

# On being a Deaf Role Model

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# This presentation

- Brief description of the “Deaf Role Model Project”
- Focus on the evaluation of the project
- One aspect of evaluation only
  - Deaf role model’s own perspectives on:
    - Impact of the project
    - Impact on them

# Introduction

## The Deaf Role Model (DRM) project

- Set up by The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS)
- In England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- Recruits d/Deaf people (not previously professional service providers) and trains them as DRMs
- Gives parents of deaf children of all ages an opportunity to meet d/Deaf adults.

# Aims of the NDCS DRM project

- For Deaf Role Models (DRMs) to share their experiences and provide information and support to parents.
- To enhance families' knowledge of and positive attitudes towards deafness.
- To help parents to feel less anxious and more able to help their children to develop independent skills.
- To increase the children's levels of confidence and self-esteem.

# The delivery of the DRM service

- Up to three Home visits with a ‘matched’ DRM of parents’ choice
- Visits to schools/youth clubs and colleges
- DRM workshops with parents of recently identified deaf children

# The total evaluation study

1. **Monitoring** — to see whether the project had achieved its pre-set targets and to monitor the pathways of referral to the project
2. **Benefits and outcomes – from the perspectives of:**
  - a. Parents
  - b. Deaf young people
  - c. Professionals
  - d. DRMs
3. **Learning for the future**

# The evaluation involving DRMs

Focus groups with DRMs took place across five different areas in the UK.

## **Aims of the focus groups were to explore:**

- DRMs professional and personal experiences of their involvement in the project
- DRMs perspective of the delivery of service
- DRMs views on the future of the service

# DRMs' evaluation

Intended areas of evaluation to be explored with the DRMs:

- Experiences of recruitment, training and practice
- Perceived benefits and difficulties
- Their evaluation of impact on families (and deaf young people)

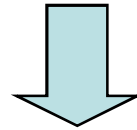
Unintended area of evaluation that arose:

- impact of involvement on the DRMs' professional and personal lives.

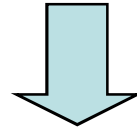


# Deaf Role Models

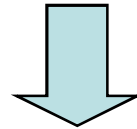
92 deaf people applied to become DRMs



73 were selected



50 attended the training (five were assessed again, and two passed)



47 passed the training programme

# Characteristics of the DRMs

Based on information from 41 DRMs\*:

- **Gender:** 31 females and 10 males
- **Preferred communication method:**

British Sign Language	5
Sign Supported English	2
Spoken English	11
Used more than one communication approach - e.g. BSL, SSE and spoken English	About half of DRMs

- **Degrees of deafness:**
  - 27 profoundly deaf
  - 12 severely deaf
- **Technical aids:** Some of the DRMs used hearing aids and some did not, and only two had cochlear implants.

\* Some data missing

# The experience of being a DRM

## Perspectives on DRM training:

- **Benefits**

- Found training informative;
- It brought a range of d/Deaf people together, in terms of age, deafness, language, and experience;
- They became clear about their role, which allowed them to be more professional and positive.

- **Difficulties**

- Missing a training session created difficulties as it was not repeated;
- Long wait between top-up sessions;
- Boundaries; for example, not giving advice.

# Perspectives on professionalism

- **Boundaries** – it was sometimes frustrating to keep to professional boundaries and not give biased answers.
- **Saw gaps** – parents asking questions that other professionals should have covered already
- Thought home visits were **more personal** and had more of an impact.
- Gained **confidence** and learned **new skills**.

# Perceived benefits for service users

- **For parents**

- Seeing how d/Deaf people can achieve
  - Asking curious questions that they have not asked of professionals
  - Exploring childhood through d/Deaf eyes
  - Feeling challenged
  - Feeling reassured
  - More positive about deafness
  - More confident about the future
  - Individuality of the service
  - More personal and direct because at home
- Sometimes at the same time

# Perceived benefits

- **For deaf young people (not infants)**
  - for some, it was the first time they had met a d/Deaf adult
  - helped reduce feelings of not being alone
  - Reinforced the idea that d/Deaf adults can achieve anything
  - Expand their concept of ‘deaf’
- **For professionals**
  - diversity of d/Deaf people important in expanding their understanding
  - helpful in understanding range of experiences, needs and strengths of deaf young people.

# Perceived difficulties for DRMs

- **Parents' expectations:**

- DRMs were asked questions that they felt unable to answer – DRMs are not social workers.
- Parents tending to choose DRMs that matched their communication choices meant they did not benefit from the diversity of DRMs available
- Parents' curiosity could be very personal

*“It was more personal and they asked things, maybe about my personal life.”*

- Not all parents knew how best to use the DRM – what could they ask/discuss

# Perceived difficulties for DRMs

- **Coping with parents' attitudes to deafness:**
  - Some parents had a very negative attitude towards deafness and d/Deaf people – was a shock
  - Could be hard to challenge parents' low expectations of their deaf child or their negative views on deafness
  - Parents might have too positive a view of deafness – important to point out what was hard as well



# Experiences of being a DRM

- **At a professional level**
  - Learning new skills that could be used in other parts of professional and personal life
  - Gaining in confidence
  - New knowledge/information
  - Reinforces awareness of skills and knowledge the DRMs already had but had never used
  - Practical experience of family support

# Experiences of being a DRM

- **At the professional/personal level**

**Feeling worthwhile** - feelings of:

- Satisfaction;
- Having achieved something worthwhile;
- Self worth;
- Pride.

*“It gives you a great buzz!”*

**Feelings of pride:**

DRMs were proud of having the opportunity to share their experiences with parents of deaf children and young people.

The experience also reinforced some DRMs' own feelings of pride in being Deaf.

# Experiences of being a DRM

- **Personal impact on identity**

This arose because:

- Of the intense focus on deafness
  - Talking about themselves brought up issues from their own past
  - The diversity of d/Deaf role models who were trained together
  - DRMs were conscious of how they presented themselves
- Impact on identity:
    - For some reinforcing of own Deaf identity
    - For some challenging of own deaf identity
    - For all – sense of personal journey

***“It’s been a little journey and hopefully it will continue.”***

# Experiences of being a DRM: difficulties

## Lack of take up:

- Some DRMs wondered whether there was a lack of interest in the project or them as an individual

## Limitations/lack of experience:

- Did not feel well prepared, e.g. when trying to interact with a deaf young person with additional needs.
- Keeping boundaries.

## Safety:

- The lone worker policy was not always adhered to.

# Overall views on the DRM service

The majority of the DRMs said they would encourage others to become deaf role models.

*“... the training has been fantastic; the opportunities to work with other deaf people, other professionals has been great. My experiences of participating in the project as a DRM have been positive...”*

# Concluding issues

- Significance of taking 'lay' d/Deaf people and building a DRM service
- Diversity of d/Deaf people important learning resource for all who have contact
- Good trainings vital to cope with personal impact and boundary issues

# Concluding issues

- DRM approach works for ‘new’ parents and for parents of older children, as well as deaf young people themselves [a childhood long resource??]
- BUT what is a role model?
  - Someone who achieves outstanding success?
    - And/or
  - Someone who has a satisfying and ordinary life?

# Contacts and thanks

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