



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION  
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## Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into access to services  
and information in Auslan

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To whom it may concern:

[ACT inquiry into access to services and information in Auslan](#)

My name is Kellyanne Rosalion and I am Deaf. I live in a bilingual and bimodal English/Auslan household with my hearing husband, Deaf 7-year-old daughter and hearing 3-year-old son. We use Auslan every day, at home and when we are out and about, and I am a proud member of the ACT Deaf community. While English is my first language (due to being raised as an oral deaf person in country Victoria), Auslan is my daughter's first language, given it was the only language fully accessible to her due to her deafness. My husband and I learnt Auslan while we were at university in Melbourne and so we were in the unique position of being able to provide our daughter with access to Auslan from birth. She also accessed a bilingual early intervention service run by the Victorian Education Department that focused on Auslan and English while we were living in Melbourne.

I grew up in country Victoria, and was one of a handful of deaf kids in the area. I attended mainstream schools with a Visiting Teacher of the Deaf for support (when funding was available), and whilst I did ok in school, I often wonder how much better I could have done if I understood the impacts of my deafness more and had more appropriate support. I suffered a lot of listening fatigue, particularly in my secondary schooling, due to having to work hard to listen and follow what was happening. Auslan (and sign language in general) was not as widespread in the 1980s, and to access education in sign language would have required my family to move to Melbourne, which was not deemed as necessary with my then mild-moderate hearing loss. Being isolated from the Deaf community and from others who were deaf like me, had a profound effect and my ability to understand my deafness and how it influences my life. My experiences growing up a deaf person in the country has shaped what I feel is necessary for my daughter as she grows up, to allow her the best opportunities in life. I am concerned for my daughter and her future as it has only been in the last 15 or so years that I have really started to fully understand the impact my deafness has had on my life, and Auslan has played a huge role in becoming comfortable with who I am as a Deaf person, as well as making communication easier.

There are times when Auslan is our family's preferred language for a number of reasons and it is disappointing and challenging not to have Auslan as an option for my daughter's education, nor was it an option for early intervention services provided in Canberra. If my daughter was born in Canberra, we would not have had any access to bilingual early interventions services, and therefore as parents of a deaf child, would not have had confidence or support to choose a bilingual path. It all helped provide her early access to language. Through our bilingual early intervention provider, Aurora, our team consisted of a Teacher of the Deaf, a Speech Therapist, a Psychologist and a Deaf Mentor among others. We had weekly visits at home from the Teacher of the Deaf and the Deaf Mentor who would monitor my daughter's progress and show me how I could interact with her and build her language skills. We also attended a weekly playgroup and a songs and stories session where we could meet and interact with other parents and deaf children, along with the Teachers of the Deaf and Deaf Mentors. These interactions were vital to help build our daughter's language, along with building a network of families who were going along the same journey as us. Similar services do not currently exist in the ACT.

We moved to Canberra when our daughter was 1 year old and when we were researching services available, I could only find early intervention services that had a strong oral/speaking and listening focus and not much in terms of Auslan. Even the options for schooling concerned me as the Hearing Support Units based at schools were being closed to allow students to attend their local schools, with support from a central unit servicing all the deaf and hard of hearing students in Canberra. This has diluted the services available to individual students and schools.

The lack of Auslan in the areas of early intervention and education was a concern when we moved to Canberra (and still is to be honest). If we were still living in Melbourne, we would have chosen for our daughter to attend a mainstream school with a Deaf Facility onsite. With this set up, she would be in a mainstream class, with other deaf students, with continual support from a Teacher of the Deaf (in the classroom and for individual specialised support) and also with possible access to educational Auslan interpreters and Auslan as a LOTE subject. It is vital that deaf kids are around other deaf kids who are younger, older and the same age as them. We've worked hard and built up a little community with other families with deaf kids but they are all the same age as my daughter or younger. She needs to see and be around older deaf kids who can be role models and mentors who can understand what she's going through and support her along the way. Yes, I can do these things too as a Deaf person, but I also wear the 'Mum' hat. As most deaf children are born to hearing parents, other families don't have this option and it's so important for my daughter to have other deaf role models.

The lack of Auslan support in ACT, means that Auslan has become the 'lesser' language in our household. There is nowhere for my husband and I to go to continually develop and grow our Auslan skills (which is particularly important given our need for Auslan has gone past conversational level for us but now is also required to build and develop our daughter's language). There is the Auslan in the Home service from Deaf Connect, but there is a very long waiting list and few teachers. As our daughter is primarily accessing Auslan from us and at our level, she is not given the opportunities to see Auslan in her community as the rich and full language that it is and realise that it is another valid communication option for her that plays to her strengths. She does have minimal access to Auslan at school from her Teacher of the Deaf (1 visit a week) and her Learning Support Assistant who is there to interpret (2 times a week) for her.

This lack of access to Auslan results in more reliance for our daughter on listening and speaking to get by, therefore requiring additional effort on her part, and removing the choice of communication options. She becomes more reliant on the language that is harder for her to access and can be less involved in natural interactions with those around her as she often misses things or gets tired and needs a break. It is for these reasons that greater access to Auslan in schools is required. Only offering mainstream school options with the support of a Teacher of the Deaf and signing support who visit once or twice a week, as opposed to a centralised school or 'hub' where deaf children can be together, exacerbates all these issues. It is important to remember that deaf kids, even when fitted with devices such as hearing aids or cochlear implants, are not the same as hearing kids and require additional supports in education. Consolidating the limited expertise that currently exists within the ACT education system would allow students to better access the supports they need and allow communities to thrive.

There is a need for services that allow families to access Auslan as soon as they become aware of their child's hearing loss. I've been searching (and hoping and waiting for someone else to set up something) for years for these kinds of supports for my daughter. Nothing has been established and so now I have to create these supports if they are to exist. I'm involved in an Auslan Playgroup, where families come together to connect with others and develop their Auslan skills. I also work for Parents of Deaf Children (a not for profit organisation) and I am establishing a support group for families of deaf and hard of hearing children, here in ACT. It is rather disappointing that the two early intervention services do not do more of this community building within the services they provide. It is becoming increasingly clear that families are struggling to find services to support them with Auslan when they discover their child is deaf. The early intervention services are great in their areas of expertise, but sadly they do not really recognise or understand how vital Auslan is to deaf babies and children.

To further support our daughter's access to entertainment and community events as a deaf person, we find we need to travel interstate for events such as Deaf Community meet ups, accessible Science Academy days and interpreted theatre shows (Frozen, Disney on Ice) as these shows do not come to Canberra. In Australia access to sign language on TV is fairly limited to emergency press conferences, whereas overseas, in the United Kingdom for example, BSL (British Sign Language) interpreters are commonplace across a variety of TV shows. At many tourist attractions and government services in the UK, BSL is available as a language option. For example, a number of museums offer self-guided tours in different languages including BSL via phone apps or on screens. Offering this provides not only accessibility but also awareness and acceptance of BSL as another valid language option.

My hope is that ACT can not only match services provided by other states, but become a leader in providing services to the Deaf and Auslan using community, particularly in the field of education.

Yours Sincerely,

Kellyanne Rosalion

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