



Cumbria Deaf Association - BBC Cumbria Interviews

Monday 15th May – Friday 19th May 2023

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| Monday 15 th May | Interview with Caroline Howsley |
| Tuesday 16 th May | Interview with Members of the Barrow Deaf Club |
| Wednesday 17 th May | Interview with NHS Staff Members |
| Thursday 18 th May | Interview with Kyle Dixon |
| Friday 19 th May | Interview with Cumbria Deaf Association Staff Members |



Interview one: 15th May 2023

Interview with Caroline Howsley

Val Armstrong – It's Val with you until two o'clock today, good to have you with me. I don't know how much you know about the Cumbria Deaf Association, or about the deaf community, because I didn't know one in six people in the UK have some form of hearing loss. Most of it is age related, but there are other causes like exposure to excessively loud noise. There's also around 400 people in Cumbria who have been deaf since they were born. The good news is that there is support out there and a lot of it's offered by Cumbria Deaf Association, which is marking its 130th birthday this year. Well, all this week, as I say, BBC Radio Cumbria Communities Reporter Belinda Artingstall will be looking at what they do and meeting some of those they work with. Today she meets the woman in charge, who has some hearing loss herself, to hear about the association's early days and why, even now, many deaf people still struggle to get the help they need.

Belinda and Caroline have a brief informal chat before the interview starts;

Caroline produces a bible.

Belinda Artingstall - Oh, it is a Bible!

Caroline Howsley - Yeah, because we were formed by the church, we were gifted many bibles, so that every...there you go.

(Opens the bible and reads inscription to Belinda)

“Chapel for the Deaf, Barrow in Furness - this lectern bible was presented by Mr. And Mrs. AJ Middleton 14th March 1953”.

CH - Hello, my name is Caroline Howsley. I'm the Chief Executive Officer of Cumbria Deaf Association.

BA - How and why did the association start all those years ago?

CH - Back in 1893, the church recognised a need to support the deaf community, as it was called then, the deaf and dumb community, and as the church did it looked after many people in need.

BA - How has that support changed over that time?

CH – The support’s moved away from the church community and it's become more independent. The need is still there, and the pride of the deaf community is still there, and the desire to do more is still there.

BA - How would you describe the experience of deaf people in Cumbria?

CH - The experience of deaf people in Cumbria is much the same as a hearing person. It varies individual to individual, but the challenges are there, and because hearing loss is a hidden disability, people don't always factor it in. They take into account physical disability, adaptations, or if someone's visually impaired they'll put different methods of support in place, but people don't think about hearing loss.

BA - So when it says Chapel for the Deaf, what does that mean?

CH - In Barrow there was actually a deaf church. If you come to the Barrow Deaf Centre, you'll see that there are some original glazed panels, stained glass windows, from that church built into the new deaf centre in Barrow.

BA - What kind of support does the association offer to people in Cumbria?

CH - CDA, like many other charities, is recovering from the impact of Covid where the team was brought very much in house, very much smaller. However, the good news is now we're up to a team of ten from a team of six, and we'll be growing more, by the end of this year we expect to be about 15 again, enabling us to do more community support work, taking people out who wants to remain independent, but sometimes need a bit more support so they have a community support worker assigned to them. We now have two in-house interpreters to cover the amount of hours that we are doing, and we also have a training team being established so we can go out and deliver more support and training, so that companies that want to access that language learning can do so through us. We do fun stuff as well, we have family fun days where the family can come along and learn some sign language, so if they have a deaf child, they can bring their Auntie, their grandma, whoever it is, to come along and learn some signs along with them.

BA - You really are there from cradle to grave with some members of the deaf community, aren't you?

CH - We absolutely are. We are there in the birthing ward through to schools, universities, workplaces, even their weddings, we interpret and sign at weddings, and then through to seeing solicitors, house purchases, and then signing at someone's funeral. We really do support the community all the way through.

BA - Is it still very unequal for deaf people in Cumbria? Is there still a lot that needs to make it a more level playing field for them?

CH - What needs to happen is there to be a greater and wider understanding of what hearing loss is, and the range that it covers. Many years ago, people didn't understand that there was an autistic spectrum, and now they do, and I think when people start to understand that hearing loss is a spectrum, will actually be able to better understand how to make adaptations and better support deaf people.

BA - And what would that support look like? How would it be different to what's available now?

CH - People will be given more time, there will be interpreters available more readily, and people wouldn't assume that IT and online solutions are the answer to everything. We've had people who have had to go for cancer treatment or diagnosis, and it was suggested by the hospital that they use the online interpreter. Now would you want to have a diagnosis of cancer being given to you by someone on an iPad? I wouldn't, so why should anyone else?

BA - I think one thing which surprised me was that for deaf people, profoundly deaf people, English isn't their first language.

CH - Well, if you've never heard the word milk, what does milk mean? Wouldn't you want to be able to communicate with someone in a language that they can understand? And sign language is a beautiful language. It is complex, it has a structure and pace all of its own, and it has accents around each area including Cumbria. Cumbria has different signs for different words, depending on whether you're in the north or the south.

BA - Can you give me an example of where a word in British Sign Language would be different in different parts of Cumbria?

CH - The one that struck me when I first started with CDA was the word for biscuit. If you signed having your two hands together and then snapping a biscuit in half, that's one way of signing biscuit, but the other one is to bend one elbow and tap the flat hand on the bottom of the elbow, and that's because with old biscuits, you used to have to tap them to get the maggots out of them! So, there's two different kinds of biscuit sign, but they're all understood.

BA - Ha! Brilliant!

VA - If I don't know any other sign language, I now know biscuit! Yeah, that and tapping under my elbow. How brilliant is that?

Lovely to hear from Caroline Howsley from the Cumbria Deaf Association, talking to Belinda Artingstall. Fascinating as well, apparently sailors in days gone by often had to tap the maggots out of their mouldy ship biscuits after months at sea. So that's where... yeah thats, maggots in biscuits, I suppose when you're at sea for so long and they were made so long ago you could imagine, couldn't you? Maggots in biscuits? In my house I don't even know why they even put best before dates on biscuits. Does a biscuit ever, ever get anywhere near its best before date? I think not!

Guys, we'll hear more about the work done around the county by the British Deaf Association (sic) and meet a whole host of people across the week as our series continues here on BBC Radio Cumbria.

Interview two: 16th May 2023

Interview with Janice and other members of the Barrow Deaf Club

Val Armstrong – If you were with me yesterday, you'll know we started a brand new series, and this is hearing all about the deaf community in the county. Now, most of the members of that community were born deaf, and for many years they were forced to leave home and leave Cumbria to get any form of education, which if you think about it, it's just amazing if you think, it's a strange world.

Now, some of them left home, would you believe, as young as three years of age to attend special residential schools, but that does mean that they formed a special bond which has endured well into adulthood.

BBC Radio Cumbria Communities Reporter, Belinda Artingstall, is looking at the work of Cumbria Deaf Association all of this week and today, she's taking us to the Barrow Deaf Club. The members all use British Sign Language, and they spoke to Janice via an interpreter. Their stories have been revoiced by BBC colleagues.

Belinda Artingstall – We're in the main community room in the deaf club, and they are getting ready for a rather large national event. The clue? Red, white and blue balloons, and bunting, and pom poms, ready to decorate the room for a party that they're going to be having.

Nicola Allaway – Hi, I'm Nicola Allaway. I am an interpreter for Cumbria Deaf Association and Activity Coordinator for Barrow Deaf Club.

It's important to be with people who you've got things in common with. I mean, obviously language is the big issue, if you go anywhere else, you're not guaranteed people will sign. It's a coming home, I think, for a lot of people.

BA - There's a lovely communal atmosphere here, everybody obviously knows each other very well, very comfortable in each other's company, and I think the kettle has just gone on for a cup of tea as well.

Janice Lippet, who is herself profoundly deaf, has worked as a support worker with deaf clients for 25 years, and now runs the coffee mornings at the club.

Janice (interpreted by NA) - When we're here at the coffee mornings, I always try and encourage people to get involved in things, like we have the bingo.

A lot of crafts go on here, but it's about encouraging people to come out and socialise, and not be isolated.

BA - Like a lot of deaf children, you went to a residential school from the age of three in your case. How difficult was that for you and your family?

Janice (interpreted by NA) - I never really thought about it until I had my own child. Looking back and thinking about my Mum and Dad, I just couldn't even comprehend how someone could take their child and put them in a residential school at that age. Mum said she cried every time she dropped me off, but I did enjoy school, I had a lot of friends there.

BA - Which is great, but you must have had struggles? What was the biggest struggle growing up as a deaf person?

Janice (interpreted by NA) - The teachers were really strict about not being able to sign, you had to learn to speak. I just wish the teachers had signed, I would have learnt a lot more if my education hadn't been focused on speech. I would have understood a lot more. The children who go to deaf schools now, and grow up signing, are very lucky.

BA - In one corner of the room is a fantastic mural which charts the history of the Deaf Association and Barrow Deaf Club from the early years at the end of the 19th Century, and comes right through to the modern day. It talks about the sorts of technology they can use, and the lovely thing is that some of the members of the club today are actually on that mural. Ken, we're standing in front of a fantastic mural. Just tell me about this.

(Both looking at the mural on the wall)

Ken (interpreted by NA) - Yes, this was all created by a group of deaf volunteers, we wanted something that saved all the memories and all the history, right back from the start of Cumbria Deaf Association and the club here in Barrow. It starts in black and white tones to reflect the past. In Barrow, they had to go and pull together all the people in the deaf community, so Mr Foster went round on his bike, knocking on doors to discover all the deaf people, and then they rented a room so all the people could meet and get together. There's no deaf schools here, so we went to Preston, or Derby, or Newcastle, so trains have been very important to our history.

BA - *(Looking at the train on the mural)* So there's a picture of a train on the mural to explain that, and Mr Foster with his bicycle.

Ken (interpreted by NA) - Yes, the church was heavily involved in the community, the missionaries ran the deaf club. This was in another building in Barrow, and we brought the stained-glass windows with us when we moved. There's a picture of our old building on the mural.

BA - There are a couple of tables laid out. I think this is where the buffet is going to be for their coronation celebration, lots of lovely silk garlands festooning the fronts of the tables. Chi Wang is one of the youngest members of the club.

Chi Wang (interpreted by NA) - I've just been looking back at the old technology and how different things are now. Now we can use video calls and the internet to communicate, but how did deaf children contact their friends in the past? I can contact my friends all the time, even if they live in different parts of the country. I went to a deaf residential school and then a residential college. I went when I was about 11, or 12, I know the other club members were very little when they went. When I went to school, I was allowed to sign, and they weren't. I do live in the hearing world, more than they do.

BA - You've got a couple of students here on placement who we can hear chatting in the background, because otherwise it's not an entirely silent space this anyway, is it?

Leslie Jackson (interpreted by NA) - No, we have people who speak alongside their signing. Our students really should be signing when they're here, and they're both looking rather guilty right now. *(Laughing with students)*,

BA - Leslie Jackson has been coming to the club for more than 30 years. You must have a close relationship with some of the other members because you were at school together from a very young age.

LJ (interpreted by NA) – Yes, yes, absolutely, that's right. You know the people that you have been at deaf school with are like family. But the schools are shutting which is a shame, today's deaf children are missing out on that deaf family that we had. Could they become more isolated as a result of this? That's something I worry about for the future.

BA - What one thing would you like hearing people to know about what it's like for you as a deaf person?

LJ (interpreted by NA) - We need hearing people to learn some sign language. If you go in the shops, you have to rely on lip reading all the time. Some people do write things down, I'm lucky I can read but some deaf people aren't good readers. English is our second language. Some hearing people have started signing 'Thank you', we need more than that. But it's nice to have a tiny bit of awareness.

Janice (interpreted by NA) - I have a lot of deaf friends, I'm in the deaf camping and caravan club, and we go all over with that. I have a good life.

VA - Interesting. It is interesting, isn't it. When you do hear how their lives have benefited from doing various things, and we do know how problematic it was for the deaf community during the pandemic when people were wearing masks and of course those who relied on lip reading, couldn't, because everybody was wearing masks. We did hear that they became and felt very

isolated, it's little things that we could have done, and we did do, you know, in shops and stuff they started to wear the transparent face shields, rather than the masks. It's interesting. Tomorrow by the way, we will be eavesdropping on a deaf awareness session for NHS staff. These sessions help them to make visits to GP surgeries or hospital less stressful for people with any kind of hearing loss. So, we'll find out more about that on the show tomorrow.

Interview three: 17th May 2023

Interview with NHS staff

Val Armstrong - It can be really difficult for the rest of us to understand the daily struggles that face people who have hearing loss. But we can all help by being a little more patient, and understanding, and by making some very simple changes to the way we interact with them. All of this week we're looking at the work of Cumbria Deaf Association which supports people, ranging from those born deaf, to those who lose some, or all, of their hearing later in life. BBC Radio Cumbria's communities reporter, Belinda Artingstall, spent a morning with NHS staff in West Cumbria, who are taking part in a session aimed at making life easier for any patients who struggle with their hearing.

Karen Edmonson (Group leader) - *(Addressing the group)* So, what I would like to start with is an activity for you guys to do. If you can just get into two huddles and chat about what you value about sound. We take it for granted, and then how would you feel if you lost that sound?

Group member - There's a big difference between day and night, at night you associate that with it being quiet, and daytime, there's more volume. That's another area that you're losing, isn't it?

KE - Hello, my name is Karen Edmondson, I work for Cumbria Deaf Association, I am an interpreter.

BA - You also do training, what was the idea behind the course?

KE - The courses are there to get information out there into the community. I feel that as a hearing society, we forget about deafness, we forget about all the barriers. I'm not teaching anybody anything new, these are all things that everybody knows, but it's bringing them back to the forefront of your mind. The hearing person has to make the changes. They're the ones that have to break the barriers to make sure that whatever their services, or whatever their communication that they're trying to impart, is accessible for all.

Kate Postlethwaite - Missing out on entertainment, missing out on social involvement, missing out on just information.

Hello, my name is Kate Postlethwaite, I work for the patient experience team. I'm based at West Cumberland Hospital.

BA - Why did you want to come on today's session?

KP - So in my job, I speak to patients a lot of the time, and I do get patients that say they can't hear what's being said. But a lot of the time there is such a huge time pressure on staff that information is missed. So, it's really, really, important that we think about deafness a lot more in our roles.

KE - What we have to remember is when you lose a speech sound it's not that everything just sounds a lot quieter. It's actually more like being on a mobile phone and going out of signal (*mimics losing phone signal*), and then your brain is working on overdrive trying to piece the puzzles back together.

BA - So, the people on the course now have been asked to speak to each other without using their voices, as you can tell some of them are struggling with that a bit. But the idea is that they talk about something they did earlier today, without using their voices, to see if the person opposite them can lip read, and read that conversation.

(Group members discussing the activity)

Mandy - I was making a conscious effort to try and miss out on unnecessary words if that makes sense, that didn't need to be there.

Group member - Yeah, I did the opposite. I think I added more in.

Mandy - Like you added the 'So's' and 'so I did this' and I tried to miss out the 'so I did', I just did the 'I had a shower'.

Hi, my name is Mandy. I'm a staff nurse at Maryport day unit. I also suffer from hearing loss, and I am meant to wear a hearing aid which I don't very often. Erm, so, I just wanted to help people or have an awareness, of ways to help people in my kind of situation, because if I struggled to hear people with masks on and not be able to lip read and see people's faces, then my patients are going to be in the same kind of situation. So, that was my main leading reason to come on this course, it's just to be able to make a difference and help other people.

KE - So we've done lip reading, and we've done about sound, and you all now feel that you know that there are a lot more barriers perhaps than you recognised before you walked into this room. I want to just move on and talk about hearing aids. It's one of those subjects that is again so wide, and they're not suitable for everyone, but there are lots of pros and cons to them. So, let's look at that for a bit.

Carla Jade - Hello, my name is Carla Jade and I work for ENT at West Cumberland Hospital.

BA - So that's Ear, Nose and Throat, and why did you want to come on this course?

CJ - I've had a background of doing some previous sign language courses so I wanted to do something while I was based at the hospital and see if it was something that we could incorporate in with the rest of our team.

BA - And what have you found most useful today?

CJ - I think just being able to speak to other people with a similar sort of interest, and see how, from a patient's point of view, things that we do could be made easier for them and their experience at the hospital.

KE - So we're basically going to be pointing with our dominant hand across. Kelly's right-handed (*Kelly uses her hand to demonstrate*). So, you've got five fingers and you've got five vowels, so the first one, if you point to your thumb, the first one is A (*continues to fingerspell the vowels*).

BA - So Karen's colleague, Kelly, who is profoundly deaf herself, is just taking the group through some fingerspelling exercises.

Kelly Francis (interpreted by KE) - My name is Kelly Francis. I work for Cumbria Deaf Association.

BA - How important is it for people, health staff, and other people to come on awareness courses like this?

KF (interpreted by KE) - Absolutely very important. I want them to be aware. I want them to know how vulnerable it can be for a deaf person, to understand what their needs are, to have the empathy, and to help them with what they need.

VA - Hmm, brilliant course. Kelly Francis from the Cumbria Deaf Association speaking through interpreter Karen Edmondson, ending that report from BBC Radio Cumbria is Belinda Artingstall.

Now, tomorrow on the show, we'll be meeting a man who developed tinnitus when he was very young, and has had to live with it basically, day in, day out, and does so even now. But he's using this experience to raise awareness of tinnitus, and of hearing loss in general. That's tomorrow on the show. Don't miss it.

Interview four: 18th May 2023

Interview with Kyle Dixon, who suffers from tinnitus

Val Armstrong - Can you imagine having to listen to this all day (*plays high pitch hissing sound*)? Seriously, can you imagine (*hissing sound continues*)?

That's what Kyle Dixon's tinnitus sounds like to him. Kyle, who lives in Carlisle, is keen to raise awareness of what it's like for him, and others who struggle with the condition. He's also hoping to work on a publicity campaign, with Cumbria Deaf Association, later this year, encouraging people to get their hearing checked if they think that there's a problem.

As part of our series looking at the Association's work, BBC Radio Cumbria's Belinda Artingstall, has been to speak to Kyle about his tinnitus, and how it affects his life. The other sounds you'll hear by the way, are typical of those experienced by many other tinnitus sufferers.

Kyle Dixon - Because I have a hearing loss that I've had since I was young, I've suffered little bits, on and off, all my life, but when it became more permanently (sic) was after I'd been to a music gig in 2009 and I noticed that it was more noticeable, and more long term, and it was starting to affect my sleeping, and my day to day life.

BA - Can you describe what your tinnitus is like, what it sounds like to you?

KD - It can vary a little bit. Sometimes it sounds like the rain on the window, or the best way to describe it is like a motorway, or a busy road in the distance and you can hear the traffic, that's what it's like.

BA - How loud does the tinnitus get? When I'm speaking to you, is it obscuring my voice very much, or not?

KD - Err, not at the moment, I'd say it's quite moderate at the moment. There is times where it does get loud and it is hard to hear. Especially if I'm run down or got a cold, then it's really sensitive, and makes noise really sensitive. At the moment I'd say it's moderate which it probably is 80% of the time. The hearing aids do help it a little bit, but obviously when I take them out on a night and go to bed, that's when sometimes it can suddenly come on.

(Loud tinnitus sound in the background).

BA - When you went to the doctors about your tinnitus and they said it is tinnitus, how did that make you feel?

KD - At the time, I just thought it was an ear infection, so I just went thinking I'll get antibiotics and I'll be alright in the next couple of days. But no, when they said they couldn't see anything and they referred me to the hospital, which I deal with a lot, and they said it could be tinnitus. I'd never heard of it before, I have to admit, and doing the research and reading the leaflets and that, it seemed quite scary, and it was difficult for the first couple of years getting used to it. You can never shut the door from it, it's just there constantly.

BA - And what does that do for your mental wellbeing if you've got this noise there all the time?

KD - Obviously, it affects it, especially on bad days. It affects it a lot. I can wake up and be ok and then the tinnitus gets bad and obviously it brings me down, and it makes me obviously grumpy, and probably sometimes not a very nice person to be around because it does affect me a lot. It's hard as well, especially when you're at work or trying to do something and it's affecting my hearing, making it sensitive. It does bring my mood down quite a lot.

BA - And is there anything that can be done for it? Have you tried things?

KD - There's a lot of techniques, people try white noise, especially when they're trying to sleep, or music. I've tried them and unfortunately, they haven't worked. You can try relaxation therapies and that, and I've tried things like that, and it's just, unfortunately for me, I haven't found something that works yet.

(Loud tinnitus sound in the background).

BA - You posted about your tinnitus on social media, didn't you? What kind of reaction did you get?

KD - A big reaction, I was surprised how it took off. I didn't put it on there to get any sympathy, or anything, it was put on just to make people aware about me as a person. But yeah, it was massive and a lot of people from all over the country got in touch saying, 'thank you for doing it', and 'I've started suffering with it', or 'I've been suffering for a long time'. When I got diagnosed there wasn't very much out there, and it's been that voice for people, and reassuring people that it's not the end of the world. It can affect a lot of your daily life, but you can still get through and enjoy life.

BA - So you can see the positives. You can still have a good life?

KD - Yeah. The things I love affects my tinnitus, so why miss out on things? I'd rather go out and have a really good night, or go have a good time, and then suffer the consequences. It probably is the wrong way to go about it sometimes, but that's just the frame

of mind I got into, because I know that if I didn't, I'd probably just be at home all the time, and probably affecting my mental health more doing that.

(Tinnitus sound in the background).

BA - You are hoping to raise awareness even more with Cumbria Deaf Association. Why do you want to do that?

KD - I run a Twitter account called Non-League Cumbria, which covers local football in Cumbria and it's got quite a good following. It seems to be, that I've noticed in my life, growing up, it seems to be this thing where you're very, very good at hearing or you're profoundly deaf, completely deaf, and there isn't, there's a lot of in between, and I think it's about spreading awareness. A lot of people suffer when they get older, but it's not just down to that, it's down to your work life or anything, and I think just spreading awareness and just telling people. Men in general, men of a certain age can be a bit stubborn sometimes about going to the doctors, just tell them if you do have any hearing issues, or notice somethings not right, just go and get checked out. So that's the main reason why I'm doing it, and why I've teamed up with them.

VA - Well done Kyle Dixon, chatting there to Belinda Artingstall, and the sounds we heard there really do give you an insight don't they into what people with tinnitus are having to deal with. Tomorrow, by the way, in the final piece from Janice, we'll be meeting a relatively new member of the team at Cumbria Deaf Association, and her job is to come up with the ways to support people who lose their hearing later in life. So, that's tomorrow here on BBC Radio Cumbria.

Interview five: 19th May 2023

Interview with some of the Cumbria Deaf Association staff members

Val Armstrong - I don't know if you've been with me most of, if not all, of this week, because we've been looking at the amazing work here on BBC Radio Cumbria, of the team at the Cumbria Deaf Association, and the support that they give to people with a wide range of hearing issues. Well, we've met the members of a club for people who were born deaf, we've been to a deaf awareness session for NHS staff, and we've heard about the constant effects of living with tinnitus.

Well, for the final part of her series, Belinda Artingstall has been chatting to a member of staff at the Cumbria Deaf Association about her own story, and how technology has helped her. She also met a much newer member of the team, who is looking at ways to support other people with moderate, to severe, hearing loss.

Grea Shepherd - Alright, so, this is my little microphone that I use in a meeting, it's sort of a little square device. It has a little flashing light that lets me know that it's on (*shows microphone*).

Hello my name is Grea Shepherd. I work in the office at the moment, but I have worked across all the different sectors within the organisation.

Belinda Artingstall - You have hearing loss yourself, you wear a hearing aid, and you think that that was caused by your lifestyle as a young person in South Africa, the things you were doing back then?

GS - Yes, that's right. Yeah, misspent youth in very loud clubs, I suppose didn't help, and also we used to go shooting; nobody ever wore ear defenders then, and they probably should have. So yeah, I've been living with my own hearing loss, diagnosed in 2006, and have had to get used to wearing hearing aids. But I wouldn't be without them now.

BA - So when did you realise that you had hearing loss? How did that show itself?

GS - It was little hints in my environment that made me realise there were things that I was missing; my children's voices when they spoke to me, I was really struggling to hear them. I have a high frequency loss so it's children's voices for me. There's certain pitches, alarms in the home, and things like that got me thinking that I needed a hearing test. I was originally, I had a mild hearing loss, and I now have a moderate hearing loss. So, over time, because our ears degenerate anyway, I will get deafer.

Caroline Howsley – I meant to ask you actually; how did Claire find the walk that you did the other week?

Lucy Belton - She wasn't particularly fazed by there not being a huge group of people, and she prepared some fun activities.

Hello, my name is Lucy Belton. I work for Cumbria Deaf Association as a Community Coordinator for the hard of hearing and deaf.

BA – This is a new role, so you're still feeling your way a little bit in terms of finding out what people want, and what you can offer. So, it could be about bringing them together to talk about their experiences of hearing loss.

LB – Yeah, absolutely, I think that's a huge part. It can be really isolating from folk that I've talked with around being the only person that they maybe know that has started to lose their hearing, or has a substantial hearing loss, and just what that means in terms of communication challenges, and feeling isolated and not necessarily wanting to be a part of friendship groups, or everyday conversations, going out for a coffee with a friend, or a few friends, becomes 'what's that going to be like?' 'Is it going to be noisy?' There's the espresso machine going off in one corner, there's babies crying, cutlery clattering, and I'm trying to hear someone's voice over all of that, you know. As hearing people, we can empathise with levels of background noise and kind of go gosh, but we still have the ability to tune into whoever it is that is speaking to us at that moment. That just becomes eminently more difficult. Hearing aids don't do that in the same way as the human ear does, so, it becomes just problematic, I think, for a lot of people in finding ways to communicate what their new needs are.

GS – I do you have a remote control for this device, so if I have several dotted around the office, I can mute one and only have the other one on. It transports the sound directly from the microphone into my hearing aids and makes it nice and clear.

BA – The technology sounds great. But I think listening to everything amplified all day is still very tiring, isn't it?

GS – Yes, absolutely. It's one of the things that we find people complain about the most with hearing aids is that the hearing aid amplifies everything. And it is very difficult to listen to an amplified version of life constantly. I'm always very tired at the end of the day having used it.

BA – That might explain why people take them out, which I know can be sometimes a bit annoying to the people around them who are wanting to have a conversation with them.

GS – Yes, absolutely, we find that people say that they do have hearing aids, but that they're in a drawer at home. You're really cutting yourself off from people if you do that.

I really strongly suggest that people use the hearing aids, because what you find if you're not using your hearing aids, is that you're actually affecting the people that you're communicating with, because they can't be spontaneous and they feel like they're on edge where they can't just relax and, you know, spontaneously comment on things.

LB – So, we were playing bird bingo at one point and trying to find kingfishers on the river, and she got the skimming stones, which is all just great tactile grounding activities.

BA – So, you're hoping that you might have groups where people can meet and talk about their experiences. You're also looking at things around wellbeing as well. Can you explain that?

LB – We live in a beautiful part of the country, so we have, about once every month, a walk that we do around sort of wellbeing, but also connecting with nature and obviously getting out physically is a good thing as well.

BA – I mean it's very good for people's cognitive health as well, isn't it?

LB – Yeah, definitely, and we all know that loneliness and isolation is not good for us, and therefore if there are other barriers and obstacles in the way, like hearing loss, what can we do to remove those, what can we do? And who knows, maybe some budding friendships in the mix.

CH – I think I'll go next time because I think I need that to get away from my desk. So, have you got another one planned?!

VA – A brief appearance from Caroline Howsley, the Chief Executive Officer at the Cumbria Deaf Association ending that report from BBC Radio Cumbria's Belinda Artingstall.

If you have any thoughts on support that her colleague Lucy could organise, then they'd love for you to get in touch, and we say a big thank you to everyone involved with the work at the Association who took time to speak to us.

If you want to find out more about what they do, even though we've had a great insight this week, if you want to find out more, you can go and have a look at the website of the Cumbria Deaf Association.

Again, it's these organisations that get on with it in the community, get on with it, they can do so much. We don't even realise that they're and they're doing it, but without them, it would be a worse place, wouldn't it, for so many people - so, well done the CDA.