



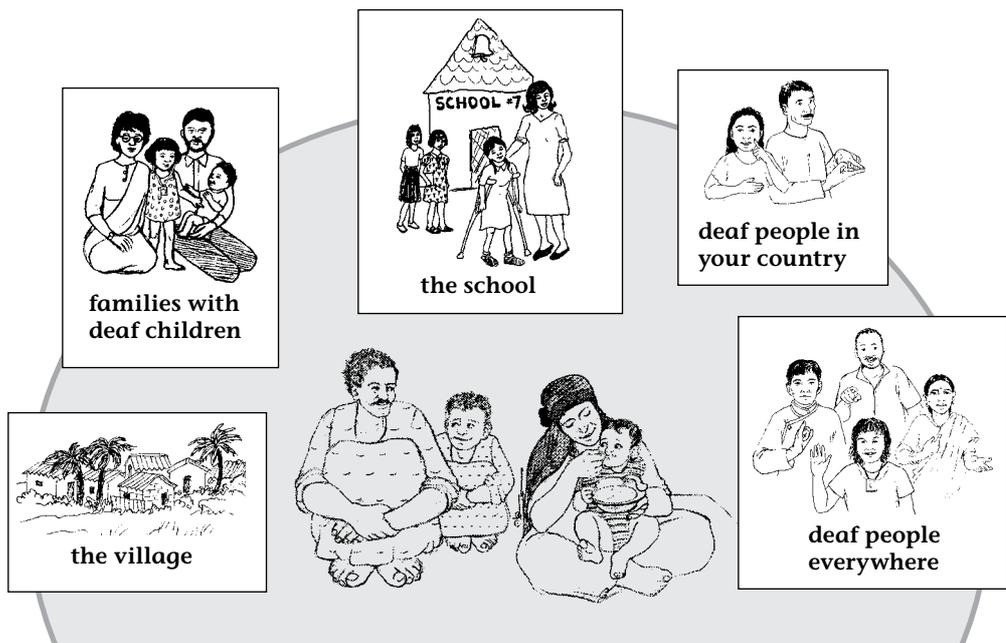
## Chapter 11

# Working together to help children who are deaf

There are many ways that people in communities can work together to make a difference for their deaf children. They can make the community a better place for children who are deaf by raising awareness about the needs and capabilities of people who are deaf or cannot hear well. Communities can support families with children who cannot hear well and they can make it possible for deaf children to get an education.

### What is your community?

The main community that most people consider their own is their neighborhood, or the area where they live. But there are many other kinds of community. Many groups can provide support for deaf children and their families since families with deaf children often belong to many different communities at the same time.



## CHILDREN WHO LEARN AND PLAY TOGETHER FORM A COMMUNITY

Children are a natural community for each other. But children need encouragement to include others who are different from them — whether they are deaf or have some other difference. Adults and older children can help children learn to respect others and to develop qualities like patience, fairness, and caring. For more information about how to encourage children with different hearing abilities to relate to each other, see Chapter 10 on developing social skills.



## DEAF PEOPLE FORM A COMMUNITY

Sometimes, people who are deaf may feel there is no community that cares about their welfare. In many communities, people who are deaf or cannot hear well are made to feel unwelcome by their families, relatives, neighbors and others who do not know how to communicate with them. Sometimes other people laugh at them and tease them. And it can be especially hard for parents of a deaf child to see their child getting teased by other people. Wherever they are, people who are deaf or cannot hear well often face similar problems. Many deaf people still have few opportunities to take their place within society.

Deaf people often feel a close bond with each other because they face similar problems and share a similar way of communicating, like sign language. Whether they live nearby or must travel to visit each other, deaf people play a very important part in each other's lives.



Anywhere there are 2 or more deaf people together, there is a community — created by the common experience of being deaf.

People who are deaf can be a source of comfort and guidance to each other. When they can meet together they usually form very strong communities. Communities may form around deaf schools, as deaf children learn and grow up together. Or deaf people may gather in deaf clubs, work cooperatives or religious organizations.

Deaf adults can also be a great help to families that are raising deaf children, because they understand the needs and challenges these families often face.

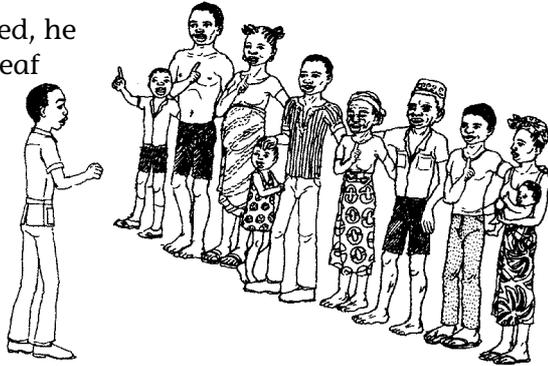
## HEARING PEOPLE WHO WELCOME DEAF PEOPLE CAN HELP BRING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

Many hearing people realize the value of friendship with deaf people. They may have deaf friends, work with a deaf person, or they may have family members who cannot hear well. Hearing people who are comfortable communicating with deaf people can build bridges between the hearing and deaf communities. When hearing people learn sign language, they can help deaf and hearing people understand each other and help deaf children thrive.

### Joseph and the deaf choir

Joseph, a young man from Haiti who can hear, learned sign language at a class in his neighborhood. Joseph made friends with some of the deaf people in his city. They encouraged him to volunteer at a church that held prayer services for deaf people. Joseph learned to translate the prayers from spoken language to sign language.

As he got more involved, he began teaching young deaf people at the church to sign (and sing out loud) some of the songs that were used in the prayer service. Soon a whole choir of young deaf people was singing and signing with him.



Now Joseph and the deaf choir drive far into the rural mountains of Haiti where they sing at other churches. Many people approach Joseph to ask him about the choir, and tell him about the deaf children in their own families.

Joseph uses the opportunity to tell people about a program for young deaf children in one of the towns, and about the residential school for older deaf children in his city.

By bringing young deaf people to rural churches, Joseph has been able to bring the hearing community and the deaf community closer together.

## Making the community a better place for children who are deaf

### RAISING AWARENESS

The way that adults and older children act towards deaf children can have a strong effect on others. For example, if people include deaf children in their activities, or if they oppose poor treatment of deaf children, it is more likely that others will follow their example. Here is a story about a school principal in Mongolia who used his position to influence how deaf children were treated in his school.

#### A school learns to welcome deaf children

In one town in Mongolia, a few families worked hard to organize classes for deaf children in their local school. After some cases of teasing and making fun of the deaf children, the school principal called all the students to a meeting and explained to them that this behavior was not acceptable, and that all children at the school should feel welcome.

Everyone's behavior changed when the school principal insisted on better treatment of the children who could not hear.

As time passed, the teachers, parents, and students began to feel proud of their deaf classes and feel responsible for the students. Now, when the other children meet their deaf schoolmates outside the school, they are friendly to them. Children from other classes often visit the deaf class, and some of the older girls have taught the young deaf children the complicated steps of traditional Mongolian dances.



#### Help people communicate with your child

Adults and children in the community can help deaf children by interacting with them. They must treat deaf children with the same respect and kindness they show to others. When community members communicate with deaf children, they will learn that children who are deaf are just like other children.

Encourage people to communicate with your child whenever they see her. Introduce her to people you meet. Show them how to greet her, and teach her how to greet them. Just as you teach a hearing child the name or term of respect for each person you know in the community, teach your child a sign or spoken name for each person, and teach people your child's sign or spoken name.

People in the community may feel more comfortable with your child if you explain how to act, and show them a few signs or gestures. Explain to people that it is best to be at the same eye level as your child when they talk or sign to her. People can use gestures and expressions on their faces as if they are communicating with a child who can hear.



Families of deaf children can organize programs for people in the neighborhood to help them understand about 'differences', respect, and awareness of deafness and hearing. They can help their friends and community-based groups to welcome children who are deaf or 'different' in other ways.

People will better understand a child who does not hear well if they can get an idea of what that might feel like. Here are some fun ways to learn. These games can be used in public places such as churches, temples or other religious places, clinics, schools, and community groups. You can use them during awareness-raising sessions or during a parents' meeting.

### ► **How to help hearing people understand what it is like to be deaf or not hear well**

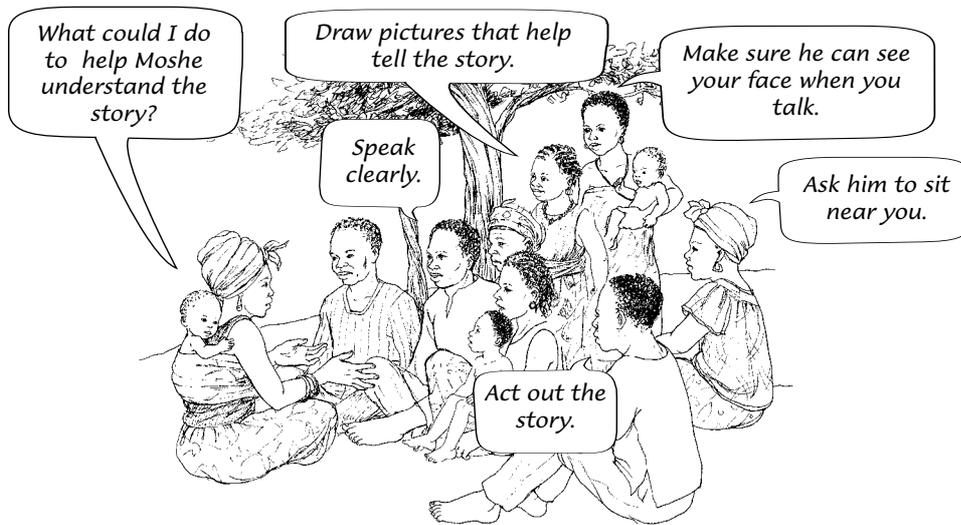
#### **Game: What did you say?**

One person covers his ears while another tells a funny story to the group. Or people can take turns sitting far away, so they cannot hear the story. Another person asks everyone questions about the story, including the person whose ears were covered or who sat far away.



Ask this person what it felt like not being able to hear the story well.

Then everyone can talk about what they can do to communicate better with children who really do have difficulty hearing.



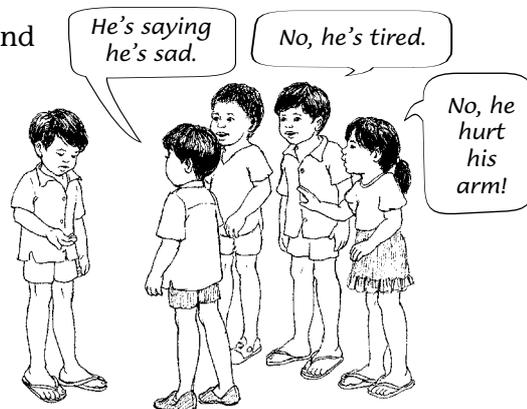
### ► **How to help children communicate without speech**

Children who have difficulty hearing usually have difficulty speaking. Their speech sounds strange to people who can hear. This is because people who cannot hear have no way to know how speech is supposed to sound. It is very hard for them to speak like hearing people do. As a result, many deaf people choose not to speak, and communicate only with gestures, or signs or sign language. People with different hearing abilities may feel shy and only talk to the people they know well.

Ask a group of children if they know other children in the community who are deaf or cannot hear well. You can all discuss ways to communicate with children who have different hearing abilities.

### **Game: Talking without words**

This game will help children understand how difficult it can be for a child who cannot speak, or who cannot speak well, to communicate. Everyone takes turns trying to say something to the group without using words. Begin with easy ideas, like 'I am sleepy', or 'give me the ball'. Then try harder ones, like 'I'm lost and can't find my house', or 'I had a bad dream'.



Afterwards, you can talk about:

- Was it difficult to explain something without talking?
- How did you feel when someone did not understand?
- What did other children do that helped you communicate with them? What else could they have done to help?
- How might you communicate with children who cannot speak?

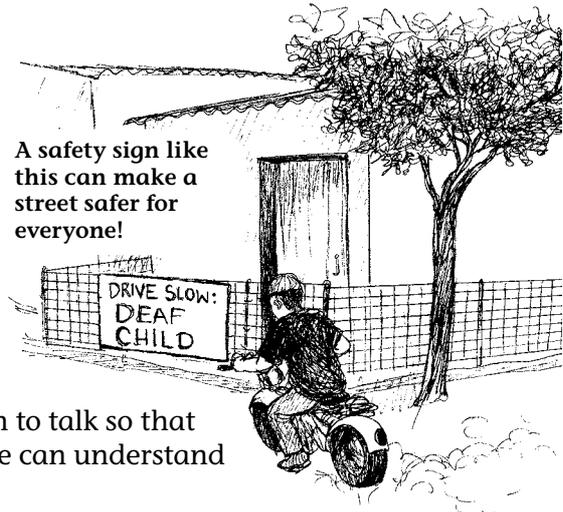
Then you could make up some signs for the ideas you tried. See how much easier it is to communicate with signs.

This is a good time to tell children about their local sign language or about how families can make up signs to help each other communicate (see Chapter 4). To help children learn some home signs, see pages 40 to 43 in Chapter 4.

## SERVICES FOR DEAF CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

All people need basic services such as water, electricity, transportation, education, and health care. It usually takes the resources of a whole community to provide services like these. The same is true of services needed by deaf children and their families. People in the community have knowledge, resources, and skills they can share. By working together, a group of families or an entire community can organize efforts toward things like:

- learning how to check the hearing of young children.
- helping local health workers learn to recognize and treat ear infections, which can help prevent deafness.
- finding a place where families with deaf children can meet.
- organizing speech or sign language classes.
- helping hearing people learn to talk so that children who can hear a little can understand them.
- translating between sign and speech at schools or play groups.



One group of parents in India worked to bring hearing aid services to their town, so that children would have trained health workers nearby to fit, repair, and maintain their hearing aids.

A parents' group or village health association can invite organizations or people from outside the community to visit the village to start new services, give training, or lead discussions. Or the community can collect money to send one person for training. This person can then train others when she returns.

## Form support groups

Families of deaf children are important resources for each other. By organizing regular meetings, they can help each other with problems they face, and share suggestions of new ideas and opportunities for their children.

This can be a great help, not only in organizing for their children's needs, but also in giving each other support as they overcome challenges.



The community can help this happen by providing space for meetings (for example, at a local temple, church, or mosque) and by letting people know about the meetings, so that other families can join.

Families with deaf children face many similar challenges and experience similar joys. See Chapter 14 for examples of how parents can start a group where they share feelings, information, and ideas to make a community more supportive for their children.

## OTHER COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS CAN GIVE SUPPORT

Many local community-based groups such as women's groups, parents' groups, farmers' groups, or credit or income generation groups can provide support to parents of children who have difficulty hearing.

For example, families may need extra time to teach and look after a child who cannot hear well. This might make it difficult to find paid work outside the home. A community-based group could help parents find ways to earn an income. Community-based groups such as a mother's group can also help deaf children get hearing aids, find resources to pay sign language teachers, arrange opportunities for early childhood education, subsidize payment of school fees, or help in other ways.

## BRING DEAF CHILDREN TOGETHER WITH OTHER DEAF PEOPLE

A community's efforts to support deaf children can also bring them together. When children who are deaf or cannot hear well have an opportunity to meet together they can begin to form a natural community and develop their language and communication skills.

One town in China took a survey to find out how many deaf children there were who might attend a deaf school. Because of this survey, two families living next to each other were surprised to find that they both had deaf family members who had never met!

If you live in a large town or city, you can probably find ways to meet other deaf people. Even if you live in a small village there may be some deaf and hearing people who communicate using signs and gestures. They will often be happy to help families with deaf children.

Many larger communities have social clubs, associations, or large informal groups made up of people who are deaf. Sometimes these associations have programs for deaf children and their families. You and your child will be welcome there.



**Deaf people who communicate well are often the best teachers and advisors for a family with a deaf child.**

Every year the Delhi Foundation of Deaf Women, in India, has a talent contest for deaf children. After the contest, families meet and learn about deafness. This is part of the foundation's 'Catch Them Young' program to involve families with young deaf children in deaf community activities.



## HELP DEAF CHILDREN GET EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Many families struggle to give their children who cannot hear well the chance to go to school. It takes time, energy, and resources to organize opportunities for deaf children to learn. But when a whole community works for educational rights for deaf children, it can make a big difference.

Chapter 12 describes in more detail the benefits that different kinds of schools or classes may have for deaf children and their families.

Communities interested in organizing better education and training for deaf children should contact their local or national association for the deaf, and the Ministry of Education. This will help them learn more about the opportunities and laws about deaf education in the area. The laws of most countries support the rights of all children — including deaf children — to a public education.

### **Awareness is the first step towards change**

Deaf adults, parents, and community members must work with government officials so that the officials know the needs of deaf children and what deaf children can be capable of.

Together they can dispel the ignorance and the myths that surround deafness.

*If the president or the prime minister had a child who could not hear well, then there would be schools and teachers for our children!*



Here are some ways a community can help schools meet deaf children's needs better:

- Offer extra training to teachers so they can learn how to communicate with deaf children.
- Invite deaf adults to help teachers, families, or students learn sign language. Or they can work in the classroom and give extra attention to the deaf students. Chapter 12 includes more activities that help deaf children learn in local schools.
- Offer extra training in skills that will help students earn an income.

Bringing deaf children together in their own school or classroom can create a community of children who might otherwise have been isolated from each other. Some communities get money from local or national associations, donor organizations, or their government to help pay for training and facilities.

## EVERYONE BENEFITS FROM EFFORTS TO SUPPORT DEAF CHILDREN

The entire community becomes stronger when people take care of each other, are responsible for each other, and when they accept people's differences as well as the things they have in common. So when attention is given to the special needs of deaf children, it often improves conditions for the entire community.

All children in the community can benefit from improved social services like hearing tests and better access to education and training.

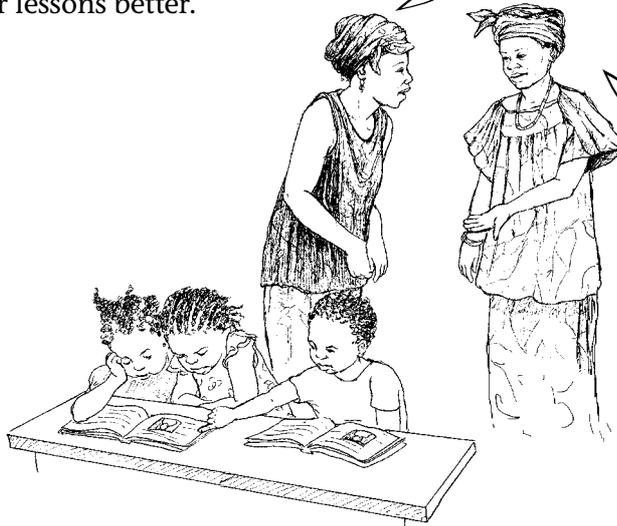


When people learn to work together toward a common goal they learn that they can achieve much more together than alone. A community that organizes around one issue will be able to use that experience to address other needs and do other projects.

When teachers find ways to communicate with children who cannot hear, it can help all children to understand their lessons better.

*Aren't you afraid that having those deaf children in your class will slow the class down?*

*No, I think the other children need to learn some patience! And all of their reading is getting stronger. They are also learning sign language.*



If children who cannot hear well do not get education and support, they may never learn to communicate with other people or learn useful skills to get work, take care of themselves, or live peacefully with others. Their unhappiness and poverty may become a burden on their families, neighborhoods, and communities.

Here is a story about how a group in Brazil is working in their community to change the lives of deaf children.

### **A town learns a new language**

In a northeastern town in Brazil, a church started a small school for deaf children. Soon the families that attended began a parents group, the Association of Parents and Friends of the Deaf in Cabo (APASC). As a group, APASC decided to offer sign language classes to hearing people so that they could communicate with their deaf children. They contacted the deaf association in the neighboring big city and hired a deaf man to teach the parents and their family members sign language.



APASC also got the local government to open the local school to their deaf children. The school hired trained teachers and started classes for deaf children.

**More and more people took sign language classes and learned how to communicate with the deaf children and deaf adults who lived in the town.**

The deaf children joined the hearing children in many of the school's activities. Soon, the town was seeing sign language in the schools, in the shops, and in the streets.

Before, many people had thought that deaf people were mentally slow. Now, they have new ideas about deafness. They see sign language interpreters at church services, deaf teenagers getting jobs in the community, and deaf children studying and playing with hearing children.

APASC helped raise the level of awareness about deafness in their community. They have workshops and monthly meetings where parents can find support from other parents, and learn about deafness and how to communicate with their deaf children. APASC also printed a simple sign language dictionary with 500 signs that many people in the community use.

By working together, they are building a society that helps all children develop to their full potential.