

INQUIRY INTO TRANSITION SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL OR COMPLEX NEEDS AND THEIR FAMILIES

Organisation: Parent Council for Deaf Education (PCDE)

Date received: 12/08/2011



Parent Council for Deaf Education

PO Box 4748, NORTH ROCKS NSW 2151

Ph: 02 9871 3049 TTY 02 9871 3026

Fax: 02 9871 3193

www.pcde.org

ABN: 47 618 685 904

9th August 2011.

The Committee Chair
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

To whom it may concern,

Re: Senate Inquiry into Transition Support for Students with Additional or Complex Needs and Their Families.

Parent Council for Deaf Education is the peak body for parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing in NSW. The role of the organisation is to support families of Deaf or HoH children, with information, referral and advocacy services. A significant proportion of our parent membership (approximately 30%) have children who are deaf or hard of hearing, with additional or complex needs.

For this submission, we have gathered three parent experiences around transition for their deaf child with additional or complex needs:

1. Transition from early intervention services and preschool, to primary school.
2. Transition from primary to high school.
3. Transition from school into post school options.

In sharing these experiences, we seek to highlight the diverse challenges such children and their families face at these times and the need for increased resources, particularly unbiased information and guidance to support them through education and post school life. The parents have also provided their recommendations regarding what support and resources would have helped over the transition time.

Sincerely,

Kate Kennedy
Coordinator, Information and Advocacy
Parent Council for Deaf Education



Parent Council for Deaf Education

PO Box 4748, NORTH ROCKS NSW 2151

Ph: 02 9871 3049 TTY 02 9871 3026

Fax: 02 9871 3193

www.pcde.org

ABN: 47 618 685 904

Transition of a deaf child with additional needs from preschool and early intervention to a mainstream primary school - a parent perspective:

By Leesa C, Mum of David, 6years.

"David is 6 years old. He is profoundly deaf and wears a cochlear Implant and hearing aid.

David also has mild cerebral palsy.

We had been told he was profoundly deaf shortly after leaving hospital, he had hearing aids 4 weeks later and we started early intervention of speech and language at 6 weeks. He was also doing regular physiotherapy and at 3yo started occupational therapy.

Just after he turned 3 he started a preschool which he attended for 3 years. He and our family had access to a special needs teacher every day he was at preschool who worked closely with our early intervention provider. There was daily communication about his progress in verbal and written form.

After two years of information gathering, research, and talking to other families, my husband and I finally decided that the mainstream public school system would be the best for David and started meetings with our chosen school and DET. David was given 10 hours of support a week based on his hearing and physical needs. This is divided into 3 hours of Itinerant Teacher of the Deaf support and 7 hours of a teacher's Aid per week.

We thought David was ready for school. We thought we were ready for school. We could never have imagined how unprepared we were for the difference between early intervention and preschool, and school.

We have an itinerant teacher of the deaf, who keeps a communication book for us but that is the only information that is actually given to us.

David was our first child off to school and it was only from other parents in the playground who already had children at school that we learned that "the school don't tell you anything, but don't worry, you'll hear as soon as something goes wrong". We had gone from hearing how David had coped with every day at preschool to only hearing when there was a problem, which leaves a huge area of uncertainty in between.

In reality David has had trouble coping both with listening and trying to write at the same time in a mainstream classroom environment. He had gone from a very supportive learning environment to having to manage on his own for much of the week. This was and is difficult for him.

We were also unprepared for the other class parents' attitude towards the help that David was getting. We had always tried to treat our son just like any other kid and tried to make him completely included in his community. We had never "played up" his disability and really only discussed it with other parents when they asked a direct question. We were really surprised and unsure how to react when parents wanted to know "well, why does David get extra help?" and why shouldn't their child who was having trouble reading get help?

Equating hearing impairment with slow readers or other learning difficulties.

We struggled. We wanted David to fit into the mainstream system and we wanted him to be like every other kid, but we know he's not. We wanted to stand back and trust the education system, we didn't want to interfere but we didn't know what was going on."



Parent Council for Deaf Education

PO Box 4748, NORTH ROCKS NSW 2151

Ph: 02 9871 3049 TTY 02 9871 3026

Fax: 02 9871 3193

www.pcde.org

ABN: 47 618 685 904

Recommendations:

1. In the transition before going to school, David was invited to sit in on kindergarten classes to familiarise himself with class routines and expectations. Looking back now it would have been really helpful if there had been a facility for parents to sit in and watch how the class actually worked rather than just being told the general idea of how it works.
2. Kindergarten teachers are dealing with a lot of new students and anxious parents but perhaps in the case of children with additional needs or disabilities, I would suggest that a fairly standard multiple choice form could be filled in by the teacher weekly to help parents understand how their child is coping with the class environment - reading, numbers, handwriting, library etc as well as social situations such as drop off, recess and lunch.
3. Preschools and early intervention providers to be very clear with parents about the changes that will take place in schools. They need to know that they will not receive the same regular updates on their child's progress as they are currently receiving

Transition of a deaf student with complex needs from primary into high school- a parent perspective:

By Katrina M, Mum of A, aged 15 years.

"Making the transition from primary to high school was a horrible time. It is stressful as you are never sure if your child will obtain placement in your chosen choice of school for them. Because of his complex needs, it was not a given that he would go to a hearing support unit, even though we knew that this would be best for him.

We had issues with transition. I was working full time and there is no funding assistance given to get children to and from high school for this transition. Even if an aide is with them, they are not allowed to transport them to high school, even if travelling at the same time in the same direction. The actual move to high school was pretty good and well organised but the lead up to it, was not."

Recommendations:

1. Funding for travel to the high school orientation or transition program so that the teacher's aide could take the student. This would be a big help for families, especially single parents, who have to take time off work.
2. A greater transition than a one day orientation. This is not sufficient – ideally it should take place over several weeks. Going from 1 single class and 1 teacher to 7 teachers and often 10 different classrooms is hard for 'normal' kids let alone those with any sort of learning difficulty.



Parent Council for Deaf Education

PO Box 4748, NORTH ROCKS NSW 2151

Ph: 02 9871 3049 TTY 02 9871 3026

Fax: 02 9871 3193

www.pcde.org

ABN: 47 618 685 904

Transition of a deaf student with Down Syndrome into post school options – a parent perspective:

By Aileen R, Mum of Elysha, aged 18 yrs old.

“Elysha is 18 years old. She has Down Syndrome and is hearing impaired. Her main mode of communication is Auslan. Although developmentally delayed, she is a very proficient signer and actually enjoys communicating in sign rather than voice. Elysha is currently in a transition to work program with Nova. She has two years to find a job. She goes to Nova 3 days a week 9.30 to 3.30pm, doing work experience and some training. Some of the challenges we had to face with the transition from high school to post school were:

- We went through a grieving process – leaving school was the end of a big part of all our lives and a place of safety where our children and our family felt supported. We were going into the unknown.
- A big hurdle was and continues to be the lack of Auslan support within the “transition to work” programs.
- We have to transport Elysha to the program, there is no special transport. Because the program is only part time, it is difficult to do this as both parents are working full time.
- We did not know whether our child would be assessed as being able to participate in the Transition to Work Program or needing to go into Community Access Program until late September of their final year at school. This caused a lot of stress for our family due to this lack of certainty.
- The assessment that took place to check eligibility for either program was a waste of time – it was just a quick one hour interview to move our daughter out of the school system. It did not assess her functionality or her abilities.
- We were sent on Open Days to different services, given gift bags of colourful brochures, pens, stress balls, mints, bags etc. This only overwhelmed us. We did not know what service to believe. We felt very alone.
- Despite starting to investigate options since Year 11, we did not actually decide until the December of Year 12 as we all felt so swamped and uncertain.”

Recommendations:

1. Unbiased support and information be available for parents early on in high school to assist families to make decisions about the next steps for their child.
2. Clear explanation about the assessment process that decides if the young person is ready for work, work transition or community access.
3. Parents and young people offered the chance to visit services without notice – to see what the service is like in reality.
4. All offers made by services to be in written format to parents.
5. Education of parents to learn about their rights and the rights of the young person within the service.