

## **International Inclusion Policy**

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## **1. Policy Statement**

- 1.1 Deaf Child Worldwide believes that all deaf children and young people have a right to be fully included and to take an active role in the life of their families, communities and education.

## **2. Definition of Inclusion**

- 2.1 Deaf Child Worldwide views inclusion as a process of enabling all children and young people to:
- a) fully access available opportunities in families, communities and education
  - b) participate actively in family, community and education
  - c) achieve their full individual potential
  - d) experience a sense of emotional well-being and belonging.
- 2.2 Inclusion is not determined by location but by the quality of the child's experience wherever they may be. Inclusion is a 'state' and not a 'place'.

## **3. Child Rights Framework**

- 3.1 Deaf Child Worldwide recognises the right of all children to inclusion as enshrined in international human rights instruments, most significantly the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1990) and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006). Our work is informed by the four general principles of the UNCRC, namely:
- a) The right not to be discriminated against
  - b) The best interests of the child
  - c) The right to survival and development
  - d) The right to be heard.
- 2.2 Deaf Child Worldwide recognises the underlying principle of the Strategic Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>1</sup> – 'leave no one behind'. SDG3 (Good health and wellbeing) commits that everyone should be able to access quality essential healthcare services and SDG4 (Quality Education) commits that all children should receive free equitable and quality education in primary and secondary schools, including children with differences and disabilities.

We recognise deaf children are not defined solely by their deafness. Interrelated issues, such as gender (SDG 5) and poverty (SDG 1), must also be understood and addressed.

## **4. Purpose of the Policy & Underlying Principles**

- 4.1 Deaf Child Worldwide's vision is of a world without barriers for every deaf child. This policy explains how Deaf Child Worldwide understands inclusion for deaf children and provides a framework for its programmatic responses.
- 4.2 Childhood deafness: Deaf Child Worldwide uses the term 'deaf' to refer to all levels of hearing loss be they mild, moderate severe or profound. Any level of hearing loss in childhood will have an impact on the way in which a child acquires

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<sup>1</sup> <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/>  
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and learns language (either spoken or signed) and on the way in which a child's cognitive, social and emotional skills develop.

- 4.3 Language and Communication Skills: Deafness is not a learning disability. Deaf children can learn to communicate through signed, spoken and written languages. Some children will use signed languages more than spoken languages or a combination of both.
- 4.4 Deaf Child worldwide believes that each child should be supported to develop fluent language skills using whichever method is most appropriate for that child. Decisions about methods of communication and where to educate the child should be made by informed parents or carers acting in the best interest of the child. In situations where deaf children do not have access to good quality hearing aids and audiology services, sign language can be particularly relevant as a means of enabling them to acquire fluent language skills. There is no evidence that learning sign language interferes with the acquisition of spoken language. There is abundant evidence that sign language can be acquired before spoken language by most young children and that learning sign language can act as a platform for the acquisition of language both written and spoken.<sup>2</sup>
- 4.5 Emotional Well-being: Deaf children are at higher risk of experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties than hearing children. These difficulties are attributable to the consequences of being deaf but not to being deaf. Deaf children may feel excluded because they may find it more difficult to express feelings and emotions or to respond to others' feelings. Delays in the development of language and communication skills can lead to limited social skills with both hearing and deaf peers. Lack of understanding of deafness on the part of family and community members may also mean that deaf children experience discrimination, rejection and abuse.
- 4.6 Deaf Child Worldwide believes that it is important for deaf children to be supported to increase their self-confidence and self-esteem so that they can develop positive friendships and relationships with family, peers and colleagues

## 5. Inclusion in Families

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises and respects the rights and responsibilities of families to direct and guide their children so that, as they grow, they learn to use their rights properly **(UNCRC, Article 5)**

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that “children with disabilities have equal rights with respect to family life. With a view to realising these rights, and to prevent concealment, abandonment, neglect and segregation of children with disabilities, States Parties shall undertake to provide early and comprehensive information, services and support to children with disabilities and their families.” **(UNCRPD, Article 23)**

## Key Challenges

<sup>2</sup> Marschark et al, *On Ethics and Deafness: research, Pedagogy and Politics*. Deafness and Education International 9(1): 45-61 (2007)

- 5.1 Deaf Children in hearing families: Over 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents who have no knowledge of deafness. Deaf children and young people are often excluded from family life because family members do not think that they can learn or do not know how to communicate with them. Many parents and families find communicating with their deaf child challenging. Delays in identifying deafness, not understanding the impact of deafness, stigma and discrimination also make it more difficult for family members to support their deaf children. In some circumstances this can lead to deaf children being hidden, neglected, prevented from socialising with other children or denied access to household resources.

### **Deaf Child Worldwide's response – principles**

- 5.2 Deaf Child Worldwide believes that families are the first teachers of their children. For all children, the early years are critical language-learning years. Children who are born deaf will not have the same access to spoken language during this time, and therefore need support to learn language so they can understand their world and express themselves.
- 5.3 Deaf children's access to education, employment, social, cultural and recreational life will all be heavily influenced by their experience of the family environment. A child with good communication and language skills and a positive understanding of their deafness is more likely to be included in these environments than a child who has been excluded within the family.
- 5.4 Deaf Child Worldwide believes that involving families in all aspects of support for deaf children is crucial. Family support, home-based and community-based work is essential to support the inclusion of deaf children. Deaf Child Worldwide believes that if families receive the right information and support, they should be able to support their deaf child to actively participate in family life and help prepare them for and support them in their education and their working life.
- 5.5 Ultimately providing high quality services to support the families of deaf children is the responsibility of governments, however relevant skills and resources are often lacking. NGOs and CBOS can advocate government for change and work in conjunction with local authorities to help ensure that the needs and rights of deaf children are addressed by practitioners, decision makers and policy makers.

### **Deaf Child Worldwide's response – practice**

- 5.6 Families and caregivers are at the centre of deaf children's lives. Deaf Child Worldwide promotes and supports the following activities to help ensure deaf children's inclusion in their families:
- a) Home and community-based services which provide families with clear, balanced, relevant and positive information in a way that they can access and understand.
  - b) Home and community-based services that support and encourage families to communicate with their child and provide them with low or no-cost ways of helping their deaf child to acquire language.

- c) Opportunities for parents of deaf children to meet together and gain practical and emotional support.
- d) Opportunities for families and deaf children and young people to meet deaf adults who act as positive role models and/or are able to give information about the Deaf community and act as mentors and communication and sign language trainers.
- e) Wherever possible, Deaf Child Worldwide will support initiatives that promote inclusion through training professionals in communications skills and through involving relevant professionals and government departments in project design and development.

## 6. Inclusion in Communities

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child makes it clear that disabled children have the right to the special care and support they need so that they can live full and independent lives **(UNCRC, Article 23)**

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises the equal right of all persons with disabilities to live in the community, with choices equal to others. **(UNCRPD, Article 19)**

### Key Challenges

- 6.1 **Deaf children and young people in their communities:** Communication difficulties, stigma and discrimination along with a general lack of knowledge and understanding of deafness lead to many deaf children being excluded from their communities. The impact of this can mean that deaf children do not develop an appreciation of the social, cultural and spiritual aspects of either hearing or deaf communities.
- 6.2 This kind of exclusion also leaves deaf children at risk of emotional, behavioural and mental health problems. In the countries in which Deaf Child Worldwide works this figure is likely to be higher due to delays in identifying deafness, not understanding the impact of deafness, stigma and discrimination. Deaf children and young people, especially girls are more vulnerable to neglect, violence and abuse.<sup>3</sup> They are also less able to seek protection or other assistance in the event of abuse.
- 6.3 The links between disability, social exclusion and poverty are well documented.<sup>4</sup> Deafness is both a cause and a consequence of poverty. Deaf children are more likely to come from poor families and grow up to be poor adults. Deaf children are also more likely to access a smaller share of household resources than non-disabled children.

<sup>3</sup> Research cited by *Sign*, UK charity focusing on the mental health of deaf people

<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization and the World Bank , *'World Report on Disability'* ( 2011) "People with disabilities have worse health and socioeconomic outcomes. Across the world, people with disabilities have poorer health, lower education achievements, less economic participation and higher rates of poverty than people without disabilities."

- 6.4 Exclusion also means that deaf children and young deaf people are often cut off from traditional support structures within communities. This can mean that deafness is a barrier to accessing the basic needs of nutrition, health care, clean water, sanitation, and a means to generate income.

### **Deaf Child Worldwide's response – principles**

- 6.5 Positive community attitudes are critical in providing an enabling environment for deaf children. A more inclusive society will ultimately weaken the links between poverty and disability. Specific action is needed to raise awareness of deafness in communities. Families and deaf young people should be continuously and sensitively consulted about how best to develop services for them. Training is needed to make sure community members and service providers communicate effectively with deaf children. In addition, deaf children and their families need to be included in mainstream community development activities.
- 6.6 Deaf children and young people need to be supported to develop their communication, emotional and social skills and to increase their self-confidence and self-esteem so that they can develop positive friendships and relationships with family, peers and colleagues.
- 6.7 Governments have primary responsibility to ensure that *all* their citizens have access to community services. In addition, other actors such as international and local NGOs working on community development issues also have a responsibility to make sure they include deaf children and their families.

### **Deaf Child Worldwide's response – practice**

- 6.8 Deaf Child Worldwide's local and global information sharing work and training modules aim to support all organisations to develop the ability to include deaf children in their work.
- 6.9 Deaf Child Worldwide recognises that deaf children and young people who have not been supported to develop their social and emotional skills and understanding may experience greater exclusion from their communities.
- 6.10 Deaf Child Worldwide also recognises that government services for families with deaf children are often insufficient. In addition, poverty prevents many families from meeting the needs of their deaf children.
- 6.11 Deaf Child Worldwide therefore promotes community-based self-help strategies, in particular through work with deaf young people's groups, parents' groups, deaf people's associations and community organisations.
- 6.12 Deaf Child Worldwide's work aims to:
- a) support deaf children and young people to develop social, emotional and 'life' skills
  - b) raise awareness of deafness within the community
  - c) improve the ability of community members and service providers to communicate with deaf children
  - d) train and employ deaf people and their family members to deliver services for deaf children

- e) promote the inclusion of families with deaf children in existing development and poverty reduction activities
- f) provide information and appropriate support to enable partners, parents and deaf young people to lobby and advocate for improved access to community services and to services specifically for deaf children.

## 7. Inclusive Education

**The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child** states that governments shall make primary education compulsory and free to all. **(UNCRC, Article 28)**

**The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** states that governments shall ensure an inclusive education system, whilst ensuring that the education of children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development. **(UNCRPD, Article 24)**

**Sustainable Development Goal 4** states that everyone should have equal opportunities and equal access to education throughout their lives.

### Challenges facing deaf children in education

- 7.1 According to the Unesco Institute of Statistics (UIS) data for the school year ending in 2018 about 258 million children and youth are out of school. The total includes 59 million children of primary school age, 62 million of lower secondary school age and 138 million of upper secondary age. During the Covid-19 pandemic many countries closed their schools, some for nearly two years, which had profound and ongoing impacts on children's education.<sup>5</sup> It is impossible to state accurately how many of these children are deaf, but UNESCO estimates that 90% of disabled children do not go to school in the developing world.
- 7.2 Although reliable statistics are rarely available, there is no doubt that deaf children are widely excluded from education. The reasons for this are many. Discrimination in society is often reflected in schools and education systems. Some parents and teachers do not know that deaf children are capable of learning. Deaf children may be hidden or prevented from attending school or families may simply not provide their deaf children with the means to attend. Even where children attend school, their communication needs are often left unmet resulting in poor outcomes and high dropout rates. Deaf children who attend schools that fail to meet their communication needs may be excluded or drop out.
- 7.3 Many teachers in developing countries teach large classes, have inadequate training and challenging working conditions. Often teachers have no access to specialist training and are not able to communicate effectively with deaf children. There is a shortage of trained professionals and a huge need for suitable education materials. In some countries, despite legislation guaranteeing the rights of all children to education, schools sometimes refuse to admit deaf children

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/document/file/2020-06-factsheet-gpe-and-covid-19-coronavirus.pdf>



because they claim to lack adequate resources. This may also be a result of discriminatory attitudes within the school management or teaching staff.

- 7.4 Many of these issues apply regardless of the type of school a deaf child attends. 'Special Schools' often cater for children with a wide range of disabilities and may not employ staff with appropriate teaching or sign language skills. Schools for the deaf offer the opportunity for children to develop friendships with deaf peers, but even in these schools teaching staff may not always be well qualified in teaching and sign language skills. Where there is an absence of a recognised national sign language teachers may have difficulties in communicating with students who use local sign languages. More often than not 'Special Schools' and Schools for the Deaf are boarding schools. Children frequently attend from a very young age and consequently lose contact with or never develop the means to communicate with their families. In the worst case scenarios, children are abandoned at the schools.
- 7.5 Education policies commonly define 'inclusive' education as the placing of a deaf (or disabled) child in a mainstream classroom. This often results in one deaf child being physically present in a classroom of hearing peers but without any access to the language of instruction, any additional support or any opportunity to communicate with other deaf children.
- 7.6 Deaf Units in mainstream schools offer opportunities for deaf children to learn and socialise together as well as with hearing peers. Where the units are in day schools, some children may have to travel long distances to attend.
- 7.7 During the COVID-19 pandemic deaf children and young people were often excluded from mainstream education because governments put schoolwork on the radio, TV and online. Radio is inaccessible for deaf children and TV programmes are inaccessible without sub-titling and/or sign language interpretation. Research conducted by DCW in West Bengal showed that one third of deaf learners had no access at all to a smartphone, and those that did worried about affording the data<sup>6</sup>.

### **Background to debates about deafness and inclusive education**

- 7.7 The term 'inclusive education' is now widely used although interpretations of what this means in practice vary. The term and some of the core inclusion concepts were first brought into currency in the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action which was the result of the UNESCO Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education in 1994.<sup>7</sup>

UNESCO currently states: 'Inclusive education works to identify all barriers to education and remove them' and covers everything from curricula to pedagogy and teaching'.

The Enabling Education Network states that it is a constantly evolving process of change and improvement within schools and the wider education system to make

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ndcs.org.uk/deaf-child-worldwide/information-and-resources/deaf-students-speak-out/>

<sup>7</sup> Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action – core inclusion concepts: Children have a wide diversity of characteristics and needs; Difference is normal; Schools need to accommodate all children; Children with disabilities should attend their neighbourhood school; community participation is essential for inclusion; child-centred pedagogy is central to inclusion; Flexible curricula should adapt to children, not vice-versa; Inclusion needs proper resources and support; Inclusion is essential to human dignity and the enjoyment of full human rights; Inclusive schools benefit all children because they help create an inclusive society; Inclusion improves the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the education system  
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education more welcoming, learner-friendly, and beneficial for a wide range of people' and that it is not 'a one-off project that can be delivered and completed within a short timeframe' or 'focused just on developing education for learners with disabilities within mainstream settings'.

- 7.8 Developing a truly inclusive system of education involves philosophical, political and economic commitment and in most countries remains at best an aspiration.
- 7.9 The Millennium Development Goal (2000-2015) of universal access to primary education for all has achieved some impressive results but is still a long way from being reached. There is a broad consensus within the international community on the need to look beyond universal access in order to improve the learning opportunities and outcomes of all children. The challenge lies now in ensuring the specific goals, and targets are met and sustained.
- 7.10 Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to ensure equitable and inclusive quality education and lifelong learning for all by 2030. The UN has defined 10 targets and 11 indicators for SDG 4. Target 4.5: 'Eliminate all discrimination in education' relates in particular to deaf children's right to an accessible education. Indicator 4.A.1 'Inclusive and safe schools' lists (d) 'adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities' which for deaf children includes, among other things, sign language provision and interpretation and visual learning resources.

### **Deaf Child Worldwide's response – principles**

- 7.11 Education is central in promoting children's development. Without education, deaf children will be unable to develop their personality, talents, creativity, mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential. The development of targets and indicators for the Strategic Development Goals in which disability is explicit is crucial. It means disabled children should be meaningfully included in the international development agenda.
- 7.12 Deaf Child Worldwide believes that deaf children are more likely to complete a full course of primary schooling if their families receive support in the early years to develop communication and language skills and if the schools where they learn are able to meet the communication needs of deaf children.
- 7.13 Deaf Child Worldwide makes a clear distinction between *inclusive education* and *integrated education*. Integrated education stresses the need for children to be placed in mainstream classrooms, without necessarily considering the support required to ensure their equal access to learning. Inclusive education enables a child to access the curriculum, learn effectively, make genuine friendships and feel included in all school activities.
- 7.14 Deaf Child Worldwide believes that inclusion is a state not a place. Deaf Child Worldwide stresses the need for deaf children to be placed in an environment in which they have full access to learning, social, emotional and recreational activities. This can be achieved in both mainstream and special classrooms. It can also be achieved for children who use either signed or spoken communication.

“Inclusion is about much more than the types of school children attend: it is about the quality of their experience and how far they are helped to learn, to achieve and participate fully in the life of the school”<sup>8</sup>

7.15 National governments have responsibility for providing education which includes all children. Donors funding education work have a responsibility to ensure their funds are used for the benefit of all children, which includes specific work to meet the needs of deaf children. All organisations working to achieve *education for all* should consider how deaf children can be included in their work.

7.16 Deaf Child Worldwide believes in the following basic principles that support the inclusion of deaf children in education. Both mainstream and special schools can promote the inclusion of deaf children through ensuring that:

- a) Schools support and encourage the involvement of parents, maintain positive communication with families and help ensure that family and community environments become more inclusive.
- b) Deaf children in special schools/boarding schools have regular contact with their families and communities.
- c) All staff, both teaching and support, working at the school have received training which enables them to understand the needs of deaf children Deaf children have equal and first-hand access to the taught and wider curriculum of the school as well as extra-curricular activities
- d) All staff are trained in and understand Safeguarding and Child Protection.
- e) Deaf children’s learning needs are properly supported by qualified and trained staff
- f) Policies and practice ensure that deaf children develop positive self-image and high self-esteem, supporting the achievement of their academic and all-round potential
- g) There are opportunities for deaf and hearing children to mix together and establish genuine and equal relationships.
- h) There is effective communication and age and ability-appropriate peer interaction between pupils, both educationally and socially (whether signed or spoken). Where deaf children’s chosen communication mode is sign language, this should involve hearing children and teachers acquiring competence in signed communication
- i) There are regular opportunities for deaf children to have contact with deaf adults and older deaf children as positive role models
- j) The learning environment has good lighting and is acoustically favourable and all reasonable steps have been taken to ensure that the environment supports deaf children’s learning and full participation in the activities of the school
- k) The school has considered how to challenge other factors which lead to exclusion, for example, gender, race, nationality, disability, child labour, poverty and HIV/AIDS.

7.17 Deaf Child Worldwide believes that during any situation such as a pandemic where face to face education is not offered, then the alternative must be accessible for deaf students. Moves to put education onto the radio or TV without subtitles/sign language interpretation are inherently inaccessible for deaf learners.

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<sup>8</sup> Department for Education and Skills (DFES), UK, *Removing Barriers to Achievement*, (2004)  
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Education must also be accessible for students from poor families who cannot afford the technology required to access the curriculum.

### **Deaf Child Worldwide's response – practice**

- 7.18 Deaf Child Worldwide works with national and local education authorities either through training, service development or campaigning to ensure that improvements in education for deaf children are made available to all children and are permanently sustained.
- 7.19 Deaf Child Worldwide shares information and learning with all organisations working in education to help them better meet the needs of deaf children.
- 7.20 The priority for Deaf Child Worldwide is to develop models of education which can provide deaf children from poor rural and urban communities with an education that will enable them to lead independent lives within inclusive communities of both deaf and hearing people.
- 7.21 These models generally include some or all of these elements:
- a) Community based outreach programmes to identify deaf children and support their families and communities to understand children's rights to education and the value of educating a deaf child.
  - b) Use of communication approaches which are affordable to the family and are the most appropriate for the individual child.
  - c) Accessible early education programmes which provide deaf children with opportunities to acquire language but do not lead to the child becoming excluded from family and community.
  - d) The involvement or employment of deaf people as community workers, teachers, classroom assistants or sign language trainers in education programmes.
  - e) Working with teachers, community workers and families to develop teaching materials that support the development of language skills, literacy and numeracy in deaf children.
  - f) Training teachers and teaching assistants to better meet the communication needs of deaf children in their classrooms. This includes improving their ability to use the national sign language, a total communication approach or more accessible spoken communication for children who lip-read or follow an oral/aural approach.
  - g) Identifying ways to use available expertise from ministries, private or special institutions to enable children who are excluded from school to access education.
  - h) Encouraging families to become more involved in the management of schools.
  - i) Sharing information about good practice in education.
  - j) Involving families, deaf people and teachers in lobbying and advocacy to ensure governments provide resources which will enable more deaf children to access education and succeed at school.