

*We make this statement in relation to the schools for Deaf children which we currently partner with in the developing world (Nepal and Uganda) and to those which we may partner with in the future.*

Our aim when partnering with a school, is always to do everything possible to ensure that we enable the school to become sustainable. By this we mean that, at a minimum, it will have the finances necessary to continue to operate for many years into the future - for as long as there are deaf children who need to attend.

However, we also recognise that both Nepal and Uganda are poor countries and that, as a result, their Governments do not have sufficient funds necessary to make anywhere near all of the schools in the country financially sustainable. We also recognise that there is a lack of understanding of the specific educational needs of deaf children on the part of these Governments and that this results in the addressing of their educational needs being much lower down the agenda than the addressing of the needs of hearing children.

With both Nepal and Uganda being poor countries, the majority of parents/guardians of deaf children cannot afford to pay school fees and it is also not possible to raise significant funds from local communities - so the schools with which we partner cannot be funded in this way.

Over recent years, raising the money needed from the UK has also become significantly more difficult due to the economic downturn.

All of the above means that - whilst we will continue to do everything possible to secure the financial future of the schools we support - we cannot guarantee that we will be successful in achieving this.

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Given the above, we are aware that some potential funders are taking the view that if we cannot either guarantee the financial sustainability of these schools, or demonstrate that there is a very strong likelihood of sustainability - they will/should turn down our request for funding.

We understand this view - putting money into a school when there is no guarantee that it will stay open in future years can seem like supporting a project which which has a significant likelihood of 'failing'.

However, with respect, we challenge this view from our position of having worked with schools for deaf children in the developing world for over 13 years.

This experience leads us to conclude that, whilst this may be an appropriate stance to take in relation to schools for hearing children - there are some very significant reasons why a different view of 'sustainability' should be taken in relation to schools for deaf children in the developing world.

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The schools for Deaf children with which we work in Nepal and Uganda, in addition to educating their pupils, also give them a range of skills, experiences, knowledge and attitudes which are completely essential foundations for their future lives, which are even more important than the education they give them - and which they will not acquire if they do not attend those schools. These include:-

- A Language
- A positive self identity as a Deaf person
- Deaf adult role models
- A peer group
- The knowledge that they are not the alone, not the only deaf child/person in the world - that there are other deaf children and adults, that there is a strong and vibrant Deaf community and Deaf culture in Nepal and Uganda -and indeed in virtually every country of the world.
- An utterly different view of their own potential future life - the hope of a positive and optimistic future.

Every deaf child who attends one of the schools we support will receive all of the above and will be completely changed as a person as a result. Their whole perspective on life will change in such a positive way.

Yes there will be challenges in the future for each of them, the society in which they live may discriminate against them, it may be harder for them to find work - etc. but they will have all of the above to help them to cope with this.

Compare this with a deaf child who is kept at home receiving no education, or one who sits for years in classrooms in a local hearing school understanding nothing. They have none of these skills, experiences, knowledge or positive attitudes.

Even if a deaf child were only able to spend a few months at one of these schools, even if then the school then had to close due to lack of funds - all of these things will be sustained within each of the pupils who have been lucky enough to attend the school.

The closure of the school is of course a worst case scenario. We will always do all that we can to sustain the school, but if we are not successful in this, this should not be counted as 'failure'. The true 'failure' would be to fail to provide deaf children with the essential skills, experiences, knowledge and attitudes which will allow them to move forward positively into adulthood.

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When we at Deafway were first approached by these schools, we were faced with a choice - should we say we won't work with them because, however hard we try, there is no guarantee that they will be financially 'sustainable' - or do we recognise that even if the school has to close sometime in the future due to lack of funds, it will have given so much that is of vital importance to the deaf pupils who have been lucky enough to attend - so much that will stay with them and sustain them for the rest of their lives?

Clearly we chose the latter option. On behalf of the deaf children who are so much in need of what these schools can offer - we ask you to do the same.