



# Factsheet

## The Cultural Model of Deafness

Inclusion  
London

The term Deaf culture is relatively new in terms of definition for the UK Deaf community. It grew out of national and international research and writings over the past 20 or 30 years, for example Carol Padden's "Inside Deaf Culture"<sup>1</sup>.

At Inclusion London we use the term Deaf Cultural Model to explain the position of the UK British Sign Language (BSL) community. This term focuses on the shared experiences, histories and, more importantly, the central role that sign language has within the Deaf community. It is this key characteristic that differentiates Deaf and "hearing" people. In the Deaf community we see the two separate cultures as the "hearing world" and "Deaf community".

The Deaf community is international. What binds Deaf people, despite their different national sign languages, is their shared visual communication, history, cultural activities, and the need for a Deaf "space" where people come together.

The Deaf Cultural Model rejects the "medical definition of deafness" as either a loss or impairment. This is comparable with the Social Model of disability and Disabled people's rejection of the Medical Model. Where the Deaf community sometimes depart from the Social Model is around the term "impairment". For the majority of culturally Deaf people there is no "impairment nor hearing loss". What makes the British Sign Language (BSL) Deaf community unique has been its campaign to be recognised as a linguistic minority. For the BSL Deaf community the capital "D" is used in a political sense to demonstrate their campaign for cultural and linguistic recognition.

For many members of the Deaf community their shared history is both personal and social. Deaf people will have gone to the same school, in many cases boarding schools where most of their younger lives will have

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<sup>1</sup> Inside Deaf Culture, Carol Padden & Tom Humphries (2005)

been spent together, and then met again at their Deaf clubs, Deaf social events, reunions and other more personal events.

One of the first things a Deaf person will often ask on meeting, before asking your name, is what school or Deaf club you go to. Making this connection is an important part of any greeting, as it will then help an individual to understand what shared history or people in common you may have.

Inclusion London acknowledges that there are different communication needs including BSL, lip reading, electronic note taking and so on. We aim to ensure we provide support to meet different communications needs including that of people who are Deaf or deafened.

The British Deaf Association has been leading the campaign for the legal recognition of British Sign Language (BSLI). This legal status would give legal protection and rights to BSL as a language and Deaf people as a rule.

The British Deaf Community is small in relation to other cultural groups in the UK. We envisage that there are:

- between 100,000-150,000 BSL users in the UK
- 1 in 10 Deaf people born into a Deaf family (where one or more members are BSL users)
- 1 in 10 of those born into a Deaf family might have Deaf children
- an estimated 10 million people living with some type of hearing loss (according to recent research this figure is due to double by the year 2020).

The UK Deaf community is international with Deaf sign language users coming from all over the world. Recently we have seen a small development of new Deaf migrants setting up support groups.

In 2014 we saw a small growth of local Deaf representation groups emerging (this could be in response to the closure of Deaf clubs which have always been a cultural mainstay for Deaf people) – local Deaf users

are becoming more keen to add their opinions and views to local services development.

## For more information contact:

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