

Including people with hearing loss in church

Open Ears

00:00:05

And the first of our guests to come on now is from the Open Ears group. Now we talked a bit earlier from with Susan joined us.

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We talked a little bit about deaf with a capital D as those community who use BSL as a first or primary language.

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What we're thinking about now is folks for whom there was hearing and that hearing is going through a process of change or loss.

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So the open ears group are looking particularly at those who have become hard of hearing or going through a hearing loss process and may or may not use BSL as a first.

00:00:43

Or second language, so I'm going to hand over to Marilyn, who's going to present to us about the work of open ears, and then I'll rejoin you in a moment for some questions and answers. So Marilyn, thank you for being here and over to you.

00:00:57

Thank you Katie.

00:00:58

Uh, well I'm hoping some slides will come up.

00:01:04

Yeah, I think they're coming whilst they are coming. I'll just introduce myself and I'm one of these people with a weirdo syndrome, UM, which involves some sight loss. You wouldn't want me driving your car, for example, UM.

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Some spina bifida in my neck actually, and some other neurological problems.

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Uhm, but I am also classified as severely to profoundly deaf.

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I've always been hard of hearing, but my hearing loss has progressed somewhat over the years.

00:01:46

Anyway, welcome to open ears everybody. Uhm, we're a charity. As you could see our logo. Our logo is on the screen and let's go to the next site the next slide, sorry.

00:02:02

This is our sort of strapline if you like and our aim. It's encouraging those with hearing loss to reach their potential and grow in their Christian lives.

00:02:19

Next slide, please.

00:02:23

We're a small Christian charity. We are for people with all degrees of hearing loss. I should say, actually Katie, some of us have been hard of hearing from birth, but others, as you say.

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Have lost hearing over time.

00:02:42



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We bear more towards the all older age group purely because that's the group that's tended to lose hearing, but we are open and raring to go with all adults from the age of 18 upwards.

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Uhm, some of us actually do use British Sign language, UM, but our main group of people come use speech and hearing aids or cochlear implants. And for most of us, our first language is actually spoken English.

00:03:16

Even if we have learnt BSL afterwards.

00:03:19

Next slide, please.

00:03:22

Right, well, I thought I'd divide this talk into two parts really. Part of it's about open ears and part of it is about, well, why do we need openers really? Uhm, because you know, why can't we just integrate or whatever the word is these days?

00:03:42

In church.

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So just to explain hearing aids actually do not.

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Give you perfect Henry.

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They're mechanical amplification devices.

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And cochlear implants are sort of similar, although they work within the air as we know.

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So most of us can hear something with a hearing aid or cochlear implant, but it might just be a noise. You know where there there. It won't actually be words and therefore we will have problems hearing speech.

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We therefore use lip reading to supplement what we can hear.

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Uhm, but as somebody already mentioned, only 30% of that. What we see on the lips is.

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Actually accurate we we can't. We can't get the whole just from watching the lips, but as deaf people do come, we pick up clues from facial expression and body language.

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And if you weren't a very good actor when you started communicating with our group, you will become so because you have to be flexible in your body language and also your expressions.

00:05:04

Another problem with hearing aids is that they don't distinguish between what you want to hear.

00:05:11

And what you don't want to hear. So in other words, we can't ignore background noise. I know that's also a problem for people with auditory processing disorder, so you'll understand where we're coming from there. So in very noisy situations.

00:05:29

Uh, we are going to have a struggle to hear speech over and above the background chatter or clatter or whatever.

00:05:40

Alright, next slide please.

00:05:43

So why do we know you don't need this?



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Now, within their church, within my church, people with hearing loss can be isolated.

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There's just all this noise going around. Or maybe we hear nothing at all.

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And if people are talking directly to us, uhm?

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We won't know what's going on.

00:06:07

We can also be misunderstood now. This often happens because hey again, most of us.

00:06:14

Look perfectly normal.

00:06:18

I'm Bart.

00:06:21

We can't hear what's going on, and sometimes we'll make guesses as to what people have said.

00:06:28

Get long and reply with something that is just totally not what they were getting at at all, which can cause a lot of laughs.

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And to be honest, I laughed with them. But it does mean people might think we're you know, missing a bit up top, and we're not particularly clever.

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Being isolated and being misunderstood means that we're going to be lonely too.

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We don't want to start talking to someone, in case we.

00:07:01

Can't hear them.

00:07:03

And they don't want to talk to us because they don't know how to.

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This makes us unable to follow and participate in church services and house groups.

00:07:17

One point on the House folks, why, why? Why do people think that God lives under the floorboards and they pray like that?

00:07:26

I mean honestly, you know. I mean, I know God is under the floorboards, but it's also everywhere. So you really do not need to look down when you're praying.

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And also finally we would be unable to take part in social occasions for the communication difficulties I've mentioned previously. Also, obviously rely on that as well.

00:07:51

Next slide, please.

00:07:56

As uhm Susan said about deaf people who use BSL.

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It's quite possible if you're hard of hearing and you're not coping in church that you actually stop growing in your Christian faith, and our vision is to encourage hard of hearing people to glow in their Christian faith.

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I also have a personal vision. I know this is my personal vision that I want to see more hard of hearing people and deaf and people in leadership roles within their church. That's a real thing of mine.

00:08:38

But for everyone, we aim to reduce isolation through Christian fellowship.

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We want to provide fully accessible Bible teaching, conferences and social get togethers. And we do this through having speech to text captions. Suzanne, who is working for us today.

00:09:04

Also works for us at open ears.

00:09:08

We also have a BSL interpreter.

00:09:12

Uhm, at our conferences. For those who perhaps find it hard to actually read the caption because of a site problem and and for those of us who actually prefer to watch BSL.

00:09:27

Next slide, please.

00:09:32

I have to say we have two editors who produce what I think is a wonderful magazine called Hearing AI that comes out every quarter.

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And it's really interesting. It contains news about people it opens events.

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Of course, articles.

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And poems written by readers. We have some very talented poets in our midst.

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Christian teaching and we also include a puzzle or two just to keep those grey cells going.

00:10:06

And we also have a website and Facebook pages.

00:10:12

Next slide, please.

00:10:15

This is our Facebook fellowship group.

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We have a fellowship group I don't know quite what's happened to the the bit at the bottom it ought to.

00:10:26

Be showing.

00:10:27

The fellowship group. Anyway, Newman and.

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And we the fellowship group is a closed group.

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Our we also have a Facebook page which is like our public persona.

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As it were.

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And uhm, yes, it's get. It is gradually gradually growing.

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Because many of our Members tend to be on the older end of the spectrum, they are perhaps more hesitant to use social media, but it is beginning to happen and we are growing.

00:11:04

And of course, as the years go by, more and more people will be familiar with social media and be using it.

00:11:13

Next slide, please.

00:11:17

Another thing we can do and do do is provide information and training.

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To enable churches and other Christian organisations to reach out more effectively for those with hearing loss. And we do have some information of course on our website we also have leaflets about hearing loss and also about fitting loop systems.

00:11:43

And stuff like that for people who need those.

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Next slide, please.

00:11:53

Writing code these are our contact details and I understand they will also come up come in the afterwards somewhere.

00:12:06

And I should say, for those who know openears from previously, Please note that we now have a new email address.

00:12:18

To contact for information, it's up there in form of info@openears.org.uk.

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One of our members is in charge of our mobile phone, which of course you can either use to phone him or use, you know text messages as well.

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So I think that's all for me at the moment, so I will shut up and shut down and we'll go on from there for questions.

00:12:58

Sorry, I clicked on the wrong thing on my laptop and a whole window popped up that I didn't know existed.

00:13:03

I was very confused that I I'm back Marilyn. Thank you so much for all that input. I know it was only a very short space of time just to give us a taste and the flavour of what?

00:13:16

Openears does we have a number of technical questions, so I'm going to put them to you one.

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The time ones about language. Are there words and phrases to describe people with hearing loss that we should definitely avoid? And are there better ways?

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Of saying things.

00:13:33

Ha ha.

00:13:36

This is a tricky 1 because it's all down to individual preference, uhm?

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If I am with a culturally deaf person.

00:13:49

I say I'm hard of hearing.

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If I'm with someone with perfect hearing, I might say I'm deaf, yeah?

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It's it's because different people have different perspectives, don't they? I'm quite happy with the term hard of hearing. I have to say and but as as Susan and others have said about this kind of thing.

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Go with personal preference. Some people say I have hearing loss.

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Fine, you know I I don't I. I personally don't have a problem with any of these.

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Dumb, but you know, yeah, go with, go with what the person likes. I can't think of anything particular in our group that would cause immense offence.

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I have to say.

00:14:47

I'm thinking back to the 1970s when the all the language around deafness and disability was unhelpful and we've managed to move away from it, thankfully.

00:14:55

But I still it still pops up sometimes when people want to be rude, they revert to the language of the 1970s and before, so it's good to know that.

00:15:06

That's getting better. Another technical question for you about T loops.

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Some church buildings have them, some don't. Some have them, but they're not turned on. Some have them, but no one knows how to operate them.

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What's your kind?

00:15:21

Of top tip, your your simple solution. 40 loops in churches and are they always the right way to go?

00:15:31

Right, well I can't get you down to one top tip. I would get you down to two, both of which you've kind of touched on. Hey, they don't suit everybody.

00:15:43

Particularly if you have a severe or profound loss and and these days a lot of hearing aids.

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Well, you can't guarantee the hearing aid will have a switch that you can turn on to so you can access a loop for start.

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The second thing I would say is make sure it's on.

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And the third thing, sorry, more than one is that in some cases, if you cite the loop box, the box actually drives the loop. The loop driver 2 near a computer. It makes most awful hissing sounds.

00:16:26

I think they'll go out of fashion over time, but at the moment, if you have a loop system, make sure it's switched on.

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Make sure the wires are plugged in in the box, but don't think that everyone is going to think this is.

00:16:41

Going to be a.

00:16:41

Marvel and that it will solve all your problems.

00:16:47

And ask the people who are using hearing aids, whether it's working or not. Don't just assume it is.

00:16:55

I've been the one of my churches, I I shan't name where for the sake of protecting the innocent, somehow managed to pick up the local taxi firms radio waves on the on the T loop system and nothing else.

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So at one point when I was preaching, someone could hear someone you know, being told about a cab pickup from.

00:17:15

I can't name where it was.

00:17:16

Can I give it?

00:17:16

Away, and I wonder why five people in the congregation started to laugh when I wasn't being about funny. In my sermon, we found out afterwards, so always cheque your technology worked and Marilyn. What do you think are?

00:17:32

Uhm, the the easiest things that hearing churches can do to quickly make.

00:17:40

A significant difference.

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Certain mentioned about don't walk up and down when you're doing your sermon.

00:17:52

That's a good one.

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And I would say both for the preacher and for individuals afterwards when you're socialising.

00:18:02

And all that.

00:18:05

Don't speak too quickly. Keep keep.

00:18:09

The lid on this speech.

00:18:11

But don't speak too quickly.

00:18:14

And make sure that the light is on your face. Don't stand in front of a window so that your face is in.

00:18:21

Shadow, because that way you just get black. Faced with no means of lipreading.

00:18:29

Yeah, I would say those are the two main things.

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I would say.

00:18:37

For anyone with a hearing loss, stroke, hard of hearing, stroke, dash, whatever you want to call yourself and it might be an idea in extremis to always have a pencil and a notepad in your bag, just so that you know if someone wants to say something really important.

00:18:57

You you can at least revert to writing.

00:19:01



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I wouldn't use that unless.

00:19:03

It was really necessary, but you know, it's good.

00:19:05

To be prepared.

00:19:07

Do you think this is from anecdotes and from conversations you've had? Do you think that there are more people in already in leadership who have hearing loss issues but they don't admit it? They just keep struggling on.

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The answer is I don't know because they don't admit it that it keeps struggling on.

00:19:32

Well, incredibly helpful, sorry.

00:19:37

I, I suspect, more people than we'll admit to it's like AM was saying about autism. There are more people who are autistic, but they have learned to pretend not to be so that they can blend in and not have, and then go home and and cry about it afterwards.

00:19:53

Because the inclusion hasn't been there, and I suspect there's many like you said, lonely people in our churches who just can't hear what's going on but haven't admitted it maybe to themselves, but certainly not to those around them. Do you think it's hard to admit that hearing is a problem?

00:20:10

Some people do find it hard to admit it took me considering I've had a hearing loss. Practically probably all my life.

00:20:22

It really wasn't until others, maybe in my 40s, something like that.

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That I would come out and say, look.

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I I actually have a problem here.

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Can you, you know, speak more clearly or whatever?

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Uhm, you have to be a bit careful with that though. 'cause one of my colleagues who again shall remain in.

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This group speak like like a fish.

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I didn't know whether to laugh or cry, 'cause I couldn't. I couldn't follow.

00:20:57

Him and then the more.

00:20:58

He tried to make himself.

00:21:01

Easily communicated with.

00:21:04

The worse it got, I just got a complete blank so please do not exaggerate. That's another thing I would say just speak a little more clearly and slowly.

00:21:14



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And it's interesting you said about lip reading. 'cause I I asked my son if he would record something for me for a Sunday service and he put his headset on and he put his microphone right across his mouth like this and I said to him can you just just put it down there?

00:21:28

Why Mama? Because people lip reading will need to be able to see your mouth and your beautiful face. And if you cover it with your.

00:21:34

Microphone then it makes it harder for them to understand, and as we were halfway through this conference, I suddenly looked at myself on screen and went Oh my microphone's covering my mouth.

00:21:44

Epic fail even. I am Marilyn on that bombshell. Thank you so much for being with us and I know people can contact you directly through the website and through Facebook and Twitter and they can get hold of you and you are happy you and your group are happy to come and visit churches or do zoom conversations.

00:22:03

Just to help churches become more accessible for those who experience hearing loss, but also for people themselves who are in that place of hearing loss on their own journey, can reach out to you and know they're not alone. So thank you so much for being with us today. Thank you.

00:22:20

You're welcome.