



Sound Friends Deaf Children's Society

Trustees Annual Report 2023-2024

Sound Friends Deaf Children's Society was set up in 2011 to support families of d/Deaf children. Many d/Deaf children (statistics suggest slightly more than 90%) are born to hearing parents and so it is a common occurrence that these parents need advice on how to deal with this diagnosis, communicate with their child and make plans for their social and academic lives. The charity supports members informally through questions being asked in their closed Facebook group (utilizing the shared experiences of the group), provides information from partner charities, signposts to other services where appropriate, and organises face-to-face events. Our events provide opportunities for parents to share experiences, ask questions and for the children to meet and play, to make new friends, help to develop and improve social skills.

Sound Friends DCS is affiliated with the **National Charity (NDCS – National Deaf Children's Society)** and is a registered charity within Northern Ireland – NIC100725.

We currently cover the following towns and surrounding areas:

- Portadown
- Lurgan
- Craigavon
- Banbridge
- Newry
- Kilkeel

Chairperson : Nataliia Buchanan

Treasurer : Ruairi Magennis

Secretary : Stephnie Thompson

Designated person for Safeguarding : Marietta Roddy appointed February 2023, stepped down in August 2023, replaced by Julie Lavery.

It has been agreed at the previous AGM that we should aim to organize at least 4 big events for the members, keep the events term times. The committee engages with group members via surveys to understand the needs, wants and preferences of its members to help focus its aims. The recent feedback from membership shown that there is lack of BSL provision in the area and committee agreed to see what can be done.

Events 2023

- Easter Party Streamvale Farm 15th April 2023
- End of the School Year Party South Lakes 1st July 2023
- Halloween Party 29th October 2023 Newry
- 16th Dec 2023 BSL Signed Panto/Christmas Party Armagh Market Place Theatre

2024

It has been the most successful year for the group. The attendance to the events has increased and the membership has grown.

Sound Friends DCS work hard to support our families and to increase the deaf awareness in the community. We want to make sure that every deaf child is given equal opportunities and inspired by sport and physical activity. Our members raised the issues about accessibility to swimming provision. Following on from this, further enquiries elicited the gap in swimming provision here in the Armagh, Banbridge, Craigavon and Newry Areas. We have progressed at our end raising awareness of these barriers, involving the local politicians with cross-party support from councillors/MLAs including Carla Lockhart, Robbie Alexander, Joy Ferguson, Kyle Savage and also input from the local operational and facility managers from South Lakes Leisure Centre.

The key inclusion milestones are as follows:

- · The ABC sports forum in partnership with Deaf Sports NI and one of Sound Friends kids who is very passionate about this project have delivered deaf awareness course on 15th Feb which was attended by council swimming teachers and swimming club coaches.
- · Partnering with DSNI officers to deliver specific pool-based activities
- · Buildings have hearing loop systems
- · Clear directional signage
- · Council purchased strobe light starting block
- · Council purchased of display cards to aid communication
- · Council purchased and installed the white boards.

We've been working closely with Armagh Planetarium and our members been very fortunate to be invited to the accessible events there.

Events 2024

- 17th February 2024 Armagh Planetarium The Ultimate Bubble Show.
- 13th April Easter Party in Streamvale Farm
- 11th of May. Deaf Awareness Week celebrated in Armagh Planetarium Happy Little Planet BSL/ISL Signed Dome Show. Funded by Heritage Fund.
- 6th October Back to school Party. Airtastic. Funded by National Lottery Community Fund.
- 27th October Halloween Party Newry community Centre/visit to Halloween House of horrors. Funded by National Lottery community Fund.
- 1st of December Mission Santa Armagh Planetarium Funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- 14th of December Armagh Market Place Theatre BSL Signed Panto/Christmas Party. Funded by National Lottery community Fund.

BSL Everyday Sign for children and adults and Physical Activities for kids(dance, Bee Active, martial arts and self-defence) 2024 in partnership with St Joseph's Centre for the Deaf and NDCS.

8 weeks April-June Brownlow Community Hub 1-3pm.

6 weeks September - November 2024. Brownlow hub 2-4pm.

Feedback from families "we enjoyed the relaxed environment. It was fun while learning. Getting together with other families who are local to us. It strengthens our Deaf community and friendship".

Early years 2024 children aged 0-4 years

Started on September 13th, meeting fortnightly in Lurgan.

2024 has become the most successful financial year in the long history of Sound Friends DCS. We received a grant from National Lottery Community Fund which will enable us to continue providing our social programme to families for two years. This whole family approach fosters a sense of community and belonging, so that deaf children feel welcome, included and proud of their deaf identity.

We would also like to highlight that we were the beneficiary of sizeable donation from one of our families who annually put Halloween display in their garden, which was visited by many members of the Newry community. We remain very grateful to this family for their loyal support. One of family's friends nominated us and we received a donation from Lindt Foundation.

Sound Friends also been nominated as one of chairperson charities for Newry and Mourne Council, the committee members along with one of the local families attended few events and as a result group received two donations from the council.

We are exploring the options and working with Newry Council to improve our presence in the area and we are extremely grateful for their support.

Deaf Sports NI supported the swimming initiative with a sizable donation towards developing the swimming resources.

Sound Friends also welcomed donation from Waringstown Primary School.

We continue to work closely with the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) with whom we are affiliated, and upon whose support and guidance we depend. It has been highlighted that there is a gap in service for early years group and our local families feel disadvantaged that they are not able to travel to Belfast to access the services. In consultation and guidance from NDCS we are looking to start the project Communication without barriers for families with kids under 5. The families will become familiar with the techniques of music therapy, play therapy, AVT, sign language and speech therapy.

We also continue to liaise and sign post our members to organisations like NDCS, ADY, BDA.

Many of our families attend Action Deaf Youth (ADY) in Belfast, which supports them in number of ways, including weekly play sessions and formal sign language courses for parents. In collaboration with other organizations, we strive to improve deaf awareness in our local community, to create a deaf friendly environment for our children and all those of the d/Deaf community.

We've been working closely with the Ulster Society for Promoting the Education of the Deaf and the Blind and in 2024 Sound Friends DCS applied to be one of the nominating organizations for distributing of £50 LIDL gift cards. As a result, four of our families received the cost of living support just before Christmas.

Committee members update the public via our page on Facebook, we have a closed group for members which people can join when they fill the membership form, we also have whatsapp group to keep the members who don't have social media updated. We work closely with Social Services in the Southern Trust and get referrals from them and NDCS.

The group didn't hold a formal AGM as per members' feedback. The financial report is available annually. The membership views are gathered through regular feedback after the events.