

Towards a freer world

David Jackson is Secretary of the World Organisation of Jewish Deaf.

The British Deaf community is varied and vibrant. Its diversity is such that there are further minorities within itself. This issue of the BDN concentrates on one of them - the Jewish Deaf community. The title above is the theme for the forthcoming World Congress of Jewish Deaf which is taking place here in London and it seems a good opportunity to show in the BDN how attitudes in the British Deaf community are changing for the better.

For a long time there was some underlying anti-semitism in the British Deaf community mainly through lack of awareness. What was not apparent to them until fairly recently was the fact that Deaf people as well as Jewish people were executed in concentration camps. The Nazis wanted to produce a pure Aryan race free of all disability and of one belief. Now, together with a better attitude, many Deaf people have changed their sign for Jewish people from the offensive hooked nose sign (possibly influenced by Nazi propaganda) to a more acceptable downward sign from the chin.

Today Deaf people in the British community are much more aware of what is happening around them. They are continually seeking for fuller access to everything. This includes a fuller understanding of the Jewish Deaf culture which brings us to this special issue which will hopefully do that.

It is worth repeating the words of the Nobel Prize-winner, Elie Wiesel, at the recent fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, himself a concentration camp survivor, - "... a better world in which children could be happy, smiling, singing, taking each other's hands and saying to each other: 'Well, another morning, another day. Another morning, another day, for humankind'". One could use a similar message to hope for an even better world for Deaf people, where freedom of communication, expression and a positive attitude towards deafness is made possible. These are the keywords and it is appropriate to end here by wishing the first-ever Deaf Chief Executive of the BDA success in pursuing together with the BDA members for that kind of world.

David Jackson

*Front page:
This young girl is now
a prominent member of
the Jewish Deaf
community. Who is she?
Find out on pages
10 and 11.*

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The World Organisation of Jewish Deaf (WOJD) was set up in 1977 in Israel. Among the founders were the late Emil Stryker from London and Chaim Apter from Israel, who is the present Secretary of the Organisation.

The WOJD was funded by the Israeli Government for the first few years but now is dependent on membership fees and fundraising.

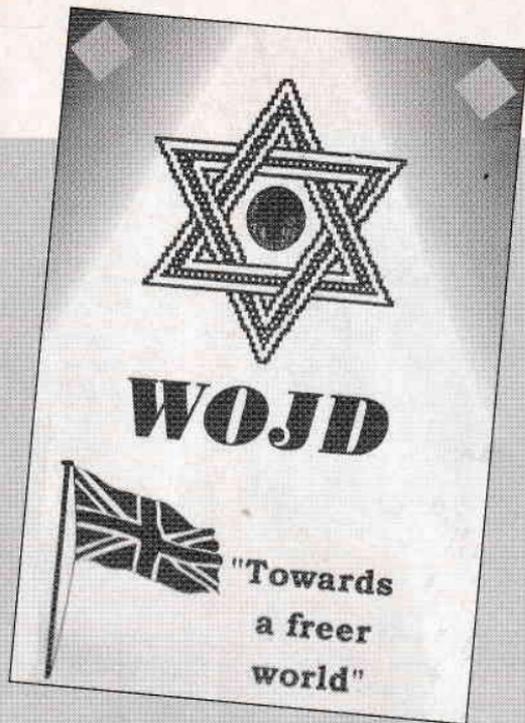
The aim of the WOJD is to keep Jewish Deaf people all over the world in touch with each other and to the Jewish faith.

Because of the various educational needs of Deaf people, they are educated in either mainstream Jewish or mixed schools or mixed denomination Schools for the Deaf. There are very few schools for Jewish Deaf people. The result is that most Jewish Deaf people are missing out, either on their Jewish culture or on their Deaf culture. The WOJD aims to be a bridge between the two and give Jewish Deaf people, access to both cultures.

The WOJD organises a Congress every four years. The first three were held in Israel and the last one in Paris in July 1992. The 5th Congress will take place in London at the Olympia Hilton between 21st and 27th July this year.

The theme of the Congress is "Towards a Freer World" and it aims to bring together, for the first time ever, Jewish Deaf people from East Europe, particularly from Russia and Hungary.

Anyone interested in the Jewish Deaf culture can attend the Congress.



For more information on the Congress contact: Eva Fielding-Jackson on 0272-836994 fax/voice, or Pat Goldring on 081-806-6147. You can also write to the Jewish Deaf Association, 90-92 Cazenove Rd., Stoke Newington, London N16 6AB.