

Highland Deaf Culture- Our Memories and Language - Heritage Project

In October 2008, the Highland Deaf Communication Project was awarded just under £49,954 by the Heritage Lottery Fund towards the cost of a £65,000 project, "*Highland Deaf Culture – Our Memories and Language*", to record the memories and finger-spelling of older Deaf people in Highland.

The Lottery people were quite amazed to find out that older Deaf people use finger-spelling and that BSL is different in different parts of the UK, and were very quick to award the very generous funding. Ours is quite an expensive project, mainly due to the costs of travelling across the Highlands and Islands, an area larger than Belgium!

So far, our Deaf Interviewers, John Montgomery and Jean Pentland have interviewed 18 older Deaf people in the Western Isles, Wick, Dingwall, Elgin and Inverness. Our Deaf participants have been very generous with their time and their memories (and cups of tea!), telling us about subjects including WWII; Deaf schools/rallies/clubs; how technology and BSL/English Interpreters have changed lives; romance (!); health and the future of BSL. Their stories are sometimes sad, often hilarious and always fascinating.

We had hoped our project would be nearly finished soon, but we've had problems thanks to our Highland weather! First, the video recordings we made of our friends in Stornoway were ruined due to a flood. Then the day we were going back to Stornoway to do the filming again – another flood! Our Film-maker, Charlie Wilson of Wee TV, had his house flooded in the middle of the night so we had to postpone our second trip to Stornoway.

However, we all dried off and managed to complete all our filming on 04 February 2010 and will now start editing the tapes. We hope to have a one hour DVD documentary style programme after we edit. But all the film we don't use for the programme will be safely stored in the new Highland Archive Centre, so that generations to come will have access to it.

The DVD will come with a special booklet cover which is being photographed and designed by Roddy Ritchie of 'Arrow Creative Marketing'. Roddy's also going to create a bigger 'coffee table' type book for us. He will be using old photos our Deaf friends have given us – pictures of when they were young, their schools, weddings etc. as well as photos taken in the last few months. The book will be available to download from a book publishing web-site, blurb.com.

We hope to launch the DVD with lots of publicity so that we raise the profile of the Deaf Community in Highland. Our main launch venue will be Eden Court Theatre in Inverness.

If we can raise some more funding, we'll also produce a Deaf Awareness pack for Highland schools (and other users) which will use the DVD to enhance learning and understanding of deafness.

Our grateful thanks to the Highland Deaf Forum, John Hay, Peter Jackson (BDHS), Sheila Lundberg (Highland Deaf Education), Janine Donald (Highland Am Baile) and Morag Maclean (Highland Archive) for all their help in creating the application and

guidance in the Project, and especially to Liz Brunjes at the Heritage Lottery for her invaluable help in shaping the application.

For more details about this project, contact Jenny Liddell, Project Manager

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