



An Evaluation of the Deaf

Third-Country Nationals

Integration Project

A Report to the
United Kingdom Border Agency

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Executive Summary

Context

This report sets out the findings from an evaluation of the Deaf Third-Country Nationals Integration Project. This evaluation looked at the effectiveness and impact of the project in order to fulfil funding requirements for the European Commission and disseminate lessons learnt and good practice. The research was commissioned by the Analysis, Research and Knowledge Management Directorate (ARK) of the UK Border Agency (UKBA).

The Deaf Third-Country Nationals Integration Project (Deaf Integration Project) was delivered by The Royal Association for Deaf People (RAD) in London and ran between December 2007 and December 2009. It was co-funded by the European Commission's European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals (EIF), administered by UKBA. The total expected budget for each year of the project was £250,000.

There are no official statistics on the number of migrants to the UK who are Deaf - either those seeking work or their families. However, of the 565,000 people who arrived to live in the UK in 2005, 329,000¹ were from non-EU countries and RAD estimated that on average 0.1% of those were pre-lingually deaf. RAD therefore estimated that there are 200-250 arrivals per year who do not have spoken or written English language skills, or approximately 1000-1250 within the last five years in the UK as a whole. From that UK total, RAD further estimated that approximately 300 individuals in London could benefit from the project.

The Deaf Integration Project aimed to address the gap in services for Deaf third-country nationals in London and facilitate successful integration into UK society by promoting independent living, economic activity and participation in community life. The project provided access to legal and employment services, an advocacy service, two educational programmes and information on social events.

Aims of the evaluation

¹ Home Office (2007), Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 2006; <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm71/7197/7197.pdf>

The evaluation of the Deaf Integration Project sought to assess the effectiveness and impact of the project and facilitate wider learning for other organisations that provide integration services to Deaf migrants and third-country nationals. In particular the aims were to examine the:

- rationale and need for the project;
- organisation and management of the project;
- outcomes for Deaf people involved in the project;
- barriers and challenges encountered;
- successes achieved; and,
- plans and strategies for the future.

Method

The evaluation comprised 14 face-to-face interviews with Deaf service-users and four interviews with project staff. The evaluation team had hoped to interview 20 of the 66 project participants who had received a service from RAD under EIF funding. Only 14 project clients were finally included in this study, as other potential interviewees did not want to participate, were no longer in the UK or were found to be ineligible for support under EIF funding criteria.

Results

Participants who were interviewed reported that the Deaf Integration Project improved their quality of life and had made a positive impact on their settlement experience. Support was particularly helpful in the areas of advocacy, legal advice and language skills.

The services provided by the Deaf Integration Project were particularly important to project participants who were managing without the support and assistance of family and friends.

Key factors contributing to the Deaf Integration Project's success were the use of an intensive support model and the knowledge and expertise of practitioners working with this client group.

Deaf Integration Project staff felt that the RAD had also benefited from its involvement in this project by:

- increasing knowledge about this particular client group and their rights

and entitlements;

- enhancing skills and capacity among RAD staff;
- raising their profile in the voluntary sector as an agency capable of working with a diverse range of Deaf people; and
- learning lessons about managing the application and delivery of grant funding from different sources.

The Deaf Integration Project was not, however, successful in achieving its recruitment target of participants onto the scheme. Staff felt this failure was due to the setting of unrealistic targets caused by confusion about the eligibility of participants under the EIF funding criteria. This specified eligible participants as newly-arrived legal migrants (arrived within the last five years) who were not asylum seekers, refugees, European Union (EU) or European Economic Area (EEA) nationals (otherwise known as third-country nationals) and who had come to the United Kingdom on a visa which may lead to settlement. Deaf Integration Project staff felt that had the funding criteria been broader they would have been able to reach more potential participants and ensure the project was cost-effective.

Failure to access the 'hard to reach' group of Deaf third-country nationals and a lack of demand for a specialised service of this kind may also have been contributing factors to low recruitment rates. This evaluation suggests that a dedicated RAD service for this group may not be a viable option.

It is also, however, questionable in the author's opinion whether the Deaf Integration Project would have been able to maintain the quality, intensity and standard of support provided to project participants if they had met their output targets.

The evaluation suggests that both organisations submitting bids and the independent panels selecting projects should be aware of the difficulties of providing services to such narrowly defined groups of participants. This is especially important when combined with targeting people from a specific background or, as in this case, with a specific disability. This is a useful lesson to be learned for bids and assessment teams. The extent of the issue to be addressed by the intervention, and the numbers involved, needs to be established before making a bid or making a decision on a bid.

RAD has decided not to continue with this project and is currently supporting this client group through referral to more general support programmes across London for Deaf migrants.

1. Context

The Royal Association for Deaf People (RAD) implemented the Deaf Third-Country Nationals Integration Project (Deaf Integration Project) with funding from the European Commission's European Fund for the Integration of third-country nationals (EIF). This fund is managed in the UK by the UK Border Agency (UKBA) that has the role of Responsible Authority (RA) for the fund. The Deaf Integration Project ran for two years (December 2007- December 2009, co-funded through the EIF 2007 and 2008 allocation). The total expected budget for each year of the project was £250,000.

The European Integration Fund (EIF) has very specific eligibility criteria. It is aimed at newly-arrived legal migrants (arrived within the last five years) who are not asylum seekers, refugees, European Union (EU) or European Economic Area (EEA) nationals (otherwise known as third-country nationals) and who have come to the United Kingdom on a visa which may lead to settlement.

The core aim of the Deaf Integration Project was to address the gap in services to support Deaf third-country nationals in London and to facilitate integration into UK society by promoting independent living, economic activity and meaningful participation in the community. These objectives were to be achieved through the provision of legal and employment services, information on social events, an advocacy service and the educational programmes set out below:

- **Legal service** - help with issues on immigration, debt, employment, consumer rights, family and marriage, welfare benefits and discrimination issues.
- **Employment service** - employment advice, support and soft skills training in order to achieve employment, self-employment or progression into training.
- **Advocacy services** - providing independent living advocacy support to enable project participants to live their lives with maximum choice, control and independence.

- **Educational programmes** - the CACDP² Certificate in British Sign Language at Levels 1 and 2; and NOCN³ Skills for Life Certificate; basic literacy and numeracy skills for everyday life.
- **Social events service** - information about multi-cultural social events and support groups.

2. Aims and Objectives

This report sets out the findings from an evaluation of the Deaf Integration Project carried out by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR) at Sheffield Hallam University. It was commissioned by Analysis, Research and Knowledge Management (ARK) at UKBA to meet the monitoring requirements of the EIF. The evaluation was carried out between December 2009 and March 2010. It sought to assess the effectiveness and impact of the Deaf Integration Project and facilitate wider learning for other organisations that provide integration services to Deaf migrants who are third-country nationals. The research aims were to evaluate the:

- rationale and need for the project;
- organisation and management of the project;
- outcomes for Deaf people involved in the project;
- barriers and challenges encountered;
- successes achieved; and
- plans and strategies for the future.

3. Method

The evaluation comprised 14 face-to-face interviews with Deaf service-users and 4 interviews with Deaf Integration Project staff. The evaluation team had hoped to interview 20 of the 66 Deaf Integration Project participants who had received a service from RAD under EIF funding. Only 14 Deaf Integration Project clients were finally included in this study, as other potential interviewees did not want to participate, were no longer in the UK or were found to be ineligible for support under EIF funding criteria.

The two researchers conducting the fieldwork did not have sign-language skills. Independent interpreters were therefore required to facilitate

² Council for Advancement of Communication with Deaf People, known as Signature since January 2009.

³ National Open College Network

communication with the Deaf respondents, most of whom had limited British Sign Language (BSL) skills. In the majority of interviews a hearing interpreter used BSL, International Sign⁴, mime and drawing to facilitate communication with the participant. The interpreter used spoken English to communicate with the researcher⁵.

Participants were interviewed at RAD's offices in London. All interviews with Deaf Integration Project participants and staff were digitally recorded and transcribed. In order to maintain the confidentiality of people using the service, quotes have been anonymised.⁶

Characteristics of the respondents

Fourteen Deaf Integration Project participants were interviewed as part of the evaluation. Six were women and eight were men. They ranged in age from 21 to 42 years old and were nationals of Belarus, Gambia, India, Morocco, Nigeria, Nepal, Pakistan, Peru, South Africa, and Turkey.

The majority of these Deaf Integration Project participants (12 out of 14) had been living in the UK for more than 12 months. Each service user had a unique story of migration. Seven of the 14 migrants interviewed came to the UK accompanied by family members (for example, a spouse, parents or siblings), 4 arrived by themselves but had friends or family already living in the UK, and 3 travelled independently and knew nobody on arrival.

Four Deaf Integration Project staff were interviewed; the first Deaf Integration Project manager (who subsequently left the post), the second Deaf Integration Project manager, the Deaf Integration Project co-ordinator and advocate; and a legal services caseworker.

4. Findings

The following section sets out the findings in relation to the:

- rationale for the project;
- operational issues for the project;

⁴ International Sign is a system of gestures used by people who do not share a common sign language.

⁵ It is important to note that the direct quotes in this report are from Deaf project workers and participants and therefore use the words of an interpreter

- project output targets;
- barriers and challenges encountered;
- outcomes for Deaf people involved in the Deaf Integration Project;
- organisational benefits;
- plans and strategies for the future; and
- lessons learnt and best practice.

4.1 Rationale for the project

RAD's written application for EIF funding stated that their key rationale for setting up a Deaf Integration Project for third-country Deaf migrants in London was to address the existing gap in service provision. The Deaf Integration Project staff interviewed described the gap in provision and further explained how Deaf third-country nationals faced multiple barriers in accessing both generic services and Deaf networks and services. This was due to a combination of factors including:

- their hearing impairment;
- lack of fluency in BSL;
- lack of literacy in English; and
- their immigration status, which restricts their entitlement to a range of benefits and financial assistance.⁷

The Deaf Integration Project participants interviewed substantiated this view and described encountering numerous challenges in their attempts to integrate and live independently in London. Language and communication difficulties were reported as the most significant problems, with 8 of the 14 respondents having come to the UK with no prior knowledge of either English or BSL. This made it difficult to access essential services and to negotiate the practicalities of daily life, such as using public transport, accessing health care and paying bills. Participants also reported struggling to gain education, training or employment and to build social networks with both Deaf and hearing people:

"It was just a complete mess in my head, it was so incredibly different.

⁶ Staff interviewed were informed that names would not be used, but it was highlighted that because of the small number of people working for the project it would not be possible to guarantee anonymity.

⁷ For example, this group was not eligible for support from the Access to Work scheme which provides people with hearing impairment with special equipment and communication support for meetings, interviews and training courses.

Different names for places, bus numbers, all that kind of stuff. I didn't understand it at all.” (male client)

Immigration status often impeded smooth integration into UK society as it impacted on participants' access to various welfare benefits, including provision of interpreter support, making it hard for participants to find work or study:

“As a non British, non EEC I can't apply for things like benefits so, for example, I registered at university [...but] they couldn't provide interpreters for me and I'd have to pay £25,000 on top of my tuition for that.... I had to drop out [...] There's lots of things that I can't seem to be able to access but RAD can't do anything to help me with that because of the law.” (female client)

People able to rely on the support and assistance of family members who lived nearby appeared to encounter fewer problems, although challenges still remained.

4.2 Operational issues for the Deaf Integration Project

A project manager, two advocates, and an employment advisor staffed the RAD Deaf Integration Project. Deaf migrants requiring legal advice were supported through RAD's Legal Services Team, but funded through the EIF grant. None of the RAD staff worked exclusively on the Deaf Integration Project. All had additional roles and responsibilities. All aspects of the Deaf Integration Project were delivered by RAD, other than the BSL and the Life Skills courses, which were contracted out to an independent provider.

Staff expertise

The staff expertise in supporting this client group and being able to address their particular needs was reported to be a key success factor in the Deaf Integration Project. Both staff and participants placed importance on the fact that most project workers were themselves Deaf. Project workers reported that Deaf people generally prefer to receive a support service from another Deaf person so they can communicate in their first language without having to rely on an interpreter. They felt that a Deaf person would be more able to empathise with the experiences of Deaf project participants than hearing staff:

“...the three way process of going to an interpreter... does create a little bit of distance, and we know how that feels like and we know and empathise with them, and we can support them and help them to feel comfortable. We’re Deaf aware as well...as a Deaf person I think I can empathise because I know pretty much what their experience has been like.” (Project worker - Deaf)

Some of the Deaf Integration Project staff were able to use a second sign language in addition to BSL and/or were able to adjust their signing to enable communication with the different language variations used by Deaf migrants.

Continuity of staff

Unfortunately, various staff changes occurred during the first 18 months of the Deaf Integration Project, including the departure and replacement of the Project Manager and the Finance/Monitoring Officer. These changes were reported to have led to some strategic and operational problems. This was reflected in interviews with some project participants who reported delays in responses from project staff to their inquiry or case.

A key concern for management staff was with the way in which the annual targets for the Deaf Integration Project had been devised. It was reported that the rationale behind decisions taken was not adequately communicated to staff. The targets were subsequently deemed to be unrealistic and so were discussed and clarified with UKBA a year into the project.

Recruitment

There was no formal recruitment strategy for recruiting participants to the Deaf Integration Project. Staff felt that the size of the target population did not warrant formal referral procedures. They reported that participants had been signposted to the project by the local Deaf community and they had received informal referrals from Deaf organisations, social services and Jobcentre Plus.

Despite not achieving their targets for recruiting participants to the Deaf Integration Project, project staff were of the opinion that the project had reached the majority of Deaf third-country nationals eligible for EIF funding who were resident in London. They explained that the London Deaf community is relatively small, allowing information and knowledge about

available services and assistance to be easily shared. As the population size and characteristics of the target groups is unknown, it is not possible to test the validity of this claim and to know the extent to which RAD reached the whole Deaf migrant population in London.

Deaf Integration Project workers acknowledged that there was likely to be a small number of 'hard-to-reach' Deaf third-country nationals who did not engage with the project. In particular, it was suggested that people from countries where there is limited or no support for Deaf people, forcing them to rely on family and limiting the opportunities for mixing more widely, were likely to prove hardest-to-reach:

"...a Deaf person who's here on a spouse visa, if they're married to a hearing person they might, the hearing partner may take on the responsibility for everything. So say the wife is Deaf, it may be a cultural thing that they're expected to stay at home." (Project worker - Deaf)

It should also be remembered that the EIF targets recently arrived migrants who may not yet have developed links into the Deaf community.

The intensity of support required by participants

The intensity of the support required by clients meant that more project worker time per participant was required than had been anticipated in the original bid. Staff suggested that the quality of the service would have suffered if the Deaf Integration Project had met its recruitment targets (200 rather than 66) unless further resources had been made available.

Staff explained that clients often came to the Deaf Integration Project with a long list of issues with which they wanted assistance, and this required an intensive level of intervention, including translation support. Staff reported that they worked with clients who had sometimes suffered extreme isolation in their home country including no experience of socialising outside the extended family and/or no sign language skills at all. In these cases Deaf Integration Project staff supported the client on an outreach basis, building their confidence and teaching them sign language from scratch:

"...the client often comes with a huge list of demands of what they want and we're supposed to meet everything they want which can be really, really

tough. They expect a hell of a lot from us and it can be difficult to do that.”

(Project worker - Deaf)

The intensity of the support required by some participants meant that more time was spent with them than had been anticipated in the original funding bid. Staff suggested that, without further resources, the quality of the service to individuals would have suffered if the Deaf Integration Project had met its recruitment target.

4.3 Deaf Integration Project output targets

Table 1 shows the quantitative output targets for the two years 2007/8 – 2008/9 and the numbers of participants achieved for each service or activity.

Table 1: Deaf Integration Project targets and outputs

Service or Activity		Year One Target	Year One Achieved	Year Two Target	Year Two Achieved	Participant target 2007-09	Participants Achieved 2007-09
Legal service	Rights based advice	50	12	110	15	160	27
	Cases resolved ⁸	48	25	192	62	240	87
Advocacy service		27	6	23	23	50	29
Employment service		31	5	69	23	100	28
Level 1 Certificate in British Sign Language.		12	2	8	12	20	14
Level 2 Certificate in British Sign Language.		0	2	16	11	16	13
OCN Skills for Life Certificate		N/A	N/A	10	6	10	6
Attending social events and support groups.		50	4	150	30	200	34

⁸ Cases resolved were in immigration, debt, employment, consumer, family and matrimonial, welfare benefits, housing and discrimination issues. This does not reflect individuals as each person may have more than one issue to resolve.

The monitoring data supplied by RAD in Table 1 shows that the Deaf Integration Project failed to meet its output targets with participation levels considerably below the project targets. The BSL, advocacy service and legal casework came closest to meeting their targets, and the social events service missed its target by the widest margin.

Deaf Integration Project staff identified a number of reasons why target outputs were not met. These included; over-estimating the number of participants eligible for EIF funding during the planning and early implementation; the limited demand for some services; and trying to engage with very 'hard-to-reach' individuals. These issues are discussed more fully in the next section.

4.4 Barriers and challenges

Understanding the EIF eligibility criteria

Staff reported that a key challenge in delivering the Deaf Integration Project was understanding the eligibility criteria for support under the terms and conditions of the EIF grant. Based on analysis of RAD's legal service client data, the Deaf Integration Project originally identified approximately 300 qualifying people who would benefit from the service. However, it became apparent that a large proportion of these individuals did not qualify for support under the EIF eligibility criteria as many were refugees or asylum seekers or had been in the UK for over five years:

“You have to then pick out the ones that aren't from Europe. Then you take out the ones who aren't eligible because of their visas and then you take out people who have immigrant status, so it becomes actually a small group.” (Project worker – Deaf)

The complexities of migrants' conditions of entry and the restrictions and benefits associated with different visa categories also created difficulties for staff. Migrants themselves were not fully aware of these conditions and Deaf Integration Project staff found it difficult to access the relevant information.

Confusion regarding the EIF funding criteria also created problems during the latter stages of implementation of the Deaf Integration Project as it emerged that some migrants who had been provided with a service were in fact

ineligible under EIF funding criteria (because either they had been in the country too long, were refugees or asylum seekers or were on a visa that would not lead to permanent settlement). These could not be included in final project outputs achieved.

Guidance from UKBA

Deaf Integration Project staff highlighted the challenges they faced in understanding the current funding guidelines. Issues raised by project staff included the use of 'jargon' and a lack of clear lines of communication with UKBA.

As part of the general management and control systems for EIF, UKBA holds mandatory workshops for all project managers where eligibility criteria and monitoring requirements are outlined. In addition, two on-site monitoring visits are carried out by UKBA each year.

However, while it is clear that mechanisms are currently in place to support projects, Deaf Integration Project staff suggested further guidance should be provided to help clarify project eligibility criteria.

Low demand for some services

Some participants did not require the educational opportunities on offer. Staff reported that some services on offer did not match the target groups needs as closely as expected, which also affected take up.

The Deaf Integration Project did not meet the targets for participants joining the BSL or Skills for Life courses. Deaf Integration Project staff considered that the proportion of project participants taking up these learning opportunities was low.

The reasons project staff gave for low participation on these courses were that clients often had more immediate and urgent needs such as advocacy and legal services and others had limited time due to work or other study commitments. They also found that the level of BSL courses offered was insufficiently advanced for some clients.

The take up of legal services was relatively high for the Deaf Integration Project but still below target, but staff explained that many participants

required a higher level of legal services. Many project participants made use of 'Level One' (initial advice), but staff were unable to help with more complex cases which had to be referred to a solicitor or law centre for legal assistance at 'Level Two' (casework) and 'Level Three' (advocacy and representation). It was suggested that the service would have been in even greater demand if this assistance had been available in-house.

Project staff explained how there was a relatively low take up of employment advice (including CV writing, completing application forms, job searching, contacting potential employers) as some participants did not have permission to work in the UK. Some participants did not take up opportunities to attend social events although all were informed about the relevant multi-cultural social events and support groups. Deaf Integration Project staff suggested that this low take up was largely due to cultural reasons:

*"The problem is a cultural thing as well sometimes. Some people are not permitted by their culture to go out in the evening and the travel cost can be a big barrier to that as well. But again some people have really wanted to take part in events, some really haven't, so mixed bag really."
(Project worker - Deaf)*

Limited employment opportunities

Those participants that used the employment advice and support services found that employment opportunities were limited by social attitudes towards the Deaf population. The key reason provided by participants to explain problems securing employment was that some employers discriminated against them on grounds of their deafness:

*"I tried to apply for a job and was a bit shocked that the hearing person who was advertising the job wasn't very open to me because of my Deafness. That dented my confidence a little bit because I thought it was going to be all right."
(male client)*

This is likely to have affected both the take up and effectiveness of this element of the service.

4.5 Outcomes for Deaf Integration Project participants

The following section draws mainly on material derived from interviews with Deaf clients. It reports on their views on the utility of the specific services they received and the impact that the Deaf Integration Project had more generally on their attempts to integrate in the UK.

The Deaf Integration Project participants interviewed for this evaluation had sought help from the project for a variety of reasons, but commonly included: advice and assistance to help resolve immigration issues; help finding employment; and to learn BSL.

The participants had received a range of services from the Deaf Integration Project, as shown in Table 2. The level and intensity of contact with the project varied greatly, with one respondent reporting that they had been in contact for no more than one month, while some respondents had been in contact with the services for over a year.

Three of the 14 Deaf Integration Project participants interviewed had been signposted to the project by another organisation,⁹ while the majority (8 of 14 respondents) reported finding out about the service through word of mouth, usually from somebody within the local Deaf community. Two respondents had contacted the project directly after proactively searching out support and assistance.

Table 2: Services or activities used by research participants.¹⁰

Service or activity	Number of participants
Employment advice	14
Informed of social events	14
Advocacy	12
Legal services	12
BSL level 2	9
BSL level 1	8
Skills for Life	6

⁹ Such as Deaf organisations, social services and Jobcentre Plus.

¹⁰ Sourced from RAD monitoring data. There were some discrepancies between this information and that given by interviewees. The reason for this is not known but it may be the case that when RAD staff provided project participants with information about forthcoming

The consensus among all respondents, regardless of the particular service they had accessed, was that the support provided by RAD had improved their quality of life and had impacted positively on their settlement experience. Participants appeared to have come to the Deaf Integration Project with low expectations, reflecting the fact that in their countries of origin Deaf people were often stigmatised and socially isolated, and receive only minimal access to education.

Clients were asked to rate the services of the Deaf Integration Project on a scale from zero (very poor) to ten (excellent). The vast majority of respondents were positive about the service they received. Of the 14 respondents, 3 people rated the service as a 10, 10 gave the project a rating of between 7 and 9 and one gave the project a rating of 5 out of 10. The project was also compared favourably to the support provided by other organisations.

Each service provided as part of the Deaf Integration Project was deemed to be useful. However, individuals found different elements of the project to be most useful dependent on their needs and other sources of support available to them.

Of the 12 respondents who had made use of RAD's **legal services** seeking immigration and benefits advice (level one), the large majority described how the assistance of the legal services team had been of use. A small number were, however, still trying to resolve problems associated with their visa eligibility;

“I’m engaged and they’re helping me in terms of forms for my fiancée to be able to come over to the UK, so they’re helping me to understand what it is I need to do to enable her to come over.” (male client)

For those who were actively seeking work, a number of respondents reported finding the **employment advice** particularly valuable:

“They helped with my CV, I’ve got a job interview on Mondayand they’ve given me some help with that, in terms of applying for jobs and help with my CV.” (female client)

events and offered employment advice, they did not recognize that they had received this 'service', perhaps because they were not actively seeking assistance in this area.

Many Deaf Integration Project participants highlighted the **advocacy support** as invaluable in helping them to meet basic needs (for example, making telephone calls, paying bills, setting up bank accounts, accessing health care):

“..in terms of help setting up a bank account, national insurance, all that, it was really, really difficult and really, really complicated and I didn’t know how to go about it. I got a lot of help and advice from them [...]. I had an interpreter come along with me and help out with stuff, so I’ve had a lot of that stuff happen because of RAD.” (male client)

Deaf Integration Project participants interviewed who had no prior knowledge of BSL (8 respondents) had reported that the **educational programmes** provided through the project had been very beneficial:

“I’ve been able to access the level 1 and 2 courses here and I’ve got a course certificate so I’m very happy and I really feel like it’s helped to improve my experience of life.” (female client)

“I think the best thing for me has been the BSL classes, I’ve done level 2 now. I’ve only been here eight months.” (female client)

One participant commented, however, that the BSL training would have been improved if it had been delivered by a practitioner from the Deaf community and another that she would have liked to have accessed more advanced BSL training through the project.

All of the Deaf Integration Project participants who were interviewed had been informed about the **social events**, although project participants rarely recounted attending such an event. Some project participants commented that attendance at BSL or life skills courses (rather than an organised social event) represented an opportunity to meet people and that the skills they provided had enabled them to build social networks:

“...it’s very useful for me to come and meet other Deaf people, talk to them.” (female client)

“I’d be on the back foot when it comes to communication because I think this has helped me to be able to meet people easier and be able to make contact with people easier.” (male client)

The impact on clients' settlement experience

Many of those interviewed described being settled and happy living in London and planned to stay in the UK permanently:

“...after three years we've got to grips with life here and we're really happy. I think it's good for us to be here for the future, the hospitals and everything like that. There's nothing in [home country], there's lots and lots of people as well. I don't feel like [home country] has any future for me but here I feel like I have got a future... two more years and I'll be able to get citizenship.” (female client)

In some cases (5), respondents suggested that the support they had received from the Deaf Integration Project had been the most helpful source of assistance in enabling them to integrate into UK society and commented on how life would have been more stressful and difficult without the support provided through the project:

“[without RAD] I think I would have been quite depressed. I think I would have been stuck at home. I wouldn't have known where in London I could go or how to communicate with hearing people or have any access to interpreters or college [...] RAD was what allowed me to get more of a social life and suggested I come looking for a job and that's really opened my eyes, using the service.” (male client)

Family and friends were reported to be an invaluable source of support for Deaf migrants where available. The services provided by the Deaf Integration Project were particularly important to clients who were managing without this support. This appeared to explain why the project proved less important for some respondents, in terms of getting by and coping with life in the UK:

“I think the difference is I get a lot of help and support from my family and other people. I think if I was on my own I would come to RAD a lot more and get a lot more support from them. ” (female client)

Reflecting on the positive experience he had of engaging with the Deaf Integration Project, one participant proclaimed that the sort of service provided by RAD should be available to all Deaf migrants including those living outside of London.

Improving the Service

Clients were asked for any suggestions they might have for how the service provided by the Deaf Integration Project might be improved. Some clients struggled to comment, reporting that they had been satisfied with the service received and could not think of any ways in which the form or scope of provision could be improved:

“I can’t really think of anything else they could do that they haven’t offered.” (male client)

“Everything that I’ve asked for I’ve had help with, there’s not been anything they’ve not been able to help me with.” (male client)

Two key observations were forthcoming from the clients who did provide a response. First, it was suggested that the time within which Deaf Integration Project staff responded to clients should be speeded up. This reflected the experience of some respondents, who reported being forced to chase up project staff for a response to their inquiry or case. Another respondent commented on a shortage of interpreters and the inconvenience that can be caused by having to wait for an interpreter to become available. Second, two clients suggested enhancing the service through the provision of higher level (BSL, numeracy and English) training.

Deaf Integration Project workers' views on the impact of the project

Staff felt that support provided through the Deaf Integration Project had been successful in assisting Deaf migrants to live independently in London and in helping them to integrate within both hearing and Deaf communities. They felt this was evidenced by the number of project participants that returned to the service for further support and assistance:

“I’ve seen the feedback and I’ve also seen myself that they come back and they come back repeatedly and ask for support. If somebody’s coming back it means that they’re satisfied with the service. Also I’ve seen they’ve recommended the service to other people so on that basis I would say that the project has been a success.” (Project worker – Deaf)

Deaf Integration Project staff also illustrated the impact of the project through reference to specific cases. One such case was a client from Somalia who

had no sign language skills at all on arrival in the UK and was fearful and unable to converse with anybody outside of his immediate family. Through the BSL course and one-to-one outreach work with the client, the Deaf Integration Project taught him sign language from scratch, which helped to increase his confidence and enabled him to live more independently:

“...you just see the confidence grow and grow and that to me is a really positive achievement because I can see an improvement in that person’s life. That was a big challenge for us as well because this person actually had no language. It’s like starting from scratch teaching language as you would to a baby but this person was an adult and it was just that slow process of the confidence growing which was really lovely to see.” (Project worker - Deaf)

4.6 Organisational benefits

Deaf Integration Project staff felt that the RAD had also benefited from its involvement in this project by:

- increasing knowledge about this particular client group and their rights and entitlements;
- enhancing skills and capacity among RAD staff;
- raising their profile in the voluntary sector as an agency capable of working with a diverse range of Deaf people; and
- learning lessons about managing the application and delivery of grant funding from different sources.

4.7 Plans and strategies for the future

The Deaf Integration Project formally ended in December 2009. RAD reported having no plans to maintain or develop the project. The reason given was that the client base was too small to make the Deaf Integration Project a viable proposal. RAD did report, however, intending to continue to provide support to this particular client group through mainstream service provision (where possible) and other RAD services designed specifically for minority ethnic groups.

The experience of RAD in trying to implement a project using EC funding raises questions about the viability of providing a dedicated service for this client group in this way, given the relatively small numbers of people involved.

On the other hand, mainstream provision for Deaf people may not possess the expertise required to service the particular (and often extreme) needs of this group, which can include social isolation, limited English language and BSL skills and restricted eligibility to welfare services¹¹. One potential way forward is to acknowledge that this group shares many support needs with Deaf refugees and asylum seekers granted leave to remain in the UK, as well as Deaf migrant workers from within the EU and/or their Deaf family members. Support is perhaps better provided to this whole range of migrants together rather than creating artificial boundaries to try and meet specific funding criteria. This is the approach seemingly adopted by RAD.

4.8 Lessons learnt and best practice for other organisations that provide integration services to Deaf migrants and third-country nationals

First, these findings have specific implications for the design of other projects seeking co-funding from the EIF – and hence subsequent assessment. EIF funding criteria means that projects have to work with a very narrowly defined target group of participants which can be challenging. The implications of this must be fully understood both by bidders, in the design of their project, and by the independent selection panels who evaluate the project bids to ensure that they are realistic and appropriate.

Second, the findings show how important it is for the bidding organisation to research the size and needs of the target group before setting targets and implementing a project. Evidence of the demand for different services would be invaluable in the successful design of a project and this would make it easier to ensure that staffing levels are appropriate.

Third, in terms of best practice, these findings provide some evidence that deploying staff who share a common culture and/or language with the participant group may improve outcomes.

¹¹ This is as a result of their immigration status.

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An evaluation of the deaf third-country nationals integration project: a report to the United Kingdom Border Agency

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