Services for Deaf People in a Rural Setting: Issues and Recommendations for Sign Language

**Helpful Hints**

# 1. What are Sign Languages?

* Sign Languages are languages in their own right.
* Like any other language, Sign Languages develop and change.

Sign Languages are visual languages.  
Sign Languages are the languages of deaf people

* Sign Languages are not usually uniform, but have dialects that differ from school to school, town to town and region to region.
* Sign Languages in rural areas are often local languages/dialects.
* One dialect is not better than another as long as it is used by Deaf people. Deaf people from different regions should respect and value the signs used in other dialects of their language.
* Foreign Sign Languages could be used to enrich the national/local language. However, foreign Sign Languages should never replace the national/local Sign Language and dialects.

# 2. Sign Language and integration

\* Sign Language helps deaf people break through their isolation and facilitates integration into society. \* Sign Language helps deaf people to develop mentally and intellectually. \* Sign Language helps deaf people to develop an identity both individually and as a group. \* Deaf adults should be given the opportunity to participate fully in the activities of the local community. \* Learning Sign Language and using it well is not an obstacle to learning spoken and written language. On the contrary, Sign Language facilitates learning other languages.

Sign Language **facilitates** communication  
Sign Language does **not** hinder integration of deaf people into communities

# 3. Hearing people and Sign Language

**Teachers**

* Teachers should develop a positive relationship with families of deaf children.
* They can help train parents **and** their children in the national Sign Language and/or local sign dialect.
* Teachers can help to spread awareness in the community about Sign Language.
* Teachers and Sign Language interpreters can mobilise other professionals.

Teachers should be encouraged to learn Sign Language and use it.  
Teachers should encourage families of deaf children to use Sign Language.

**Parents of Deaf children**

* Parents can help to spread awareness in the community about Sign Language.
* Where necessary parents should ask for help to communicate with their children.
* Where possible, parents should ensure that their deaf children go to school.
* Parents can support deaf adults by sharing in activities.

# 4. Sign Language Development

**We can all play a part**

Deaf children and adults should be involved in the development of 'their' Sign Language.

* Deaf adults can provide training courses through their own organisations and clubs.
* Deaf adults can be teachers and assistant teachers within the schools.

**The role of Hearing and Deaf people**

arents of deaf children, local communities and schools and other professionals should encourage, support and be involved in Sign Language development.

* Public awareness campaigns can be carried out.
* People can learn the local Sign Language.
* People should practice Sign Language with deaf people in order to become fluent.

Local NGOs (non-government organisations) could support the development of Sign Languages in poor, rural areas.

* NGOs can provide the local communities with specialised people for orientation and training.
* NGOs can hold workshops, meetings and seminars to develop Sign Language(s).

They can offer assistance by providing technical and educational materials.

# 5. Sign Language Dictionaries

Sign Language dictionaries are important for the language development process.

* A Sign Language dictionary should contain the national/regional Sign Language and the local dialects.
* Sign Language dictionaries do not aim to make the language uniform. They are simply a record of the languages (and dialects) as they are used.
* Sign Language dictionaries are not teaching materials. They form a data-base of information about the language and facilitate study and use of the language.
* Deaf people should be given responsibility for the development of a Sign Language dictionary.

**Data Collection**

* A team of deaf people could be used for data-collection. Deaf people, educated or not, are the experts as it is their language.
* Don't be put off by the idea of creating a Sign Language dictionary. Simple materials can be used for data-collection and the development of a dictionary. If nothing else is available, paper and pencil are enough.
* For more details on compiling a Sign Language dictionary, please see appendix.

# 6. Conclusion

This short booklet is not designed to cover all topics relating to Sign Language. The aim is to encourage you, whether you are hearing or deaf, to assist the development and use of Sign Languages.

**Goals:**

Sign Language should be accessible to everyone.  
Sign Languages should cover the vocabulary of day-to-day needs.

* Sign Languages are the languages of deaf people.
* Sign Language should be accessible everyone.
* Teachers should be encouraged to learn Sign Language and use it.
* Parents of deaf children, local communities and schools and other professional should encourage, support and be involved in Sign Language development.
* Deaf children and adults should be involved in the development of 'their' Sign Language.
* Sign Language does not hinder integration of deaf people into communities.
* Sign Language facilitates communication.
* Sign Language should cover the vocabulary of day-to-day needs \* Sign Languages are visual languages.
* Sign Language dictionaries are important for the language development process.
* Teachers should encourage families of deaf children to use Sign Language
* Local NGOs could support the development of Sign Language in poor, rural areas.

Initiative for Deaf Education in the Third World, Egypt, 1997

Issues and Recommendations for [Interpreters](http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/interps.docx)  
Issues and Recommendations for [Parents](http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/parents.docx)  
Issues and Recommendations for [Teachers](http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/teachers.docx)

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