

We're On Our Way!



Dear Supporters,

Signal has now been operating for six months since the merger of our founding organisations and we are already dramatically growing the work that we do for the benefit of people with hearing loss both in the UK and overseas. The response to the merger from our partners and the people our work benefits has been fantastic and this means that we can continue to help to make communities deaf friendly.

NEW PARTNERSHIPS

One of the exciting developments for Signal has been a growth in partnerships. New areas of work are being forged in our UK operations and in April-June we are working together with the charity Hearing Link to run a specialist course on managing hearing loss. We are also working with the Audiology department at the Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust to showcase assistive technology.

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

In our overseas work we are delighted to have built a new three-way partnership with Sense International, which works around the world to aid deafblind people, and Sound Seekers, which looks to "improve the lives of the hearing impaired." This new collaboration will see our three organisations share knowledge, skills and capacity wherever possible, so that we can collectively increase assistance to people with a sensory impairment.

These new partnerships and developments are fantastic, but we also continue to prize partnerships that have grown over a number of years. These are the cornerstones that have allowed us to do so much already and without them we would not exist today.

I hope that you enjoy reading Wave, and please get in touch if you wish to comment on anything in this issue.

Mathew Gilbert - Chief Executive, Signal

Chickens lay a bright future for the vocational training centre

Africa Story



The end of last year saw 305 "professional layers" from the country's top chicken supplier arrive at the Vocational Training Centre for Deaf Learners (VTCD) in Tanzania. The chicken farm is the first of the VTCD's planned income generation schemes.

These healthy little chicks are now fully grown chickens and are expected to start laying any day now. This means that the students will have a regular supply of fresh eggs and the centre will be able to generate valuable income from sales.



Deaf student Zainabu told us:

“ We were all amazed to arrive back from holidays to find the chicks having grown up so fast. ”

Eggcellent!





Signal and Hearing Link tackle hearing loss in Shropshire

Signal has teamed up with the charity Hearing Link to run a self-management programme that helps people with hearing loss to take control of their lives.

The first session was in April, and friends and family members



also attended to tackle the issues together. The venue has a hearing induction loop and a palantypist relayed everything that was said into text on a large screen so that no one was excluded. The participants began by sharing stories about how their hearing loss developed and how it impacts their lives. Just knowing that there are others in the same situation is often a huge boost for people.

The group then exchanged coping strategies and techniques, led by Hearing Link volunteers Lyndon and John, who themselves have been through the course.

The participants also moved on to set themselves some goals for everyday life – something as simple, perhaps, as asking the person next to them to face them when speaking, or to make a train journey. Everyone is looking forward to reviewing their own progress at the second session in May.

Equipment for Audiology

Our UK Operations Director, James Cousins, has had great pleasure in handing over new assistive devices, known as streamers, to Vicky Sadler, deputy head of Audiology at The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust.



Streamers send sound from audio equipment, televisions or microphones directly to people's hearing aids. This gives people with hearing loss access to sounds and conversations that others would take for granted. People who were previously isolated by hearing loss can take part in the lives of their families and communities again.

However, these devices are not available on the NHS and are costly. People worry about spending their money on something that may not be suitable for them. The scheme run by The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust allows people to try before they buy.

Audiology specialists will now be able to use their professional judgement to identify people who may benefit. Being able to give the devices a test run means that people who could benefit are given the confidence to go ahead and purchase the equipment.

Dates for Your Diary



Tinnitus Support Groups

Facilitated by Signal and the Audiology department at The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust.

Wednesday 7 May | 10–12am

Telford Tinnitus Support Group

Education Centre, Princess Royal Hospital, Grainger Drive, Apley Castle, Telford, TF1 6TF.

Parking charges apply.

Thursday 29 May | 10–12am

Shrewsbury Tinnitus Support Group

£2 per meeting or £5 annual contribution

The Lantern Community Centre, Meadow Farm Drive, Harlescott, Shrewsbury, SY1 4NG.

Free car park and on-road parking.

Exhibitions

Wednesday 14 May | 10–4pm

See and Hear Exhibition 2014

Visit Signal's stand! Also, hearing screening by the NHS Audiology department.

Sports Village, Sundorne Road, Shrewsbury, SY1 4RQ.

Free car park.

Raising Awareness

Thursday 22 May | From 10am

Signal Awareness Raising Stall

To coincide with the UK Deaf Awareness Week, this year themed "Equality in communication for all."

The Square, Shrewsbury, SY1 1LA

COMING UP..

We are planning a taster course in British Sign Language for beginners.

Please contact us if you are interested in taking part.

Overseas Projects



We are marking anniversaries in two of the countries where we work, **Uganda & Malawi**...

Uganda



Signal's Comic Relief-funded programme in Uganda has passed its first birthday. This three-year initiative with our partners SignHealth Uganda, working with communities and teachers in mainstream schools, aims to help deaf children to go to school, stay in school and achieve in school.



The programme accepts that class sizes are often in excess of 100 pupils and that the teaching staff have few resources and next to no special educational needs training. Signal works with local communities and schools to enhance key individuals' skills and knowledge to support the 10-15% of each classroom's pupils with special needs, particularly deaf children.

In our first year we have seen over 100 deaf children identified, where before they had been labelled as "stupid" or "unable" to achieve. Many of these children have stories of bullying and abuse due to their hearing loss, but they are already seeing the benefits of the programme, with increased attendance in school, and growing awareness by both their families and teachers of their needs and capabilities. Teachers have expressed how the training has given them the knowledge to support all the children in their classrooms. Families are now seeing the potential within their children and are learning how to communicate with them more effectively.

All this is just the start of our work, but with increasing numbers of schools and communities getting involved, the ultimate potential possibilities are life-changing for thousands of deaf children and their families.

Malawi



Five years ago in May, Signal started its first official project, with its partners Sense Scotland, in Malawi. This initial pilot project, funded by the Scottish Government, has grown in size and depth since those early days. The initial project was to find "hidden" deaf children and assist them to go to school.



Deafness in Malawi, as in many other places, is known as a hidden disability for two reasons. The first is that it is so much more difficult to recognise whether someone is deaf just by looking at them, in comparison with other disabilities. This means that deafness can often go undetected, which can bring with it a whole host of issues, including isolation, misunderstanding and marginalisation. The second reason is that deaf people are often hidden away from society, as they can be seen as a source of shame for their families, due to cultural stereotypes and sometimes superstitions.



As we mark this five-year anniversary of working in Malawi, we are also celebrating the milestone of providing support and assistance to some 15,000 people - deaf children, family and community members and teachers. Now also funded by Comic Relief, our initiatives have evolved and adapted, as we continue to work in collaboration with our beneficiaries and stakeholders to build deaf friendly communities.

Felicity*

Shropshire tinnitus support group member

Felicity saw an article about the new tinnitus support group in Shropshire in the newspaper and decided to go along. Here, she gives her personal insight into this condition.



When did you realise you had tinnitus?

My tinnitus started about seven years ago, when I experienced the sensation of noise in my head. I did some internet research and found information on tinnitus. I experience a lot of buzzing in my head and a tingling sensation. My experience of tinnitus is as much a sensation as it is a sound. It was interesting when I went to the support group to discover the symptoms other people attribute to tinnitus; many people experience quite intrusive sounds similar to screeching or a car engine running.

So, people's experiences differ widely?

Yes, I think this is also linked to what the cause, or perceived cause, of people's tinnitus is. Some people can see the association with Ménière's disease, hearing loss or noise-related damage. My tinnitus is a lot to do with stress and anxiety levels and how rested I am. If I haven't slept very well, this can exacerbate my symptoms the next day. Noisy, busy environments also exacerbate my symptoms. I don't think it's necessarily the noise levels, but the fact that there's a lot going on for the brain to assimilate. Moreover, I think the body has an auto-stress reaction to what's going on. Once your body is on high alert, it might find noises threatening.

Have you been to a support group before?

No, and I had never really spoken to anyone else who has experienced tinnitus. At the support group, some people said they had lived with tinnitus for many years, decades even – and I wondered whether

this was the first time they had spoken about their tinnitus and been listened to sympathetically. It was surprising the number of people who said that when they had mentioned their tinnitus to other people, they were sometimes told "not to be so silly" and that "they were making it up."

Do you think tinnitus is a hidden condition?

Sometimes I look in the mirror and think, "Oh my goodness, I look really normal, and all this tingling around the ears, all this buzzing in my head, this vague feeling of nausea in my stomach, it is so invisible." How can you talk about it, when people see that you look fine? I feel like I should have two heads, because of how I actually feel inside. It would be interesting to talk to people about how they cope with tinnitus in the workplace, for example. The lack of awareness of tinnitus can be isolating and, because having tinnitus can be exhausting, the desire to not go out can be strong.

What do you hope to get out of the group?

Because tinnitus is a little understood condition, I would like to help increase the profile of the experience. I would like there to be far more research into tinnitus. A lot of focus on the causes of tinnitus has been in relation to damage to the ear, and when you read about tinnitus, then stress and anxiety tend to be at the bottom of the list of causes. However, I think they can be very much a cause as opposed to an aggravating factor.

** Name changed to protect individual's identity.*

Community Fundraising



Supporter Ruth Crackett came up with a creative way of encouraging donations towards Signal's work!

Ruth set up her own Everyclick page, offering portrait sketches:

www.everyclick.com/portraitsforsignal

If you would like to get involved in fundraising for Signal, we would love to hear from you.

Tremendous thanks to all of our supporters, donors and volunteers, who make our work possible!

Keeping in Touch

To keep up to date with all our work and projects on a weekly basis follow us on:

 @SignalCharity  /SignalCharity

If you would like further information, to make a donation or get more involved please contact us:

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We are trying to keep our administration costs low, therefore please send us your email address if you are happy to receive the newsletter electronically.

 give with confidence

www.signal.org.uk