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## Undiagnosed hearing difficulties identified thanks to new project

[Chris Corkish](#), a Senior Lecturer in learning disabilities and [Community Public Health Nursing](#) worked with Lynzee McShea, Senior Clinical Scientist (Audiology) at City Hospital Sunderland, to create the '3As pathways' – 'Access, Assessment and Aftercare' – to identify and remove barriers to accessing health services for people with learning disabilities.

They have found that approximately 40% of people with learning disabilities who are seen at the audiology adult assessment clinics have a significant hearing loss. These specialist clinics cater for those who, for a number of reasons, cannot be assessed using mainstream methods.

One person to benefit from the project was a man with a severe learning disability who was found to have a severe hearing impairment that had not been identified previously. The partially-sighted 40-year-old, known as Simon, is on the autistic spectrum, and exhibited some challenging behaviours. He found it difficult to both communicate and understand and the professionals providing his specialist care often struggled to cope with his complex needs. One day staff noticed a discharge from one ear and, despite an initial diagnosis of excess ear wax, he was eventually referred to a local hospital, where a non-routine hearing assessment identified that he had severe hearing loss. Simon was prescribed hearing aids and his carers reported immediate and significant improvements in his expressive and receptive language skills. His behaviour improved so remarkably that the specialist learning disabilities services closed his case and he is now monitored via out-patient reviews.

Chris, who also worked as a learning disability nurse until his retirement from clinical practice in January, said: "The needs of the relatively small number of

people with learning disabilities are easily overlooked, and winning this award will really help promote our ideas nationally. The model we have created is easily transferable to other areas where access to services is problematic, both for people with learning disabilities and other groups.

“All people with learning disabilities can have their hearing tested, many are likely to have undiagnosed hearing impairments and those who are helped with this are likely to experience significant improvements.

“For many people, like Simon, improved hearing can be life changing. People with learning disabilities commonly experience poor health care and consequently on average die 16 years younger than any other group. Key to the success of this project has been equal partnership working between different agencies and the model developed for this helps to support joint working.”

Sponsored by Unite the Union and Public Health England, the Advancing Healthcare award was granted in recognition of partnership working to reduce the barriers to healthcare for people with learning disabilities.

More about the project can be found in the following article

McShea, L., Corkish, C. & McAnelly, S. (2014) Audiology Services: access, assessment and aftercare. Learning Disability Practice Vol17(2) p20-25

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