

Not just lip service:

Why it's time to recognise the value of **Lipreading and Managing Hearing Loss** support

Project by Action on Hearing Loss – see report below

Lipreading is a vital communication skill for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

We have published the report on our Research Project – 'Not just lip service: Why it's time to recognise the value of lipreading and managing hearing loss support'.

Laura Ringham, from Action on Hearing Loss Policy and Campaigns team, shares some of her findings after spending some time at a Lipreading Class.

Why did we need the research?

Lipreading classes provide vital support for people with hearing loss. As well as teaching people to recognise lip shapes and patterns, classes provide information and advice to help people with communication, and management of their hearing loss.

As an organisation we have always had a sense that classes are beneficial, often because people with hearing loss have told us. However, we lacked evidence about how classes can improve communication and help people with hearing loss to live full and independent lives – evidence that we needed to encourage further investment in this vital support.

In response to this evidence gap we funded beginners' 'Lipreading and Managing Hearing Loss' class in London as the basis for a research project. Through the project we set out to explore in detail how classes impact on communication, both in terms of lipreading and additional communication tactics.

At intervals before, during, and after the course, our lipreading class members were tested on their lipreading ability, and took part in interviews to discuss their communication experiences outside of the class environment.

What did we find?

We interviewed class members about a number of different areas of their life, including work, social activities and the overall management of their hearing loss.

At the course outset, some of the class talked about how developing hearing loss had been a traumatic experience and how it had created challenges at work, created feelings of isolation during social occasions, and affected their overall self-confidence.

We met with our class members four times in total, so we really got to know them, what they were learning in the class, and how they were using this outside of the classroom. It was great to see how our class members progressed over the duration of the course and how their communication tactics developed as a result of what they were learning.

Through the interviews it emerged that some class members felt more confident to tell people that they had a hearing loss, and to ask people to face them during conversation. Some class members felt empowered to talk more openly with family and friends about their experiences of hearing loss, and how best to communicate with them. Others benefitted from an understanding of how to manage different environments, for example knowing where to sit in a group setting or how to minimise background noise.

By the end of the course, a number of our participants spoke about how they were regularly using lipreading in conversation, a fantastic result!

Out of the research came some really positive examples of how learning from the course can make a difference in people's lives. Some class members spoke about how they were able to better manage work meetings, others felt they were better able to manage, and interact, in social situations, and many of the group felt they had improved their management of hearing loss overall.

At the end of the first and last interview, we played our class members a video clip of a man speaking a sentence (24 different statements in total) and asked each of them to lipread each

sentence.

One of the most important findings from the project was that the lipreading ability of our class members had improved as a result of the course. A brilliant result for the class and for our project!