



Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Julie Ryder
Interviewed by Sarah Smith

British Library ref. C1345/18

IMPORTANT

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Interview Summary Sheet

Ref no: C1345/18

Collection title: Unheard Voices: interviews with deafened people

Interviewee's surname: Ryder

Title:

Interviewee's forename: Julie

Sex: Female

Occupation: Managing Director

Date and place of birth: 1970, Lancashire

Date(s) of recording: 14th December 2008

Location of interview: The Westminster Hotel, Cheshire

Name of interviewer: Sarah Smith

Speech to Text reporter: Francis Barrett

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Interviewer's comments:

[Track 1]

So, my name is Sarah Smith and I am interviewing Julie Ryder for the Unheard Voices Project in Chester and today is Sunday the 14th December. Just for some basic information to start with could you just tell me your full name including your maiden name?

My name now is Julie Ryder, my maiden name was Julie Butterworth.

That's a great Northern name [laughs]. What's your occupation?

Managing director.

And your date and place of birth?

25th August 1970 and the place was Bacup in Lancashire that's spelt B-A-C-U-P.

Your mother's occupation?

Mum's occupation self-employed.

Okay and your Dad?

Managing director.

Okay. So I am going to start off asking some kind of general questions about early life and your childhood can you tell me a little bit about your family to begin with?

I am one of 3 girls the youngest of 3 girls all very close together in age there is 3 years 3 weeks between us a fairly average childhood grew up in Northern England in the 1970s went to a mainstream school had no hearing loss or anything at that stage so just went through schooling where I live there was a grammar school and you had to pass the 11 plus which you did and along with my 2 sisters went to local grammar school went there when I finished my O levels got 7 O levels I didn't want to carry on

in education even though the school were pushing for you to stay on and do A levels, wanted you to get out and start work so I left school and started work.

And did you get on well with your sisters? You said you were very close in age?

Yes, got on well with my sisters and still do. One lives quite close still and the other 1 lives down South in Sussex so I don't see that much of her but still get on well with them yes.

Did you share a bedroom and things?

We moved house when I was 8 so I shared bedrooms yes probably 'til I was about 10 something like that, then I had my own room after then, also quite musical as well. Growing up I was always a busy person. I am now and I was then and used to play in a brass band, also played piano as well and was in Brownies and Guides, used to play church organ a bit as well and involved in youth club and just very busy and doing homework and stuff.

Wow. And you mentioned playing the church organ. Was it quite a religious family you are from?

Not particularly, just lived very close to the church a lot of stuff going on there with youth club and stuff I used to play the piano and used to play the church organ every now and again. Not really religious, no, parents always very busy, had their own business, didn't see a lot of my Dad at all. He was always working, he was a mechanic and he had his own garage and got his own garage selling cars as well repairing cars and selling them, then started to sort of diversify and buy property which he then rented out, industrial property, industrial factory units and that's what they still do. Sold the car side of it and just has industrial units.

He still does that now?

Yes.

Is that close to you? Do you all still live...?

Yes, my parents live really close yes, just live next door but one, so I see quite a lot of them but they don't interfere. I think part of it, they wanted me to live close really to sort of keep an eye on me really when I became deaf and also the tables are turning a bit as they are getting older they like me living close so I can look after them as well and they really like seeing the grandchildren as well.

[04:48]

I think daughters are excellent at looking after their parents. I am sure they are pleased they have 3. You had a very busy childhood. It sounds like a hard working family?

A lot of nice holidays, that was the main time we spent together as a family really. Even in the 1970s went over to America to Disney World for our holidays. At that time it was fairly unheard of. I didn't know anybody else who had been there sort of 1979 we went there. To Switzerland as well which was young, so even though my parents worked really hard we did have really nice holidays.

[05:42]

That's good so moving on to when you began to lose your hearing do you want to tell me a bit about when that first started?

I can tell you exactly when it started December 1991, so that's 17 years ago now. I was working at the time in Rochdale at the Natwest Bank. Started work in 1986 there so I had been there for just over 5 years. I had worked in different branches, worked my way up. I had worked -- been working in the back office as an office junior on to the counter and different jobs like opening bank accounts and processing Standing Orders and Direct Debits. I had done that in 1991. I worked my way up to be a mortgage advisor, quite well on with banking exams things like that, was almost qualified with those. One day I picked up the phone, couldn't hear very well. Perhaps my ears need syringing didn't think of anything of it, no history of deafness in the family at all. And I went to the doctors and he said, 'I can't see a blockage or

anything in your ears. I will have to refer you to an ENT consultant'. I was lucky because I had private health care with the bank. Because I was so young and fit and healthy it was really cheap. I thought might as well get it, I did. I was glad of it, got an appointment really quickly, got an appointment to see a consultant. Consultant said, 'you have a mild hearing loss in both ears', said, 'your hearing loss may deteriorate. It will reach a plateau and that will be it', so he gave me -- eventually got a hearing-aid and probably that would be in about the February got my first hearing-aid then I were due to get married in that February in 1992 and so I were just a bit miffed really age 21 embarking on my life really and getting married and having to wear a hearing-aid, the physical appearance of it, sort of not the most attractive things in the world but my actual hearing loss itself didn't bother me that much. It was only a mild hearing loss, more inconvenient than anything else and stigma of wearing a hearing-aid.

Did it affect your work at the bank, did it continue to...?

Not really, not at that time when I had a mild hearing loss. I got the second hearing-aid then and so I got on with it and try and get used to wearing them. By -- within weeks really of getting the second hearing-aid, so March 92 I noticed my hearing seemed to be getting worse rather than staying the same I went out to a party with friends and there was a lot of loud music and afterwards my ears were ringing, had really bad tinnitus and it didn't go. The tinnitus just stayed there, didn't subside after a day or two days, it just stayed and everything sounded very fuzzy and distorted so I went back to audiology and they said your hearing has deteriorated further and really that just set the pattern of events, that's what it was like really from 1992 onwards a continual deterioration, bi-lateral deterioration. For no known reason there was not any other symptoms, no illness, accident anything like that - it was just a long slow death of my hearing basically.

What kind of effect did it have on your life and your new life?

Because it was a continual deterioration you could never think right this is what I have got let's get on with it and turn the corner. It were getting worse and when you went from mild to moderate hearing loss I thought how will I cope? Then it went to

severe. You think, 'how will I cope if it gets worse than this?', and it did. It went to eventually profound deafness it affected every area of my life. At first I thought losing my hearing or having some hearing loss not being able to hear as much, is it going to make a big difference in my life? Once it got to the stage where I couldn't communicate effectively and I couldn't understand what people were telling me, I couldn't lipread or use sign language, the effect was a massive effect in every area of my life and one thing I didn't expect was how tired I was because every time I got new stronger hearing-aids everything sounded very different, so there were a period of two or three weeks where you have to get used to this new sensation of hearing and hearing in a different way so during that time was just zombie-like. You were that tired and your brain is having to process sound in a different way, working really, really hard. That surprised me. I didn't think I would feel tired by being deaf. I was surprised how noisy it was, noises going out in the car, it's really noisy experiences really irritating and you were trying to pick up what people are saying and still the noise of the engine, the road noise there all the time.

[11:45]

And keep going back to the hospital and having the new hearing-aids, was it all still through your medical insurance?

That's right, yes.

What was the treatment like you had and the kind of staff you met? What were they like?

Erm, not that aware really. I mean really I've been to ENT departments and they have shouted your name when it's your turn and you think, 'Well, I am deaf'. There was another instance where I had a hearing test, my tinnitus was going mad with all the beeps from the hearing test. I had to press the button when I heard the beep. I didn't know if it was the beep simulated for the hearing test or tinnitus. I kept pressing the button and the audiologist was getting really annoyed with me. I was obviously pressing when there was no sound there. I didn't know whether it was tinnitus or the sound she was making, so she got rather cross at that. I thought that were a bit unfair

really, I was doing my best so I can't compare it to the NHS. I don't know what the service would have been like in the NHS. I did go through the NHS for that, the service was good, they managed to get me the most up to date hearing-aids at the time but there is no joined-up thinking, so if somebody they are sorting you out with hearing-aids then I say, 'Oh I have a problem hearing doorbell or telephone', 'You need to go to Social Services for that', so everything seemed to be down to me to go out and get what I needed from lots of different places whereas at the time when you are coping with hearing loss yourself you need someone there to hold your hand really and there was no joined-up thinking and all the time I were working full-time, not to let my job slip, so it's hard getting time off as well to getting all the time off I really needed.

Were you trying to do more than you could actually do with your job?

I don't think so, just trying to keep my head above water really. I had really high expectations of myself when I went in, really keen, and wanted to get on and get promoted. I wanted to carry on doing what I set out to do.

[14:17]

Your family, were they supportive?

Yes, they were supportive but they didn't know what to do and what support I needed, so I think it was hard for them really to see me sort of sink further and further down I suppose and because I looked the same they couldn't imagine what I was hearing was any different than what I had always heard so I don't think really they could understand. There was no support for them, no awareness for them, so it was hard, yes. My husband was good, erm, you know, just treating me as normal which is really I suppose what I needed. He didn't start treating me as though I was silly or speaking in an over exaggerated way or didn't start introducing me as, 'This is Julie and she is deaf' and things. He treated me as Julie like he always had.

And did it come to any kind of a crisis point or did you just keep going?

There was one time I went to see the consultant, the private consultant and I burst into tears in his office when he said it's gone down again Julie only a 10 decibel drop. I was going every 3 months and every 3 months it would go down 10 decibels he said it's fairly variable, you can't judge it, sometimes it comes up, sometimes it goes down. I knew it was going down and down every time I went. It was always further and further down. I thought, 'What's going on, I am going to drop off the bottom of the audiogram', what am I going to do then? When I burst into tears in his office that's when he said, 'There is somewhere down South you can go called LINK. I have only sent one person there before but they may be able to help you'. That was in about 1996 he said that, it's 4 or 5 years after the onset. I eventually went to LINK I think it was February 1997.

[16:32]

Do you want to tell me about that experience going to LINK?

It was a good experience, good meeting other people who had experienced the same as me. I came away feeling quite confused to where I fitted into all this. I still didn't, so I still couldn't identify with older people who were hard of hearing. I felt I wanted to get more involved with deaf people but at LINK, 'Don't go to Deaf Club, you will not fit in there'. That was the sort of impression I got from LINK at that time. I thought what do I do, really? So in some ways it was really good but in other ways it set me thinking about it all a bit more which I suppose then erm, sort of was a bit disturbing for me to think about it so much because really I didn't have a lot of time to think about it before you were working keeping your head above water. I felt I were in better shape than a lot of people down there on the same course as me.

Were the other people generally older than you?

Yes they were, yes.

Did your husband go along with you?

Yes.

Did he find it useful?

Yes he did definitely and some of the communication tips and things he definitely found useful, yes.

You said you felt about deaf clubs, you felt it would be difficult or they gave the impression it would be really difficult to fit in. Did you feel you were becoming aware of a difference between deaf and deafened people and any kind of friction there or is it something you had experienced before?

Not really, no. By that time we had tried to learn some sign language and me and my husband attended college to learn level 1 sign language but then we realised it was such a slow way of communicating when we were used to speaking what I really needed was lipreading rather than sign language. I was surprised really at the LINK Centre, they didn't advise you to mix with the deaf community. Certainly before I would get on to having the implant later but before the implant I certainly felt I really needed to mix more with deaf people who sign.

And did you manage to find anybody to mix with in your area?

From the Deaf Club?

Yes?

No, no, they put me off, it put me off going really. They sort of indicated you will not be welcome there really. I suppose vibes I got from the Deaf Club they said, 'You are hearing', so I suppose culturally I am hearing but medically deaf.

Did it mean you didn't really mix with anybody with a hearing loss?

That's right, yes.

For quite a long time?

Yes, for a long time, yes.

[19:50]

And were there things you found helpful at the LINK course?

Definitely, yes. I found the talk Heather Jackson gave was really inspirational to see somebody had actually gone through the whole thing. I think she had been deaf about 13 years at that stage and she had certainly come out the other end. She had gone through a lot and felt suicidal, felt very low, felt rock bottom. She was at the other side now looking at deafness in a more positive way and I thought, 'Maybe that's how I will feel if I give it long enough'. Really, until you know what level of hearing you have got then it's difficult to turn the corner, it's continually changing.

So, at that point, when you were on the LINK course, it was still going down?

Yes.

At what point did it reach as low as it was going to go?

Really, the implant really, it was just gradually going all the time then in 2002 I had a cochlear implant in March 2002 and so once I had got that I knew, 'Right, this is what I have got, just get on with it now'. So, it wasn't really until then. By that time I had 10 or 11 years of this continual downward spiral, really low in confidence, really difficult to communicate with anybody. By that time I had 2 young children by 2002, both hearing and I had to lipread everything they said.

How does it work lipreading with children, is it very difficult?

Yes, their minds are all over the place. They are talking about one thing, then something else pops in their head and start talking about something else. With adults they stay in context more than a 2 year old would. That's difficult so also if you are making tea and need to get stuff done which you do the want to say something so

you have to break off what you are doing to turn to them to have a conversation with them which might be about something totally stupid, irrelevant, useless. It's obviously not to them and you need to get the tea on so it can be frustrating but on the other side of it there are positive sides because the children speak clearly, lip patterns are very clear, so I think overall with my children their speech is much better I think they have a confidence to speak up a bit, not shout but confidence to speak a bit more loudly and a bit clearer.

Did you have anyone to talk to at the time about it being difficult for you?

Not really. I don't think I really -- at that time it was just how it was. I didn't feel sorry for myself and think this is really difficult. It's not 'til now, when I look back and think, how did I do that? so at the time I just got on with it.

[23:02]

And you spoke a bit about your cochlear implant. How did the process go to the point where you actually had the implant?

Well, I had been in the system for quite a while and initially when I went to be assessed for the implant my hearing loss was not enough for them to implant. It was disappointing really at that stage, then I had the children and another appointment came through. I thought, 'No, I am coping okay, I don't want to have the implant', then about 12 months later when they both started talking I thought, I just felt so tired, I thought, 'I really need to be able to hear a bit better. I am going to give myself a chance to have the implant. If it works it works; if it doesn't it doesn't. It didn't really feel at that stage, even if it didn't work, I would be worse off. I had the implant and... I have forgotten the question.

About the process, the way the process works towards getting the implant...

So, when the next appointment came through, I thought, 'I am going for this', went for it and really smooth process. In fact, the operation came a lot sooner than I expected. Funding came through, I think there was a cancellation and I had it done.

In fact, my parents had gone away on holiday. When they came back, I had had it done and they didn't know I was going to have it.

How long were you in hospital for?

About 3 days I was very poorly afterwards. I don't know whether it was because I was so rock bottom before I went in and physically very tired and keep on going, keep on going, keep on going. I just slept for about two weeks after the operation, really, really sleepy.

What happened with your kids, while you were asleep?

My mother-in-law had to come and stay so [laughs]

You had lots of family support, that's great. How long did it take before it was switched on?

About 4 weeks.

Can you tell me about that?

Yes, straight away. I felt the benefit immediately. They said to my husband, I had to turn away from him and him name some days of the week in random order and I could tell every one he said. Straight away there was benefit. Things sounded very different, my own voice sounded different, things like high frequency sound, 'F, S, CH, SH'. I had not heard such long time, they all decided to jump out when everything was talking, things sounded very sort of hissy. The first day things sounded so different, I thought I am not looking forward to putting this implant on for the second day, I thought I've got to persevere with that. I had been a really good hearing-aid user, done really well with hearing-aids, persevered with those. Even things like switching a light switch on, it was a click. I didn't realise how hard I was banging on the computer, really loud, you know, I think I was really noisy. Before I had the implant I realised I was banging cupboard doors and generally making a racket and the second day when I put the processor on I couldn't believe it, everything

sounded pretty normal. I don't know what my brain had done overnight, it adjusted in some miraculous way because I could hear pretty normally on the second day. I mean, obviously there was improvement as well, the biggest improvement was day one to day two.

Was it different to what you were expecting to happen?

Yes, a lot more successful to what I expected. They keep your expectations really low at the implant centre. I can use a phone, use an amplified phone. Now, I can use a mobile, only if I am in a very quiet environment and it's a good connection for something or not crackling what have you. So yeah a lot better. I didn't expect to use the phone. I had gone through 7 years of not using the phone. That one thing the implant gave me, ability to use the phone, a massive thing having two young children, phoning for a doctor's appointment.

I was going to ask what difference it made hearing your children and your husband?

Lovely, I had to lipread everything the children said to me and sometimes if I made mistakes it caused frustration if they wanted one thing and I gave them another. The first thing I heard without lipreading, it was Easter time my little boy dropped some of his Easter egg on the carpet and he was looking for it and he said, 'Oh whoopsie' and that's the first thing I heard. It still brings a tear to my eye now thinking about it.

Do you want me to stop for a minute? [laughs]

He was 4 then, so that was the first time I heard him without looking at him when he was 4 years old.

Do you think they could tell that anything different had happened to you?

Well, I think they always knew I was deaf and my son, he used to sign to me before I ever signed to him, right from being very young. If he wanted something to eat he used to point to his mouth or the loo he would tap the front or back depending which one.

Or both [laughs]

He used signs with me and I never used any with him. He knew he would get a reaction with that and my daughter came along, 21 months between the children. She realised if she shouted loud enough for something he would tell me. She communicated through him so communication skills then weren't as good as her brother's because she would just shout and then force him into action then to say something to me. They used to say things like, 'Look at me Mum' and turn my head to look at them and like tug on my hair, get my head round to them, so when I sort of said, 'I've had this operation now, I don't always need to look at you', it took quite a while for them to stop saying, 'Look at me Mum, look at me, look at me'. They had been so used to saying it.

I am going to pause it for a minute.

[30:02]

So, you were saying that your son would communicate with you with some signs. At what point did you start learning sign language?

I started learning before he was born when my hearing started to deteriorate at a level I couldn't communicate normally. Me and my husband started learning to sign. I realised it was really lipreading I needed. I was mixing with mostly hearing people so I tried to get on a lipreading class. They were all sort of 3:00 on a Thursday afternoon, all geared up for the over 80s, not a 20 odd year old, full-time person in work and so I made contact with the Association of Lipreading Teachers. They gave me the name and contact details for a local lipreading tutor. She agreed to give private tuition and she used to come to my house every Wednesday night for about 2 years. When I had the children I decided I had had enough lipreading tuition, I was fine and obviously with the cochlear implant you need to lipread although I do still lipread depending on the environment. If it's noisy I still need to lipread.

So, you have done a bit of basic sign language?

I had done some basic sign language and the catalyst came when I set up my own business. When I had the implant things became a lot easier for me, wasn't having to lipread as much and I had a rush of energy to do something and around that time I had been working as a volunteer with Hearing Concern on their Sympathetic Hearing Scheme project providing deaf awareness training. I hadn't done a lot but the work I had done I really enjoyed it. The funding for that project ran out and there were no more funding for deaf awareness training to do, there was no one to coordinate it. I said to the lipreading teacher, I said, 'How do you fancy setting up on our own doing deaf awareness training?', and this was after I had the implant, feeling a lot better, general health a lot better. She said, 'Oh yeah, go on then'. So, in Autumn 2002, 6 months after the implant, I set up my first company called, 'Hear First'. We deliver quality deaf and disability awareness training including British Sign Language training. It's called, 'Hear First' because I could hear first and also we were the only organisation at that time in the area where we worked delivering the sort of courses we were delivering but obviously I didn't have expertise to deliver everything we wanted to deliver. The deaf awareness was okay but things like general disability awareness and British Sign Language I didn't have that expertise, so when the business had grown a bit I took on my first member of staff who was a BSL user and also got a degree specialising in disablism. I could expand the range of courses then. We have been going now for 6 years and we work throughout the UK with a range of public sector organisations, so things like Local Authorities, the police, the NHS, Also work with housing associations and visitor attractions, things like Forestry Commission, work on a national basis with them and recently completed some work for the National Deaf Children's Society, so the business really has gone from strength to strength and I think I have been so driven and so determined because of the prejudice and discrimination I faced as a deaf person, just no need for it and often it's not because people don't want to help it's because they don't know what to do and I felt I had done I all I could do by learning to lipread, being good hearing-aid user, good cochlear implant user, learning to sign and my signing skills really improved when I started working with people who signed because you start using it every day. I felt I had done my bit and really trying my best. There was an awful lot could be done by service providers. That's why I set up, 'Hear First' really, because they need to make a difference to deaf people. I didn't want to moan about it or have a chip on my shoulder. I wanted to get out there and deliver some really interesting, positive

training and be a positive role model for deaf people and also, so service providers could see deaf people aren't tragic cases and they could think about it more in a positive way.

[35:11]

You said that the part of your impetus for setting up the project was some of the prejudice you had faced. Can you tell me a little bit about any examples of things you faced?

Things like sitting in the doctors and shouting your name and having to say to my son 2 years old, 'Listen and when they say Julie Ryder we need to see the doctor. Listen, listen, was that my name?', and he is 2 years old. I don't think that's right. And other times when I did the implant and started the business I phoned up Inland Revenue I needed information on employing people, I can't remember what it was. I said to the man on the other end of the phone, I said, 'I am sorry, I can't hear. Can you speak slowly and clearly, I am deaf', and, 'Can you move to a quieter place, it's really noisy your end', and the man just put the phone down. You are struggling to get equal access to things all the time and even recently I have been on a tour round the BBC. I expected them to be really accessible. I said, 'Have you got any listening systems, loop systems for going on the tour, or infra-red or anything?'. 'Oh just stand at the front, you will be fine'. She didn't know I could lipread and we went on the tour. A lot of it was in very dark rooms. You are looking in studios, it's really poorly lit and of course when you look at the guide speaking you can't see what's going on in the studio, so you have only half access to the tour anyway, so all the time you come across it. Even now, with the implant, time and time again, just inaccessible things. There are some good examples. Only this week I went to Christmas children's performance, headteacher reserved a place at the front so I would be able to see the performance. She knew I couldn't hear it very well. It was an example of really good practise. She is in the minority, really by doing that.

In the length of time you've been working, have you seen any big changes you have been really pleased about it?

A lot of changes things like Stage Text has come on since I was deaf so access to the theatre, subtitled cinema, that's been quite a recent thing and a lot more TV programmes are subtitled as well now. I think people's attitudes as well, maybe. I don't know whether it's because of the area where I work when people phone up and ask about deaf awareness training or British Sign Language training, you half expect someone to be deaf on the phone anyway. If you say I can't hear very well, it's authentic. It's this is a deaf led company, you just e-mail me, so in business when I am dealing with actual clients the attitude is quite good but that's what they are only phoning me because they want the training. In the real business world for example, I went to a networking meeting. There was a lot of business people there in a restaurant. Everybody had to stand up one minute and tell people about their business in one minute because all the seating was restaurant style, not everyone was facing me, so I didn't know what the other people at the networking meeting did. The chairman said, 'Do you want to come back next time?'. I said, 'I don't think so, I couldn't hear what everybody does'. I still don't know what all the people do which is a bit of a non-starter when it's a networking meeting. He said, 'I can see you have a problem, Julie. You are probably better off not coming next time', so there are attitudes like that in business and commerce really.

It makes me cringe hearing stories like that.

It's true, that's real life. It gives you the determination and drive to change things though because of people like that, because of that ignorance.

[39:45]

Can you tell me any specific success stories of your business?

Oh yes, every day I get a bit of business in, yes. [laughs] No, two things really, erm, one in 2004. My husband joined me in the business. He gave up a successful career as commercial manager with an engineering company to join me in the business. It was a really big step to make a living from what we do. He runs the office side of the business; I go out and do a lot of the training and there are other tutors, 7 of us all together go out and do the tutoring. There is a lot of office generates a lot of office

paperwork and what have you. That was a success really and more recently last year I was runner up for Disabled Entrepreneur 2007 and so that was a big success, to be runner up in a UK wide award like that. Stelios from Easyjet pledged to give 50,000 pounds per year for the next 10 years to a disabled entrepreneur. I had to go through a rigorous process really of being selected runner up and so I was pleased to get that. I were disappointed on the day not to have won, because I knew it was close but to get runner up is an achievement and this year I won regional winner for Barclays Trading Places award as well. That was with my second business called, 'Talk First'.

Tell me about that one as well?

Okay, in 2005 we were working with quite a few Sure Starts and children's centres delivering basic sign language training and they said, 'Do you know anything about signing with babies, not deaf babies, any babies?'. I said, 'I know it works, my children are hearing, I used sign with them and they are calm and aware of your facial expression and things like that and so I know it works'. So, I thought, 'I will have look into this', really and did some research and realised there was not a lot of baby signing up in the North where we are. There is quite a bit down South. I managed to find a class in Cheshire, looked at another company's baby signing class and I came away thinking, 'I could do better than that', so I did I set up a second company, 'Talk First Baby Sign' and the aim is to improve communication and all children getting parents looking at the children doing the word and the sign at the same time. I am hoping more children will start to sign and communication will improve and that business again is going from strength to strength. It's a franchise so it means that we sell a ready-made business model to somebody who wants to set up baby signing classes in other areas. We have 3 franchisees and 3 more in the pipeline and one of those is a school for deaf children who want to put on baby signing classes for the wider community. It's good. We produced our own signing dictionary and a unique signing puppet we have had made in China, I should have brought it. You are not going to see it on the tape are you. It's good stuff at the moment. I am running Hear First for deafness and disability awareness training, that's the adult side in the public sector and baby signing is the fun side really.

You are responsible for both?

Yes.

So, this keeps you very very busy?

Yes, correct.

Your children are how old?

8 and 10.

Can they sign?

Yes, 10 year old is a boy, Mum, 'Just say it', no patience for it all. I have been into the school for a session. They said, 'It's not my thing'. My daughter is quite into it, really good at signing.

And the baby signing is that based on BSL?

Yes, it is, yes.

It's just very basic things?

In English word order and sign the key things in a sentence, 'Where is your teddy bear?'. Sign, 'where' and 'teddy', so it's the key words in a sentence to help them understand the meaning of language really and to encourage the bond between parent and child and also it stops a child getting as frustrated. They can tell the parents what they want before they speak, hungry, tired, drink. We have 150 babies coming to classes every week in various locations. Quite a few 12 months old know various signs but can't speak. It's a really good way to communicate.

And it helps babies to speak sooner?

Yes, it doesn't delay speech. They get used to communicating as soon as the speech organs are developed. They speak, they are wired to speak so they speak and the signs gradually drop off. You get children might sign milk, hot or food, hot and so as soon

as they speak they are putting two and three words together straight away as soon as speech organs are developed.

[45:57]

Amazing. I wanted to ask you about - I mentioned it a little bit earlier - whether you perceive there to be a difference between the deaf and deafened community. I can see in your workplace, would you consider yourself a deafened person?

Definitely.

You work with people from the deaf community?

Yes.

Do you feel any tension there or can you tell a difference or?

Erm, you can definitely tell the difference, the language they use in BSL all the time also in written communication if they e-mail me or text me it's in BSL word order obviously, where I do everything in an English word order so there is that but there is no tension at all. Perhaps if I am the boss then... [laughs] they want to keep their job don't they. What I tried to do this year, we have taken on a deaf girl who graduated from Wolverhampton University and we were supporting her as she does her teacher training getting all her experience with us doing post grad teaching certificate two years part-time and hopefully at the end of the two years she will either stay with us. We'll be quite happy to keep her or go off and do whatever teaching she wants to do. I just feel I have given somebody the chance and opportunity to get a job, to have the experience of working and to get extra qualifications and support somebody in doing that. Obviously to her life it's made a massive difference. It's giving a young person a real start in a career and if she goes after - she started in September - if she goes after the two years, I will look for somebody else to take on and do exactly the same thing with. We are not that big I can take lots of people in. I can really do one person at a time and nurture them a bit and let them grow their wings and send them on their way.

Do a lot people come to you or?

Yes, people want to work for us, a lot of requests. I can't give everybody a job at the end of the day. We are a business and we've got to make a profit. We are sustainable, we don't rely on funding whatsoever. It's completely sustainable.

Fantastic. If you could sum up the things you really want to see change as a result of the work you do, what would they be?

I think just on a local level really, more awareness and more accessibility for deaf people.

That's great. Is there anything else you want to tell me about that I haven't asked you about?

Erm, I don't think so, no. I would just say if the British Library is listening to this, you have enquired about some training and you need to get it booked.

That's excellent. That will remain in the archive forever and forever. Thank you ever so much [laughs] it's been really interesting. I will stop it now.

[End of recording]