

Deaf Mental Health Trust
A Partnership between Karli Health Centre and Green Door Auslan

Historical Context

Originally in Australia, the mental health needs of Deaf and hard-of-hearing people were catered for by the Deaf Societies in each state. These Deaf Societies provided social welfare services to the Deaf community and had grown from their original base, which was as Christian Missions tending to the spiritual needs of the Deaf community.

Support was provided by minimally qualified welfare workers, not all of whom had experience in supporting individuals with mental health challenges. When a high-level of mental health support was required, this was sought from mainstream mental health services which had minimal experience with people who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing.

All of this meant that those who were Deaf or hard-of-hearing received inadequate mental health care. In fact, this is a situation that persists to this day with few mainstream services able to provide a linguistically and culturally-appropriate service to the Deaf community.

Mental Health Needs of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing People

When compared to mainstream mental health needs, the mental health needs of Deaf and hard-of-hearing people are unique. This is for a range of complex reasons, which include, but are not limited to:

- the age of onset of deafness,
- the degree of deafness,
- the communication barriers that deafness creates and how these translate into inequity and inequality, and
- potential language deprivation in those born significantly deaf as well as a blunting of understanding of emotions and, possibly, world view.

Further information on these issues can be found at <https://karlihealthcentre.com.au/information-for-professionals/>

Current Context and the Need for More ...

In Australia, there are very few services who truly understand the mental health needs for Deaf and hard-of-hearing people. Due to communication barriers, Deaf people are often left with little to no access to services who understand their needs or can readily communicate with them. As well, there is little information available in Auslan (Australian Sign Language), the primary language of the Australian Deaf community.

Karli Health Centre and Green Door Auslan have come together to establish the Deaf Mental Health Trust, which aims to increase awareness and understanding about Deaf mental health as well as provide resources in Auslan. The idea of the Trust began with the untimely death of a well-respected Auslan/English interpreter, Benjamin (Ben) Souter. Ben had contributed significantly to his profession and had long-held a dream of creating accessible mental health services for Deaf and

hard-of-hearing people. From the original concept of wanting to create something that honoured the life of Ben and his passion for accessible mental health services, grew our Deaf Mental Health Trust.

The Trust raises funds through both events and grants. Annually, it makes grants available – by application – to support projects that meet its aims. The purpose of the Trust is to promote awareness, understanding and education about the very real and specific issues affecting the mental health of people in the Australian Deaf Community whether they be Deaf, hard-of-hearing, Deafblind, interpreters, parents of deaf children, children of deaf adults, teachers, doctors or anyone who has a connection to deaf people. More information about what the Trust's grants have funded to date can be found at <https://karlihealthcentre.com.au/mental-health-trust/>

To this end, we seek your support in assisting us to increase the funds that we have available to offer through our grants.

Promoting Deaf mental health,

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