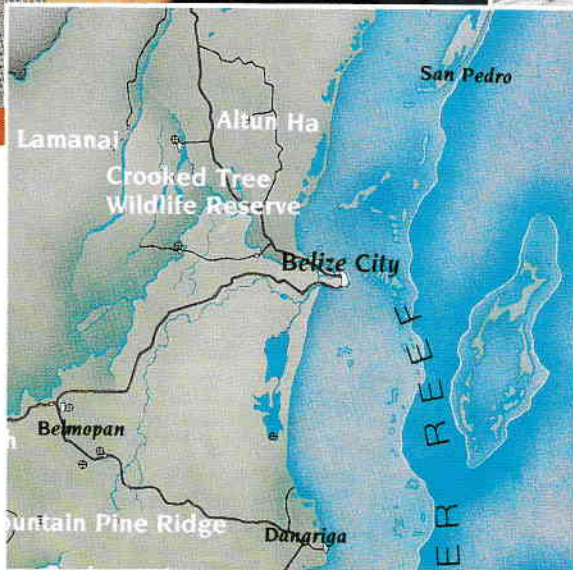


Soundbarrier

THE LEADING MAGAZINE FOR DEAF AND HEARING IMPAIRED PEOPLE



**BT-not just
out for the
Bread!**



Community help
from the Jewish Deaf
Association
Offering a helping
hand in Belize



A defined community

Increasing numbers of hearing impaired people feel that they belong to a distinct deaf culture which has something in common with an ethnic minority group. However, a strong religious and cultural background can change the perspective - as *Soundbarrier* found out by visiting the Jewish Deaf Association at its North London home

If Bradford is noted for its Asian community and areas of South and West London are regarded as centres of Afro-Caribbean culture, then certain parts of North London are definitely Jewish. And the JDA is definitely Jewish.

The Executive Director of the JDA is Pat Goldring. She operates from a large Edwardian House in Stoke Newington and, while acknowledging some of the fundamental differences of deafness are universal, she does have a relaxed attitude towards a deaf culture. Asked about the JDA's use of BSL, for example, she places it in her own context and says, "We use total communication here, SSE, BSL or whatever is necessary." The feeling is that doing somersaults around the room would not be ruled out!

But there must be as many problems associated with getting hearing Jewish people to understand some of the difficul-

ties of their own as there is with the population in general.

Indeed, some of the difficulties seem to be beyond solution in this world - such as the fact that it is not permissible to use induction loops in synagogues on the Sabbath, even if it is turned on during Friday afternoon. Fortunately, though, this restriction doesn't apply to assembly halls, so an important part of Pat Goldring's work is getting synagogue authorities to understand how much could be achieved with that crucial £500 investment which would wire up a hall.

Mrs Goldring has no special emotional involvement for having become involved with deaf people. And perhaps the fact that she has good hearing and hasn't had to deal with deaf relatives gives her a useful degree of objectivity. She first began to work with the JDA on a part-time basis as an administrative assistant after her chil-

dren went to school some thirty years ago. And, as she became more involved and learned all her communication techniques, the JDA gradually took over all her time.

The organisation was founded in 1951 by Julius Newman during a period when Jews were trying to recover from the Holocaust. At that time there was a particularly powerful feeling that those who had escaped the Nazis had a duty to others who were at a disadvantage. Newman's daughter was deaf and he had been surprised to find that, although blind Jewish people had an organisation, there was nothing for deaf people.

Community centre

There are now around 200 members of the JDA across the country and the centre of the set-up is the headquarters at Stoke Newington. It operates fundamentally as a community centre "to encourage that members live full and active Jewish lives." They observe all the main festivals and have a very active chaplain, Michael Plaskow, who deals with the often formidable religious difficulties which arise, and has acted as a delegate to the World Organisation of Jewish Deaf in Israel. He helps with Hebrew and with problems with

important events such as weddings and bar mitzvah. There's also a new day centre which meets regularly at Kingsbury in North West London.

But besides these specifically Jewish initiatives, the JDA has chosen to pursue a number of other specific causes.

Pat Goldring likes to sponsor Jewish deaf people if they need assistance in their academic and sporting endeavours and is proud of its support of Martin Bogarde, the only British deaf international badminton player. She's also concerned with football, and has helped Simon Hart, who was recently selected for the English deaf team.

Professional PR

There's also a scheme to provide Jewish deaf people with Minicoms. It spells out to hearing Jews how just £150 will provide a "priceless ability to communicate" and Pat has had some notable successes involving North and East London police in its sign language courses.

But one of the more unusual and interesting aspects of the way that the JDA operates is the fact that it uses a professional public relations agency to promote its cause - a remarkable decision for a charity whose total income is less than £30,000 a year. "The Alan Gold Creative Consultancy is the second such agency we have used," explained Pat, "and it's particularly good at understanding deaf sensitivities."

Howard Robinson of the consultancy explained his reasoning. "The JDA, as a small social service charity, tended to be left in the background, so it made a conscious decision to raise its profile.

"We've been working with them for around two years now, and are at least beginning to get a response." He says that, although there are around 14,000 deaf Jewish people, it is still difficult to find them all. But if awareness is developed by his direct appeal to synagogues, then mem-

Emil Striker (centre) who is deaf and blind, keeps up to date with gossip in the canteen.



Isaac Holder puts a new telephone to the test, under the eye of BT's Vic Bartlett.

bers are likely to make the effort to find local deaf Jewish people - particularly if they install a loop, and publicise the fact. It's the familiar story of breaking the vicious circle of not doing anything because they don't know they exist, and the deaf not asserting themselves because they are unsure of the response.

"This awareness even comes before fund raising," says Howard. "If you're going to shake collection tins at people they have to know why you're doing it." An exhibition stand is used around the country and Howard is especially grateful for the efforts of Phil Brackman, who frequently accompanies it. "He has suffered the trauma of finding out that he has a deaf daughter and has now spoken to 4,000 people on the subject. He can reduce a room full of people to tears!"

The JDA is essentially an Orthodox Jewish organisation, although all Jewish people are welcome. Non-Jews are in-

involved too, but on the staff or as volunteers. It does perhaps make a non-Jew feel uncomfortable when an organisation is only for one part of the community and therefore implicitly excludes another section, particularly when it is in an area where Jews may not even be a minority.

However, by restricting itself to its own community, the JDA is clearly defining its area of operation and as a result the problems must seem more manageable - its potential clients are measured in thousands rather than millions. This has the interesting effect of reducing a tendency towards militancy found in some deaf groups and replacing it with a strong religious and cultural element. So if you're going to be deaf in Stoke Newington, it does seem to be advantageous to be Jewish as well.

The Jewish Deaf Association can be contacted at 90 - 92 Cazenove Road, London N16 6AB.