

# BSL Health Navigator

Working in partnership to transform healthcare experiences and outcomes for Deaf people

---



# Why was there a need for a British Sign Language (BSL) Health Navigator Service?

Feedback had been received about poor service for BSL users from various sources:

- An analysis of complaints from D/deaf patients
- Concerns raised with senior leaders / MP enquiries
- Co-design sessions supported by NHCT's Patient Experience team and Deaflink (a charity offering support to D/deaf, Deafblind, Hard-of-Hearing and Deafened people and their families across the North East)
- Feedback from staff about their lack of knowledge and how difficult it was to find BSL interpreting services
- Work to meet the Accessible Information Standard, that highlighted a need to improve standards for D/deaf, Deafblind, Hard of Hearing and Deafened people and their families

# What is the BSL Navigator Service?

The BSL Health Navigator service from Deaflink is an innovative programme that seeks to help BSL users to better access healthcare. It does this by delivering 5 key elements:

1. Supporting the flow of communication and information
2. Helping people to prepare for and attend healthcare appointments and treatments
3. Preparing for and supporting discharge home or to alternatives, like care homes
4. Community engagement and health promotion with BSL users and the Deaf community
5. Providing a responsive intervention for the BSL community when an urgent healthcare access need arises

# BSL Health Navigators

---

We:

- Are from the BSL community ourselves
- Are based in a known and trusted BSL organisation
- Will support and advocate for BSL users
- Work with you to improve the Deaf patient experience

For more information visit [www.Deaflink.org.uk](http://www.Deaflink.org.uk)

## BSL HEALTH NAVIGATORS



Using a hospital in Northumberland, Newcastle or North Tyneside? Use BSL?

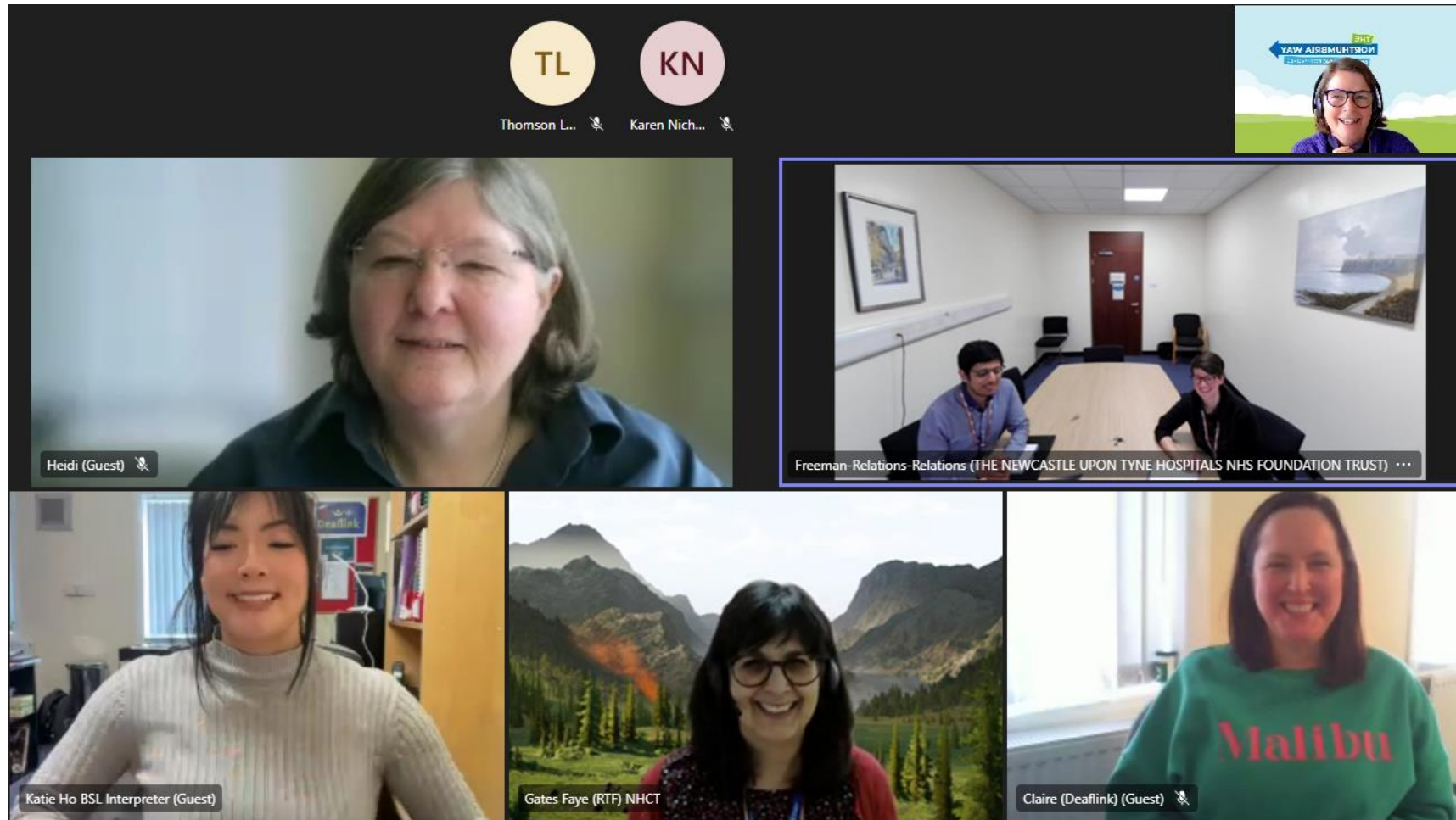
- Support
- Information
- Communication



# Working together as a multi-agency partnership

- Deaflink has been working with three NHS Trusts to explore issues faced by BSL users in accessing healthcare services
- Our work together has highlighted significant inequity in access and treatment for BSL users and a lack of understanding about the unique aspects of BSL as a language of its own
- We established a working group across CNTW, Newcastle Hospitals and Northumbria Healthcare which is supported by Deaflink, the Bright Charity, Newcastle Hospital Charities and NENC ICB. We also won one of the highly prestigious Health Foundation Q-Exchange funding awards for 2023.
- Two Health Navigators were recruited and offer a service to BSL users.
- We have been investigating patient experience from a BSL user perspective and capturing case studies for learning.
- We set up an additional operational working group to try to improve access to BSL interpreters, as this was a key factor of poor experience and accessibility.
- Each Trust has been undertaking a series of improvement projects, such as estate audits, trying to improve access to video and face to face interpretation, improvements in letters, information, signage, web pages, identification of BSL users in health records, staff training and awareness raising etc.

# Our multi-agency steering group meets monthly and includes a BSL interpreter for members



# Which sectors of the system have benefitted from this service?

Whilst patients from the three participating NHS Trusts have been the highest health and social care users from the service, a wide range of additional system partners that are not currently a part of the multi-agency steering group have benefitted from the service, along with Deaf people and their families, carers and personal assistants.

People who have benefited from Health Navigator Service contacts

The three participating NHS Trusts

Patients, family, carers and personal assistants

Pharmacy, patient transport, dentist, wheelchair services and others

Primary care

Interpreter agency

Social care and care homes

# Which types of healthcare have been served?

Many individuals using the Health Navigator Service required multiple touchpoints of Health Navigator support, often across numerous specialities because:

- Most health care episodes require frequent access points from start to finish to ensure successful outcomes (primary care, inpatient, outpatient, pharmacy, care home, social care etc). **On average each client had over 22 Health Care Navigator appointments each to access their healthcare appropriately.**
- Co-morbidity is a known feature of the Deaf community, meaning multiple healthcare episodes can be in play at the same time. Over 70 types of health conditions have been supported.

## Medical Specialities Served

ENT	Autoimmune-MSK	Ophthalmology
Renal	A&E	Cardio-vascular
Respiratory	Cancer	Acute mental illness
Stroke	Diabetes	Colorectal
Dermatology	Gastroenterology	Gynaecology
Haematology	Minor Injury	Dementia
Burns	Mental health: Counselling	Primary Care



# Uncovering patient & staff stories for multi-agency learning and improvement

“In order to access and understand full information, I rely completely on a BSL interpreter. And I was not provided with one. To this day, I am not sure why I have blood in my urine or why I need to have a CT scan to check my kidneys/abdomen/pelvis”

“The information I received from my chest appointment was in written format. This is difficult for me, BSL is my first language so I require someone to translate this into BSL. I rely on a BSL interpreter to help me understand any information relating to my illnesses, treatments and medication. That is the only way to ensure I have full access to health information.”

# Overarching learning



- The Health Navigator programme has helped us to identify multiple improvements that we need to make as individual Trusts, but our biggest learning is that we need to improve the whole patient journey by working together at system level as a multi-agency partnership.
- Many of the appointments the Health Navigator supported were for primary care, social care and dentistry, wheelchair services etc, not just hospital visits.
- Working together has meant that we are able to compare data to drive improvements and reduce unwarranted variation.
- It has helped us to identify key system issues, such as lack of access to interpreters, which we have then been able to address as a multi-agency partnership.
- Including people with lived experience of the BSL community in our meetings has meant we now have deeper insight into the issues and more effective solutions.