

Solus Productions: For many getting older comes with age related hearing loss, a common condition that can leave many feeling frustrated and lonely. Well, in a new series on BBC. One this week rose ailing Ellis. Old hands, new tricks. The actor and strictly winner. Rose is on a mission to teach British sign language to care home residents with hearing loss convinced

Solus Productions: it will reduce isolation. Well, it's no small task. But does it work well? I'm joined by Matthew Felon, who oversees the support services for the charity, deaf action, Scotland.

Solus Productions: to see what he made of the programme. Matthew was born deaf, and grew up with Bsl. As his 1st language. He's speaking to me through his Bsl interpreter, Megan. The voice you hear is Matthew's words spoken by his interpreter, Megan. So welcome

Solus Productions: to the programme, Matthew, and thank you for

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): Hello! Thank you. Thank you for inviting me

Solus Productions: Well. Deaf action supports people with many different types of deafness, from profoundly deaf to deaf, blind to people with partial hearing loss. What are the knock on effects, Matthew. When you see people who are not able to communicate and connect with others

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): Okay? So well, that is something that Rose actually highlighted in her new series. And really, communication is vital without communication. People are isolated and lonely.

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): So this is something that the program really highlights. And it's something that we are doing every day in our job supporting and the support services. We see that there's deaf people out there, or people that have lost their hearing, they do become that there's barriers to communication there.

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): and our job really is to bridge those gaps like, build a bridge between the barriers, and make sure that they are still included within the community, empower them and give them choices to make sure that they are able to be involved in the community and go about their daily life, because without that support they would be isolated. So communication is vital. There's language barriers there, and it is a big issue that we face

Solus Productions: And that's what Rose was trying to tackle in the programme. Old hands, new tricks. You met Rose, didn't you, Matthew, to talk about this project?

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): So I went to London.

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): Yeah, I just went, and I was there, and I was there as the expert in the field of working in care services. So I was thinking about the pros and the cons from what I've seen of deaf people with or deaf people, hard feeling people, deafblind people. So I, from what was described as true, and I was just given, like an idea of how to improve things, to go for moving forward

Solus Productions: And what did you make of her dream, Matthew, to inspire care homes to provide? Bsl, you know, is this something? Maybe Scottish care homes need, is it likely, and maybe, is it likely to catch on

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): I think. Well, I think it's great. I think it's a great project to learn sign language from what you've seen in the program. It is not easy. You can see that is not straightforward. It is not something that you can do in 6 weeks. And I was absolutely amazed. Like as the intense crash course a 6 week course, and Mario's a teacher. He changed the curriculum because we do have a full Bsl curriculum to. So we've got structure to learn in the language. We've got qualification

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): level one level 2 level 3 all the way up to level 6, so you can become a qualified, fluent sign language. So this project

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): it is difficult. It was difficult for them to cram it into 6 weeks, and I was trying to think, Oh, maybe this is a bit too ambitious. Is this going to be done? But the program does really show that

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): with the people, with the effort that they made to get involved in learning. Bsl. It's obvious, by the end of the 6 week course, that they did achieve it specifically for some of the residents there. Like Tina, she was one of the ones who had speech, difficulties.

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): and learning sign language gave her another way of communicating and expressing herself. And that was amazing. I actually met Tina myself, and that day when they graduated, shall we say the end of the 6 week? Course? I said to her that you've proved to me. That sign language, of course, is deaf language. It's my language. We've got our culture, but it has benefits for people like her as well, who have difficulty communicating through speech

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): sign language shows that it's a visual language. It's a way of communicating that everybody can understand. If everybody learned Bsl, then the future

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): we would. We would solve the isolation problem. We wouldn't have that problem. And often, you see, in care homes as well, hearing people that are losing their hearing. They set, and they don't talk much because it's difficult for them to hear. So imagine if everybody could sign, we wouldn't have that problem, the barrier would be removed

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): so and I'm not expecting them to become fluent Bsl users. That's not what I'm expecting, but they have options there. They can express their emotions, they can say, Oh, Hi! How are you like? Have little bits like food? I want chicken, or like just adding a little bit of extra communication without struggling, saying, Oh, what you saying? Can you repeat that? So I think that was really good

Solus Productions: Yeah. And just in the context of the programme, let's talk about these benefits a little bit further, because there were some real surprising impact through the course of both programmes in the documentary, you know, aside from communication benefits like you've just

explained Matthew, what other impacts of Bsl do we see amongst the residents who are learning, I mean, it almost is a deeply emotional experience for some of them, isn't it?

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): Yes, 100%. Yeah. So

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): I think that was shown that Bsl is, you have to use your facial expressions. That was shown in the series. You have to show that you're happy or you're sad, or that you're excited. You're able to show that in Bsl is engaging with the body and your face so. Yes, it does make them reflect a little bit more like, oh, how can I communicate so with your voice? You can speak in a very monotone voice, or you've got tone to express that.

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): whereas now you need to think about every part of your body, to express your language and express your feelings so that can be difficult for some people. So you need to think like.

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): think people think they're making a fool of themselves like being more expressive. But you're not. That's just a form of communication, and we all do it. Anyway. Those that don't sign you still use your face every day. You still have facial expressions and body language, and we're all communicating with our bodies anyway. So this just really highlights and shows that it can be beneficial for those that are learning sign language.

Solus Productions: And what did you think of the other aspects of the programme in general, Matthew, do you think it did a good job in portraying the isolation people with hearing loss in care homes are experiencing. Or would you have liked to have seen a little bit more of that

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): Well for me. I was hoping to see a little bit more of what it's like for deaf people like myself, deaf Bsl. Users what they struggle with, because there are a lot of deaf Bsl users in care homes around the Uk. And in Scotland, and you see them, that they are isolated, and they're lonely because the staff can't communicate with them. In Bsl. They are completely isolated there. It's like an extra layer of exclusion there. So this really this program. It shows that

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): if we all learn to sign, then there we go. The barriers would be removed.

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): So the one aspect of it is, was shown that Eric one of the residents there. He was learning to sign because his wife is June, and they've got grandchildren. They came to learn to sign as well, and it gave him like an extra way of bonding with the grandchildren. His daughter was even saying, Wow! Like, I've never seen my dad. It's like he's got come back to life like before he'd lost his personality

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): personality a little bit. But now he's back to him so old self again. So that really shows that communication. I'm not just meaning in Bsl, but communication is vital for everybody in everyday life and without communication and without expressing yourself. You are isolated, and you are lonely, so you have to be able to communicate and express yourself, and it's a benefit or benefit your mental health that'll improve. You'll feel better within yourself.

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): So engaging within the community is so much better. And then the manager at the care home there as well, or the retirement village, she at the end said, everybody's coming together. Normally people are a bit off in their own rooms, doing their own thing and everything. But as a community they all came together by the end. Could you see at the start, when Rose was asking people it was like 101

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): think the old woman was, and she was like, I'm too old. I'm too old. Don't want to do that. By the end she was in it. She was there. She was learning like you could see she was ordering food. She was ordering chicken. It was fantastic. You're never too old. It just proves you're never too old to learn something new, and it's just wonderful to see them all together. That was something that was so powerful. It shows the power of sign language

Solus Productions: Yeah, it really was. And it was fantastic at the end with the karaoke and also the bingo and everything. It was really joyous. And, as you're saying, Matthew, breaking down those communication barriers, it was wonderful to see, and Rose talks about there only being 2 Bsl care homes in the United Kingdom, who are completely geared up for the deaf community. One of those is run by deaf action, isn't it? Am I right

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): Yes, so yes, we run one of those care homes on the Isle of Wight.

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): So all the residents there are Bsl users. Some of them are hard of hearing, but they learn to sign when they were there, so all of the staff can sign as well, and when I go to visit. It is just wonderful to see them all chatting away, signing away. It's wonderful. It's a wonderful environment. Nobody's sitting, feeling left out. Everybody is included signing away. And that is why it's so important to have that language there have access to the language, and it's just a shame that yes, we do only have 2

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): Bsl care homes and deaf action do run one, which is sad to say that the options for deaf people, deaf Bsl users are limited. They don't have a choice. It's 1 or the other that's it.

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): compared to the thousands of care homes hearing care homes you've got around Scotland and the Uk. But

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): they are not able to provide that specific access communications for deaf people are kinda put into the rooms and they're isolated, and their quality of life decreases

Solus Productions: So let's talk about the communication a little bit further, because people often think that hearing loss, whether it be through an illness, an accident or old age even, can be solved through hearing aids. But that's not always the case, is it so? Apart from learning? Bsl. What kinds of other solutions are there to help people communicate

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): Okay? So in the program, you could see that. I think Rose was talking to the other lady about hearing Aids, and everybody assumes that hearing aids is, you get it in, and that says a magic fix. It solves the problem which is not not the case whatsoever.

It's a tool. It's a tool to support communication, because once you've got the hearing aids off, you're still deaf. You're you're not cured of deafness

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): to, I would say. Sorry. Can you repeat the question? What was the

Solus Productions: Yeah, just I'm wondering what other kinds of solutions are there to help people communicate

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): Oh, yes, so I would say, it's more about people being aware being people being deaf, aware. So like face people when you're talking to them. Make sure you've got the right light in the environment's not too noisy. Just be more aware of the space around you when you start communicating with people. I think that is really vital for deaf people and hard of hearing people as well.

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): because there's so many times we've seen people. They start talking, the mumbling they turn away, and I'm like, Oh, sorry. Can you say that again? I need to make sure that everybody is patient. They're facing me, or we're all human at the end of the day. So we need time to develop that. And I think in care services specifically with older people and with the staff there they treat them like children. They talk, they talk down to them.

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): And I'm like they don't treat them like humans anymore. These people have much more life experience than us they need. They want to be able to share their experiences, and often with the time they're like, Oh, like, here's your drink, they get off, and

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): the older people are left there like, Oh, I can't express myself. I can't get my feelings and experience out there, and it's so sad to see that happening to people because their quality of life and engagement is gone, they don't have it. So we need to stop that happening because we all are going to get older selves. It's going to happen. And I don't want to see that happening in my future, I might need to go to a care home.

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): And if that's how we're treating our current, elderly people imagine how we're going to get treated. I want to break that pattern. I don't want that to continue

Solus Productions: And so, if someone is experiencing isolation through profound deafness, Matthew, or loss of hearing in Scotland what support is available to help them overcome that isolation

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): Okay? So well. And here, at deaf action, we have a range of different services that we provide. So we've got our wellbeing service. We've got counselling service. We've got our support service that can do outreach. We've also got a lot of different activities that people can come and get in. We do have Bingo, like you've seen in the programme. It's a very powerful thing for the older generation. We have that here in deaf action as well, and we have weekend events that run. It's really important that people have like a hub, a central hub that they can go to, and they can engage and meet with other people

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): so many times. People are just left in their own home, not doing anything. They need to have places where they can go and meet other people like themselves.

It's so interesting to talk with you. Thank you. Thank you so much. You make me want to learn. Bsl, now.

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): Everybody should do it. Everybody should learn. Bsl, it benefits you clearly when you get older, even if you know a little bit of sign language, there you go. You're going to break through. It's a bit like at the end of the program. Did you see the woman? Sadly she passed away, but she had the tube down her throat when she was in hospital, but she was still able to communicate through sign language, and that is just the power of language we can communicate through noisy situation.

Megan (BSL/Eng Interpreter): We can talk through windows we've got. We can talk underwater because it's a visual language. So it's really important that it's been. It's going to benefit you one day

Solus Productions: Absolutely well, Matthew Felon from deaf action. Scotland. Thank you for taking part today, and thank you to you as well, Megan, for being an interpreter.

Solus Productions: and you can find out more information about deaf action's support services from interpretation and befriending services to wellbeing support and residential care via deafaction.org and the 1st episode of Rose Ayling's old hands. New tricks is available to watch now on the BBC. Iplayer, with the second episode broadcast on Wednesday, on BBC. One Scotland.