

British Deaf Association Wales – Electoral Access

The Electoral Commission established the New Initiatives Fund to support and promote new ways of raising awareness about voting and democracy. We have awarded grants to local, community and national organisations working with different target audiences across the whole of the UK.

This evaluation report provides information about the British Deaf Association (BDA) in Wales' Electoral Access project funded by the New Initiatives Fund. In the report we highlight the aims, objectives and achievements of the project, and lessons learnt by the BDA.

Background

The Electoral Access project was run by the BDA to improve access and raise awareness of the democratic process. BDA recruited a project officer to set up hustings events with political parties in the lead up to the combined 2004 European and local elections, information workshops in deaf clubs across Wales to raise awareness of political systems and decision-making processes, and training days to encourage deaf people to share the information they had learnt within their own deaf clubs.

Aims

The aims of the project were to empower and enable deaf people to gain access, information, knowledge, awareness and understanding of local and national political issues, and local and national political systems. In addition the project hoped to support people to vote independently and confidently according to their preferred political party, or political representative.

Funding

A grant of £28,050 was awarded in July 2003 of which £24,368 was paid out. The project ran

for 15 months from December 2003 to March 2005.

Target outcomes

The target outcomes of the project were to:

- increase links between the deaf community and local council candidates
- increase awareness amongst deaf people of the electoral system
- increase access to information about the electoral process
- increase the number of people attending BDA training courses to become Electoral Access trainers and able to train people in their own deaf clubs.

How successful was the project?

Overall the project achieved its key objectives and outcomes toward disseminating information about the electoral process and encouraging deaf people to take part in the democratic process.

Evaluation

The evaluation was undertaken by Lorna Allsop and Jim Kyle from the Deaf Studies Trust. The

main methods used to measure the success of the project were observation of a workshop, questionnaires collected before and after workshops and interviews with the project officer, manager and participants.

Most activities proposed in their application were delivered, although there were some difficulties encountered in the delivery of workshops. However those who attended the workshops felt that they had had a positive impact and increased their knowledge about the electoral process.

Delivery

The project delivered the following outputs:

- 183 deaf people attended information workshops at 17 deaf clubs across Wales.
- 59 deaf people attended seven training workshops to enable them to explain the electoral system to deaf club members.
- 112 deaf people attended seven hustings events across Wales. Three to four political parties attended each husting.
- 17 deaf people participated in a one-day visit to the Welsh Assembly.
- 70 deaf people attended seven hustings events in the lead up to the 2004 combined European Parliamentary and local elections.

Good practice

A number of areas of good practice can be identified from this project:

- Through running the workshops, the BDA were able to identify more ways to make politics more accessible to deaf people.
- Working with deaf clubs in Wales was a successful way to reach deaf people and publicise project events.
- The hustings events gave deaf people the opportunity to question candidates in the forthcoming elections about their policies, and raise concerns of their own.
- Running training workshops meant that 10 deaf people became trainers, and ran workshops in their own deaf clubs, one of which organised its own hustings event.
- The workshops increased the confidence of deaf people to explain the political process to other deaf people.

Lessons learnt

Projects of a similar nature can learn from the following lessons:

- Participants and the evaluator felt that the content of the workshops was in some cases long and complex. Workshops should be designed in consultation with deaf people, and delivered in smaller modules with more time for questions and answers.
- The part-time project officer found it difficult to run a project of this size and nature, and felt that a full-time worker should be recruited for future projects.
- Due to there only being one part-time worker, there was

less opportunity for face-to-face contact with deaf clubs. More face-to-face contact with deaf clubs and the opportunity to build relationships would increase the likelihood of people attending the workshops and other events.

- Reliance on deaf clubs meant in some cases attendance was low, and perhaps either targeting more diverse venues or greater support of staff in deaf clubs would increase attendance.
- Due to a lack of funding and resources few materials were provided in British Sign Language (BSL). Providing materials in BSL would increase access to the information provided during the project.
- The project also identified through pre-workshop questionnaires that only 4.5% of deaf people voted in elections due to lack of access to information.

Further information

For further information about this project please contact:

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Further information about the New Initiatives Fund and the wider work of the Electoral Commission can be found at: www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

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