



Daphne Brett
The Hello Church Network
EASTBOURNE

e: hellochurches@gmail.com

t: 01323 484220

September 2017

Report on “Dear Church, Can You Hear Me” event

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ

We really appreciated the interest shown in the recent event, and are especially thankful for all those attending on the day. It is often impossible to gather together Deaf BSL Users, Lip Readers, those who have Hearing Impairment and those who are Hearing. At this event we were truly blessed meet Christians from all those groups able to come and join together for this first event.

One comment was “What a FAB-U-LOUS day!” (The capitals and emphasis is from the author). For those of us on the planning group it was joyous to see everyone there, and although exhausting, we give glory to God for all that took place. We learned a lot, especially about the mental and physical demands of sign interpretation or following the screen to text commentary. We are now trying to work out where God wants to take us for the future and what additional help we will need for that.

Initial presentations by Rev Gill Behenna and the Revd Susan Myatt were given in British Sign Language, and these were interpreted for those of us who use oral language. It was informative and challenging, and we discovered there is much to be done to enable Deaf BSL Users, and Christians with Hearing Impairment, who can often be struggling in isolation from church life.

Gill and Susan led the workshop for BSL Users, which was signed. From that workshop we recognised there is a great need for Christians to learn sign language. We particularly need Christians able to use the language both of the Christian faith and BSL together. Susan also explained about the need for visual resources, because BSL is very much a visual language. Using tools like PowerPoint and drama are essential. We had planned for an interpreter to be on our reception desk, the person concerned was unable to attend at the last minute. Susan emphasised how important it is to have a BSL Interpreter as a welcomer and for the coffee teams. It is necessary to prepare interpreters who, of course, have to be appropriately qualified and

briefed as to what to expect. One disappointment for event organisers was that no Deaf BSL User from East Sussex attended.

The workshop for church leaders was smaller than hoped. Some leaders planning to attend were unwell just before the event, and we had hardly any response from the wider range of churches contacted. It is a real concern if church leaders do not consider this topic a high priority, and we recognise that much awareness raising is needed. The Revd David Farey led the church leaders workshop, who has a real heart for those with all levels of hearing impairment, was able to include someone he knows willing to share personal experiences to open up a helpful discussion.

The Revd Simon James-Morse shared how his church, who has a service for Deaf BSL Users, are learning from those who are Deaf BSL Users. In his workshop, Simon stressed the need for visual resources and good preparation, with an outline of services, sermon notes, and a programme to tell folk what is about to happen. He also emphasised that attitudes of hearing congregations are important, and there should be deaf awareness training for everyone in every church. Finally, a useful practical tip was to have an arrow alongside hymn lyrics on a screen to indicate which word is being sung.

The Hearing Impaired workshop was a larger group than initially anticipated, and took a few minutes to settle down. A letter was read out with the author's permission, sharing an individual's experience of being hearing impaired in a hearing church. People generously shared from their hearts the isolation, frustration, hurts and difficulties, they had each experienced in different churches. As with Deaf BSL Users, it is negative attitudes towards deaf people which causes them to feel they have to withdraw from church activities, meetings and fellowship.

Overall, provision for people who are hearing impaired is NOT good in most churches. We were told that in one single church about 50% of the congregation are hearing impaired. The group saw value in meeting together occasionally, including with audiologists and other specialists, such as those from the Hearing Resource Centre or Hearing Link, to encourage greater understanding of anything that would be helpful. This group also considered that every church would benefit from Deaf Awareness training, but especially those with responsibility for a role at the front of churches. The need for speakers to use microphones at all times was repeatedly an issue for everyone attending, and for people to use them correctly, such as speaking clearly and without turning away from the microphone etc. It was considered that these basic but important issues could be addressed in a well planned training scheme.

Overall, the day was brilliant. We are, however, a really small group of volunteers who felt led to initiate the event. To move forward we will need

more help. We are still analysing the amount of information collected from attendees.

We are liaising with group leaders to identify clearly the best way forward but here are a few conclusions reached so far:

- No single church will be able to do everything, but all can improve.
- Our small group cannot do what is needed alone, we need more help.
- Churches will have to work together in order to create adequate provision for Deaf BSL Users, for whom we could find absolutely nothing across East Sussex.
- How could we set up a Deaf Café in Eastbourne?
- How do we establish a regular event to encourage the hearing impaired to have encouragement and fellowship with other Christians in the Eastbourne area?
- How do we raise awareness and establish some practical training for church leaders and for those who read the bible, lead prayers or speak from the front of church?
- Are there people willing to act as Champions for the deaf in different churches so that we can start working with them?
- What more can we learn from the Deaf BSL community to help establish a meaningful Christian community of Deaf BSL using believers in East Sussex?

All ideas, constructive suggestions, and offers of help should be sent to Daphne Brett (see contact details above).