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| TITLE | EARLY YEARS RESEARCH CHALLENGE FUND |
| ABOUT THE | <p>The National Deaf Children's Society</p> <p>We're the leading charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for every deaf child.</p> |

DEFINITIONS

By deaf, we mean any level of hearing loss. This includes unilateral hearing loss.

By early years, in this context, we mean the period before children start statutory education.

BACKGROUND

A key strategic priority for the National Deaf Children's Society is to make sure deaf children get the best support from the start.

The newborn hearing screening programme, fully rolled out 15 years ago across the UK, removed a major barrier to deaf children's development by ensuring deafness was identified as early as possible for children born deaf. This has helped to transform the lives of many deaf children by making it possible to put in place a package or programmes of early intervention support. We know that there are many areas of good practice across the UK where this early intervention is helping deaf children achieve the best possible outcomes.

At the same time, we believe there is more to be done to ensure that all families benefit from high-quality early years support. We also believe that more needs to be done to more clearly define the factors that underpin high quality early intervention and to explore how different approaches can successfully interplay with family needs and preferences.

Within NDCS, we work to improve early years support in a range of different ways, including:

- Bright Start programme of activities and events for families and professionals
- Developing and updating resources for professionals, such as the Success from the Start resource (replacing the previous Early Support Monitoring Protocol)
- Promoting peer to peer support among families

Our support is driven by the following points and beliefs:

- the home learning environment is the biggest predictor of a child's future success
- the first two years of a child's life are critical in laying the foundations for future development
- the quality of interactions between families and their child are key

- it is important to promote self-efficacy in parents and to support them to make informed choices about their child's language and social development
- families should be encouraged to use a range of auditory, visual and tactile strategies to promote effective communication and language development.

We know from talking to professionals, there are lots of good ideas for further research out there or examples of good practice that are yet to be fully evidenced. This is why we have created an early years research challenge fund – to invite proposals for new research that will help further improve early years support across the UK.

TASK AND OBJECTIVES

This is an open 'challenge' and so we welcome any proposals or ideas that might help us achieve our goal of making sure that deaf children receive the best support from the start in the early years.

We are especially interested in proposals that:

- focus on effective support for deaf children age 0 to 2 and their families, and steps that can be taken to support families and promote a positive and rich home learning environment
- have practical application (for example, to test an intervention that can be taken forward by NDCS and/or by existing services and settings or to evidence an area of existing good practice)
- are coproduced with families.

We are open to proposals from anyone, including professionals and services or from partnerships. We also welcome collaborative approaches.

We are also open to proposals that are UK-wide or which focus on a specific nation, region or area, providing that the research has wider application.

OUTPUTS

The outputs will largely depend on the proposal and will be confirmed at a later point with successful applicants. However, we would expect to see the following outputs in any proposal, unless there are good reasons why not.

- A research paper that is suitable for external publication and dissemination.
- A plain English summary of the research suitable for publication as a resource for families with deaf children.

We anticipate that intellectual property rights of any outputs would be held by the National Deaf Children's Society. However, we would not expect to limit or restrict reasonable use of such outputs by applicants.

BUDGET

We have put aside £40,000 for the early years research fund, to be spent over two years from 2021/22 to 2022/23.

Depending on the quality of the proposals we receive, it may be possible to increase this budget, though this is by no means guaranteed. We are also open to working with applicants to seek external funding, either to supplement the funding available to NDCS or to fund the entire project.

INVITATION TO SUBMIT IDEAS AND PROPOSALS

As this is a challenge fund, at this stage, we're most interested in people's ideas and proposals for research in an outline format. You should not feel the need to produce especially lengthy or detailed proposals and we suggest that any response does not exceed 3,000 words in total. However, it would be helpful to cover the below in your response.

1. Background

Information about your background and knowledge of childhood deafness.

2. Research questions

An outline of your proposed research questions. These should be in line with the parameters set out earlier.

3. Methodology

A summary of the proposed methodological approach.

4. Timetable

If possible, it would be helpful to provide an indicative timetable showing the expected duration of each stage of your proposed research.

5. Outputs

Your proposed outputs from any research.

6. Project team

If you are working in collaboration with others or part of a wider team, it would be helpful to set out who you will be working with and their background.

7. Price

This should set out an indicative cost of the research. At this stage, we are looking for price proposals that can show us that you've thought carefully about what would be needed to fulfil the required task and objectives and how good value for money can be achieved.

As set out earlier, we hold a budget of £40,000. However, applicants may wish to set out what could be achieved with a larger budget, in the event we are able to secure more funding through our own resources and/or externally.

If possible, it would be helpful to make clear if VAT would apply and if the price is inclusive of VAT or not.

RECEIVING YOUR PROPOSALS

Proposals should be sent to conn.doherty@ndcs.org.uk by the end of Monday 10th January 2022.

We will acknowledge receipt of your proposal, as soon as possible.

An internal panel at the National Deaf Children's Society will review the proposals. The internal panel will include:

- Conn Doherty, Research Officer
- Ian Noon, Chief Policy Advisor
- Emma Fraser, Teacher of the Deaf
- Debra Bowen, Deputy Director – Families

It is intended that we will decide on a way forward based primarily on the quality of the proposals received. However, we may carry out short interviews using Teams if there are a high number of strong applicants.

We will let applicants know of how we plan to move forward with their proposal, as soon as possible in January or early February.

MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The main contact at the National Deaf Children's Society will be Conn Doherty, Research Officer.

Once we have agreed a partner, a contract will be prepared, which will set out the expected management arrangements. This is likely to include regular reporting requirements and possibly also the establishment of an advisory group to oversee progress.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information or for an informal discussion, please contact conn.doherty@ndcs.org.uk.