Evaluation

Of

Signing Information Mid-West

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Commissioned by PAUL Partnership

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Ms. Alona Troy, the Development Officer in Signing Information Mid-West and Ms. Mariead Hegarty, the ISL/English interpreter must be singled out for appreciation here for her support and information.

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Glossary

❑ **D/deaf:**

Note the difference in the first letter of the word 'd/Deaf'.

The lower case 'd' refers to all persons with hearing loss. However, the use of a capital 'D' in Deaf refers to those who view themselves as culturally Deaf, differentiating them from other persons with hearing loss. The difference is based on the collective experience of using a signed language and its related culture, and hence embodies the Deaf community. They do not necessarily view deafness as impairment but a characteristic trait. Membership of the community is not necessarily based on levels of hearing loss but fluency in signing and appreciation of a collective approach to issues.

In contrast, 'deaf' people are more commonly deafened or hard of hearing, they may be more orientated to the majority hearing society and are more likely to base their identity and status in the hearing world. For them, being deprived of hearing impacts on their status and identity since talking and listening are prerequisites for participating in the hearing world.

We uphold the d/Deaf distinction in this report.

Abbreviations

❑ **PAUL Partnership**: People Action Against Unemployment Limited based in Limerick city (an organisation made up of communities, state agencies, social partners, voluntary groups and elected representatives to tackle social exclusion and community issues.

- **MWDA**   Mid-West Deaf Association is a representative organisation of Deaf people residing in this regional area. MDWA runs a social club with an information outlet.

- **EDS**   Enhancing Disability Services is an initiative administered by POBAL via the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. This initiative administers a state fund to support disability services.

- **NADP**   National Association for Deaf People is a service-based organisation catering for all people with a hearing loss. Now known as DeafHear.ie.

- **GU**   Gallaudet University is the only liberal arts university in the world for the Deaf and it is based in Washington DC, USA.

- **ISL**   The Deaf community in Ireland (including some signers in Northern Ireland) use Irish Sign Language. In the Republic, this is the indigenous signed language of the community.

- **BSL**   British Sign Language is the signed language used by members of the Deaf community in Britain and much of Northern Ireland.

- **CIC**   Citizens' Information Centres are supported by the state to disseminate public and state information to the public.

Chapter 1

Summary

General commentary

The socio-economic status of Deaf communities in several countries, including Ireland, has been comparatively lower than their non-deaf (or 'hearing') counterparts (Conama and Grehan, 2001; Conroy, 2006). This fact is generally accepted and supported by research that Deaf communities in most countries have availed of interpreting services to enhance their socio-economic position in society (Kyle and Allsop, 1997) Ireland is no exemption and this is exemplified by the creation of a local interpreting service in the Mid-West by PAUL Partnership[1].

However, the existence of interpreting services has not ameliorated the situation for deaf people as much as had been hoped. One main reason is that the interpreting service has not been able to meet the demand for qualified interpretation: the supply of interpreters is slow due to the fact that the process of training interpreters at university level necessarily takes time. The Centre for Deaf Studies was established in 2001, and hence, the process of working towards an optimum level of provision of interpreters is still quite new.

The project, Signing Information Mid-West, was first mooted in 2005 and application for funding under the Enhancing Disability Services programme administered by POBAL to establish the project was successful. The project started its work in August 2006 by employing one person who worked with a dual remit: (a) interpreter and (b) information giver. A number of adjustments were subsequently put in place to progress the project's objectives further. An

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[1] The organisations involved in the creation of Signing Information Mid-West can be seen in the table of steering committee below.

integral part of the funding agreement included the requirement to evaluate the project.

A brief synopsis of the situation follows:

The Signing Information Mid-West project has established a foothold in the Mid-West region despite heavy odds. This should be regarded as a very successful step towards achieving further accessibility for Deaf people in the Mid-West region. The difficulties facing the project should be considered in the national context. For example, there is a severe shortage of qualified interpreters nationally and there is no short-term solution pending. Public information though the medium of Irish Sign Language remains rudimentary. Some public information in ISL is produced by non-governmental organisations and the financing of such work is infrequent.

The criteria for the evaluation of this project are limited to whether the stated aims and objectives of the Sign Information Mid-West have been met. The project's management committee developed these aims and objectives.

This background to the evolution of this evaluation report can be summarised as follows:

Background information

1. PAUL Partnership on behalf of SIMW awarded the Centre for Deaf Studies the tender for evaluating one of their projects, Signing Information Mid-West in summer of 2007.

2. The main purpose of the Sign Information Mid-West project was to establish a local interpreting service in the Mid-West Region.

3. The project was awarded a grant of €186,495.00 from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in November 2005.

4. After a series of advertisements, due to a severe shortage of qualified interpreters in Ireland, an interpreter, Ms. Elena McGinvey, was

appointed in August 2006. However, for personal reasons, Ms. McGinvey resigned in December 2006. Her contribution to the foundation of this service is widely acknowledged and appreciated.

5. Following from this, the Signing Information Mid-West project decided to split the role of interpreter into two functions; (i) development worker and (ii) interpreter.

6. In January 2007, these roles were filled and work recommenced.

7. The evaluation was conducted from May 2007 and completed in December 2007.

8. The Signing Information Mid-West sets the aims, objectives and values for the project.

9. The methodologies for evaluating were varied. They include documentary analysis, short questionnaires, interviews and focus group meetings.

10. A demographic profile of deaf people has been prepared to complement this evaluation.

Findings of the evaluation

1. Given the short timeframe for evaluation and the limited resources available, this evaluation is limited to enquiring whether the aims and objectives of the Signing Information Mid-West project were successfully achieved.

2. There is a strong sense of pride in the fact that the project was established in the Mid-West across the spectrum of stakeholders.

3. While, there is overall satisfaction with the establishment of a local interpreting service, there is widespread recognition that there are several shortcomings:

    a. Aims and objectives of the project have been only partially realised

b. Some objectives are aspirational in nature and should be regarded as underlying *values* associated with the project.

The shortcomings identified are:

i. The quantity of interpreters in the Mid-West is inadequate for meeting the number of interpreting requests received.

ii. The provision of one interpreter is totally inadequate given that there are approximately 360 Deaf people living in the region.

iii. Given this situation, if each Deaf person requested the presence of the interpreter for a total of 30^2 hours across the calendar year, the total hours for interpreting work in the region (if all requests were met) would be approximately 11,000 hours. This number of hours per Deaf person per annum is highly conservative.

iv. In principle, an interpreter is supposed to work for approx. 1,100 hours per year (excluding travel and rest times) (see Appendix 4 for assumed calculations).

v. Hence, the minimum number of interpreters for the region should ideally be ten.

vi. The project is currently only able to meet interpreting requests where advanced notice (a month at least) is given.

vii. The lack of availability of interpreting services during weekends and evenings is a cause for concern for respondents.

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[2] The number here is arbitrarily chosen but in Finland, a Deaf person is entitled to have 180 hours of social interpreting (financed by local municipality) (Prospectus, 2005) and according to one research report, the Danish government regards that a Deaf person is entitled to have 20 hours of interpreting on weekly basis (Prospectus, 2005). So this arbitrarily chosen number can be regarded as conservative in this context

4. There is strong evidence that requests for interpreting services are seriously underestimated given the reluctance of service users and providers to request one at a short notice[3]. There are several reasons behind this:

    a. Informants report that they are often informed that the interpreting service is not available at short notice;

    b. The strong reluctance to request last-minute interpretation can be considered an avoidance strategy i.e. avoidance of disappointment, deflated expectations, etc.

    c. The continued pattern of using family members or communication support workers to interpret is inevitable given this context. This is highly undesirable[4].

5. Regional variation in ISL is not widely acknowledged or appreciated. Informants generally felt that the dominant variant of ISL based in Dublin is not widely understood in the region. It is necessary to investigate if this really is the case;

    a. There are suggestions from informants that the regional variant of ISL used in this region needs to be identified and recognised. Service providers who produce information in ISL need to be sufficiently aware of this variant.

    b. Interpreters should be made aware of this issue and develop a consultative strategy to identify the local

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[3] This is not unique to the Mid-West. Similar descriptions emerge from Scotland (see Brien, 2002)

[4] Although some of may possess signing skill, they do not have necessary training for translating and interpreting. There is a widespread mistaken perception that ability to sign equates to the ability to interpret. Interpretation requires different levels of skill, such as language processing ability under the pressure of time required in simultaneous interpreting contexts. English and ISL are different in terms of linguistic organisation, as they possess different grammatical and syntactic rules. Those who have do not have access to extensive training in these areas are more likely to make grave errors in interpreting contexts. There are many examples, including such as a Deaf man acquitted of a murder in New Zealand after a discovery that a teacher had misinterpreted at the original trial (Napier, McKee and Goswell 2006).

variant of ISL in order to relay information more effectively.

6. Accessibility of local services is considered as greatly improved vis-à-vis the pre-existing situation. However, there are a number of issues regarding accessibility need to be considered carefully.

    a. Timing of local services may not be ideal for most Deaf people hence accessibility is seriously reduced during weekends and evenings. Thus, the project fails to achieve the specific objective of having local services fully accessible in terms of timeliness of provision.

    b. There is a strong tendency among service providers to view having an interpreter as the sole possible point of access for many Deaf people, subsequently failing to realise that there are additional issues to consider, such as providing public information in alternative formats, e.g. in ISL on DVD or via websites. We can summarise some of these issues under the heading of "Awareness about ISL and Deaf-related issues" as follows:

      i. There is a general view among informants that there is a lot of misunderstanding regarding the status of ISL. There is also strong feeling that an awareness programme should be initiated for service providers.

      ii. There is also a general feeling amongst informants that Deaf Awareness Training led by qualified Deaf instructors aimed at specific service providers should be considered by the project as another vital component of development in the region.

Recommendations arising from the evaluation:

1. Some of the aims and objectives of the project need to be carefully re-considered, realistically quantified and matched to the resources

available to the project. Each objective is commented upon in this context (please see Chapter 9).

2. Consultative strategies need to be reconsidered to consolidate the link between service providers and service users.

3. Signing Information Mid-West, the project should explore the options for increasing the availability of interpreters.

4. The project is strongly urged to integrate best international practice to their approach as they move forward with this essential service. We especially refer Signing Information to the Charter for British Sign Language adopted by the Bristol City Council, and the proposed accessibility model outlined in the research report published by the Scottish Parliament (2005). Such practices can be modified and applied to local use.

5. The use of alternative formats as standard practice for the dissemination of public information to Deaf people (i.e. through DVDs, websites, etc.) should be actively encouraged.

Chapter 2

Aims, Objectives and Values of the Project

Aims and values	*Related questions*
	What are the aims, objectives and values of Sign Information Mid-West?
	What objectives did Sign Information Mid-West set?
	Who decided the aims / objectives?

The rationale of the project:

The specific aim was to set up a provision of a high quality, accessible Irish Signing Language Interpreting Service in the Mid-West area.

It was generally envisaged that the project would enable the full time appointment of an interpreter to meet the interpreting needs of Deaf users, and at the same time, satisfying the statutory requirements of the community, statutory and voluntary bodies in the region. This statutory requirement entailed ensuring that their services and information is accessible to people with a disability.

The rationale for this project was based on a number of issues:

❑ No qualified ISL/English interpreter was available within 100 km of Limerick city. This incurred an extra financial burden on local organisations, as it entailed hiring from outside the region. Apart from interpreting fees, travel and subsistence, as well as preparation time costs, would need to be met.

❑ Interpreters had previously been hired to work in this region but all of them operated on a freelance basis. Therefore, they would charge either full or half-day rate.

❑ Given the heavy demand for interpreters, a month's notice would be a standard minimum requirement of the proposed Sign Information service.

❑ The original proposal for funding for the project claims that there are 250 Deaf people in the region who would require ISL/English interpreting services. However, to date, only 30 have availed of the service.

❑ The inability of the local Deaf population to participate in society at every level was highlighted as one of the reasons for establishing this project.

The nature of the project:

The operation of the project was envisaged as involving the hiring of an interpreter with a dual remit:

The primary focus was to be on providing interpreting services for events and meetings on request within the aforementioned area, while the secondary aspect of the remit entailed the interpreter functioning as disseminator of information regarding the CIC offices throughout the region. This meant that an interpreter would be employed to interpret information on a face-to-face basis or via a video-link.

The roles of the organisations involved in this project:

The following have been involved with the initial set up the Sign Information Mid-West project:

NAME OF COMMITTEE MEMBER:	ORGANISATION TO WHICH COMMITEEE MEMBER BELONGS:
John Buttery (Liaison person with ADM)	PAUL Partnership
Marion Browne	Citizens Information Centre
Shane Buckley (Chairperson)	Mid West Deaf Association / Limerick City Community and Voluntary Forum
Toni Gleeson	Disability Federation of Ireland

| Seamus Moore | National Association for the Deaf |
| Gerard Boyce | Mid West Deaf Association |

The project's finances and the contract for the employment of the interpreter are the responsibility of the PAUL Partnership. Hence, the interpreter was allowed to avail of this organisation's office space and associated facilitates.

The National Association for the Deaf (NAD)[5], Mid-West Deaf Association (MWDA) and the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) have taken on the role of providing expertise, advice and support for the project. They each nominated a member to the project's management committee.

The Citizens Information Centre (CIC) took on the responsibility of ensuring that the general public and community, voluntary and statutory agencies were made aware of the availability of the service. They offer, through the interpreter, information and advice on personal social services to deaf people in the region.

Limerick City Community and Voluntary Forum and the Social Inclusion Measures Group of the City Development Board have also provided support in the development of this proposal and will continue to work to make Limerick City more accessible to all residents. Each organisation is allocated a seat on the management committee.

The composition of the original steering committee has been expanded. The current composition of the committee is:

Marian Browne (Chairperson)	Citizens Information
Elaine McGrath	PAUL Partnership
Toni Gleeson	Disability Federation of Ireland
Paula Donohue	NADP (now DeafHear.ie)
Sandra Morrissey	Deaf Community Centre
Karen O'Donnell O'Connor	PAUL Partnership

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[5] NADP have since changed their name to DeafHear (www.deafhear.ie)

| Jennifer Ring | NADP (now DeafHear.ie) |
| Ger Boyce | Mid West Deaf Association |

The following names contributes to Steering committee meetings but is not a member of the committee:

| Alona Troy | EDS Development Worker |
| Mairead Hegarty | EDS ISL Interpreter |

Aims and Values of Sign Information Mid-West

> *Aim*:
> ❑ To create a full time interpreting post where the post can meet the interpreting needs of Deaf people and satisfy the statutory requirement of community, statutory and voluntary bodies to make their services and information available and accessible to people with disability.

The project's objectives and values can be summarised as follows:

Objectives:

❑ To utilise the time and resources of having an interpreter employed locally, which otherwise would be lost.

❑ To enable Deaf people to advocate for their rights and needs locally;

❑ To have proper access to information (in an accessible language);

❑ To enable Deaf people to participate and contribute in meetings locally;

❑ To empower Deaf people to exercise their constitutional rights as citizens;

❑ To minimise the migration of Deaf people to the Dublin area which in turn minimises the social and psychological detrimental effects of such migration on the local Deaf community;

❑ To enhance the employment prospects of local Deaf people;

❑ To enable Deaf people to have access to essential local information such as local housing;

❑ To shift the attitude towards deafness from the medical model towards the social model;

- To increase the information and knowledge among Deaf sign language users in all aspects of personal and social services;
- To enhance the understanding of Irish Sign Language as an effective communication tool;
- To eliminate deafness as a barrier to participation;
- To promote equality of access to opportunity.

Values:

The following values are identified in documents associated with the project although they are not listed as specific objectives or aims for the project. This description of values is aimed at capturing the spirit and rationale behind Sign-Information Mid-West:

- Recognition of the inability of Deaf people to participate in society at every level and a desire to address this situation urgently;
- Recognition of the right to an interpreting service to enable Deaf people to participate in society;
- Recognition that Deaf people can participate and live actively and productively in the region;
- Recognition of the status of Irish Sign Language as the community language of the local Deaf community;
- Appreciation of the social model of deafness which recognises that the related issues fall beyond the remit of medical intervention or assistance;
- Recognition of and respect for privacy and confidentiality of Deaf people where they engage in personal or intimate situations, for example, where they deal with legal or medical situations;
- Recognition of the rights of Deaf people to have equal access to services as non-deaf people.

The points above are augmented by the strong commitment given by the organisations involved in the project to deliver services to Deaf people.

Who decided the Aims / Objectives?

Review of the original application for funding reported that several of the organisations listed above had met on several occasions and decided the aims and objectives for this project.

Concluding Remarks:

Having identified the rationale and the management structure for this project, Sign Information Mid-West also provided additional secondary information to assist this evaluation.

This evaluation is based on the aims, values and objectives of the project, and consideration of whether they have been successfully met. The evaluation is to examine if these elements are realistic or justified in terms of resources (finance, time, personnel), provided for this project.

Chapter 3

Assessing the situation

Assessing the situation	Related questions What has happened? Evidence?

Introduction:

This section focuses on the assessment of the project, as it currently exists, a review of how it was previously delivered. This initial assessment is based on documentary analysis and correspondence with the Development Worker, who provided relevant documentation to support this analysis.

Given that only a limited amount of information was available for documentary analysis[6], the situation assessment, along with the summary of the aims/objectives and values of the project, provided the basis for the design of a questionnaire. This questionnaire aims to provide necessary information relevant to this evaluation.

Timeline and synopsis of the Sign Information Mid-West Project:

❑ July 2005: Submitted an application to the Enhancing Disability Services

❑ November 2005: funding of €186,495.00 received from Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

❑ March 2006: first round of advertising for the post of ISL Interpreter / Information Officer (see appendix 1)

❑ May 2006: second round of advertising and a suitable candidate was identified.

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[6] Limited amount of documentation refers to the lack of local documentation. It has to be remembered that the project actually commenced its work in August 2006.

❑ August 2006: a post of ISL interpreter and information officer was created and Ms. Elena McGivney was appointed. Ms. McGivney had instrumental in laying foundation of this service.

❑ November 2006: meeting with POBAL officials, a review of the project was informally carried out and consequently, it was suggested to split the dual role into two roles; that of interpreter and development worker.

❑ December 2006: Ms. McGivney had to vacate the position for personal reasons. Given the difficulty in hiring a full time interpreter to replace her, the steering committee decided to endorse the suggestion to split the position into two roles, that of the Enhancing Disability Services Development Worker and ISL interpreter (*Interim Evaluation*) (see Appendix 1)

❑ End of December 2006: both roles were filled. (Ms. Mairead Hegarty (interpreter) and Ms. Alona Troy (Enhancing Disability Services Development Worker)

❑ January 2007: Both staff members started their work.

❑ March 2007: Development Worker issues an interim evaluation report.

Documents:

The following documents provided by the Development Worker are synopsised as follows:

1. *Qualitative Elements of the Work to date (November, November 2006, prepared by Elena McGivney):*

The ISL Interpreter/Information Officer complied this report for the steering committee. She described the progress to date and the following list of completed tasks, which she had undertaken:

❑ Provided ISL interpreting services

❑ Assisting the service users to access funding towards interpreting fees

- ❑ When funding was not available, some interpreting services were provided (it did not mention whether these services were unpaid or voluntary)[7]

- ❑ Acted as information giver in the Citizen Information Centre (CIC)

- ❑ Reported to steering committee and organised meetings for them

- ❑ Attended and highlighted the Sign Information Mid-West service at information meetings within the Deaf community

- ❑ Devised an information pack

- ❑ General administrative responsibilities

- ❑ Participated in training;

    - o Information giving with the CIC

    - o Staff training with PAUL Partnership on equality issues

    - o With POBAL focusing on project evaluation strategy

2. *The Midwest Area Irish Sign Language Interpreting and Information Service (December 2006):*

This report outlined a proposal to split the roles into two distinct roles (see appendix): the Interpreter and the Development Worker. The proposal was decided after a discussion with the POBAL officials and an interim review by the steering committee.

The report stated that perceptions held by members of the Deaf community was a factor in this decision, and noted that there was a limited awareness of what interpreting services entail amongst the community. This report also mentioned the extent of isolation among members from mainstream services and the negative experiences of these members in engaging with services, which formed a sense of strong reluctance towards re-engaging.

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[7] The difference between unpaid and voluntary services is that the former can be linked to reluctance but obliged to offer services.

The report suggested that up to December 2006, the focus of the project was centred on increasing the supply of interpreting services, resulting in inadequate attention being provided to the issue of demand for interpreting services. This information was received from members of the Deaf community.

3. *Signing Information Mid-West Evaluation (March 2007, prepared by Ms. Alona Troy):*

This interim evaluation reported that interpreting services were provided in various settings ranging from staff meetings to conferences. The report also stated that the ISL interpreter continued to work in the CIC to provide interpretation to the members of the Deaf community who availed of the CIC services.

The Development Worker reported that she had participated in a number of training courses, including an Irish Sign Language course, Deaf awareness, and disability awareness programmes. She also participated in conferences such as those provided by the National Disability Authority and People with Disability in Ireland. She additionally participated in a PAUL Partnership staff-training course on crisis management.

Both staff had attended a number of exhibitions and fairs where they promoted the profile of the project. They contacted a number of statutory, community and voluntary agencies with a view to making their services accessible to members of the Deaf community. The report highlighted an example whereby staff liaised with the local theatre with a view to providing interpreted plays in the coming months.

The report also mentioned that the successful allocation of funding to enable the project to acquire a video link would allow for the development of a remote interpreting service. The report also mentioned that general

administrative duties, including organising steering committee meetings, were assigned to the Development Worker.

Concluding remarks:

These annotated descriptions of how the project developed over time aids further background to the project, which is essential to a fair evaluation. The roles of employees in this project have been clarified since the decision to split the dual role of interpreter in two roles: Information Officer and Interpreter in November 2006.

Given that the project only started its life in August 2006, we are operating under a tight timeframe for evaluation regarding the real benefits and losses arising from this service to the Deaf community in the Mid-West. A real danger is that the project's work could be superficially analysed as it is still evolving. This evaluation necessitates an outline of the demographic profile of Deaf people living in the Mid-West and the inclusion of views from service users and providers in the region. Such information is provided in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4:

Demographic profile of Deaf people in the Mid-West

Rationale:

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the provision of the Sign Information service, it is first necessary to have a clear demographic profile of Deaf people in the Mid-West. This profile will be used as a part of the basis for evaluating the project and can be used to issue a number of recommendations. The profile will provide a context for considering the real value of the project

Definitions:

Since the project focuses on the establishment of a high quality, accessible Irish Sign Language (ISL) Interpreting Service in the Mid-Western region, it is important to note that there are two distinct user groups that avail of this service. The first group are the members of the Deaf community in the Mid-West, and as such, it is important to have a clear understanding of who Deaf people are.

The second group are non-deaf (or "hearing") people who do not possess necessary fluency in ISL to communicate directly with Deaf people. These are likely to be agents of service-providing organisations.

Actual Data:

The Mid-West Deaf Association (MWDA) reports that it has 138 members and this list does not identify if members are Deaf. For the purpose of this evaluation, it is assumed that they are all Deaf; as typically, membership of organisations of Deaf people is made up of members of the Deaf community. Of this 138, 83 live in County Limerick and city, 21 live in Tipperary North, and 34 in Clare. It is noted that membership is optional and is regarded as a leisure pursuit. There is no register of Deaf people in this region. As such, this

membership list can be taken as indicative only – as it represents the self-selection of Deaf people to participate in a social club on a social basis.

The Limerick office of the National Association for the Deaf (NADP) reports that there are 92 '*sign language users*' in the region.[8] As with the MDWA, take-up of services offered is optional and can be perceived as based on Deaf people's self-selected need for the service. Data from both sources do not provide a precise outline of the number of Deaf people in the Mid-West. Personal communication with Deaf people in the region suggests that many are not members of either of these organisations, thus indicating that these figures do not provide a complete view of the situation.

Given this, it is necessary to create an informed estimate of Deaf people living in the Mid-West so that we can assess the efficiency of the project against the demographic backdrop.

Some selected notes regarding the general demographic profile of Deaf people and sign language users:

Generally, the calculations of populations of Deaf and hard of hearing people are inconclusive, and differences arise regarding how one defines hearing loss or deafness (or categorises people as such cause difficulties in the final calculations). One of the reasons for this is that defining oneself as D/deaf or hard of hearing can be a personal decision, with the result that self-selected responses can be euphemistic.

However, there are a number of generalised calculations for identifying the probable population of deaf and hard of hearing people in a population, which we can draw on. These are:

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[8] Seamus Moore (NADP) notes that that the categories of users are not based on age or level of deafness. NADP has more than 300 names on their database but only 92 of them are identified as 'sign language users' (S. Moore, NADP, email correspondence, 29/6/07)

❏ The Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID) (UK) regularly uses the general calculation of '*One in Seven'*. This equates to 14% of the population. However, it includes those with all kind of hearing loss and does not distinguish between those who are sign language users and those who are not. The National Association for Deaf People (NADP) (Ireland) also favours this analysis.

❏ Another general principle, much favoured by the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) and the European Union of the Deaf (EUD), clearly distinguishes between those who use an indigenous sign language or may potentially use a sign language, and other groups such as people who are deafened late in life, who are very unlikely to become signed language users. This distinction is based on the view of accepting the existence of Deaf culture and Deaf communities. This is known as "the international rule of thumb" and it estimates that 1 in 1,000 people will be a signed language user. This equates to 0.1% of any given population. This is widely reflected in the Deaf Studies literature (e.g. Matthews 1996). The Irish Deaf Society (IDS) also favours this method.

❏ However, these calculations are not without controversy: one Swedish study (Werngren-Elgstrom *et al*, 2003) suggests 0.07% is a more appropriate figure. The reasons for this proposal are based on differential definitions of deafness and decrease of the number in children with hearing loss over time. It is also supported by an important Australian study (Johnston, 2004).

❏ Despite this, an American study, carried out by Matthews (2005) reiterates the validity of the international rule of thumb (0.1%).

In order to summarise the general calculations above and apply them to the national population, and more specifically, to the Mid-West region, we

outline figures drawn from the Census of 2006. The following summary table demonstrates the estimated number of Deaf people in the country based on the three methods of calculating prevalence of deafness as outlined above:

Area	Population	RNID 14%	WFD 0.1%	Swedish 0.07%
National	4,239,848	593,579	4,240	2,968

The following table outlines the application of similar calculations to the region.

Area	Population	RNID 14%	WFD 0.1%	Swedish 0.07%
Mid-West Of which are in the following counties:	361,028	50,544	361	253
Clare	110,950	15,533	111	78
Limerick	184,055	25,768	184	129
Tipperary North	66,023	9,243	66	46

It appears that estimates for the region, based on figures provided by MWDA and NADP, are some way below these suggested percentages. This gives rise to the possibility that potential service users have not availed of their services, and may be unknown to service providers and community groups in the region. This in turn suggests the significant possibility of social isolation for many Deaf people in the region.

Official calculations:

We can also draw on a number of official calculations:

❑ National Census for the year of 2006.

❑ National Disability Database (Health Research Board)[9]

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[9] The Quarterly Household Survey (QHS) is not included here given its unreliability especially in the categories for hearing difficulty and speech impediment.

These sources provide necessary information regarding the Mid-West. The 2006 Census forms the basis for our calculations and was based on the following question in the census:

- ❑ *Question 14 was a two-part question, which asked of persons of all ages about the existence of the following long lasting conditions:*
- ❑ *(a) blindness, deafness or a severe vision or hearing impairment*
- ❑ *(b) a condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting or carrying. (CSO, 2006).*

For the purpose of this evaluation, sub-question (b) is ignored and we focus on (a), which did not make any distinction between blindness, deafness and vision / hearing impairment or allow for respondents to enter such detailed data. Given this, the calculation of Deaf people living in the Mid-West remains difficult.

However, this experience is similar to that of the United States, where the same question was included in the US census. As a result, Gallaudet University in Washington DC suggests *that somewhere between one-quarter and one-half of this group is likely to be persons with deafness or a severe hearing impairment*. (Gallaudet University website, accessed December 2007).

The inclusion of the wording 'severe' in the census question would leave reduced scope for those who regard their hearing loss as less than severe. Hence, there is a good chance that a quarter of them would consider themselves as Deaf or hard of hearing. The following table is compiled on the basis of this assumption.

Census 2006:

Area	Actual number of stating deafness, blindness or severe vision /hearing impairment according to the Census 2006	25%	50%
State	76,832	19,208	38,416
Mid-West	6,718	1,680	3,359

However, this figure also probably would include deafened people or elderly people who are experiencing some degree of deafness, who would fall outside the scope of the kind of service offered by the Sign Information project as they are not signed language users. Notwithstanding this probability, there are specific age-related group statistics on this category in the census. The statistics are as follows:

Census 2006	Actual number of people with deafness/blindness	Age Groups					
		0>9	10>19	20>34	35>59	Total	>60
State	76,832	2,477	3,002	7,152	18,978	31,609	45,223
Mid-West	6,718	217	262	625	1,659	2,764	3,954
	8.74%						
25%		54	66	156	415	691	989
50%		108	131	313	830	1,382	1,977

There were 76,832 people stating their deafness, blindness or severe hearing/vision impairment nationally, 6,718 of who were in the Mid-West. . Applying the Gallaudet calculation – 25% and 50% of the overall figure, and excluding the age group of 60 and over - there may be some 691 (25% of total) to 1,382 (50% of total) people respectively.

Based on the 25% calculation, and excluding those in the over-60 age group[10], we can estimate that there are almost 700 deaf people living in the Mid-West and there is a good probability that a significant number of this group would avail of ISL/English interpreting services. However, these figures are also significantly higher than those provided by the MWDA and NADP.

We should also take account of the fact that Gallaudet University warns that the categories for cutoff ages for children do not provide accurate statistics. In general, figures for very young deaf children are not available due to the problems and uncertainties in identifying deafness in that age group (Gallaudet University, website – accessed December 2007).

National Physical and Sensory Disability Database (NPSDD)

The purpose of this database is to inform and enable the Department of Health and Children in planning and sustaining efficient services. The Health Research Bureau (HRB) regulates this database and issues an annual report. Participation in the database is entirely voluntary and limited to those who are aged under 66 years. The following statistics, obtained from the 2007 annual report can be seen below:

	Number of people on database	Hearing loss / deafness only	Percentage
National	27,184	1,634	6 %
Mid-West	2,010	121	6.2%

Although this disability database is close to the number provided by the MWDA, a caution has to be applied here for several reasons. First, we must remember that participation is voluntary. Secondly, we must bear in mind that there are several categories that include reference to hearing loss, therefore it is possible for this category to also include those who have

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[10] It is likelihood that a large proportion of this age group and above are deafened or become hard of hearing in later age (calculation from Census 2006; www.cso.ie). Also, it is very likely a tiny minority of these age groups would seek to avail of interpreting services. This purpose is to simplify the picture here.

additional disabilities and experience deafness. Further, there is no regional breakdown of numbers for the category of those who have a hearing loss/deafness only (i.e. who do not have a disability).

The prevalence of sign language users;

To date, the censuses, surveys and questionnaires we have considered have focused on the classification of hearing loss as the basis for calculation. An official calculation based on the prevalence of signed language users is non-existent in Ireland but is applied in a number of countries abroad[11]. In New Zealand, the national census has a section on language usage and one of the languages listed is New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL). New Zealand is appropriate for comparative purposes since it has a similar population, societal and cultural patterns as the Republic of Ireland. The application of their findings to the Irish context can give us a general indication of the prevalence of ISL users. According to its latest census, there are:

❑ A total of 24,090 people who reported the ability to use New Zealand Sign Language, New Zealand's third official language after English and Maori.

❑ A total of 6,057 people can communicate in all three of New Zealand's official languages English, Maori and New Zealand Sign Language (NZ Census 2006).

If we apply similar calculations to the Irish situation, there would be 25,500 people having the ability to use ISL as follows:

	New Zealand			Republic of Ireland		
Census 2006	4,027,940	24,090	0.6%	4,239,848	25,439	0.6%

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[11] South Africa is considering the inclusion of sign language usage in its next census in 2011 (Statistics South Africa website - accessed January 2008). Australia included the usage of sign language in its national census in 2001 (Johnston, 2004).

According to the state statistics in New Zealand, there are estimated 223,500 people with all kind of hearing loss/limitations, and of these, 7,700 use NZSL. In terms of ratio between Deaf and non-Deaf users, this equates to 1:3.12.

New Zealand			Republic of Ireland			Mid-West		
Deaf NZSL Users	Hearing NZSL Users	Ratio	Deaf ISL Users	Hearing ISL Users	Ratio	Deaf ISL Users	Hearing ISL Users	Ratio
7,700	24,090	1:3.12	8,154	25,439	1:3.12	694	2,166	1:3.12

 We should note that the ratio of 1:3.12 used in the New Zealand census is somewhat out of line with methods favoured by many organisations as mentioned earlier.

However, Gallaudet University's demographic unit's attempt to estimate the number of sign language users in the US states that there were 500,000 "primary users" of a signed language (about 0.24% of the population), only slightly over half of whom were Deaf (280,000 or 0.14% of the population) (Gallaudet University, website – accessed December 2007). If we follow this approach and use the 2006 Census as our base, the Republic would have over 10,000 regular users of Irish Sign Language, of whom, 5,900 would be Deaf.

United States			Republic of Ireland			Mid -West		
National Population	Hearing ASL Users	Deaf ASL Users	National Population	Hearing ISL Users	Deaf ISL Users	Regional Population	Hearing ISL Users	Deaf ISL Users
	0.24%	0.14%		0.24%	0.14%		0.24%	0.14%
302,203,149	725,288	423,084	4,239,848	10,176	5,936	361,028	866	505

Based on Gallaudet University's approach, the figures still remain distant from those provided by the MWDA and NADP. However, it has to be

remembered that not all Deaf people have availed of services provided by both organizations – a crucial fact when considering the provision of interpreting services as a means to promoting greater participation in society at large.

Concluding remarks and suggestion:

We have seen that there are a number of methodologies adopted by different organisations and individuals regarding the identification of the percentage of a given population who are likely to be signed language users. It is hard to know from these statistics how many identify themselves as culturally Deaf. Thus, there is no clearly definable number of Deaf people possible at this time. However, calculating the number of people using Irish Sign Language would prove more problematic because it would include hearing users of ISL, which goes some way to explaining why official statistics tend to base calculations on level of hearing loss rather than the use of language.

However, for the purpose of this evaluation, having considering a number of calculations and statistical methodologies used by other organisations, we recommend the adoption of the international rule of thumb (1:1,000), which suggests that the prevalence of Deaf people who use ISL in the Mid-West would be 361.

Given this figure, the best possible scenario for meeting all interpreting requests, would allow for an average interpreting request per Deaf person of approximately 30 hours per annum. Though in the international context, the average number of interpreted hours per Deaf person would exceed a hundred hours per annum[12] - given this, 30 hours per person should be regarded as very conservative.

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[12] In Finland, Deaf people are legally entitled to have 180 hours of social interpreting (while Deaf-blind gets 240 hours) and the local authorities finance these hours (ref:).

A qualified interpreter is recommended to work twenty-four hours per week. The hours are set in a health and safety context and are also focused on the maintenance of high quality interpreting (see Appendix 4). Including consideration of holiday time, an interpreter can be available for 1,104 hours per annum. A simplified overview is provided in the table below:

Deaf people in the Mid-West	Estimated Hours requested per annum	Total estimated hours requested per annum	Each interpreter work hours per year	Number of interpreters needed in the Mid-West
361	30	10,830	1,104	10
180	20	3,600	1,104	3

The second and third row in the above table estimate of the number of Deaf ISL users in the region who would require interpreting services. Given the higher end figures (estimating a Deaf ISL using population of 361), the Mid-West would require ten interpreters to meet all requests. Even allowing for a lower number of Deaf people (180) and resulting demands for interpreting, the number of full-time interpreters required would be three. These calculations do not take into account travel and preparation time. They also calculations do not take account of human resource issues such as sick leave and the fact that some interpreting assignments may require the full-day attendance of the interpreter (e.g. court cases).

These calculations serve to establish a basic benchmark for this evaluation and can be used to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the project relative to the estimated and demonstrated demands for services in the region.

Chapter 5

Survey Findings from Service Users

Introduction

Given that the documentary materials available for analysis are limited, it was decided to conduct two surveys: (i) focusing on service users and (ii) on service providers. This chapter focuses responses from service users.

Service users:

The total number of questionnaires distributed to service users was 109. The questionnaires were circulated through two agencies; the Deaf Community Centre and Signing Information Mid-West. The number of responses was 20, which accounts for 18% of the total number, and which is, unfortunately, slightly below ideal for validating these findings. Regarding the level of validity and representation, a focus group meeting was organised and findings associated with that process are outlined in chapter 7. As we shall see, the results from the focus group are in line with and reinforce the issues raised by the service users group, thus reinforcing the validity of the issues raised here.

The reasons for the low response rate can be accounted for by these following plausible reasons:

- Given the limited time for review of the project, little time was available for preparing a sample questionnaire, and as such, the potential response rate could not be predicted from the outset.

- The project is a recent addition to service provision to the Deaf community in the Mid-West. Given this, a number of potential respondents had expressed doubts about the timing of the questionnaire as they felt that not enough time had passed since the

establishment of the project to allow for a comprehensive review. Consequently, they were reluctant to participate.

- Many potential respondents indicated that their preference was for information about this review process to be provided to them in ISL rather than English. However, this was not readily available, because of budgetary constraints.

- The literacy issue: it was made known to the author that many respondents experienced difficulty when attempting to complete the questionnaires. Some did not complete questionnaires because of problems with literacy, despite the fact that a number of key contacts in the Mid-West had been contacted to ensure that translation of the questionnaire in ISL could be arranged as required.

- A number of potential respondents (approximately ten) had expressed lack of awareness about the project - hence they were not in a position to complete the questionnaire.

- At least one respondent who did complete the questionnaire seemed not to require interpreting services. Hence, there is the probability that a significant number of similar potential respondents declined to participate for the same reason.

In order to address the response rate, a focus group was organised and its findings are outlined in chapter 7.

Structure of questionnaires:

The questionnaire is divided into four sections. The first section focuses on personal information. The second section is designed to capture some basic information on previous experiences of communication approaches. The next section focuses on determining the level of awareness of the existence of project. A range of general statements follows this, in which respondents are asked to rate. Responses run along a continuum from 'strongly agree' to

strongly disagree'. In this section, there is also a box allowing respondents to comment on specific or general relevant issues.

Profile of users:

Here are the main characteristic profiles of respondents to this questionnaire.

Age Group	18-35	36-59	>60	No entry	Total of respondents
Number	9	8	1	2	20
Percentage	45%	40%	5%	10%	100 %

The age groups 18-35 and 36-59 dominate the profile of respondent as they account for 85% of the respondents (though two did not enter date in the age group).

Gender	Male	Female	No entry	Total of respondents
Number	10	9	1	20
Percentage	50%	45%	5%	100 %

The gender profile is roughly balanced (though one respondent didn't complete the gender question)

Area of Residence	County Limerick	Limerick City	County Clare	Tipperary North	No entry	Total of respondents
Number	5	5	7	2	1	20
Percentage	25%	25%	35%	10%	5%	100%

The representation of areas of residence is evenly balanced across the region and it is more or less in line with the general population ratios for this region.

Findings of the questionnaires:

A: Availing of communication services in previous situations

This section was aimed at determining how the respondents availed of communication options to deal with the service providers. This would create a basic understanding of how much impact the current project has on the local Deaf community.

1	I had availed of a communicator with service providers			
	Yes	*No*	**Total**	
	13	7	20	
	65%	35%	100%	

2	Who was / were the communicator(s)?					
	Mother/Sister	*Father/Brother*	*Neighbour*	*Workmate*	*Friend*	**Total**
	11	2	2	6	7	28
	39%	7%	7%	21%	25%	100%

3	If yes, how often?					
	Once-off	*Sometimes*	*Daily*	*Weekly*	*Monthly*	**Total**
	2	7	1	2	1	13
	15%	54%	8%	15%	8%	100%

NB: Respondents entered more than one answer to question 2.

Thirteen respondents had availed of a communicator to deal with service providers and the group; mother/sister got the highest number for being a communicator for their Deaf son/sibling. The next groups frequently requested to communicate on behalf of Deaf respondents are workmates and friends.   The rate of using these people as communicators varied from monthly to once off but the 'sometimes' category scored 54%.

4	I communicated with service providers on my own.		
	Yes	*No*	**Total**
	16	4	20
	80%	20%	100%

5	If yes, how?				
	Writing notes	*Lip-reading / Using speech*	*Gestures*	*Signing*	**Total**
	9	13	2	5	29
	31%	45%	7%	17%	100%

NB: Respondents entered more than one answer to question 5.

The vast majority of respondents had had experience of dealing with service providers on their own and the most common methods for communication in such instances were writing notes, lip-reading or using speech.

6	I had availed of interpreting services before the project was established.

	Yes	*No*	**Total**
	10	10	20
	50%	50%	100 %

7	If yes, how?

	Service agency arranged this	*I had to arrange this myself*	**Total**
	6	6	12
	50%	50%	100 %

8	If yes, how often?

	Once-off	*Sometimes*	*Daily*	*Weekly*	*Monthly*	**Total**
	3	5	0	0	2	10
	30%	50%	0%	0%	20%	100%

9	For what?

	Employment	*Education*	*Medical*	*Seeking information*	*Family occasions*	*Others*	**Total**
	8	1	2	1	2	2	16
	50%	6%	13%	6%	13%	13%	100%

NB: Respondents entered more than one answer to question 7,8 and 9.

Half of the respondents had availed of an interpreting service before the Signing Information Mid-West project was established. Half of those who had availed of previous interpreting services had to arrange this themselves. The assignments in this regard ranged from meetings associated with employment to family occasions, with employment associated events emerging as the most cited reason for the requirement for an interpreter.

In summary, this part of the questionnaire was designed to capture general information regarding the situation before the Signing Information Mid-West was established. This kind of information is an essential part of evaluating the project itself, providing indirect data on the levels of expectation and usage among potential service users.

It appears that half of the respondents were sufficiently aware of the importance of having interpreting services and had availed of interpreters themselves prior to the establishment of the project. However, the key point that emerges from the respondents' own experiences is that they had to resort to communicating with statutory agencies on their own, or through a family member or a close acquaintance due to the lack of professional interpreters in the region.

B: Current situation

This section aims to synthesise information regarding levels of service user awareness regarding the existence of Sign Information Mid-West.

11	Have you used ISL/English interpreter to date?			
	Yes	No	No Entry	Total
	15	4	1	20
	75%	20%	5%	100%

12	If yes, how often?					
	Once-off	*Sometimes*	*Daily*	*Weekly*	*Monthly*	**Total**
	3	4	-	-	5	12
	25%	33%	0%	0%	42%	100%

13	For what?						
	Employment	*Education*	*Medical*	*Seeking information*	*Family occasions*	*Others*	**Total**
	4	2	3	3	2	4	18
	22%	11%	17%	17%	11%	22%	100%

NB: Respondents entered more than one answer to question 12 and 13.

Three quarters of the respondents have availed of interpreting services from the project, marking an increase of 25% in relation to question 6. The domains that interpreters were requested for vary evenly across the spectrum, including everything from employment to family occasions.

14	If no, will you use the ISL/English interpreter in the future?				
		Yes	*No*	*No Entry*	**Total**
		16	-	4	20
		80%	0%	20%	100%

15	If yes, for what area?						
	Employment	*Education*	*Medical*	*Seeking information*	*Family occasions*	*Others*	**Total**
	8	5	9	6	5	6	39
	21%	13%	23%	15%	13%	15%	100%

NB: Respondents entered more than one answer to question 15.

The vast majority of respondents indicated that they would request interpreting provision again, and these requests would vary evenly across the spectrum.

C: Respondent views on Sign Information Mid-West

Respondents were asked rate a range of statements that were graded from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' their reaction.

		I am satisfied with				

16   the awareness re: the availability of interpreters in the Mid-West

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Not sure*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*	**Total**
6	3	7	2	2	20
30%	15%	35%	10%	10%	100%

17   the number of interpreters at the present in the Mid-West.

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Not sure*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*	*No Entry*	*Total*
0	1	5	7	6	1	20
0%	5%	25%	35%	30%	5%	100%

18   the service providers' level of awareness regarding the availability of the project

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Not sure*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*	*Total*
2		13	2	3	20
10%	0%	65%	10%	15%	100%

19   plenty of choices for Deaf users to have access to information

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Not sure*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*	*Total*
2	5	9	1	3	20
10%	25%	45%	5%	15%	100%

20   having ISL/English interpreter is important for accessing information

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Not sure*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*	*No Entry*	*Total*
11	3	4	0	1	1	20
55%	15%	20%	0%	5%	5%	100%

21   the current direction of the project

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Not sure*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*	*Total*
6	13	0	1	0	20
30%	65%	0%	5%	0%	100%

22   This project will lead to better services for Deaf people

Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Not sure*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*	*No Entry*	*Total*
8	11	0	0	0	1	20
40%	55%	0%	0%	0%	5%	100%

23	This project will assist Deaf people to participate in society more often.					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
	10	7	3	0	0	20
	50%	35%	15%	0%	0%	100%

Commentary

Responses were fairly evenly balanced in terms of how general awareness regarding the presence of interpreting services in the Mid-West was judged. There were also a fairly high percentage of respondents who were not sure about the level of general awareness that exists among service providers.

Strong opinion, perhaps associated with a deep sense of dissatisfaction, was expressed regarding the low number of interpreters available in the Mid-West. However a significant percentage was not sure in this regard.

There was a high level of uncertainty among the respondents regarding the issue of how much awareness service providers have about the availability of interpreting services.

There was a mixed response to the existing choices in accessing information. Most respondents were unsure. The number who were optimistic in this regard, is slightly higher than those who were pessimistic.

High value was attached to the interpreting services as a means of accessing information. Interestingly, a considerable number of respondents expressed uncertainty as to the value of interpreting.

The vast majority of respondents agreed with the direction the project has taken to date. Likewise, the partnership approach taken by the project has prompted optimistic views that the project would lead to better services for Deaf people and integrate Deaf people further into the society.

Selected comments from the respondents

Only six respondents entered comments. Please note that as comments are presented in English, the second language of respondents, they are cited here as respondents wrote them. Brackets are used to clarify meaning or correct spelling.

- *'Hope that will help deaf to enable to do on their own & strength and have access to somebody [information]'*

- *'It's my first experience for the interpreter to be provided in the Mid-West last year. It's great to have an interpreter based in the Mid-West. The [one] interpreter in the Mid-West is not enough & would not catch [be readily available for] other any areas like college, education, employment etc'.*

- *'It would be helpful for Deaf people to have full time interpreters. Interpreters are very good at explaining [things]. I need a full time interpreter. That would be easier for me. That makes learning easy. '*

- *'I need 24 hours service emergency for hospital, police station, GP home visits. It's more impanton [important].*

- *'I live by myself and have no access to any social contact with other deaf people. I had to spend 3 days in hospital last year and had no help with communicating with nurses and Doctors'.*

- *'It's great to have access to an interpreter in Mid-West for Deaf people but one interpreter is not enough because interpreter may not be available all the time'.*

Concluding remarks

It is clear that service users are basically content with the current level of service available while, at the same time, being acutely aware of severe

limitations that impact on the service, for example, the inadequate number of interpreters in the Mid-West. They also expressed uncertainty about service providers' level of awareness about the availability of the Signing Information Project.

Prior to the establishment of the service, half of the respondents had availed of interpreting services. It indicates that the demand would increase if sufficient awareness regarding the availability of interpreting services existed.

Moreover, the majority had experienced communicating with service providers on their own or via family members or friends. With limited interpreting services available, it is likely that some informants will revert to attempting to communicate with service providers directly, or drawing on non-professional interpreters to assist them. This has serious implications for service providers with respect to their statutory obligations in providing accessible services. It is important to point out that although service providers may be led to believe that they provide services that are accessible because family members are acting as communicators, this may not actually be the case. Instead, the illusion of inclusion may be created when the intention and goal must be real participation.

The vast majority of respondents expressed their intention to avail of the project's interpreting services in the future, which, going forward, predicts a higher level of demand.

Chapter 6

Survey findings and the service providers

Introduction

This second survey focused on the views of service providers in the Mid-west region.

Service providers:

Thirty-three questionnaires were sent to service users in the region. Signing Information Mid-West provided details of regular service providers who drew on their services, and it is noticeable that all providers listed are either statutory bodies or voluntary or community organisations. The absence of commercial service providers raises an interesting issue, which is to be dealt later in this report.

Thirteen organisations responded, representing a total of 39%.

Profile of service providers:

Type of service provision			
Statutory	Voluntary/community	State-sponsored	Total
7	4	2	13
54%	31%	15%	100%

As noted above, no commercial service provider had drawn on the project's services to date.

Structure of questionnaires:

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. The first section focused on business information. The second section was designed to capture some basic information on service providers' previous experiences of communication with Deaf people. The third section aimed to characterise the current situation to determine the level of awareness regarding the Sign Information Midwest

project. This was followed by a list of statements that respondents were asked to rate along a scale that ranged from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Additional comments were invited from informants in this section.

Previous situation:

This section aims to picture create a snapshot of how service providers typically responded to their Deaf customers.

1	Has your agency dealt with the Deaf consumer previously?		
	Yes	*No*	**Total**
	12	1	13
	92%	8%	100%

2	If yes, how often?						
	Once-off	*Sometimes*	*Daily*	*Weekly*	*Monthly*	*Bi-Monthly*	**Total**
	1	9	0	1	0	1	12
	8%	75%	0%	8%	0%	8%	100%

All but one organisation had had previous experience of dealing with members of Deaf community. Popular methods of communication included writing notes, lip-reading and using gestures. Service providers had availed of family members of Deaf respondents and one of their employees to communicate with members of Deaf community.

Current situation:

This section attempts to provide a snapshot of the current situation of how service providers deal with the members of Deaf community.

5	Has your agency availed of the Sign Information interpreting services?		
	Yes	*No*	**Total**
	8	5	**13**
	62%	38%	**100%**

6	If yes, how often?						
	Once-off	*Sometimes*	*Daily*	*Weekly*	*Monthly*	*Bi-Monthly*	**Total**
	3	3	-	-	1	1	**8**
	38%	38%	0%	0%	13%	13%	**100%**

7	Was it at the request of Deaf user(s)?		
	Yes	*No*	**Total**
	5	3	**8**
	63%	38%	**100%**

8	Who financed the interpreter's fee?				
	Consumer	*Your Agency*	*External funds*	*No entry*	**Total**
	0	7	0	1	**8**
	0%	87.5%	0%	12.5%	100%

9	If external funds are received to cover this cost, where do they originate?						
	Once-off	*Sometimes*	*Daily*	*Weekly*	*Monthly*	*No entry*	**Total**
	0	0	0	0	0	8	**8**
	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	**100%**

Five providers had not availed of the interpreting services; three of the other eight had availed of the service on one occasion. Five providers had availed of the services at the behest of Deaf clients. The vast majority of providers funded the interpreting assignments themselves. No one answered the question about the availability of external funding to cover interpreting costs and where that may be sourced.

10	Your agency has sufficient awareness of interpreting services.					
	Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Neutral*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*	**Total**
	5	3	2	1	1	12
	42%	25%	17%	8%	8%	100%

11	Your agency responds positively to the needs of Deaf people.					
	Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Neutral*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*	**Total**
	8	4			1	13
	62%	31%	0%	0%	8%	100%

12	Your agency should finance the interpreting fees.					
	Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Neutral*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*	**Total**
	5	2	4	1	1	13
	38%	15%	31%	8%	8%	100%

13	Using interpreting services, your agency fulfils its responsibility towards the needs of Deaf service users.					
	Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Neutral*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*	**Total**
	3	2	4		1	10
	30%	20%	40%	0%	10%	100%

14	Your agency has sufficient amount of access for Deaf people to its information					
	Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Neutral*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*	**Total**
	2	5	2	2	1	12
	17%	42%	17%	17%	8%	100%

15	Your agency has facilitated the integration of Deaf people into society greater than before.					
	Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Neutral*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*	**Total**
		4	4		1	9
	0%	44%	44%	0%	11%	100%

16	The availability of the interpreter enhances your service for Deaf people considerably.					
	Strongly Agree	*Agree*	*Neutral*	*Disagree*	*Strongly Disagree*	**Total**
	5	6	2		0	13
	38%	46%	15%	0%	0%	100%

Some of the service providers made some additional comments regarding the current situation:

- *While it is fantastic to have the service, there aren't enough interpreters available, or support workers.*

- *My main concern is if I have a client who needs an interpreter to be with them at short notice, and first you have to apply for a grant to pay for interpreter, then will you get an interpreter in time.*

- *My clients would be on social welfare payments so where would they get the money to pay an interpreter to attend interview.*

- *I feel there are a lot of gaps.*

- *My work is mostly seeking employment but I have gone over my job description when supporting a hearing impaired person.*

- *There are two individuals attending this service who have particular signing needs. They would benefit in a major way if they were supported with an Irish Sign Language interpreting service. This is not available currently and any linking outside of this organisation is promoted by the staff in the particular service area.*

- *It would be good if a register would include individuals with intellectual disabilities who are deaf so that they are not forgotten within other services. It is so important for individuals to be given the opportunity to be included and to use their signs.*

- *As a specialist-training provider, we have always provided a holistic approach to all of our clients. It is very beneficial to have the service in the Mid-West.*

- *LCIS has facilitated the sign language interpreter within the service for 7 hours per week and has advertised within the deaf community. LCIS is part of the application to POBAL.*

- *At present, there are very few Deaf people using our services. PAUL Partnership are about to install a special phone and hopefully then we can provide a fuller and better service.*

- *The availability of an interpreting service would greatly enhance service delivery. Issue such as informed consent and confidentiality would have to be addressed.*

- *The Clare local authorities are committed to communicating effectively with all the customers including customers with disabilities and will consult regularly with end-users to establish their communication needs. It is intended that Irish Sign Language interpreters will be provided for interviews, public meetings and other events where practicable and appropriate and where requested in advance.*

Concluding remarks

Although the information gleaned from the questionnaires is concise, it provides some useful information. The respondents seem to be positively disposed towards the service, while acknowledging the shortcomings that exist. A significant number of service providers have not availed of the service although they deal with Deaf customers. This raises a number of issues in terms of customer service quality.

Service providers seem to view the provision of an interpreter as being "for" the Deaf person rather than considering the interpreter as a cultural and linguistic mediator for two parties who use different languages. This raises the issue of customer service, as service providers would, we imagine,

endeavour to have good relationship with all their clients, including those who are Deaf.

Chapter 7

Themes arising from focus group discussion

Focus meeting
A focus group meeting was held in the Deaf Community Centre in Limerick City on Saturday, October 13th 2007, with fifteen Deaf people participating.

The purpose of the meeting was to solicit further information and opinions regarding the Signing Information Mid-West service. The meeting aimed to build up a dialogistic interaction rather than functioning as a question and answer session. A number of basic prompt questions were used as starting points for discussion. The author acted as facilitator.

The focus meeting was advertised through the Deaf Community Centre and notices were sent by emails and mobile text messages. These approaches through the key contacts in the Deaf Community Centre had proven effectiveness and this is evidenced in the turn out for the focus group meeting.

General discussion about the service

What do you think of the service overall?
- There was general consensus that the service provided has been very good and is regarded as going someway towards meeting a fundamental need in the Mid-West.

- There was general agreement that the some service providers may lack awareness about how to work with an interpreter. This lack of awareness refers to the fact that a number of participants found that

service providers tend to utilise the interpreter as some kind of personal assistant or social worker.

- One participant commented that as one interpreter staffs the service, the region is still dependent upon interpreters from outside the area, with associated additional costs involved when hiring them (travel, accommodation, etc.) where demand outweighs supply.

What is the most positive outcome of the project?
- The general consensus is that the very existence of the service is the most positive outcome of the project: forum participants stated that such a service was long overdue in the region.

- When pressed for the most positive outcome, the general view was that the service provided a useful focal point where interpreting assignments can be arranged locally, leading to the development of a more general public awareness about the interpreting situation, and particularly regarding the shortage of qualified interpreters.

- A number of participants questioned the timing of the evaluation as they pointed out that the "real work" had only taken place in the months previous.: as the project is (in their view) only getting off the ground, they felt that they were not yet in a position to assess outcomes of the project.

Does it meet your expectations?
- The forum participants agreed that their expectations for the project had been met initially, although a number of participants felt the timing of this evaluation did not give them a sufficient timeframe to adequately assess their expectations of the service.

- For a small number of participants, the successful establishment of the service exceeded their expectations: this was particularly related to the fact that the service was locally based.

Is there any room for improvements?

- Given that the service has only recently been established, all the participants agreed that there are areas that could be improved upon. A case in point is the fact that there is currently only one interpreter based in the Mid-West, which is a cause for concern. The meeting agreed that one interpreter is inadequate to meet the actual demand in the region, and that the number of interpreters based in the Mid-West needs to be increased.

- The lack of awareness regarding the service amongst the Deaf community was commented on, and it was suggested that community level awareness training be organised.

- There were also comments regarding regional differences in ISL, which the current interpreter may not be sufficiently familiar with. Some commented that even the style of ISL used on information DVDs or on the "Hands On" television programme was not widely understood, especially amongst those who never attended the schools for the Deaf in Dublin. The meeting also learned that there had been several requests for 'relay' interpreting when interpretation was not universally understood. Regional and stylistic differences are believed to be reasons for these requests.

- As for the service providers, there were suggestions that having Deaf Awareness Training (DAT) conducted by Deaf persons with appropriate qualifications, would be useful. DAT aims to increase the awareness and appreciation among service providers.

Initial survey findings; is there some disparity between views of Deaf users and service providers concerning the quality of interpreting service?

- The meeting expressed no surprise at the apparent disparities between the views of Deaf users and service providers concerning the adequateness of interpreting service. Service providers tended, at least from the view of participants, to regard interpretation provision as a panacea to all issues. From their (users) perspectives, service providers tend to be complacent regarding interpreting services without realising that there are alternative approaches to making information accessible, such as on DVD and through the provision of signed information on websites.

Aims and objectives discussed.

The forum attendees were asked to assess the aim and objectives set by the project, and asked if they considered that they had been achieved. The responses included here are generalised, reflecting what participants said.

> **Aim:**
>
> ❑ *To create a full time interpreting post where the post can meet the interpreting needs of Deaf people and satisfying the statutory requirement of community, statutory and voluntary bodies to make their services and information available and accessible to people with disability.*

Do you feel this aim is achieved?

- o Participants agreed that this aim was achieved. There was also general agreement on the point that one interpreter cannot meet the interpreting requirements in the Mid-West. Further, given the current low levels of interpreter availability, the statutory

requirements of community, statutory and voluntary bodies are not being satisfactorily met. They also pointed out that written and electronic information remains inaccessible. They did not believe that complete access to information could be achieved by the availability of interpreters alone.

Objectives:

Are these objectives achieved or not?
(NB, some objectives were randomly selected for this discussion. These italicised objectives are citied in the original application form).

To utilise the time and resources of having an interpreter employed locally otherwise would be lost.

- It was agreed that this objective had been achieved although an interpreter was not sufficient to meet the interpretation requirement.

To enable Deaf people to advocate for their rights and needs locally.

- The participants felt that it was too soon to assess this. However they provided examples of other ways that their rights could be advocated by the Sign Information service, such as asking the local cinema to provide subtitled films as happens in some Dublin cinemas. There was a concern that if the cinemas did provide this service, then Deaf people would be obliged to inform the cinema managers in advance of their desire to attend the film. Understandably, Deaf people would prefer to have regular subtitled films provided as an issue of universal access, without binding obligation to attend[13].

To empower Deaf people to exercise their constitutional rights as citizens

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[13] Subtitling films is a universal access issue which also provides increased access for those who have English as a second or foreign language, as well as those who are deafened late or hard of hearing.

- Forum participants agreed that the availability of an interpreter has enhanced the possibility of empowerment regarding Deaf people's ability to exercise their rights as local citizens. However, there were concerns that the project is understaffed vis-à-vis the potential demand on services. Coinciding with this is the fact that if there is only one interpreter in the region: it is essential that the consequences of this in real terms are pointed out here.

- Effectively, this one interpreter is privy to a significant amount of personal information about Deaf people, which understandably is a significant issue for the community. Until there is more choice regarding interpreter provision, there is no scope to diminish the access that this one interpreter has to the local community's personal affairs that are mediated via interpretation. This fact causes some Deaf people to re-consider whether or not they will use an interpreter in all situations where they would like one. Thus, the sense that one's privacy is protected collates with the availability of choice in interpreting provision.

- The forum participants emphasised that they do trust the interpreter who is in post and commented on her adherence to ethical practice. But the fact that the same interpreter is provided for all interpreting assignments – ranging from visits to the GP to meetings with employers has the potential to create uneasiness amongst Deaf people because of the privacy issue addressed previously.

To minimise the migration of Deaf people to the Dublin area which in turn minimise the social and psychological detrimental effects on the local Deaf community

- Participants agreed with the statement here but felt it was too early to judge the impact of service on this issue. They also felt that the migration of Deaf people from the region to the greater Dublin area

was not solely dependent on the availability of interpreting services. Other factors that influence Deaf people's migration include the possibility of a more accessible social life and better employment prospects.

To enhance the employment prospects of local Deaf people.

Participants agreed that there had been a number of improvements in this regard. One participant gave a practical example: she had availed of the interpreter for a job interview and was successful. She later learned that one of her Deaf colleagues had applied for the same job but did not avail of the interpreter and did not get the job[14]. The meeting agreed that access to language was a crucial factor and that clear communication at any interview is essential.

Linked to the issue of increasing awareness of how to work with an interpreter amongst the Deaf community, the forum meeting learned that mock interviews were conducted in the local school for the Deaf and an interpreter was 'employed' to enhance the understanding and awareness of the interpreter's role.

To enable Deaf people to have access to essential local information such as local housing.

- While they agreed this objective was important, forum participants raised some concerns. There were concerns raised about the unsuitability of the opening hours of CIC offices, which limited the possibility for Deaf people to attend due to other commitments (e.g. work). Some participants pointed out that email discussion was

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[14] It has to be pointed out that having an interpreter at the interview can only enhance the chances of the interviewee because smooth communication is made possible. There are other factors that must also be factored in here including employers attitudes to deafness and signed languages, as well as the candidate's qualifications, experience and suitability for the post with respect to other candidates. In short, having an interpreter does not guarantee that a deaf candidate will be successful in every case.

available, but others viewed writing in English as no substitute for having an interpreter to facilitate face-to-face discussion.

To shift the attitude towards deafness from the medical model to social model

- There was general agreement that changes in societal attitudes towards deafness can been detected, although these have not been dramatic. The general feeling was that is too soon to assess the scale of this shift and evaluate the extent of its link to the establishment of the project. Some referred to the limited understanding that some people have regarding how to work with an interpreter.

- Participants cite individual practices such as explaining to the hearing participant in a meeting that they should look at the signer instead of the interpreter. However, not all references were negative: one participant reported that his parish priest asked about the possibility of employing an interpreter for religious services after witnessing the impact that the presence of the interpreter had on the involvement of this person in a service.

- Another person said they were more respected by their employer after having participated in an interpreted meeting with him. According to this woman, the employer started to cultivate her for her views and opinions subsequent to that meeting – something that had never happened previously. Other participants recounted that they had had similar experiences.

To enhance the understanding of Irish Sign Language as an effective communication tool

- There was a brief discussion on this point. Forum participants believe that, as a key objective, this may be the remit of another agency that may achieve it through different means. This led to further discussion

about the style of signing and particular signs adopted by the interpreter. Participants agreed that the interpreter required time and cooperation to have adequate exposure to the local style and regional variant of ISL.

- Participants also expressed increased confidence and enthusiasm in participating further in society and this in itself validates the importance of having ISL recognised as a community language.

To promote equality of access to opportunity

- There was general agreement that equality of access to opportunity remains elusive for Deaf people in the region. However, the maintenance of this objective was stressed as important. An example of why Deaf people feel that this issue is far from being resolved came from a female participant: the woman, a mother, reported her difficulty in communicating with medical professionals in Accident and Emergency services. Staff at A&E didn't communicate with her – instead they communicated via her child, even though he was injured.

- The fact that there was no 24-hour interpreting service was commented on, particularly with respect to emergency situations.

- There were general comments on the need for clarity with respect to the reimbursement of interpreting fees. Many participants were uncertain about whose responsibility it was to meet the costs of interpreter provision, and as a result, some decided not to avail of the service out of fear that they could be liable for the costs. One suggestion made was that the Irish Deaf Society should draft a document outlining who is responsible for reimbursing interpreting fees in a range of situations.

Other related issues

Two issues raised at the forum meeting are very relevant to the success of the project. There was a strong tendency *not* to request an interpreter if they know the likelihood of having one is low. For example, users were asked if they would request an interpreter at a short notice knowing the chances of having one may be virtually nil. They replied that they would not make a request in such circumstances.

Secondly, relating to this, if they were pressed to do so, there were a high proportion of users who disliked the idea of requesting an interpreter at short notice because they anticipated a negative outcome (i.e. that no interpreter would be available). For them, a negative response correlates with negative emotional experiences (disappointment, guilt, feeling demoralised). Given this, service users are keen to avoid this kind of emotional effect, even if it means losing out on the possibility that there *might* be an interpreter available.

These two issues raise the probability that demand for interpreting services is severely underreported.

Commentary

Service users provided a wide variety of views about the project and were generally very positive about the local development of this project. While acutely aware of the limitations that exist (number of interpreters, funding, scope of project, etc.), Deaf people in the region see this as a stepping stone to greater fulfilment of their interpreting needs, while at the same time remaining clear that interpretation services do not by themselves solve all of the issues that face Deaf people in the region.

Service users report uncertainty regarding the way in which some service providers view the interpreter's function: they report that some tend to treat

the interpreter as an assistant of sorts, whose focus is on Deaf clients, rather treating the interpreter as an intermediary who will work between the two languages used by the different parties involved in an interpreted event.

The most prevailing view among the participants was their content with having this locally based service. The participants agreed that the presence of an interpreter had had a considerable beneficial effect on the Deaf community, for example, with respect to the shift in collective attitudes towards them, which has noticeably changed for the better.

Chapter 8

Interviews with selected key service providers

Introduction

With the assistance of Sign Information Mid-West, a number of service providers were identified who we approached for their perspectives.

Profiles

Seven providers were approached with a view of being interviewed. Two did not respond to the request. The four service providers whom we report on here are:

- ❑ Signing Information Mid-West
- ❑ National Learning Network
- ❑ Red Ribbon Project
- ❑ PAUL Partnership

Approaches

Each service provider was asked to respond to six questions in an interview-based format. The interview was more dialogical in nature than a question and answer session. Some unstructured questions were asked and clarifications were sought as necessary, across the process.

Responses to each standard question are summarised here.

  1. *What do you think of the service overall?*

There was strong consensus that the service is innovative and very positive. The service arose because the lack of interpretation had been identified as a real gap in provision by the Deaf community. Service providers commented on how valuable this service is, as a social resource. It was generally agreed

that one interpreter is not sufficient to meet the needs for the region. One respondent expressed relief for at having an interpreter based locally, which means a significant reduction in costs associated with hiring interpreters from outside the region.

2. *What is the most positive outcome of the project?*

The response to this question varied. One interviewee stated that the project had enabled her to invite Deaf people to avail of and contribute to her organisation's services. Another interviewee said the project had enabled her to communicate with her two Deaf employees in an equitable manner. For some, the positive outcome was that the project enabled them to meet some statutory obligations, which in previous times, had proven difficult due to lack of availability of interpreters. The ability of the project to readapt itself to respond to the needs of Deaf community was also cited as a positive outcome, and the growing confidence of Deaf people to participate in the society was considered as one of the defining hallmarks of this project.

3. *Does it meet your expectations?*

Most interviewees agreed that the project had met their expectations although one was not sure about the level of expectation she had had before the project was established. This uncertainty related to her lack of experience of dealing with ISL/English interpreters and she had since come to realise that the situation regarding ISL interpretation and the provision of interpreting services is complex.

One interviewee stressed the importance of the role of the community worker as the pivotal figure behind the success of the project. The decision to split the former combined roles of interpreter and information officer was pointed out as being a catalytic point in generating success for this project.

4. *Is there any room for improvements?*

There was solid agreement that there still remains room for improvement. The lack of interpreters in the region was citied by many interviewees as an area where the service needs to focus its attention: that is, the service should look to expand the number of interpreters in the region as part of the process of rolling out and improving on their service. Others saw the need to advertise the service as widely as possible and become a normative feature of the local community.

One view was raised related to the economics of provision of interpreting services: for example, local service providers may demand reasons for the non-attendance of Deaf people if they have booked and paid for an interpreter. At the same time, it was felt that it is unfair to add this burden of responsibility on Deaf people, expecting them to attend all services or conferences where interpretation is provided, in order to justify the costs incurred.

5. *Initial survey findings; there is some disparity between views of Deaf users and service providers concerning the quality of interpreting service?*

(Please note that this question was not asked to a number of interviewees where interviews took place before the focus group meeting with service users and before the completion of service user questionnaire analysis).

Many agreed that it was inevitable that there would be disparity between views of Deaf users and service providers concerning the quality of service. Some service users put this down to the different levels of expectations held by both sides. Some agreed there should be a considerable improvement in consulting with Deaf people by the project.

6. *Any comment?*

Some service providers expressed a personal sense of pride in achieving the project's targets within the tight timeframe that the project has operated

under to date. They also identified a number of improvements to consolidate the project. Their concerns centre on the frequent unavailability of interpreters during the weekends and evenings and concerns regarding sources of funding. The unavailability of interpreters during the weekends or evenings has enforced deferment or cancellation of events or workshops, hence reducing accessibility in real terms.

The question regarding sources for funding raised a number of political tensions, as the local branch of Health Services Executive allocated funds for interpreting to one agency that many Deaf people refuse to acknowledge. This tension left the interpreters and service providers in a difficult situation although the source of this funding is publicly financed and the allocation of funds to this particular agency is administrative in nature.

One respondent adopted the view that when she acquires the ability to sign, she will be able to provide access to events or workshops herself, and thus cut out the need to hire an interpreter[15]. Another comment related to awareness among service providers that language variation exists and that this impacts on interpreter performance as they have seen situations where the interpreter and the Deaf person did not fully understand each other. However, all respondents were grateful for the establishment of the project and recognised the benefits it brought to the region, especially with respect to the reduction in interpreting fees and travel costs now incurred.

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[15] This may not be a realistic goal and caution is urged. There are threshold levels for communicative competence and when it comes to essential information (NB medical contexts), and there are potential hazards regarding negligence if information is mistranslated by a member of staff who may assume their skills are better than they are. (For example, a case in New Zealand where a Deaf man was acquitted after a retrial on the murdered infant and the acquittal was attributed to mistranslation by a teacher (Napier, McKee and Goswell 2006).

Chapter 9

Evaluation

Introduction

The total body of documentation – actual documents relating to the project, questionnaire surveys and focus group interviews- provide considerable data to assist in the evaluation of the Signing Information Mid-West project. As mentioned in chapter 1, the criteria for evaluation are whether the project has met its objectives and embodied the values that were outlined for the project.

Evaluation

> *Aim***:**
>
> ❑ To create a full time interpreting post where the post can meet the interpreting needs of Deaf people and satisfying the statutory requirement of community, statutory and voluntary bodies to make their services and information available and accessible to people with disability.

This analysis suggests that this aim has not been fully achieved though the project. There are two separate but related issues here: (1) that the interpreting post has been established, (2) that the issue of meeting the interpreting needs of Deaf people is in progress, but not yet satisfactory. The prevailing view that has emerged from this consultation process is that the presence of one interpreter in the Mid-West is not sufficient to meet demand. Moving forward, a larger pool of interpreters is considered both necessary and highly desirable.

In terms of satisfying statutory requirement, it is necessary to specify the legalisation underpinning this requirement, which comes under sections 27 &

28 of the Disability Act 2005 and equality-related legislation such as the Equality Act 2000, 2004. In terms of the response from consultation, both service users and service providers believe that this requirement has not been met as expected. In great part, this is due to the issue of interpreter availability, which we have already outlined.

Another issue that emerges from the consultative process is that while the project established a local interpreting service, and outlined the long-term aim of setting up a videophone network, the project did not outline *how* their services and information would be made available and accessible While these approaches are commendable, desirable and necessary, providers should also be encouraged to examine other available alternative options such as availing of technological advances and maximising use of 3G, the proviso of information on DVD and websites where signed information is available. A word of caution here: these alternatives should not be regarded as an adequate substitute for live interpretation in face-to-face settings.

Recommended review of aims
❑ It is recommended that the steering committee review the aims and objectives of the project once again to ensure that implementation is possible given the current limited resources available. The aims outlined are well defined, but the committee should recognise the limitations and barriers that exist. It is suggested that these limitations and barriers be spelt out to prompt consideration of how they can be best overcome.
❑ The statutory requirements that service providers are required to uphold need to be listed so that service providers and service users know their rights and responsibilities.
❑ Apart from the interpreting services and videophone project, service providers should be encouraged to examine alternative formats such as DVDs, online signed versions of website information and use of 3G

> technology. A list of available ISL version DVDs and a number of examples of websites that contain signed versions of content are included in the appendix).

Objectives:

Responses from service users and service providers differed with respect to a number of objectives. Providers tended to regard objectives as fully or partially achieved, while users considered them to have not been achieved or only marginally achieved. Disparities in responses may be due to the different expectations and attitudes that exist with respect to the project. Notably, providers are more concerned with their obligation to fulfil statutory duties, while users are more orientated towards the quality and availability of service.

A process of regular consultative engagement with the Deaf community is recommended as a means of mitigating this as the project evolves, while acknowledging that there are representatives from the Deaf community on the steering committee.

We now turn to consider if the stated objectives of the project have been achieved.

> ❑ To utilise the time and resources of having an interpreter employed locally otherwise would be lost.

The project has employed an interpreter locally, with notable success. However it is not able to meet all interpreting requests. Hence, the reality is that some interpreting costs (i.e. travel and time) remain issues for some service providers[16].

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[16] This is outside the scope of the project though if the project did not exist, all costs would be higher.

> ❑   To enable Deaf people to advocate for their rights and needs locally.

It is agreed that the project has met this objective insofar as it has not taken on the central role in advocating *for* Deaf people, but it has taken on the important role of informing service providers and the public of issues of concern, for example legal obligations that exist regarding provision, explaining how one hires an interpreter, etc.

> ❑   To have proper access to information

This objective needs to be quantified properly otherwise it remains rhetorical and subjective. The key terms 'proper' and 'access' can be subjective and rhetorical. To emphasise these terms clearly, it is necessary to quantify these terms. Therefore, if it is impossible to quantify these terms, this should be considered as comprising some of the project's underpinning values.

> ❑   To enable Deaf people to participate and contribute in meetings locally.

A number of Deaf service users expressed increasing confidence in attending meetings locally since the project has been established. However it is difficult to quantify the level of increased confidence in real terms given the absence of data regarding participation levels prior to the establishment of the project. We can say that among the Deaf community, the perception is that the Sign Information Mid-West project is inextricably linked to feelings of increased confidence and participation.

> ❑   To empower Deaf people to exercise their constitutional rights as citizens

Although this objective is laudable, the consequence of increased confidence and participation levels amongst the Deaf community relative to the establishment of the Sign Information Mid-West project has been commented on. In turn, this may lead to greater confidence in Deaf people demanding increased access to their citizen rights as outlined here. However, we suggest that the inclusion of this as a specific objective is inadvisable, as it is not possible to quantify post-hoc the absolute relationship between the project and fulfilment of constitutional rights.

> ❑ To minimise the migration of Deaf people to the Dublin area which in turn minimise the social and psychological detrimental effects on the local Deaf community

Participants in the focus group suggested that this objective might be considered as somewhat simplistic, as there are many factors that impact on migration patterns that fall beyond the scope of interpreter provision. Given this response, we suggest that this objective be considered as a project value rather than an objective.

> ❑ To enhance the employment prospects of local Deaf people.

There is some anecdotal evidence that employment prospects have improved as a result of the availability of local interpretation services. However, it is recommended that quantitative data be collated, insofar as possible and that the achievement of this objective be monitored regularly.

> ❑ To enable Deaf people to have access to essential local information such as local housing.

Access to essential information has been improved since establishment of the project. What is somewhat beyond the scope of the project are other issues that impact on the accessibility of information. These include the opening hours of information services, which remain an issue for Deaf service users. The project should also consider the possibility of hosting negotiations with the Deaf community and key information providers with a view to finding agreement regarding making information as accessible as possible to signed language users.

> ❑ To shift the attitude towards deafness from the medical model to the social model

Deaf people themselves suggest that, since the establishment of the Sign Information Mid-west project, this shift has occurred to some extent. While we cannot quantify this in an absolute manner, such observations and anecdotal references are highly welcome and exemplify the effectiveness of the project.

> ❑ To increase the information and knowledge among Deaf users in all aspects of personal and social services

During the consultative process, it became clear that a series of information meetings had been held for the benefit of local Deaf people, which have been commented on in a positive way by service users. It is strongly recommended that these meetings be continued on a regular basis in conjunction with the development of additional consultative approaches.

> ❑ To enhance the understanding of Irish Sign Language as an effective communication tool

There were a number of comments that emerged regarding the regional variant of Irish Sign Language used in the Mid-West, with service users expressing the view that their variant was not appreciated and recognised. There were also comments about the dominant variant of ISL used in Dublin not being understood by a number of Deaf people in the Mid-West, particularly those who had been educated locally. This evaluation recommends that the question of language variation be explored further in order to ensure that the service can adapt to meet the linguistic preferences of local Deaf people.

> ❑   To eliminate deafness as a barrier to participation

This objective is a laudable target but given the national situation, this should be regarded as a long-term collective objective to be achieved in tandem with other national organisations.

> ❑   To promote equality of access to opportunity.

The project has made some progress in promoting equality of access to opportunity, though a number of issues remain to be tackled. Some of these are within the scope of the project: for example the availability of the interpreter (evenings, weekends) relative to demand for interpreting. Others may fall outside the direct control of the service, for example, issues relating to the time of information sessions organised by service providers.

Summarised recommendations for these objectives:

Some objectives are long term or difficult to achieve given the resources available to this project. These should be re-designated as values. Other objectives should be carefully assessed and properly quantified with regard to the scope of the project and the resources available. Objectives should be re-stated to include reference to short and long term plans.

Values:

- ❑ Recognise the inability of Deaf people to participate in society at every level and want to address this situation urgently.

- ❑ Recognise the right to an interpreting service to enable Deaf people to participate in society

- ❑ Recognise Deaf people can participate and live actively and productively in the region

- ❑ Recognise the status of Irish Sign Language as the community language of the local Deaf community

- ❑ Appreciate the social model of deafness which recognise the related issues are beyond the medical intervention or assistance

- ❑ Recognise the respect for privacy and confidentiality of Deaf people where they engage in personal or intimate situation where they deal with their medical situation

- ❑ Recognise the rights of Deaf people to have equal access to services

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These values are laudable and inspirational and the list can be expanded to include some 'objectives'. The key issue is to ensure that they are attainable and that the necessary resources required are available to the project.

Issues to be considered in the future

Recommendations emerging from this consultation process and review are general and inspirational rather than specific and concrete because the timing of this has, in the opinion of many respondents, occurred too soon after the establishment of the service for them to be otherwise. Given the timeframe and resources available to this evaluation, we focus here solely on the efficiency and effectiveness of the project. The efficiency and effectiveness criteria are based on whether aims and objectives have been achieved to date or not.

The obvious solution to the key issue of interpreter availability is for this project is to increase the number of qualified interpreters available and improve the coordination of allocating interpreting assignments. This, of course, has funding implications. There are also broader issues that the project may wish to consider in terms of meeting objectives relating to public awareness and full participation of Deaf people in the broader community. These include the possibility of seeking public commitment to the provision of accessible services to Deaf people, as has been the case in Bristol (UK), which we outline below.

BSL charter in the city of Bristol

The city council of Bristol adopted a charter on British Sign Language (BSL) in 2003 and promised to assure accessibility of services for BSL users in their area. The council developed a strategy for consulting with local Deaf population regarding the accessibility of services. (For the full text of BSL, please see

http://www.bristol.gov.uk/ccm/cms-service/stream/asset/?asset_id=16912105)

It is recommended that the management committee explore the possibility of seeking to have a similar approach adopted in the Mid-West.

A related recommendation links to the range of issues raised by the Scottish Parliament's report Access to Public Services in Scotland Using British Sign Language, which was conducted by the Centre for Deaf Studies, University of Bristol.

This research could provide useful reference points for the project, as it moves forward. Appendix five of the Scottish Parliament report is particularly worthy of consideration. It relates to a framework that guides service providers and users in working to ensure that services are increasingly accessible.

The full report can be downloaded from the Scottish Parliament website:

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/05/23131410/14269

❑ *Summary and Conclusions*

Overall, the evaluation of this project points to a number of positive outcomes, identified by users and service providers. They felt that a service such as is offered by Sign Information Mid-West was a long overdue and crucial for the region of Mid-West. Users have expressed some satisfaction in improvements in societal attitudes towards Deaf people and improvements in access to public information. Service providers are satisfied with the knowledge that they have a locally based interpreter available to them.
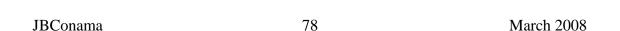
We noted that the establishment of this service has provided the necessary focal point to increase awareness and understanding about the role of interpretation in the Deaf community. We then outlined some of the shortcomings of the service, which were noted.

All groups acknowledged the existence of shortcomings and endeavour to work together to eliminate or address these. The most obvious shortcoming is the inadequacy of having only one qualified interpreter to cater for all assignments. This leads to the possibility of grossly underestimating the level of interpreting requests in the Mid-West.

We linked this concern with an attempt at developing our understanding of the demographic profile for the region. This was created as a benchmark and shows the inadequacy of provision in the region at present. We also pointed out two positive developments in the UK, which may be considered for adaptation to the Mid-West region.

While acknowledging the successes of the project vis-à-vis the originally established aims and objectives, it is suggested that it is now timely to review these aims and objectives, to incorporate some of the emerging recommendations from this report as a means of fine-tuning a medium to long term plan as the project moves forward.

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Website resources and addresses:

Central Statistics Office: www.cso.ie (check Census 2006 for disability report)

European Union of the Deaf: www.eudeaf.org

Gallaudet University: http://library.gallaudet.edu/deaf-faq-stats-intro.shtml (dedicated page on statistics on Deaf people).

Health Research Board: www.hrb.ie (check National
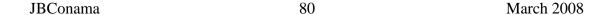
Irish Deaf Society: www.deaf.ie

National Association for Deaf People (NADP) (now renamed as Deafhear.ie): www.deafhear.ie

Royal National Institute for the Deaf: www.rnid.org.uk

Statistics New Zealand: www.stats.govt.nz (type in key word: language or NZSL).

Statistics South Africa: www.statssa.gov.za (type in key word: language or SASL).

World Federation of the Deaf: www.wfdeaf.org

Appendix 1:

The role of Interpreter and Information Officer:

The dual role of the person appointed as the interpreter and information officer started work in August 2006 and had to vacate the position in December 2006. In her qualitative report to POBAL (November, 2006), the dual role's specific responsibilities are identified as follows;

- ❑ Provided interpreting services
- ❑ Assisted service users to assess funding
- ❑ Brokered of interpreting services to other freelance interpreters
- ❑ Raised awareness of the project with statutory agencies
- ❑ Gave information through the services of Citizen Information Centre to members of Deaf community and the general public in the 'shadow' capacity on weekly basis.
- ❑ Reported to the steering committee on monthly and 'as needed' basis. Prepared agenda and participate in meetings. Recorded minutes and distributed them to members
- ❑ Had responsibility for implementing decisions made by the steering committee
- ❑ Devised a comprehensive information pack and distributed them to members of the Deaf community and service agencies.
- ❑ Had general administrative responsibilities such as processing payments and invoicing feed. Administered the budget project and ensured it in line with the agreement with the POBAL.

The role of Interpreter (after December 2006)

- o ISL interpreter role to be focused solely on the provision of ISL Interpreting

- o Service 20 hours a week. Where applicable fees will be charged for this interpreting service (i.e. where funding is available) to ensure that the project is sustainable beyond the funding period.
- o Within this role the Interpreter will:
- o Provide ISL interpreting services for the local public service, community and voluntary sectors in the Mid-West
- o Promote ISL as a visual language such that the general public can use it when oral communication is not possible
- o Liaise with development worker to promote the service

The role of Development Worker

- Responsibilities of the position will include:
  - o Working with the steering committee to ensure that the objectives of the programme are met
  - o Providing information and referral supports to deaf clients.
  - o Developing and improving access to ISL amongst local services.
  - o Promoting training in ISL amongst community, voluntary and statutory groups in the region.
  - o Facilitating the Steering Committee
  - o Ensuring financial and narrative reporting requirements are fulfilled
  - o Working with the deaf community to identify and meet information and training needs
  - o Working closely with the ISL Interpreter to ensure effective delivery of interpreting services

Appendix 2:
Sample Questionnaire for <u>Service Users Survey</u>

NAME:	....						
AGE GROUP	**10-17**	**18-35**	**36-59**	**>60**	GENDER	**Male**	**Female**
AREA of RESIDENCE	**County Limerick**		**Limerick City**		**County Clare**		**Tipperary North**

A: Previous situation

Availing of communication services

	Yes	No	
1. I had availed of a communicator with service providers.			If no, please go to Question 4.

	Mother/Sister	Father/Brother	Neighbour	Work mate	Friend
2. Who was / were the communicator(s)?					

	Once-off	Sometimes	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
3. If yes, how often?					

	Yes	No	
4. I communicated with service providers on my own.			If no, please go to Question 6.

	Writing notes	Lip-reading / Using speech	Gestures	Signing
5. If yes, how?				

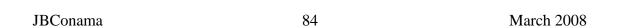|	Yes	No	
6. I had availed of interpreting services before the project was established.			If no, please go to Question 10.

	Service agency arranged this	I had to arrange this myself
7. If yes, how?		

	Once-off	Sometimes	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
8. If yes, how often?					

	Employment	Education	Medical	Seeking information	Family occasions	Others
9. For what?						

B: Current situation

Availing of ISL/English interpreting services

	Yes	No
10. Are you aware of ISL/English interpreter available in the Mid-West?		

Yes	No

11. Have you used ISL/English interpreter to date?						(If no, please move to Question 14).
		Once-off	Sometimes	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
12. If yes, how often?						
	Employment	Education	Medical	Seeking information	Family occasions	Others
13. For what?						

			Yes	No		
14. If no, will you use the ISL/English interpreter in the future?					(If no, please explain the reasons in the additional comment box below)	
	Employment	Education	Medical	Seeking information	Family occasions	Others
15. If yes, for what area?						

C: Your view on Signing Information Mid-West	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Signing Information Mid-West's awareness regarding the availability of interpreter?					
I am satisfied with the awareness regarding the availability of interpreters in the Mid-West					
I am satisfied with the number of interpreters at the present in the Mid-West.					
Service providers regarding the availability of interpreter?					
I am satisfied with the service providers' level of awareness regarding the availability of interpreter in the Mid-West					
Access to signing information					
There are plenty of choices for Deaf users to have access to information					
Having ISL/English interpreter is important for accessing to information					
Overall direction					
I am satisfied with the current direction of the project					
This project will lead to better services for Deaf people					
This project will assist Deaf people to participate in society more often.					
Additional Comments:					

Appendix 3

Signing Information Mid-West
Evaluation Survey
Enhancing Disability Services / PAUL Partnership
Centre for Deaf Studies

Agency	
Address	
E-mail	
Phone	
Fax	
Representative Name	

Previous situation

	Yes	No
16. Has your agency dealt with the Deaf consumer previously?		

	Once-off	Sometimes	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
17. If yes, how often?					

	Writing notes	Lip-reading / Using speech	Gestures	Signing
18. If yes, how did your agency communicate with these consumers?				

	Family Member	Work Employee	Workmate /Friend of consumer
19. Who acted as the communicator(s) on behalf of consumer (if applicable)?			

Current situation

	Yes	No
20. Has your agency availed of the Signing Information interpreting services?		

	Once-off	Sometimes	Daily	Weekly	Monthly
21. If yes, how often?					
	Yes	No			
22. Was it at the request of Deaf user(s)?					

	Consumer	Your Agency	External funds
23. Who financed the interpreter's fee?			
24. If external funds are received to cover this cost, where do they originate?			

Statements	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
Your agency has sufficient awareness of interpreting services.					
Your agency responds positively to the needs of Deaf people.					
Your agency should finance the interpreting fees.					
Using interpreting services, your agency fulfils its responsibility towards the needs of Deaf service users.					
Your agency has sufficient amount of access for Deaf people to its information					
Your agency has facilitated the integration of Deaf people into society greater than before.					
The availability of the interpreter enhances your service for Deaf people considerably.					

Additional comments:

Appendix 4

Assumed calculation for interpreting hours per annum.

While it is difficult to locate authoritative sources to determine the working conditions for a typical interpreter, there are a number of sources, which can be used for creating an assumed calculation. The sources are:

- ❑ Organisation of Working Time Act 1997

- ❑ Safety, Health and Welfare Act 2005

- ❑ Article by Susanne Carstensen (Denmark)

- ❑ Prospectus Review, 2006.

Organisation of Working Time Act 1997

The Act was enacted in 1997 in a response to the European directive on the organisation working hours. Among the points in the Act, they are:

- ❑ Maximum working hours: 48 (few exemptions)

- ❑ 11 hours daily rest per 24-hour period;

- ❑ One period of 24 hours rest per week preceded by a daily rest period (11 hours);

- ❑ Rest breaks - 15 minutes where up to 4 and a half hours have been worked; 30 minutes where up to 6 hours have been worked which may include the first break.

- ❑ The Act provides employees with four weeks (twenty days) annual leave per year and nine public holidays.

While there are exemptions from the Act for some employment such as Garda Siochana, Defence Forces, farmers and fishermen, they are not examined in detail here. However, given the possible scenario, the interpreters are not exempted from this Act. The typical interpreter would be available for 48 hours per week but the contact hours (actual work) could be much reduced to

take account of rest and interval breaks. Four hours of interval breaks have to be accommodated hence reducing the actual work to 44 hours per week.

Additionally, taking account of annual leaves and rest periods of 24 hours, the interpreter would be only available for 284 days per year.

The **Prospectus Review** of Sign Language Interpretation Services and Service Requirements in Ireland was published in September 2006. It quotes from a Finnish source that an interpreter requires an hour for preparation work and travel for every three hours. Therefore, the actual contact work of 44 hours per week is to be reduced to 33 taking account of this necessary part.

The same review reports that salaried interpreters only do contact work up to 21 hours per work.

Safety, Health and Welfare Act 2005

This Act came into force and all employers and employees (including the self-employed) are expected to observe the following points:

❑ Familiar with and conform with Health and Safety programme
❑ Observe safety rules
❑ Comply with laws and protect own health & safety and others.
❑ Forbids using the intoxicant influences or do not engage in improper conduct
❑ Cooperate with the employer
❑ Report any potential deficit in health and safety issues.

Among the points, the most significant point here is the workers are expected to comply with laws and protect own health and safety. Therefore, it is important for interpreters to be familiar with the health and safety risks of working as the interpreter. this can be demonstrated by the following article.

Article by Susanne Carstensen

This author informs at the beginning of the article that the original contents were translated from another article in the Danish union magazine. She emphasises to her best endeavour to translate the article as much as possible. The article cities a number of health and safety risks such as the speed of signing in the context of where the interpreter has to ensure precise translation and this demands a high concentration. The most common complaint for ignoring this health and safety risk is Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI).

This article also reports a very high burnout rate among the interpreters who do not observe the health and safety risks carefully. It also reports a much comparatively lower rate of burnout among the Swedish interpreters and it attributes the low rate to the existence of support services and strict adherence to health and safety issues. Thus, the article proposes the contact hours to 20 per week or four hours and twenty minutes per day.

On these accounts arising from these sources, if we adopt and observe these measures, it would mean that the interpreter would be only available for slightly more than 1,100 hours per annum.