent support for all parents and guardians of d/Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (DHOH) children.
- Promote mutual respect for all parents and guardians of DHOH children irrespective of communication, education and technological decisions they have made or will make for their children.
- Provide access to the most up-to-date research information on all issues relating to DHOH children.
- Raise awareness of the educational and communication needs of DHOH children.
- Provide educational, recreational and social activities for DHOH children and their families.
- Liaise with all organisations and associations working with DHOH children.
- Be a representative and advocacy body for parents of DHOH children.

What services do they offer?

Sharing The Journey offers you advice on early intervention. It also gives you the opportunities to meet other parents of DHOH children, and provides support and insight that only another parent can. They will also introduce you to other DHOH adults who are willing to answer your questions and give you practical suggestions for communication at home.

Irish Deaf Society

The Irish Deaf Society (IDS) has a number of different departments which offer different services for Deaf and hearing people. The staff in the IDS consists mainly of Deaf people who have grown up in hearing families and have the empathy to offer advice which parents appreciate.

What services do they offer?

Deaf Forward

Deaf Forward is an advocacy department and they provide information, access to services and support on any issues that may affect a Deaf person and their family. They also work with both Deaf and hearing families who may need support and assistance in relation to their child.

Irish Sign Language Academy

The Irish Sign Language Academy (ISL Academy) provides Irish Sign Language classes and Deaf Awareness Training which can improve you and your families' communication skills.

Deaf Adult Literacy Service

The IDS provides a literacy support service and provides literacy classes nationwide. Classes are FETAC accredited and include classes in Computers, English and Personal Development. We also run homework clubs for those still in school.

For parents who may feel isolated and unsure where to go, The Irish Deaf Society can assist. Do not hesitate to contact us for further information. Our full contact details are located on Page 44.

Contact Information

Website: www.deaf.ie

Phone: +353 1 8601878

Text: +353 86 3807033

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**DEAF; WE CAN!-
CASE PROFILES**

In this chapter you will read different case profiles of Deaf and hard of hearing adults from a variety of backgrounds. They will give their experience in education and prove that being Deaf is not a disability.

1. Finbarr Ryan

Born to hearing parents and was educated in a mainstream school.

2. Caroline McGrotty

Born to Deaf parents and was educated in a mainstream school and a school for the Deaf.

3. Maeve Dermody

Born to hearing parents and educated in a school for the Deaf.

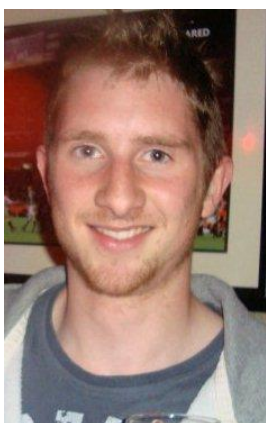
4. Emma Clarke

Born to hearing parents with one Deaf sibling and educated in a mainstream school.

5. Dr. John Bosco Conama

Born to hearing parents and educated in a school for the Deaf.

Finbarr Ryan



I was born in Limerick to a hearing family. When I was 2 ½, I was identified as being deaf. I was brought up in a hearing world. When I was in 5th class my parents decided to transfer me to a different school as I was having trouble communicating with my teacher who was also the principal at the time. I started my secondary education in 2002 which was a huge step for me as there were new teachers, subjects, sport activities, technologies etc... so it was challenging for me but also an adventure! I got involved in many different sport activities and have achieved a lot in these sports.

Throughout my mainstream education, I had to lip-read teachers and use radio aids which helped me to hear the teacher clearly and cut out background noise. I also availed of the Visiting Teacher who made sure that my teachers understood what they needed to do to ensure that I was well supported.

In 2008, I started my Third Level Education in the University of Limerick studying for a BA Degree in Construction Management & Engineering. I hope to graduate in 2012. Being in university was tough as this was the first time that I had to learn to be independent as I had to do everything myself, such as, telling the lecturer about my deafness, looking for a note-taker, arranging one-to-one tutorials etc... There was no Visiting Teacher to help me! The 1st year of my course was the hardest year of my life but by 2nd year, better supports were put in place.

I am now currently living in Dublin and doing work experience for university. Since I've been in Dublin, I have become involved with many Deaf organisations such as the Irish Deaf Sports Association, Irish Deaf Youth Association and I have also started ISL classes because I believe that ISL will benefit both my career and social life.

I also play Senior Rugby with UL Bohemians in Limerick and I am a member of the Academy Players. My sense of humour and big smile helps to get what I want in life, plus my parents believed in throwing me in at the deep end!

Finbarr Ryan.

Caroline McGrotty



I am from Donegal, born to Deaf parents and have two brothers who are both hearing. As both of my parents are Deaf, you would have thought my deafness would be identified early seeing as it can be hereditary. However it was not until after a hearing test in 1st class in school that I was then brought to hospital where I was later identified as being deaf. I was 8 years old at the time and in mainstream education in Donegal.

My parents decided to keep me in mainstream education with the use of just hearing aids plus a Visiting Teacher and speech therapist. When I was approaching the transition from primary to secondary education I told my parents I wanted to go to St. Mary's School for the Deaf in Dublin as I had not yet met any other Deaf children and felt there was something missing. My parents did not like this decision but they knew I wasn't happy in mainstream education!

At the age of 12, I entered St. Mary's in 1st year as a boarder. It was the first time I met other Deaf children the same age as me and while I had only a few basic signs to communicate with my family, I quickly became fluent in ISL after 3 months. I stayed at St. Mary's until the age of 18. I then went to study in the Centre for Deaf Studies in Trinity College Dublin for a Diploma in ISL Teaching. I graduated from this course with a First Class Honours in 2010 and will be returning for another 2 years for a degree in Deaf Studies. After this, I hope to do a Masters and Doctorate in social studies around the area of Deaf people. However, it's a long way away yet!

I became strongly involved in the Deaf Community in 2007 where I started out in the Irish Deaf Youth Association and in 'Hands On' which is a television programme for Deaf and hard of hearing people in Ireland. Furthermore I have been involved in steering groups relating to ISL and Advocacy. There is no limit for me; all I want to do is ensure that Deaf people have the same access to education and information as their hearing counterparts.

Caroline McGrotty.

Maeve Dermody



I am a Longford girl born to hearing parents with four siblings, two of whom are hard of hearing. When I was 9 months old, I didn't respond to anyone calling me and it became apparent that I had a hearing loss i.e. I was Deaf. Even though my two older brothers had a small hearing loss from birth, my parents thought that my deafness was a nightmare and truly believed that I wouldn't be '*normal*' and grow up to have a normal life.

I went to the local pre-school in Longford, and then went on to the residential school, St. Mary's School for Deaf Girls just before my fourth birthday. I stayed there mid-week returning home at weekends and for holidays until I completed my Leaving Certificate at the age of 19.

I applied to Dublin City University to pursue a Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree in Accounting & Finance and fortunately I got it! I was also the first in my family to go to university in Ireland. Now I have just completed my final year (2011) and will go on to do a Postgraduate Diploma in Education for two more years. My goal is to be a business/accounting teacher in a secondary school and complete further study with the chartered accounting bodies and to have a job in the sector also.

My experience of moving from a school for the Deaf where I was educated for 16 years of my life to a mixed environment in university didn't cause any problems for me. I was used to travelling home at the weekends and mixing with local hearing friends and this helped my social skills. Also, while I was growing up, I was involved in many different activities e.g. playing Gaelic football and doing Irish dancing in Longford and then playing basketball and going to the Youth Club in Dublin.

My family were told not to encourage the use of ISL at home and now they regret not learning it themselves because they would have had better communication with me when I was younger. However, we managed with our own home signs that we are still using today.

Maeve Dermody.

Emma Clarke



I was born in Dublin to hearing parents and have two sisters, one of whom is Deaf also. I was in a mainstream education for both primary and secondary Level.

I started university in Trinity College Dublin studying Dentistry in 2003 but after a difficult start of adjusting to college I dropped out and then returned the following year to do a degree in Physiotherapy. After 4 years of studying Physiotherapy, I graduated with a B.A.

Honours Degree, but after a year working in the area of Physiotherapy research, I decided to go back to what I initially wanted to do which was Dentistry. I am now in my third year.

After having a difficult start to college myself, I started to get involved in the DS3 which aims to increase the numbers and retention of Deaf and hard of hearing students in Ireland. They hold a summer school for students about to start their third level journey. This helps to ease their worries and gives them an opportunity to meet other Deaf and hard of hearing students who have the same concerns about making the big move!

I played an active role in this as project officer over the past few years, I am now involved distantly as the free hours in a Dental Student's timetable are scarce! I first learned ISL when I went to university and met with other people who were Deaf and hard of hearing studying in TCD also. It was then I began to take an interest in ISL and was Chairperson of the Sign Language Society during my undergraduate degree.

Doing something you enjoy and are genuinely passionate about is such a privilege. I don't blame my deafness for anything but accept that it may make some things just that little more difficult. While not the only reason, it was certainly a contributor to not having the confidence, maturity or experience to see that there were ways around the challenges that I faced such as group work, etc. Dropping out seemed like the only option at the time

I have accepted that some things may just take a little longer when you have a hearing issue to think of. I would not have been ready for such a tough course at the age of 18 but now having being given a second chance I am more driven than ever and really enjoy what I do.

Emma Clarke.

Dr. John Bosco Conama



I come from Roscommon and I was identified as being Deaf at a young age. There are differing stories of when I was identified as being deaf; some say it was at birth and others say it was at the age of one year.

I went to Beechpark which was a school for Deaf boys in Stillorgan, South Dublin. Sadly it closed down a few years ago. It was there I was introduced to other Deaf boys and signing. This was the first time I realised that I was not the only deaf person in the world. My friends and I developed life-lasting friendships and we shared the same concerns and views. I was transferred to St. Joseph's School for Deaf Boys in Cabra in North Dublin at the age of ten. It was there, I learned to acquire ISL and have been fluent ever since.

I left the school without completing my Leaving Certificate but later decided to go back to night classes to complete my Leaving Certificate. I then went on to University College Dublin to complete a social policy and economics degree which was also through evening classes. Interpreters were not available at that time so I had to rely heavily on notes supplied by lecturers and radio aids. Despite these shortcomings, I managed to complete the degree successfully. I could not rest after this so I completed a research Master's Degree in Social Policy in Trinity College Dublin. Again I could not rest until I successfully completed my doctorate with the Equality Studies Centre at University College Dublin.

I become the coordinator of Bachelor in Deaf Studies degree in the Centre for Deaf Studies in Trinity College Dublin. I was temporarily employed as the acting Director of this centre when the director was on sabbatical leave. There I managed the successful move to our new building from the old one. At the same time, I coordinated the change in the programme from a diploma level to its degree level.

I have been involved in community activities ranging from youth, sports and to political level. This has brought me to the four corners of Ireland and the rest of world. I have been invited to present papers at universities across the world and I have also been involved in several international projects and events. As a result, I have a lot of international friends with whom I communicate through social networking channels on a daily basis.

Being Deaf is no barrier to successful achievements as my experience testifies. The barriers I have experienced were (and sadly still are) the attitudes by society and the level of expectations for us are always lower than the rest. Hence, I keep surprising loads of people including my wider family, which is nice!

John Bosco Conama.

SUGGESTED READING

Recommended Reading:

- Ladd, Paddy. *Understanding Deaf Culture in search of Deafhood*; 2003.
- McDonnell, Patrick. *Deaf Studies in Ireland: an Introduction*; 2002.
- Matthews, Patrick A & O' Baoill, Donall P. *The Irish Deaf Community, Volume 2: The Structure of Irish Sign Language*. 2000
- Crean, Edward. *Breaking the Silence: The Education of the Deaf in Ireland 1816-1996*. 1997.
- Matthews, Patrick A. *The Irish Deaf Community, Volume 1: Survey report, history of education, language and culture*. 1996

Recommended websites:

- www.babyhearing.org
- www.ncse.ie
- www.babysignlanguage.com
- www.deaflinx.com
- www.education.ie

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USEFUL CONTACTS

There are over 25 regional Deaf organisations all over Ireland. If you want to find your local organisation, just contact the Irish Deaf Society for more. Meanwhile, here is a list of some of the main organisations in Ireland.

National Deaf-led organisations

Irish Deaf Society

30 Blessington Street, Dublin 7

Phone: 01 8601878 **Mobile:** 086 3807033 **Fax:** 01 8601960

Email: info@irishdeafsociety.ie

Website: www.deaf.ie

Irish Deaf Youth Association

30 Blessington Street, Dublin 7

www.irishdeafyouth.com

Irish Deaf Sports Association

40 Lwr Drumcondra Rd, Dublin 9

www.irishdeafsports.net

191st Dublin Deaf Scouts

40 Lwr Drumcondra Rd, Dublin 9

www.dublindeafscouts.com

Education

St. Mary's School for Deaf Girls

Dominican Convent, Cabra, Dublin 7

www.stmarysdeafgirls.ie

St. Joseph's School for Deaf Boys

Navan Road, Cabra, Dublin 7

www.stjosephsboys.ie

Mid West School for Hearing Impaired Children

Rosbrien, Limerick

mwshic@eircom.net

Other Organisations

Sharing the Journey

www.sharingthejourney.ie

Phone/Text: +353 86 7225659

Ann Sullivan Foundation for Deaf-Blind People

40 Lwr Drumcondra Road, Dublin 9

www.annesullivan.ie

Catholic Institute for the Deaf People

40 Lwr Drumcondra Road, Dublin 9

www.cidp.ie

Deafhear.ie

35 Nth Frederick Street, Dublin 1

www.deafhear.ie

National Council for Special Education (Home Tuition Scheme)

1-2 Mill Street, Trim, Co. Meath.

www.ncse.ie

Irish Deaf Society

30 Blessington Street

Dublin 7

www.deaf.ie

[st.stephen's green trust](#)