

# GDA Children, Young People and Families. Impact Report 2025 - 26



*Building connection, confidence and belonging for deaf and hard of hearing children*

## Overview

*Deaf children face systemic barriers to communication, positive identity and social connection. 90% of deaf children are born to hearing parents with little knowledge of deafness. Without early access to language and specialist support, deaf children experience language deprivation, developmental delay and educational disadvantage. Deaf people are at 50% increased risk of poor mental health due to communication barriers, exclusion, isolation and reduced opportunity.*

*Evidence shows that early language deprivation and lack of peer connection are key drivers of long-term inequality. Deaf children achieve, on average two grades lower at G.C.S.E despite deafness not being a learning disability.*

*GDA directly addresses this through a community-based Children, Young People and Families service (CYPF) providing opportunities for early intervention, family support, peer networks, and facilitating school engagement. This integrated model ensures timely support throughout childhood reducing inequality and strengthening long-term outcomes.*





## A Research Informed Approach:

Friedman & Rusou (2015) showed that without access to a complete language from birth, permanent long-term language impairment can result within the first year of life.

Evidence from the National Deaf Children's Society, alongside Hall et al. (2017) and Humphries et al. (2012; 2014), shows many deaf children in hearing families experience delayed access to fluent, accessible communication. This increases risk of social isolation, reduced educational attainment, and poorer mental health.

Peterson & Siegal (1995, 1999) show that delayed language access impacts theory of mind development, affecting social integration and increasing isolation. National data from the Department for Education consistently shows an attainment gap for deaf pupils, particularly in mainstream education settings.

Anglin-Jaffe (2020) highlights that deaf-centred community hubs with peer networks, and identity-affirming environments improve wellbeing, resilience, and social capital, acting as protective factors when combined with early access to communication and family support. GDA is this community hub model in action.





## Our Ethos:

GDA's CYPF service is built on three core principles:

- Early access prevents long-term inequality
- Identity and belonging are protective factors
- Family empowerment drives sustainable change

We work on the understanding that deafness itself is not a limitation, but that unequal access to communication, accessible information, and peer connection can create avoidable disadvantage. Our role is to remove those barriers.

## What We Deliver:

GDA provides a continuum of support:

- Baby Group (0 – 4 yrs) - Deaf-led sensory play and parent support.
- One-to-one family mentoring and communication support.
- Dalmatians club (0 – 8yrs) - Peer connection, positive identity.
- Workshops, including school transition, for parents and families.
- School assemblies and teacher deaf awareness training.
- Family support, advocacy, and SEND navigation.
- NXT GEN (9 - 16 yrs) - Co-designed leadership, identity and self-expression.
- Deaf mentorship and role model exposure.
- Deaf inclusion training for professionals and services for family access.
- Deaf community-based multi-generational social and wellbeing events.
- Life Skills for 16 – 25-year-olds (future development).

Our model ensures intervention at the earliest stage, and ongoing family partnership and opportunity at every stage to support optimal trajectories.

*My daughter was buzzing after the bowling trip and made a new friend which is everything we could have hoped for' - Parent*



## Outcomes for CYPF:

### Families consistently report children experience:

- Increased positive associations with deafness.
- Increased social confidence, expression and belonging.
- Greater overall confidence including communication.
- Improved sibling attitudes and understanding.
- Increased participation opportunities and social connections.

### Social confidence:

- "He looks forward to coming to Dalmatian's mostly because he's around peers like him!"
- "More confident but also calmer"
- "More positivity seeing others with hearing aids."
- "More confident around other children and finds making friends easier."
- "All methods of communication are valued. This helps our Deaf son feel more confident."

### Positive Deaf Identity:

"He went through a phase of not wanting to wear his aids and questioning why he has to wear them and why is he the only one with them. Coming to Dalmatians he can see other children/people with devices and provides him with a sense of community, has helped with his identity and he doesn't feel different."

'These events really help E with her deaf identity and acceptance of this. Since coming to Dalmatians E has embraced her deafness and owns it proudly, this was our main thing to overcome'

### Engagement:

- "Everyone is always so friendly and welcoming and you can tell so much love goes into curating these sessions and activities."
- "We're really glad to take boys to this cause they are happy and have nothing to complain about it's just perfect"
- "Thank you for all the opportunities and fun activities you provide for my children"
- "You are all fantastic and we love everything GDA has to offer. We all enjoy coming. It's a great social event for us all and it also provides a safe place for support."

# Outcomes for key groups:

## **Dalmatian Pups (Baby Group/Early Years Impact)**

'Dalmatian Pups' provides early communication, knowledge and social intervention at a critical developmental stage, supporting families after diagnosis to prevent adverse childhood experiences and reduce risks associated with language delay.

Key Outcomes:

- Increased parental confidence in early communication choices
- Reduced isolation during a period of overwhelm
- Early peer connection between families
- Increased communication awareness
- Increased optimism through contact with positive role models.

*"Its nice being in a mixed group, with signing happening casually around us"*

*"We loved the baby group, it was a lovely experience"*

## **Dalmatians Club (Children's Programme)**

Dalmatians provides structured peer support for deaf children in a safe, identity-affirming environment.

Key outcomes:

- Strong peer belonging and friendship development
- Increased confidence and emotional regulation
- Positive deaf identity formation
- Reduced feelings of difference or isolation

*"He looks forward to coming... because he's around peers like him!"*

*"has helped with his identity and he doesn't feel different"*

## **NXT GEN (Youth Impact)**

NXT GEN is co-designed with young people to provide a programme focussing on self-esteem, teamwork, deaf identity, aspiration, and self-expression.

Outcomes include:

- Increased aspiration and positive responses to role models.
- Increased opportunity – events and activities made accessible.
- Stronger positive deaf identity.
- Friendships, sense of belonging.

I can be more myself, because there are others  
around who are also deaf  
-Deaf Teen

## Family Impact:

The impact of GDA extends beyond the child, strengthening whole-family wellbeing.

Parents consistently report:

- Reduced isolation and anxiety following diagnosis
- Increased confidence in communication
- Stronger understanding of deafness and communication options
- Support from parent peer group
- Improvement in family acceptance and relationships
- Siblings benefit through increased inclusion, understanding and participation
- First-time opportunities for respite and social time
- Increased understanding of SEND and school pathways
- Confidence advocating for their child
- 71% of parents rated improved connection with other deaf families
- 80% felt our communication was clear and inclusive

*"Support from everyone here has meant so much to us. We feel less alone and there is always someone to answer our many questions"*

## Systemic Impact:

GDA's work goes beyond supporting individual children and families, contributing to wider systems to achieve:

- Improved deaf awareness and inclusive practice in schools
- Improved peer understanding and friendships with hearing peers through awareness assemblies
- Early years and delivery partners receiving deaf awareness
- Stronger multi-agency collaboration across education, health and social care

This contributes to sustained cultural change in how deafness is understood and supported.

**'An absolutely outstanding workshop' - Deaf Awareness client**

*'Kim is a fabulous teacher, patient, calm and really relaxed, fun and friendly' - BSL Learner*



## Ripple Effects into the 1,000s

65 children benefited from GDA's services in the last year and the number continues to grow. Including the impact on parents and carers this number triples. Including wider family this expands to over 500 people being impacted with a direct improvement in family environment, improving family awareness of need, communication and bonding.



Beyond the family our service impacts school peers with our assemblies and professionals who receive deaf awareness training in organisations accessed by deaf children and their families. The ripple effect begins to impact thousands of children, adults and professionals rippling out from around the deaf child, family, extended family and our deaf awareness work facilitating access to services and places to transform deaf children's relationship with public space and opportunity.

# A Case Study:

When we first met GB, she was seriously withdrawn, sitting with knees up to her chest, face hidden behind hair, jumper frayed from anxious picking. Through GDA's support, GB gradually joined our Youth Club, and became part of a signing choir, and eventually performed at Cheltenham Town Hall. She later wrote us a moving letter thanking GDA for turning her life around.

This transformation was only possible because GDA provided a community where GB could finally feel she belonged, something unavailable anywhere else in Gloucestershire.



# Qualitative Survey Results

## Sample of 7 Families

### Reported Change:



Child



Family



School

Confidence ✓

Positive Identity ✓

Peer Affirmation ✓

Peer Group ✓

Confidence ✓

Knowledge ✓

Navigation ✓

Inclusion ✓

Awareness ✓

## Future Feedback:

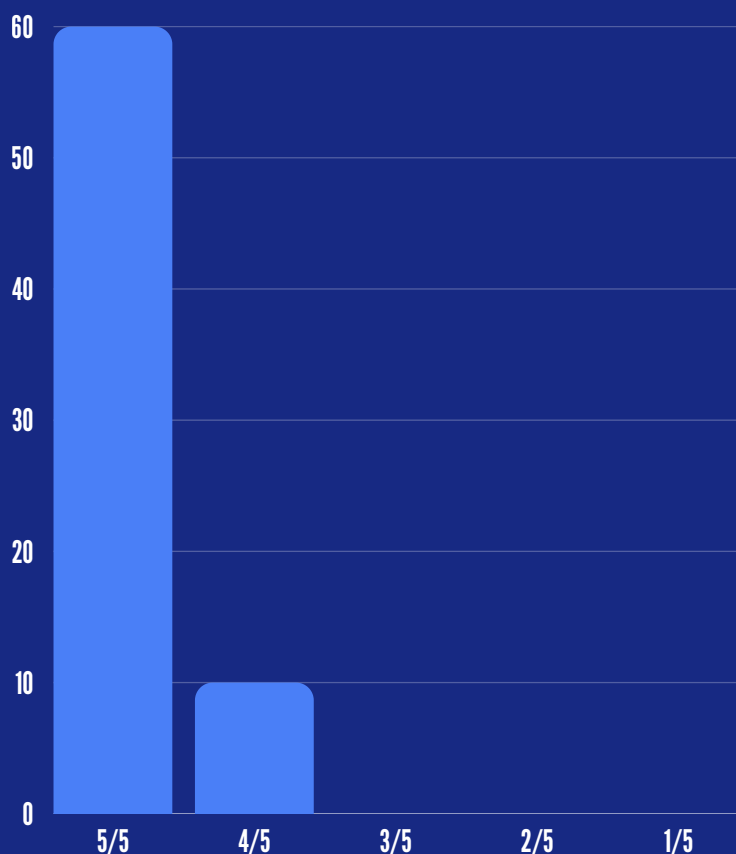
More of Everything 

Parent Advocacy 

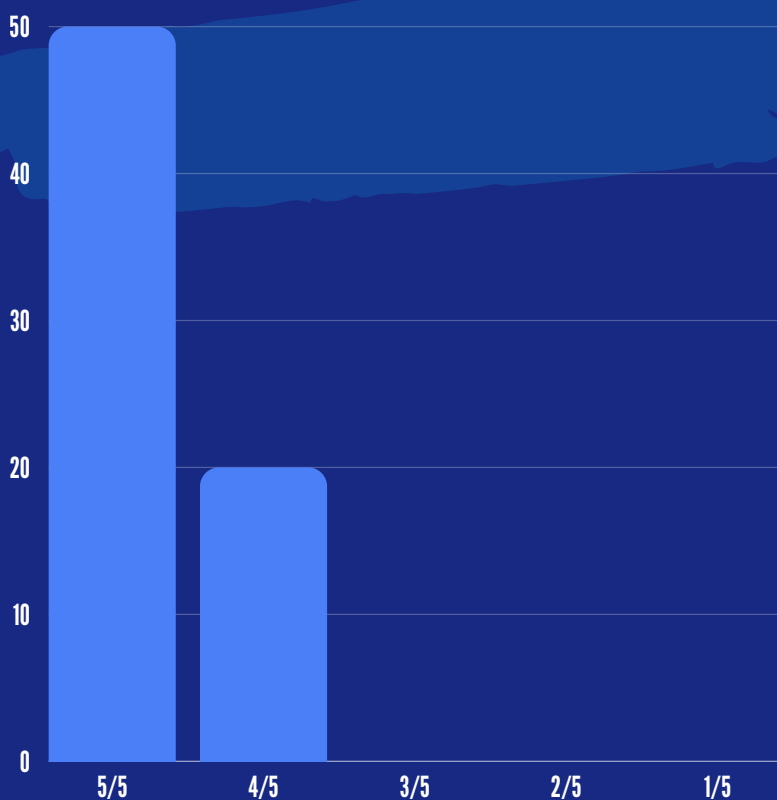
Formal BSL Training 



# Spot Survey Results



**Child Enjoyment**



**Parent Peer Connection**

**100%**  
positive  
feedback

**86%**  
Maximum  
rating

**0%**  
Negative  
feedback



# Summary:

GDA's CYPF service drives impact across children, families, and wider systems, strengthening communication, confidence, identity, wellbeing, understanding, informed choice, and inclusion.

Feedback shows clear evidence of strong whole family system impact and high demand, with positive feedback on accessibility, engagement, empowerment and support.

Evidence shows high satisfaction across all CYPF services with strong evidence of reduced isolation, improved identity, connection and wellbeing. Many of the activities are consistently oversubscribed, reflecting high demand and limited alternative provision.

By combining early intervention, peer support, family empowerment and community-based delivery, GDA creates long-term change that works to prevent and ameliorate language disenfranchisement and access barriers, strengthening outcomes for deaf children across Gloucestershire.

