



Sign on Screen Transcript

Slide 3:

Hi everyone, I am Gordon and I am the Chief Executive of a charity based in Glasgow called Deaf Connections. The organisation has been about for a very long time and we work predominantly with people who use British Sign Language BSL as their first language one of our main services is to provide BSL interpreters so we have experience supporting Deaf students at colleges and universities. One of the big issues is the difficulty in locating suitably qualified and experienced interpreters and then retaining them for a whole variety of reasons, which we will explore during this session.

One of the things we have been exploring is the use of modern technology and how that could change not just the communication access within a university but how Deaf people communicate with the hearing world. That is why I have used the title '*Using technology to overcome the communication barrier: A paradigm shift in services for deaf people*'.

Start off and walk through the slides as I go along and Morag is sitting beside me and she will jump in and if you want to ask questions as you go along we will deal with them as they go along.

Slide 4:

When I use the term deaf I am talking about Deaf students who use BSL however we can also use the technology for students who do not use BSL. We might be talking about people who have cochlear implants, do not see themselves as deaf but would benefit from communication support and who can use technology to provide online electronic note services. So this service is very very flexible, as I will explain.

Slide 5:

The reason why we designed SOS because across the whole of the UK there is a critical shortage of BSL interpreters and our experience has been that while people are learning or doing their training to become a qualified interpreter but quite often once they become qualified interpreters are more reluctant to be work in an educational setting and much prefer to be involved to be involved in a judicial or medical settings and tend to move away from educational settings.

There is a great shortage paradoxically you find people early on in their career and quite often you have a group of people called Communication Support Workers (CSW) and paradoxically university and college wise the quality of BSL is actually quite demanding are the deaf students getting good quality interpreters

The other issue is to do with expense and BSL interpreters are not a cheap commodity, the norm is to charge a minimum of 2 hours which is probably not that bad but in an educational setting you may have down time, the student may have one lecture in the morning and another lecture in the afternoon but wants to keep the interpreter there for logistical reasons, which means that you have to pay the interpreter to be there all that time, very expensive resource.

Often it is difficult to get the right interpreter there at the right time because students don't turn up and a whole host of reasons. Very expensive resource and of course from a practical experience it is sometimes very hard to get the right interpreters there at the right time because invariably lecture rooms are changed or students don't run up and a whole host.

Slide 6:

Can we use the modern technology in a way that is much more responsive to students needs - and I think we can.

I would like to spend a couple of minutes looking at it from a Deaf students perspective. If a Deaf student is going to college or university and has an interpreter with them it does not give them much independence. It actually continues to reinforce a dependency culture - they need a hearing person there to help them communicate and if they are going to be with that interpreter for a number of hours a day, or a number of hours a week they actually have to get on with that interpreter.

There can be personal issues that arise, but the key thing is that it makes the Deaf student feel different to all the other students. Instead of just going in the class with all the other students and chatting about what happens at college, they will instead be with someone invariably older than them and it just singles them out as being different, sticking a bit label on them saying *I need help, I need support* and when you are in the students union it is not very cool to have an interpreter with you and also the interpreters presence has a debilitating effect on the other students desire to communicate with the Deaf students.

Relationships don't have the time to build up. So from a student's perspective they acknowledge the fact that they need an interpreter but not the best thing when you are trying to nurture new relationships. Anything that takes away that dependent culture has got to be a good thing from the student's perspective

Slide 7:

What we are trying to do is to give the Deaf student much more flexibility by using technology and what we have done is we have software called Sign on Screen. In some respects it is very similar to the software we are using right now, but it has compression rates that allow the sign language to be seen over the Internet. When we tried to do a dummy run earlier on this Elluminate webinar software this week, we found that we couldn't use this very well because when Morag was signing for me it wouldn't work, you could not see her hands and it was just a blur. However our software takes care of all that, you would download the software onto a netbook or a laptop and could take it anywhere you like.

What users need is access to the Internet and that could be either wireless Internet connection through the Internet or a 3G dongle or a MIFI. The critical thing is that if you go with the latter you have the same problems as with the mobile phone, the connection is only as good as the signal and depends on the where you are on the campus and the signal strength. We would always

recommend that the user plugs in to a wired broadband connection but there is a compromise and if you want mobility you can't always get that.

So in our model what we would be saying is that they would have the software on their computer, they go into the lecture theatre they would log in with us and what would happen is that our interpreters would be available back in Glasgow and we are working with other partners across the UK and we might have interpreter stations in London, Liverpool, Manchester etc so we can take into account such issues as regional sign variations because what a lot of people don't always understand is that BSL is like any other language, it has dialectical variation so someone like myself seeing a Deaf person would recognise if a person comes from the north of Scotland, the midlands or somewhere else. An interpreter has to adjust the signs accordingly.

So when they are ready they would log in and the interpreter would come on screen and I'll show you a couple of pictures in a second and the interpreter effectively listens to what is being said and interprets real time and/or you could have an electronic note taker back at the ranch who is typing what is being said in the classroom.

Now obviously each setting is slightly different in a large lecture theatre for example the Deaf student would give the lecturer a Bluetooth headset so that when he/she is moving around the lecture theatre and writing things on the smart board there is a very clear signal being picked up by the students computer being passed onto the interpreter. There are issues obviously if we get multiple scenarios where you have a lot of students asking questions at the same time, you have to give consideration to the microphone etc. It works extremely well in a tutorial scenario. So it is real time, the Deaf student has access to the interpreter and can pick up what is being said and if the student wants it, can be recorded too.

Slide 8:

There are two different ways of using our software, in this picture here is what we would call a video relay three participants, i.e. the deaf person, the hearing and the interpreter and all three do not need to be in the same room.

I don't see this being used much in an education setting, but in this image the deaf student might be phoning the disability advisor or tutor to check time for lecturer, so they could phone in the comfort of their own home. The deaf person relays the message to their own tutor so if the tutor or an advisor wanted to contact the student they would just phone the persons phone number and this would be routed through an interpreters.

If the Deaf person is not there, you could leave a video message. e.g. *the lecture is changed, this particular classroom so just make sure you know that* and the interpreter would sign that, an automatic email is sent to the Deaf student and this is accessed remotely. So this is an important tool the video relay

Slide 9:

A more likely scenario in an education setting would be called 'Video Interpreting'. The picture on the right hand side - imagine this is the person signing, the other person is the student and the other person could be the tutor or another students on a course and they want to check something, or the lecturer. So we have the deaf person signing and the interpreter is speaking which the hearing person in the room would hear.

Similarly in the lecture scenario, the lecturer would have a Bluetooth headphone, which would go to the interpreter, which would be signed to the Deaf person. It is not always an easy concept to get over, so if you are coming along to the Future Focus Conference on 10th June we will be giving practical demonstrations and we also would be happy to talk to people on a local/regional basis to demonstrate and it is very easy to download to try it.

So it is not rocket science and it works extremely well and we have over 300 Deaf people who use it on almost a daily basis across a wide section of their lives. It is much much quicker than the current text relay service. It is real time, and takes 6 times faster than a text message and because it is visual you can have a much better understanding of emotion etc.

Slide 10:

That is basically how it works - the benefits are immediate, and if you need to talk to a Deaf student at the present moment you might need to get an interpreter who are hard to come by and sometimes you can be waiting for nearly a week or even longer and this way you have immediate access.

You only pay for what you use, so you are not bound by minimum call outs of 1 or 2 hours, typically in a 10-minute meeting you still have to pay for 2 hours. With this service we bill people in the same way you would get on a mobile phone, based on the number of minutes and the number of seconds.

You could use this service in a wide number of settings you might have a practical workshop/ someone in the lab so they need to open the laptop to get the information/interpretation/nature of experiment, shut the laptop and get on with the experiment and get on with it, if they want to ask the lecturer something they can open the laptop and ask the lecturer questions and they are totally free

And of course for those of us who are very green in our thinking, there is no travel and we are reducing our carbon footprint. The critical issue, which you can't get away with, is it gives the Deaf student much greater independence. At the moment we are talking about using it on a desktop on a laptop or a netbook but we are working with our software engineers to get it right down to mobile phones we have it now on the Samsung Galaxy and the Galaxy tab and the engineers are working to get it on the iPhone and the iPad and any of the android kit coming.

I would not recommend try on a phone such as apple because screen too small but this but this will be a major shift for Deaf people because they will move away to a place where they are able for the first time in their lives to take their interpreter with them in their pocket.

Once Deaf people become familiar with that there will be no going back. One thing which is absolutely critical, it is NOT a replacement for an f2f BSL interpreter in all scenarios. I think it would take over a large percentage in an educational setting, but it would not be appropriate in every setting (e.g. in a medical setting). It would be OK in a routine setting with GP or practice nurse etc., but in a hospital where a doctor wants to talk about surgery or chemotherapy in that scenario you would have to have a f2f BSL interpreter. But for small/everyday life this is going to be the way forward for Deaf people.

In America this is huge, and providers of services have interpreters who do nothing but work online. Here in Britain we don't agree with this, interpreters would take their turn in front of a computer screen lets say 2 half days per week and the rest of the time they are out and about maintaining and developing their BSL skills. Just want to make sure that we are not moving to an environment where we just have interpreters who have been trained and are just going to sit in front of a screen 8 hours a day

Slide 11:

There is a capital outlay to consider and that is for the students. There may be funding available from the different authorities that would make this available. At the moment the software is free to download but how much they want to use it is dependent on how much they want to spend. I think that it would be very good for universities/colleges to have this in supported services, reception areas or libraries where Deaf students could be coming in at any given time.

The other thing, which is interesting, is that we can do what we call locked down net books. This would be useful with older people or young users who are very worried about using a computer so effectively, we are stripping all of the operating software and just using it as a communication tool. So they just press a couple of buttons and up it comes so there is no risk of downloading a piece of software, which has conflict issues that buggers up the system. We have had a couple of issues from families who are very worried about that and are worried about their young Deaf son having access to the Internet.

So that is a whistle stop tour of how we think that sign on screen could be used in an educational setting so that it the presentation finished so that is all that I have to say. I am happy to take questions and I am sure that Morag is too. Morag, is there anything you want to add?

Morag:

The only thing I was going to add was the responsibility of the college or university themselves to allow Deaf people to contact them or as students or prospective students to use the SOS to allow them to contact the institutions and to communicate in their own preferred way could use the software in reception areas, guidance/student services, or at the library for example which would mean that whenever students are matriculating or seeking advice that they could have meaningful communication support before they had DSA and formal communication support in place and before they are a legitimate students in the institutions.

Gordon:

I see Paul has raised a question about whether service is available outside Scotland. Technologically we have the resources to provide a service across the whole of the UK. Whether we would be able to meet the demand is another issue, but if you have students right now we would be able to support them.

We are working with other Deaf organisations right across the whole of the UK to help build up an network so that we can support each other so that if demand outstripped our capacity to provide a service say for example in Liverpool, might be able to pick up that slack and vice versa. So I would not be inhibited by the fact that we are based in Glasgow or Scotland. If you had students now and you thought that they might be interested, talk to us now and we would rake it from there

Morag:

Paul also at the moment we are providing a VRS service across the UK at the moment so we are able to provide the software at the moment from all over Britain from our base here in Glasgow and Gordon was talking earlier about regional variation but actually we have found as an interpreting team that it is actually not a problem at all for the Deaf clients themselves, so I actually think that in the same way that is usual for a BSL interpreter working with a Deaf person within a particular course there are some signs that they make up between themselves to agree vocabulary on the course that they are on, the same would apply on the remote captioning as well.

Paul:

OK that would be great, I was worried about what I saw on the booking form.

Morag:

I think what you probably saw on the booking form was the f2f interpreting service possibly rather than the Sign on Screen service but I'll certainly go back to our booking form and if that has been a mistake I will go back and change that, thanks for highlighting that.

Gordon:

We are involved in a national campaign to try to get the video relay service funded in the same way as it is in America and part of the campaign we were in a road show and part of this we were in the University of Lancaster where there are a number of Deaf students there and they saw this and their faces/jaws dropped with amazement and they said that this is what they want. We need to work with Deaf students, you cannot impose this on Deaf people, as Morag says they need to become familiar with this to think outside the box about how this might help them in their daily lives and in an educational setting.

There is an informing exercise and we need to work with students and specialist advisors in colleges and universities to see how this could work. There are practical issues that need to be resolved as I said earlier in a big lecture theatre we might be able to hook up the lecturer with a Bluetooth, but if the whole classroom need to make sure the mic can pick up or the lecturer to repeat the question if they think that it might be a bit faint but that will come in time.

Margaret:

OK, now I am going to as a final point because I am very conscious that time is moving on, I want ask if there are any final questions to Gordon or Morag, feel free to add them in the text.

Margaret - Slide 12:

Also just to reiterate the fact that our RSC are hosting a future focus conference in Glasgow on 10th June and Deaf Connections are going to be presenting a workshop about SOS and it would give people an opportunity to hear more about it, to see the resource in practice and also to speak to Gordon, Morag and staff at Deaf Connection on a face to face basis to ask more questions and I notice that Lisa has kindly put the URL in the text chat pane.

Gordon and Morag have also very kindly offered to have a more meaningful discussion in the context of your own department or service that they are more than happy to do that. You can communicate with them directly and we have your contact details and with your permission we would be more than happy to pass your details onto them so that they could liaise with them directly, please email me and let me know.

So as well as being able to view this recording as an archive, we will send you a URL and a written transcript of everything talked about in this webinar.

Jenni Cairns:

What is the capital outlay? The capital outlay would be dependent on whether the student would want to access a netbook with a 3g dongle or whether the university would be able to supply a fixed PC or laptop if it was to be used over the university. It is just the price of a netbook and a 3g connection that you would be looking to have as a capital outlay.

Looking to purchase the monthly download of the software and there is the price of the BSL interpreters time. Do get in touch and you can go onto our website and download the SOS software and you can go online and have a chat using the software and show the Deaf students who are asking about it and show them how they use it. We are happy to do with yourselves and any Deaf students.

Question -

What is the Price of the Service? At the moment we are charging £1 per minute and a one-hour BSL service would cost you £60. If someone makes a block booking then we would negotiate a price that would be mutually agreeable. Remember there are no travel expenses, no administration charges, only charge for the time online to the BSL interpreter, and because we have a pool of interpreter who work in Glasgow at the moment and because we are hoping to expand our pool there would be little chance of an interpreter not being there because of sickness or whatever reason would rarely happen,

Margaret Slide 13: -

I want to finish off with one last slide and ask if you would like to be contacted by Deaf Connections, if you do please indicate a tick on the poll and if you want to follow this up we can act on this.

I would like to offer a massive thank you to Gordon and Morag, for their time, for their hard work and for their commitment to this because this is a wonderful service and is a powerful service and certainly is the way ahead and it is about how students can become independent in their communication, and I guess with mobile technology really this is highlights a way where students have their support in their pocket so to speak.

On that note thank you to all of you and for all your support and most importantly thanks to Gordon, Morag and thanks to Lisa in Newcastle.