Courageous boy regains confidence

Mungudit developed hearing loss around one year of age. Now 13 years old, he attends primary school some ten kilometres from his village in Nebbi District, but he is hindered by his ear problem.

Nebbi is part of the West Nile region in Northern Uganda, where Signal and its partner Signhealth Uganda help deaf and hearing impaired children to stay in school and achieve. West Nile is remote with limited health infrastructure and is also known for hosting over one million refugees from South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi.

Mungudit’s parents, peasant farmers, took their son to the hospital, but the only treatment given was ear drops and an injection which did not help much. He reports intermittent pain and itching in his ear, which makes him very uncomfortable and disrupts his home and school chores and his progress as a talented athlete.

The long distance to school prevents Mungudit from returning home and eating a meal at lunchtime too. His class teacher explains that these challenges, combined with worries about his ear problem and the stigma attached to this, have affected his schoolwork. Deep-rooted beliefs in witchcraft in the region mean that deaf people are often regarded as cursed.

Signhealth Uganda carried out deaf awareness and inclusive communication training in Mungudit’s school. Since then he has been receiving constant support and guidance from his teachers, who did not want to lose “such a promising footballer and courageous boy.”

With renewed confidence thanks to support from both his teachers and his parents, Mungudit’s talent has shone through and he was selected to represent Nebbi Municipality in a national football league competition.

His dad John is proud of him, as “a very hardworking boy who is an inspiration among his peers.”

Mungudit’s class teacher has linked up with his parents to encourage safe ear cleaning, and the family has requested a hearing assessment.

We are delighted to have received the backing of The True Colours Trust for our work in Northern Uganda, as the trust fulfils an ambition to expand its support in Africa to include disabled children.
I really enjoy teaching British Sign Language. Back when I was little, a lot of hearing people teased deaf people, and I felt that there was a barrier to communication throughout. I felt this as I was growing up as well. Now with more hearing people learning some sign language and deaf awareness, it is a lot better, but there are still barriers around and we still need to break these down.

For example, once I was standing by a bus stop, when somebody in a car stopped and opened their window to ask the way. I said ‘Oh, I’m deaf’ and they said ‘No thank you’ and drove off with a negative attitude. Not everybody does that. Some people show me a map and I help to give them directions.

We need trained interpreters too. If I go to the doctor’s and they use a lot of jargon in English language, I cannot follow what they are saying, so with an interpreter I feel more confident.

**Teaching sign language is satisfying for me and Kevin** – from watching the students struggle at the start, helping them to improve, and then watching them communicate a lot more easily with us at the end. It is important that we don’t use our voices when we are teaching, but that the students use their eyes and concentrate on our movements.

Signal’s Introduction to British Sign Language (BSL) course has expanded geographically in Shropshire in response to growing demand, and it has become part of the enrichment programme at Harper Adams University.

We asked our tutors Mary and Kevin, who are deaf sign language users, and student Becky, who took part in our latest course in Telford, about their motivations for teaching and learning sign language...

**Mary**

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**Becky**

“I have always had an interest in sign language as an alternative to sometimes speaking, as I have had a stammer since I was born, and I did a session in primary school. When I found out that Signal runs a beginners’ course, I really wanted to get involved, because I understand the issues which other people have with communicating as well, and I just went for it.

I enjoyed it so much, and I thought that I would also really enjoy using sign language in a job. I just want to be able to talk with the deaf community and get involved with them and help as much as I can. I have actually been to a university open day, because I want to pursue sign language and deaf studies, and they had an interpreter for almost all of the talks, which was awesome to see.

I feel like as a society we need to try harder to just get everyone involved and support everyone for all the individual differences which they have.”
Students at the Vocational Training Centre for Deaf Learners in Tanzania have successfully completed the first phase of internships in a programme to provide practical experience in the workplace. Signal and its partner Childreach Tanzania are running this programme with the support of The Marr-Munning Trust.

Ten second- and third-year students at the Vocational Training Centre in the Kilimanjaro Region carried out four-week internships in tailoring and carpentry with local businesses. These deaf young people were mentored and helped to develop their knowledge, skills and confidence.

Gaining experience and goodwill

As part of the internship programme, supervisors and employees from the businesses hosting the students took part in deaf awareness and inclusive communication training. Both supervisors and students reported each other’s willingness to teach and learn and overcome communication challenges, with supervisors learning some signs in Tanzanian Sign Language and using some pictorial and written illustrations.

This mutual enthusiasm translated into host businesses inviting all of the tailoring and carpentry students to take up additional hands-on placements on Fridays and Saturdays over another four-week period. The garments, accessories and furniture that the students produced during their time with the local businesses were showcased at an exhibition at the Vocational Training Centre. This was visited by the district education officer and other local officials, teachers from neighbouring schools and the students’ families.

Encouragingly, one of the interns, a third- and final-year carpentry student, was offered and has accepted a job with one of the carpentry workshops which is participating in the internship programme. All of the participating businesses have been awarded with certificates of recognition and are keen to stay involved.

These businesses are helping to change negative assumptions about deaf people and build a positive understanding of deafness and disability among their customers and surrounding businesses.
Finding empathy and expertise

Barbara explains what Signal’s specialist support in the rural county of Shropshire has meant to both her and husband Roy. This support has been made possible by the Big Lottery Fund.

“My husband was born partially deaf and has always had to rely on lip reading and hearing aids. Since we have been together, he also relies on myself to communicate and help him in day-to-day activities in the hearing world, even to ensure that he has understood what others have said.

As technology advances, hearing aids have helped Roy to be part of the hearing world. So when he suffered sudden complete hearing loss in his better ear and the surgery he had didn’t work, he was left isolated and withdrawn from the world and needed someone who would understand the devastation it caused him.

What’s more, I suffered a Bell’s palsy attack which has affected one side of my face. This meant that Roy could no longer lip read me and understand me, leaving him even more apart from the hearing world. Over time I have improved, but at the time of his sudden hearing loss this impacted greatly on us both.

Even though I could speak clearly, my lip pattern had changed to Roy and he could not always understand me. Taking several attempts to communicate to each other left us upset and frustrated with the situation we were in.

This has persuaded Roy to keep going through the difficulties of adjusting to new hearing aids each time. Jo has given us hope that life can improve again, by not giving up and convincing Roy to keep going to the checks. Knowing someone cares and wants to help is so valuable, it makes a difference.

Then the local NHS Audiology department referred us to Joanne Rose at Signal. What can I say? She turned our life around and has given us help and support in ways a simple leaflet or website will never be able to do.

Jo was able to understand Roy’s anger, sadness and frustrations as well as mine. She too was born hearing impaired and could relate to Roy, and he instantly trusted and connected with her. Jo also has a cochlear implant and so can speak from experience about the pros and cons of this surgery. She is genuine.

Keeping in Touch

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If you would like further information, to make a donation or get more involved, please contact us:

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