

# Exploring inclusivity for deaf children in Finland and Sweden

**Emma Peasgood** gives an overview of her trip exploring the services available for deaf children in Finland and Sweden

In June 2018, I was awarded a scholarship from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust to travel to Finland and Sweden to explore what services were provided for Deaf children.

A Churchill Fellowship is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to expand your professional and personal horizons and, crucially, make a difference to communities and professions across the UK.

## Why Finland and Sweden?

Sweden is the first country to recognise sign language as the first language of the Deaf in 1981. TSP did not stem from any other sign languages, but it did influence Finnish Sign Language (FSL) and Portuguese Sign

Language (PSR). Swedish sign language has been in use since the early 19th century and the first deaf school was founded in 1809.

Finland is one of the first countries in the world to have adopted sign language in its constitution (1995). The World Federation of the Deaf is an international non-profit and non-governmental organisation of deaf associations from 133 countries. The WFD has eight Regional Secretariats and one Co-operating Member. Its legal seat is in Helsinki, Finland where the WFD Secretariat operates.

During my time abroad I met with many different agencies and organisations. Some examples include meeting with

rehabilitation workers for the Deaf in Helsinki hospital, social service directors and support workers in Gothenburg, psychiatrists in Stockholm and the Finnish Association for the Deaf and the Deafblind Centre in Tampere. I also was able to participate in a four day family course in Raasapori which enabled me to attend seminars on Deaf children's rights and one from a speech and language therapist developing a tool to enable people in her profession to assess Deaf children's speech and sign more appropriately.

## Findings

I found that interpreter access in Finland is more advanced allowing the service user to have a bank of hours to use with whatever they wish to do.

It was felt that the provision for CODAs was at a higher level, particularly in Finland, where hearing children



*Emma visiting the Finnish Deafblind Centre in Tampere and exploring some of the games accessible for Deaf blind people*

can be taught at Deaf schools if they choose to do so due to sign language being their native language. In Sweden, parents have access to 240 hours of free sign language

provision which is encouraging for Deaf children and their families.

However, currently in Finland and Sweden, there are no specialist social workers for the Deaf and no mental health provisions for the Deaf people. I was surprised to learn that the Sensory service in Kent and Deaf CAMHS service is more unusual than first realised.

Now back in the UK, I would like to share my findings and to promote my service in the hope it will generate interest and encourage other Local Authorities to train social workers to enable them to communicate and understand the needs and challenges that Deaf children regularly face.

Following on from the project, I plan to meet with various stakeholders in Kent to see if we can begin to implement some ideas from Scandinavia. One of these is to identify more ways for CODAs and siblings of Deaf children to become involved and to support them to improve family links. Another plan is to identify ways that the Kent Sensory team can participate in research where learning can be established and shared with other Local Authorities and agencies for future development and good practice for working with Deaf children.



Finnish magazine for families with events for Deaf children



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