

Michael Britland Hearinglink

Hearing Link LinkUps: a chance to meet others and share solutions

What is a LinkUp?

A LinkUp brings together a group of around 15 people to explore the challenges of living with hearing loss, to share solutions, and to learn more about the strategies and equipment that can help make life a little bit easier. There is no fixed agenda. The group leaders and the group members work together in the early part of the LinkUp to agree what topics or issues should be addressed. There are many common topics that tend to occur quite frequently, but there is also an opportunity for unusual topics to be raised and discussed.

Who will benefit from attending a LinkUp?

LinkUps will be of interest to anyone whose life has been affected by hearing loss. That includes those whose own hearing has deteriorated to the point where it is causing them difficulties, and it also includes those whose relative, partner or friend is struggling with hearing loss. A LinkUp offers everyone the opportunity to explore their own challenges, and also to understand better the perspective of other members of their family.

It offers a valuable opportunity for anyone whose hearing loss is relatively recent; but it is also valuable for those who have lived with hearing loss for many years or decades. It can be helpful for people with all degrees of hearing loss, from the 'mild' losses on an audiogram that can nevertheless cause distress and disruption to everyday life through to 'profound' losses.

How is the LinkUp managed?

It is led by two people with personal experience of hearing loss in their own lives. One will have a personal hearing loss and so will have practical experience of managing the daily challenges that brings; the other will have a personal understanding of the frustrations hearing loss brings to the family as a whole, or to other close relationships. Both will be experienced group facilitators, and their role is to help the members of the group agree on the topics they wish to discuss.

In addition to this, there will be two or three volunteers who all have personal experience of hearing loss in one way or another. Their role is to make sure the practical arrangements run smoothly, and to share their own personal experiences and the solutions they have found for the problems they have encountered.

Furthermore, there is a rich resource of information materials that the group leaders can draw on once they and the group have agreed the issues to be explored. These information materials are compiled by an active team of volunteers again all of whom live with personal experience of hearing loss. They are regularly reviewed and updated.

How long does a LinkUp last?

Most LinkUps are run over a weekend to make sure those with employment commitments can access them. Participants normally arrive on a Friday evening to begin to get to know

each other. Formal sessions begin on Saturday morning and run throughout the day, concluding with a shared meal in the evening. Work continues on Sunday morning, and concludes just after lunchtime to allow for return travel.

How does communication work?

Everyone attending a LinkUp knows just how difficult communication can be. During group sessions, we provide an excellent working loop and speech to text support whereby everything that is said is typed in real-time and displayed on a screen so that everyone can follow everything. During the break times, we use the opportunity to practise some of the communication strategies that will have been discussed during the sessions. The most important thing to remember is that everyone is in the same boat, so everyone understands and everyone looks out for everyone else. Many participants arrive feeling deeply anxious that they will be left out of the conversation, just like the situation in their everyday life. It doesn't take long before they realise that this is one place where good communication is practised, and everyone is included.

How much does it cost?

Currently, we make no charge for participating in a LinkUp and we cover the costs of accommodation, meals and refreshments from arrival to departure. We do not normally cover the cost of transport to and from the LinkUp, but if this would prevent someone from attending who really needs this help we will always consider options.

How do I apply for a Linkup?

Simply complete the Application Form that is available on the website or direct from our Helpdesk, and return it to us. There is usually a waiting list for any given LinkUp so do be sure to give us a couple of alternative dates.

If having read your application form we think that one of our other services may be more relevant or appropriate for you at this stage, we will contact you to discuss this.

Where and when are LinkUps held?

We aim to deliver LinkUps in various parts of the UK over the next 12 months, at the rate of at least one per month. Sometimes the location is determined by funding we may receive; sometimes it is determined by demand. Please do let us know of any location where there is reason to believe that a group of 10 or 15 people might find a LinkUp helpful.

Where can I get more information?

For any further information, please contact our Helpdesk. Email helpdesk@hearinglink.org or tel/text: 07526 123255.

About Let's Hear

The importance of hearing well

We all want to hear at our best - whether we are at home, at work, or when we are out and about. We also want others to be able to hear us clearly.

Simply 'getting by' is not enough. Being heard and hearing well helps us feel included, understood and involved. We become active and engaged - empowered to participate in society at the level of our choice.

Hearing Link's Let's Hear campaign is a community-driven campaign to enhance hearing in public places. It empowers local people everywhere to improve hearing experiences for themselves, in their own communities – from high street retailers and hairdressers to banks and council offices, from cinemas to supermarkets, and beyond. Improving the listening environment benefits everyone by making communication with each other easier and less frustrating.

Providing better hearing accessibility

In 2012, when we launched the pilot campaign, 'Let's Loop the UK', Hearing Link became the hearing aid users' champion, promoting and improving standards of hearing loop provision.

This essential piece of technology can improve the listening experience for millions of people in the UK who use hearing aids or implantable devices – helping them to listen more easily, cutting out any unwanted background noise, transforming garbled public-address announcements to intelligible information and creating clearer sound.

However, hearing loops are often absent, they don't work properly, staff don't understand how to switch them on or use them, or the hearing aid users themselves are unaware of what a loop is, the benefits they bring, or how to use one.

Volunteers, as members of community-based loop groups, work as loop checkers, visiting public buildings and businesses in their local towns to audit loop availability and quality.

"I am proud to be supporting Hearing Link's campaign in Swindon. Hearing loops are a vital part of an inclusive society and with the spending power of disabled households calculated at £212 billion, making shops accessible is good for business too." Justin Tomlinson, MP

With properly working hearing loops in more public buildings and venues, which are both well signed and maintained, together with staff who understand their purpose and value, hearing aid users will feel more included and considered.

Building momentum

In 2016, our campaign expanded to become Let's Hear, reflecting a step-change and expansion of our work towards 'better hearing', and consequently improved accessibility and inclusivity in local communities. With today's phenomenal hearing technology, there are so many ways to ensure that we can hear well, wherever we are. Let's Hear will focus more widely on:

- advances in hearing aids and implantable devices, and in assistive hearing technologies (including hearing loops, personal listening devices, infrared systems, Bluetooth and WIFI streamers)

About Let's Hear

- improvements to the built acoustic environment around us, and
- awareness of good communication habits and behaviours, which can all enhance our hearing and ability to be heard in public places.

A network of sustainable action

Through Let's Hear, we will build on our successes to date, expanding our network of volunteers and establishing 45 new Let's Hear groups by 2019 to build a groundswell of community activity which improves listening experiences.

These volunteers are often hearing aid users themselves, and they sit at the heart of our project. Not only do they actively check local buildings and premises, but they directly benefit by using assistive technology, expecting it to work and challenging when it does not.

Working in partnership

We have developed our campaign by working alongside individuals, organisations, audiologists, hearing aid and hearing loop manufacturers, architects, loop installers and leading supermarkets, pharmacies, high street banks and other service providers. Our core partners are nationally renowned and play a key influential role in promoting the campaign. With a strong heritage in volunteering to benefit local communities, they are helping us to develop and deliver activity across the country.

- **Rotary International in Great Britain and Ireland** has adopted Let's Hear as a Rotary Community Project. Clubs can be assured that Let's Hear has gone through the process of due diligence and is approved. A growing number of Rotary clubs are working closely with us to develop and expand the campaign. Your club could be one of them.
- **The National Trust** is a huge supporter of our initiative, striving to improve access to its properties for people with hearing difficulties and making them feel more welcome.

Join us

By working together, and with your support and involvement, we will bring positive and sustainable change to enhance hearing in public places.

If you would like further information, please contact Michael Britland, Let's Hear Officer at [**michael.britland@hearinglink.org**](mailto:michael.britland@hearinglink.org)