

## Response by the National Deaf Children's Society to Dewiniaith, A vision for Mudiad Meithrin



### About Us

The National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) Cymru is the national charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people.

We represent the interests and campaign for the rights of deaf children and their families.

**Please note** that in referring to “deaf” we refer to all levels of hearing loss, including mild, moderate, severe, profound, and temporary hearing loss.

### Response

We welcome the opportunity to respond to Mudiad Meithrin's strategic vision for 2015-2025 and fully support your core aims, including giving every child, whatever their needs, an equal opportunity to access Welsh-medium services in the early years. NDCS Cymru supports deaf children across Wales, whatever their background. We support deaf children from families where Welsh is the main spoken language and also families who do not speak Welsh but who wish their deaf child to benefit from a Welsh-medium education.

Deafness is a low incidence disability. 1.3 in every 1000 babies in Wales is diagnosed with deafness at Newborn Hearing Screening.<sup>1</sup> 50% of deaf children are born deaf. The remainder are diagnosed later in childhood or acquire deafness as a result of illness, trauma or genetic predisposition.

It is also important to remember that 80% of all children will experience temporary deafness before they are 10 years old. This is often as a result of glue ear. For some of these children the temporary deafness may be recurrent and last for several weeks or months. This temporary deafness can have a serious impact on the child's development and communication at a crucial stage in their lives. Therefore it is vital that all staff working in cylchoedd meithrin can spot the signs when a child is experiencing hearing problems in order to adapt support and learning strategies and alert any other relevant people involved in the child's care.

Deafness in childhood has a major impact on the learning of spoken language. Language is usually acquired through hearing and vision together. Deafness has the potential to delay language development. This delay can then impact more broadly on a

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/980/news/33579>

deaf child's life as language is essential for successful cognitive, emotional and social development.

Universal newborn hearing screening and vastly improved hearing technologies have meant that more young children have the potential to use spoken language. However, this means their language, communication and learning needs may not be immediately apparent: good speech intelligibility may mask their level of linguistic ability.

The impact of deafness on language development may mean a young child has difficulty being able to:

- make sense of what people say and understand what is happening around them
- learn to think things through and problem solve
- understand and express what they are feeling and manage their emotions.

The optimal range of hearing that hearing technologies can typically offer a deaf child is approximately three metres in a good listening environment. This both reduces their ability to access spoken language beyond this range and limits their access to any incidental learning that would enable them to acquire and absorb new language and information, which is naturally accessed by their peers. It is therefore likely that the deaf child will require additional support to ensure they are to make the same progress as other children of a similar age and cognitive ability. Strategies may need to be put in place to manage and minimise the impact of hearing loss, to develop learning skills and to provide access to the curriculum.

NDCS has a wide range of resources available on its website to support early years practitioners. Some resources require registration which is free. [www.ndcs.org.uk](http://www.ndcs.org.uk)

### **Theme 1: Developing our presence at the grass roots**

4. We welcome Mudiad Meithrin's intention to adopt an Inclusivity Strategy and providing training so that staff at cylchoedd meithrin are able to welcome every child. We would strongly recommend that this strategy includes deaf awareness training for all staff at cylchoedd meithrin. This is essential for developing strategies to support deaf children, but also of paramount importance in spotting the signs that a child may be experiencing temporary deafness. NDCS Cymru can offer advice to Mudiad Meithrin in this area. Local Teachers of the Deaf are also well placed to provide support and assistance to individual cylchoedd meithrin.

### **Theme 2: Nurturing and developing our people**

2. We warmly welcome the intention to launch the national training body Academi and would encourage Mudiad Meithrin to develop specific modules on the learning needs of deaf children. We would encourage Mudiad Meithrin to work with Teachers of the Deaf who have expertise in this area and can advise on devising strategies to support deaf learners.

13. We would be very happy to be part of "Friends of Mudiad Meithrin" and would support an annual event.

### **Theme 4: Prioritising the quality and standard of our work**

1. We would be very willing to support Mudiad Meithrin in identifying a group of specialists who can help to improve the quality and raise the standard in your provision, especially in relation to the needs of children with permanent or temporary deafness.
25. We understand Mudiad Meithrin's aspiration to increase the use of Makaton in your work. We would also wish to emphasise that Makaton is not a substitute for BSL for deaf children where BSL is the preferred method of communication. NDCS has developed a range of Family Sign Language resources available on <http://www.familysignlanguage.org.uk/>. We can also refer you to tutors who can deliver Family Sign Language workshops in Welsh.

### **Theme 5: Co-operating with others to reach our goal**

7. Several years ago Mudiad Meithrin supported the launch of a Welsh language resource for deaf-friendly nurseries created by NDCS. We would relish the opportunity to work together in future to support deaf children in cylchoedd meithrin and cylchoedd Ti a Fi.

### **Concluding Remarks**

As you know the Welsh Government is currently reforming the assessment and support provision for children and young people with additional learning needs. We would welcome Mudiad Meithrin sharing your expertise and experience in pre-school education to ensure that there is adequate and appropriate provision in the Bill and new Code of Practice to meet the needs of young children with additional learning needs in Welsh medium pre-school settings.

For any more information please contact:

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