



**Health insights with our
D/deaf community**

Grant & scope

After being awarded funding of £500 from Great Linford Parish Council (GLPC), Healthwatch Milton Keynes (HWMK) delivered an engagement and focus group specifically for our D/deaf communities, covering a range of topics.

While the grant awarded was less than applied for, HWMK the grant specifically paid for British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters for the Health Insights With Our D/deaf Community Event in January and partially paid for the interpreters who worked at a HWMK health event in February.

As part of the grant application, HWMK stated that using BSL interpreters will help deaf people communicate with Healthwatch on their local Health and Care Services and needs, so that we can use our respected voice to ensure other care professionals are aware of the Parishes' D/deaf community's treatment and care.

HWMK considered and actioned the following points when planning and delivering the event:

Q **Accessibility and Inclusion**

Using credible, qualified BSL interpreters will ensure that all D/deaf participants, within the parish, who use BSL can fully engage in all health inequalities discussions, making the event and its outcomes inclusive and accessible to everyone.

Q **Effective Communication**

Our deaf communities across the parish tell us that BSL interpreters facilitate clear and accurate communication between deaf and hearing participants, reducing misunderstandings and ensuring that all voices are heard.

Q **Legal Compliance** Providing a BSL interpreter helps us comply with legal requirements for accessibility, such as the Equality Act 2010 in the UK, which mandates reasonable adjustments to support disabled individuals.

Q **Enhanced Participation**

Deaf participants can contribute their perspectives and experiences more effectively, enriching the discussion and leading to more comprehensive and diverse insights, these areas can be missed if the communities are not enabled to take part.

Q **Improved Outcomes**

When all participants can communicate effectively, the quality of the feedback and the overall outcomes of all our focus group are likely to improve.

After engaging with numerous members of our D/deaf communities throughout our ongoing 'British Sign Language' (BSL) project, we've discovered that this group is **"so accustomed to a lack of accessible BSL interaction"** that they are unlikely to attend events unless they are specifically designed for them and provide the necessary interpreters. As a result, they often miss out on important and relevant health information and updates that affect them.

Planning

Two requirements of the grant stated that the event needed to take place within the boundaries of Great Linford Parish and before the end of January 2025. We selected the Parish Office at Great Linford House as the venue, which provided a variety of facilities for attendees, including audio-visual equipment and a hearing loop to enhance accessibility. The event was held on 27th January 2025.

To customise the event, we contacted Carron Huggett, a leader within the community, to inquire about the topics that the D/deaf community in Milton Keynes wished to hear, learn, and discuss. She came back to us noting that the community wished to hear about dementia, heart health and mental health. With this information, we reached out to professionals from those specific fields and invited them to present at the event, allowing time for attendees to ask questions.

The funding from GLPC was allocated to hire two BSL interpreters, Clare Barrs and J'enna Ashby, who are both highly regarded in the local D/deaf community. HWMK has previously collaborated with both interpreters at past events. Total spend for the event was £1457 which included room hire, staffing, communications, travel and refreshments.

Promotion

HWMK promoted the event widely across Milton Keynes through various social media platforms, including Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram, this included a paid 'boost' which gained good traction on the week of the event. Flyers were distributed to key stakeholders for sharing through their communication channels via email.

Those who wished to attend the event were encouraged to book via the booking page on HWMK's website.

Event flyer



Event

The event itself, was similar to a seminar with guest speakers who each gave a 15–20-minute presentation on their particular field of expertise and then opened for questions.

HWMK also presented on the need for the session stating: ***“It’s really important that you share your experiences – whether good or bad, happy or sad. If you’ve had a negative experience, it’s easy to think there’s no point in complaining, and that ‘nothing ever changes’ Or, if you’ve had a great experience, that you ‘wish you could say thank you’. Remember, your feedback is helping to improve people’s lives. So, if you need advice, or you’re ready to tell your story – we’re here to listen.”***

The three speakers we asked to attend the event were:

- 🕒 Dr. Andrew Potter – MBBS, MRCGP, MRCP, MFSRH and accredited in Community Echocardiography, Whaddon Healthcare.
- 🕒 Louise Bates – Communication & Volunteer Lead, Alzheimer’s Society.
- 🕒 Spencer Soilleux – Head Occupational Therapist (OT) – Milton Keynes Mental Health. Central and North-West London NHS Foundation Trust.



Andrew Potter presented on heart health covering a range on issues such as hypertension, cholesterol, exercise & lifestyle. He also covered symptoms to watch for and smart watches to keep a check on the heart.

Louise Bates presented an insightful session on dementia that featured a signed video detailing symptoms and available services. She also discussed specialised BSL screening services offered to the D/deaf community. Additionally, Louise provided useful tips on how deaf individuals can effectively navigate their website.

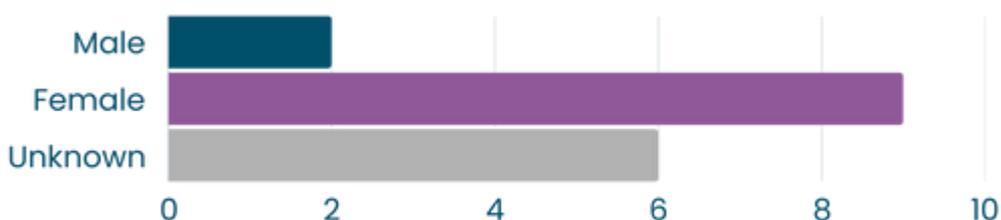
Spencer Sollieux was regrettably unable to participate in the session due to illness. He was scheduled to present on the mental health services offered under the CNWL banner, focusing on accessibility. Instead, HWMK took over this portion of the session, as they are well-acquainted with local services.



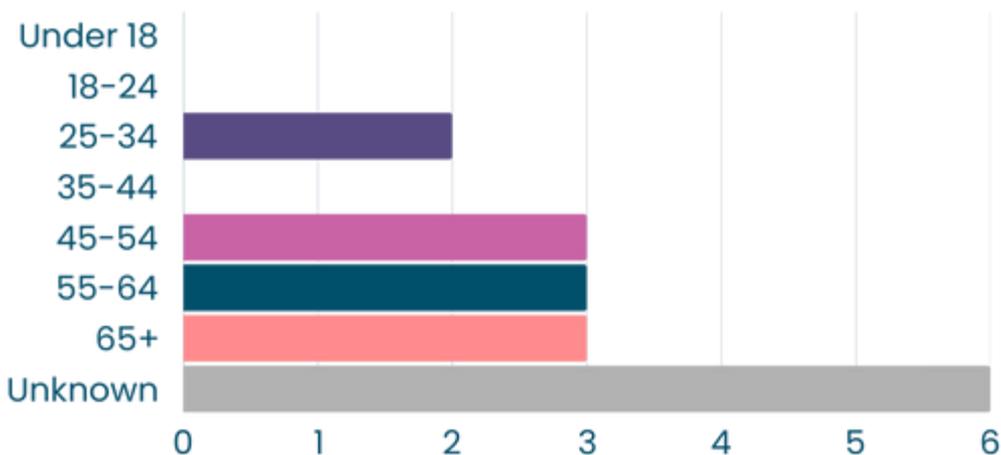
Attendance and feedback

Seventeen people attended the session along with the two BSL interpreters and two Healthwatch Milton Keynes staff. A short feedback survey was presented towards the end of the session. Eleven attendees completed the survey giving us the demographic breakdown shown below:

Gender



Age

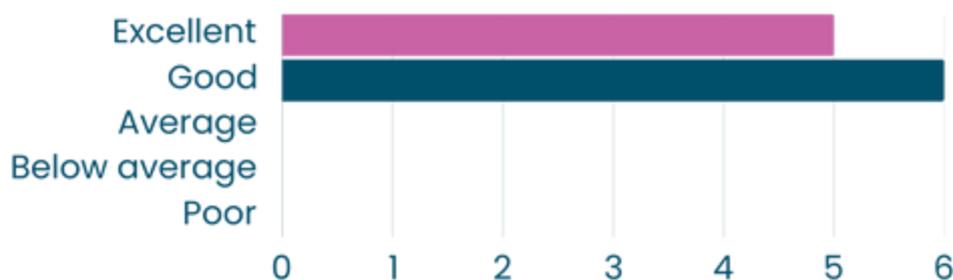


When asked What they liked the most about the event, responses included ***“The range of topics discussed.”***, ***“The sharing of info.”*** and ***“Having BSL interpreters present at the event.”***

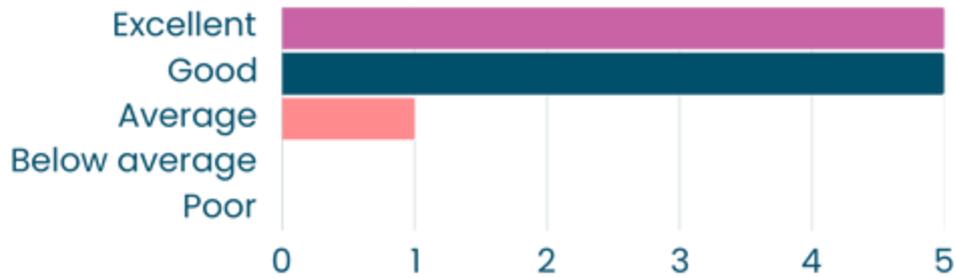
Attendees were asked what HWMK could do to improve in future events. Answers included ***“Deaf presenters”*** and ***“More info around autism, asthma and diabetes.”*** Three people that completed the survey asked for more publicity online. One person stated that ***“Nothing can be done to improve!”***

Other results from the survey were very positive:

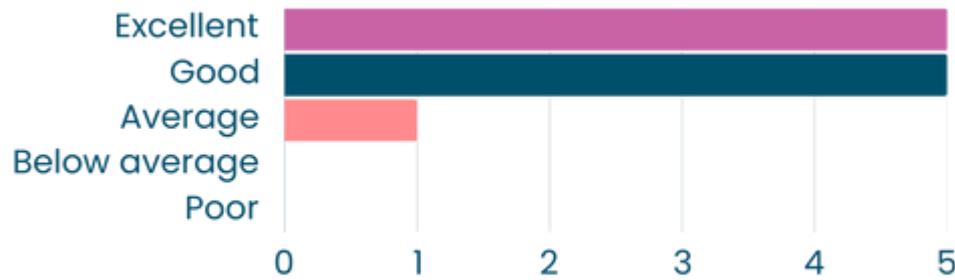
How would you describe the overall organisation and planning of the event?



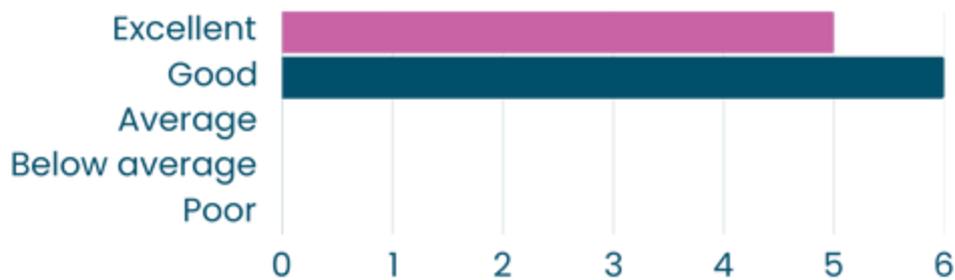
How would you rate the relevance of the event content?



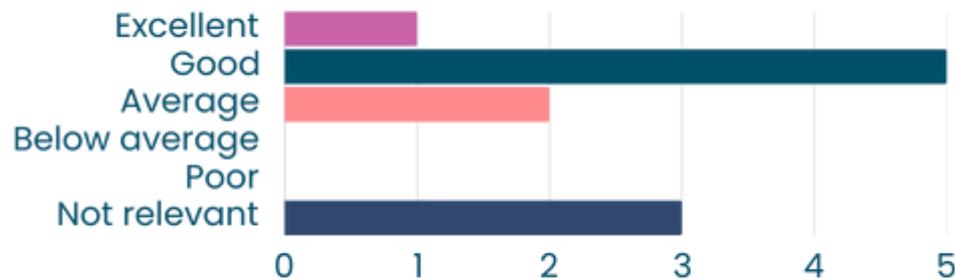
How would you rate the quality of the speakers?



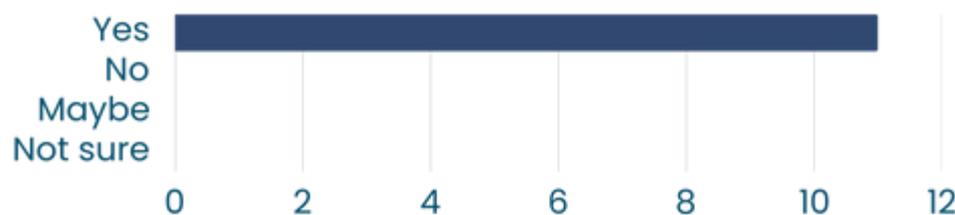
How would you rate the venue and facilities?



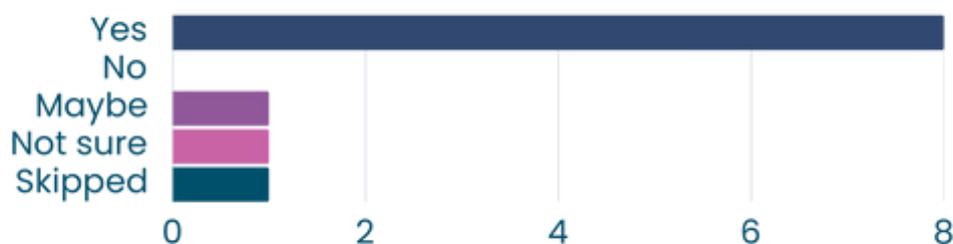
How would you rate the networking opportunities? (where relevant)



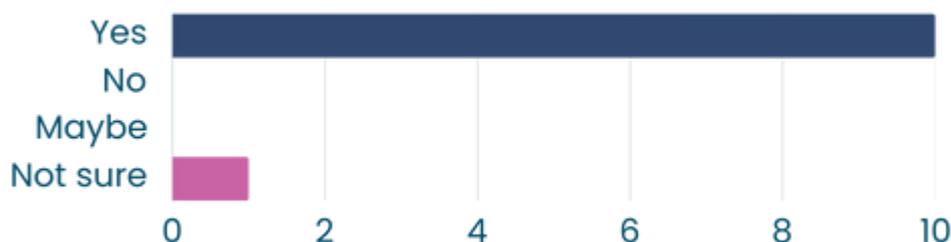
Did the event increase your knowledge and understanding of the topic being discussed?



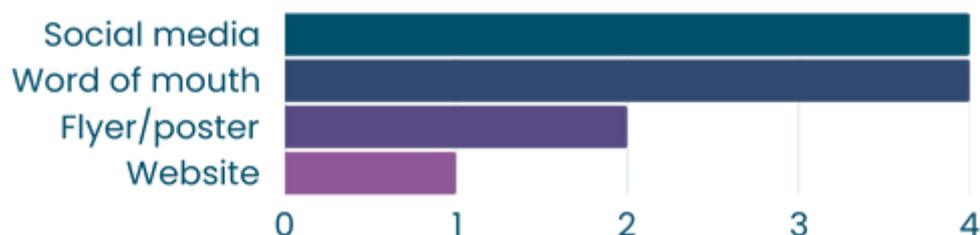
As a result of this event, do you think you will make any changes, or take any action, in relation to your own health and wellbeing?



Based on your experience, would you attend another Healthwatch Milton Keynes event?



How did you hear about this event?



Our two BSL Interpreters, J'enna and Clare, who attended the event told us ***“Many thanks for asking me to attend, what a great turnout to a great event.”*** and ***“What a well put together event, that was much needed for the community. It'd be great if I was considered for any future HWMK events.”***

Evaluation

Conversations with community leaders following the event have emphasised the importance of Healthwatch Milton Keynes organising these types of events for the D/deaf community more regularly and to cover other topics that were raised with those who completed the feedback survey and by the BSL interpreters present at the event.

HWMK held an event on February 15th aimed at engaging with our under-served communities. This was promoted within the D/deaf community. Attendees were given the chance to explore a variety of local health and social care services. The event included BSL interpreters, which was warmly welcomed and appreciated by the D/deaf participants, highlighting the importance of continuing our efforts with this group.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Great Linford Parish Council for boosting our funding, enabling us to offer BSL interpreters for an important event supporting the D/deaf community.



healthwatch

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