

This consultation carried out in April 2023 was sent to 68 service users who were contacted in the format of their choice. We received 20 replies. We would point out that in addition Deafblind Scotland uses a range of ways to allow this hard to reach group express their views and opinions.

The consultation exercise focussed on 5 main questions:

1. What difference has the Guide/communicator service made in helping you stay independent over the past year?
2. Does your Guide/communicator enable you to have choice and control in your life?
3. Does your guide/communicator help you improve or maintain your health and wellbeing?
4. In what way has your health and wellbeing improved or maintained?
5. Does your guide/communicator service help you in achieving your personal goals in a way that makes you feel valued and respected?
6. My family/friends' views about the guide/communicator service are:
7. Any suggestions or improvements.

Summary of responses and Findings

When service users were asked **what difference has the Guide/communicator service made in helping you stay independent over the past year** all those who replied have continued to be happy with the service and one service user said **“Guides help with reading mail so that I can manage my own business. They help with doctor and dentist appointments to keep me healthy and they also help me with shopping so I can make my own food choices”** The guide/communicators provide information in the individual's preferred communication method, for example, clear speech, British Sign Language, Deafblind Manual, Hands on Signing allowing each individual to make informed decisions and having choice and control over how they live their life. All respondents agreed this is the case when they have a guide. When asked about how the service has supported improvements to health and wellbeing one service user responded **“My physical health has improved by being able to go for long walks 2/3 times a week with my guide. This has also benefited my wellbeing by being able to get out the house for fresh air and also to socialise”** another said **“I have had a gym membership for sometime now. This helps with health issues and improves my mental health”**. Further feedback includes **“By assisting me at parkinsons dance classes which is vital for my mobility”**. A common theme around feeling respected and valued was that when people are out and meet friends, guide/communicator always stands/sits in the background while being there for support when required and service user feeling respected when guide checks their clothes/appearance as they are unable to see this. Consistently service users said they feel the guide/communicators help them achieve their personal goals, with responses including **“guides helping me with my writing makes me feel accomplished and excited to finish something I like”** also **“It helps me by being able to go to the gym and swimming and to shop for things I need and this helps maintain my wellbeing”**

Feedback from Family/friends/carers

89% of friends and family said the service was invaluable with one service user's daughter saying "**Absolutely brilliant. Dad so looks forward to the visits which gives him independence separate from family**". Another service user said "**My brother & sister think the service is good for me, especially because they live far away and I don't see them much**". Whilst another's said "**Without this service I would be housebound more times than not**".

Improvements were evidenced to the overall mental wellbeing of those who responded. When asked: **How do you think we can improve your service:** Service users have consistently said that overall they were very satisfied with the quality of service they receive and hope that DBS can continue to provide an excellent service to everyone that requires it. It was noted from responses that service users welcome the establishment of hubs and see this as a great benefit to those further afield. Also supporting individuals to learn alternative communication skills by pushing hard to have signing and touch introduced at an early age so that it becomes the first second language that we learn. One service user commented that they like to have a variety of guides, not the same ones several times in the same week. I sometimes feel low and depressed because I miss my husband so enjoy talking to different people. A variety of guides helps with that, however issues with recruitment across social care have at times impacted on the extent of flexibility in direct delivery of services and through our service review process individual concerns are discussed with service users affected. Feedback included "t would be so good if replacement guide was available for holidays/sick cover but appreciate the difficulty with recruitment and that where I live is remote".