**Supported Evidence Session – 21.11.2021**

Two Asian Deaf sign language users (one woman and one man) asked to give evidence to contribute towards the United Nations report. The session was facilitated by a Black Deaf sign language user. BSL interpreters were present as the note taker was hearing.

Transcripts

Person 1: “I used to work at the Shaw Trust and I was the first Deaf Asian co-ordinator – this was a long time ago 1991. I’m very keen on being involved in this. I set up different organisations with BAME Deaf people. There was a lot of activity going on in terms of the social workers and that kind of things and I thought I wanted to set something up for Deaf people ourselves. Nervous to begin with and had young children. Set up a group maybe February 1992 and we had 7 Deaf Asian – Deaf Asian Women’s Association. It was really exciting this group up and we used to meet every week but the management committee didn’t really know how to be a management committee and we got some funding in to try and improve or knowledge and slowly but surely it seemed that hearing people took over again and we had to manage lipreading. Time went on and I learned quite a lot about management and funding and rule and all those things – we managed to get £90,000 for our group and the funding came in from all places and it was good for my knowledge and background. The Deaf women’s group – were issues – difficult to find Deaf Asian women to join with knowledge of Committees. Up to the year 2000. I felt very responsible. It had a big effect on me personally. I was very anxious. Within Deaf culture there can be a lot of negativity and jealousy about what I was achieving. It is all linked to education and what is going on in the world and how people function in work. And then the Shaw trust. I became a personal advisor and that was for disabled people – 4/5 years. Then I worked in Connexions with young people aimed at supporting them into education and training. I enjoy working with young people. When I was in Tower Hamlets I had a very good team and I miss them but I had to leave in 2018 because of cuts cuts cuts from Conservatives. I was made redundant. Now I work in Newham. I am the only profoundly Deaf person on a team of hearing people and I find them very cold. When I was looking for jobs I found it much harder than years ago. I researched into both the Double Tick and the Disability Confident schemes. They are meaningless. It is clear the government has not been liaising with Deaf or disability organisations. I feel the government is choosing their own way and not listening to us. When I was made redundant and I went to job centre, the staff lacked Deaf or disability awareness. There was a Disability Employment Advisor but again they were hearing and they never booked interpreters. This is not just me this has happened to. Other Deaf friends are experiencing the same issue – they say to me, I keep telling them I am Deaf! I worry about the younger generation. The bug Deaf organisations are very white. There is a real lack of Deaf role models and Deaf empowerment. Deaf people are becoming isolated and that affects their mental health. There is a really big gap if I am being honest. I try to encourage Deaf young people, I keep saying you have to prepare yourselves. For example, there was a big change to Universal credit and a lot of Deaf people don’t realise. I now work through Newham Council. They do not follow equality, diversity and inclusion. When you work in a company for 15 years and transfer careers there is so much new to learn it is overwhelming and all the information is in English. Policies should be written in plain English. I was just given a big pack of information and told to understand it. I’m also expected to teach colleagues about Deaf awareness. I’m there to do a job, and employed as a public servant, as a Deaf awareness specialist. And now I am getting older and I feel a lot of pressure and discrimination from my age and my Deafness and language is – give me time to learn. So much thrown at me at once. There should be reasonable adjustments for Deaf people and there is none. If you look at me, I am a strong woman but they don’t know what is going on inside. One big thing that is missing for the Deaf community is the understanding that for Deaf sign language users who are BAME, English will be only their third or fourth language.”

Person 2: “I was at college on a course – graphics and I used to have assessments and an interpreter – meant to have one for group work in college but that didn’t always happen – at start of course not in plac so had to wait until interpreter borough on board so that held me back. Met the interpreter in college, promised they would be there, eventually, took ages for college to get back to me and could I start the course. Finally I went and the interpreter came and I was able to access my course and take assessments and the teacher had said you know this may not be suitable for you and I felt I was being discriminated against, I felt my confidence was lost, made to feel I was not good enough, so I went to a different college and I started to do IT – gave up my dream of the design course and I went and I did an IT course that I thought would suit me as I am quite technical – I went through level 1,2 and 3, did really well, got all the units, had an interpreter Different experience from that other college. I achieved what I wanted to, got my qualifications – got all my levels and got my IT qualifications as well. I also learned about PC maintenance and repair, can fix computers if broken. I did really well on the course. And am hoping I will be able to get decent employment linked to the course I have done – kind of vocational so I can do technology, repairs, have applied for quite a number of jobs through the job centre and I tell them what kind of job I want like computer technician that kind of things and when they find me jobs suitable in IT and they set up an interview, interpreter, polish up for the interview, then I waited and the interview did not turn up for the interview. At that time support wasn’t really good and I tried really hard, worked so hard for it and I felt the job centre really weren’t that interested in me, keep me waiting. I wasn’t happy. They should have interpreters on tap. Travel all that way. You have to show evidence you are making an effort to find a job and I felt really let down by the system. Sometimes Deaf people are shoved aside. I’ve had enough of it really. The job centre in particular I think. Yes you’re talking about rights across the board. It’s about setting up systems so Deaf people can have interpreters when we need them. Without them we become stuck, we are held back in life. Deaf people become so frustrated. And I don’t think people understand how that can make you feel when interpreters don’t turn up – very very stressful on the Deaf person and makes you feel I give up, I can’t be bothered. Peabody Housing Trust – they put a poster on the wall for a job on the noticeboard and I saw the advertisement and I thought do you know what I’ll apply for that. It was about showing people around, organising different events, so I took this advertisement, I said I am quite good at organising time and meetings and was happy to go forward for the job and again no interpreter, so I thought you know what I am going to rely on pen and paper. Thankfully the guy was good with me but he was speaking really fast. He was shocked I was Deaf. I don’t kind of forewarn people – being Deaf has nothing to do with it. I like to get in there and meet face to face before going “oh, I’m Deaf” – trying to break through those barriers. Maybe pen and paper aren’t always that suitable. I kind of enjoy the challenge now I am getting round it this way. We sat for about an hour discussing that and the details and why he should hire me and all of this. Said I wanted to be earning, wanted better quality of life, said I can do my best to communicate with people with pen and paper and gestures, not like I can’t manage with people and vice versa and I am quite a confident job and, in the end, they said yes and I got the job and I am really happy I got the job. I have a special book, like a handbook that tells me the things I am supposed to do and we use email a lot. Unfortunately, they had to let me go cos it didn’t take off – this service they were offering – but I thought it was a good experience for six months and I was thankful to put it on my CV. So now trying to find a new job but it’s not easy, so many barriers. I need someone to teach me how to create a decent CV. Something I need some help with and something like a personal statement. So you know when problems hit you like that you have to find ways to get round the barriers. You build up, you learn. Obviously I can’t make phone calls. I don’t have interpreters attached to my hip – can be difficult making phone calls for a job – interpreters not on tap. But I’m not alone – lots of other Deaf people – some have good jobs- but some are at home, have money issues – and then that isn’t good for mental health. I think for Deaf people there is so much discrimination there it is hard to come back after those knocks, especially when you are looking for employment, it is a hard thing. I feel like I am down here and all the jobs are up here. I have a brother and he has a job, he has had a good education, he has had a lot more chances than me because he is hearing and he hasn’t had the same barriers to education and access to information and he manages to get jobs – for me it’s like there is a delay. The thing is not to give up you see, Deaf education there is a delay in children being taught to speak. Constantly catching up – a real inequality between myself and my sibling. He has had all the opportunities and I have had multiple barriers all the way through.”

Person 1: “Most disability assessments they don’t follow up properly. When I applied to be a teacher they gave me agency interpreters – very low standard – when to manage my degree I needed high level interpreters. In this country more and more BAME whose first language is not English. They think cheaper to get BSL. I had to fight fight fight – Deaf people don’t fight for themselves and they’re not empowered. There is a law but they forget it or ignore it for an easier job. They told X the course is not suitable – that is a big discrimination. My experience as a qualified careers advisor – they should involve Deaf and disabled people. Many Deaf people have degree or high level qualifications but employers don’t look at you. You need to sell yourself and get to know English jargon. Job centres don’t follow equality and diversity. They want their job easy. I never had an interpreter when I was signing on. But you have to remember that for BAME sign language users, English will only be their third or fourth language. Deaf people don’t know how to apply to Access to Work for interpreters or Communication Support Workers. For Deaf people if you want to make a complaint you need to read English. Interpreters aren’t there as advisors just as interpreters. Looking to DWP and whether they follow equality and diversity but colleges are failing too. In the 1990s there was work going on where Deaf people were advising jobcentres on how to be more inclusive. It’s like it’s gone backwards. Why do we have to keep fighting? It’s really worn us out.”

Facilitator: “My experience with a lot of Deaf people has been that they give up their jobs because of the communication barriers/language barriers at work. We encourage Deaf people to have their dreams but it doesn’t become a reality for them because of the barriers that they face.”

Person 1 “It’s wonderful Deaf people dream but they need to understand reality. They have to get good qualifications and education and Continuing Professional Development. And the problem is that at primary and secondary school you get a low level of communication support worker which has a detrimental effect on Deaf people’s education.”