



COMPANIES REGISTRATION NUMBER (IRELAND): CRO 506131

Sound Advice's Genesis

Fearing for their deaf child's social, emotional and physical well-being, parents can unwittingly limit their child's potential through over-protection. This projection of parental fears and perceived limits reinforces society's erroneous perceptions of ability, traditionally resulting in poor educational results for many deaf children with correlated high levels of unemployment and related health issues.

Successful role models are core to revising outdated attitudes (Gov.uk, 2013), as advocacy links for parents, educators and employers. Role models like Sound Advice's founder can guide parents on options (Beginnings, 2008), one example being a mother in France who travelled to Spain to secure bilateral cochlear implants for her son (Pisane, 2012). Inspired by this case study on the Sound Advice website, a group of parents in Ireland began the Happy New Ear campaign in 2012 to seek bilateral cochlear implants for their eligible infants and children aged under 18 (O'Cionnaith, 2012).

Sound Advice, A Social Enterprise

Sound Advice is a social enterprise. According to Social Enterprise UK, "social enterprises spot the social problem and the social opportunity first, but use business methods and create wealth to solve them" (BBC, 2012). In the UK, social enterprises contribute £8.4 billion to GDP (Northey, 2010), with the 2013 Social Enterprise Survey showing 63% of UK social enterprises expecting turnover to increase through 2016, versus 37% of mainstream SMEs (Social Enterprise UK, 2013).

Lived Experience

Caroline Carswell is the profoundly deaf founder of Sound Advice, an e-government award-winning social venture in Ireland that supports mainstream education for deaf children and young people. Through its content, Sound Advice empowers parents to develop their deaf child's full potential by presenting child deafness, ability, technical tools and devices for mainstream settings to its primary stakeholders (parents, educators, professionals, policymakers, employers and technology firms).

A verbal, bilateral cochlear implant wearer, Caroline does not sign. In the 1970s, Caroline was among the first deaf pupils in Ireland to be mainstream-educated with speech therapy, instead of attending a deaf school. She matriculated to Trinity College, Dublin, where she gained an honours degree before the disability office existed. On graduation, after student summer work programmes in the US and Canada, Caroline moved to Oxford (UK) for a postgraduate diploma in publishing and later worked in demanding mainstream careers in digital publishing and marketing communications.

As a proactive role model and advisor to government, state and semi-state bodies in Ireland, and as an international advocate, employer, trainer and mentor, Caroline has worked through Sound Advice to present deafness and ability in the correlated education, training and employment spheres. In the UK and Ireland, deaf professionals are rare, but link for visibility and advocacy via social networking and online sites while using storytelling techniques to share and showcase their lived experience.

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Sound Advice's Role of Dialogue, Understanding and Inclusion

Engaged service providers realise deaf people can help optimise their technologies, products and services for a wider user pool. Crucially, mainstream education leads a new generation to consider universal design when designing, developing and building new products, buildings, facilities and services. Initiating this dialogue allows Sound Advice to mainstream first-hand knowledge about deafness and its daily impact, in an approach that suggests free digital tools as everyday solutions.

What Are Social Enterprises?

Social enterprises are established by social entrepreneurs, who (a) act for public benefit (b) have innovative solutions to defined problems and (c) can grow their idea to maximise impacts. In 2007, Sound Advice was a response to the Irish government's passing of the EPSEN Act (2004) to mainstream-educate all school-aged children in Ireland, irrespective of ability or educational needs (Irish Government, 2004). After her experiences in mainstream education, Sound Advice's founder saw real shortfalls in the EPSEN Act, and in 2011 Ireland's National Council for Special Education conceded, "The EPSEN Act has not been fully implemented due to economic circumstances".

Technology is core to Sound Advice's approach, with its website hub delivering disruptive, low-cost services to a global audience with free, web-based tools. Currently, 45% of visitors to the website are outside Ireland, which shows the venture's impact at home and abroad. In short, technology is the enabler, equaliser and empowering tool for the Sound Advice team (deaf and hearing) to serve families, students, educators, policymakers and stakeholders accessing the website hub services.

Today, deaf infants can access digital hearing-devices and soundfield systems from their earliest months of life. Digital tools and classroom captions level mainstream classrooms for these children, whose smart devices are portable access toolkits. Mainstream education, after all, builds empathy and mutual understanding within local neighborhood ecosystems and wider regions (NCSE, 2011).

Social Needs and Sound Advice's Role Modelling Approach

Sound Advice uses its website and e-zine to engage stakeholders needing to understand deafness, particularly with international governments actively mainstream-educating children with disability.

Parents must know how a deaf child learns and interacts, while teachers face a teacher-education system that does not prepare for teaching pupils with disability (Kern, 2013). Employers need to know what deaf people can hear with today's digital devices and to learn about access technologies that a deaf person can use in mainstream workplaces. Successful deaf professionals and students need visibility with employers to educate on their ability. The power of positive role models is vital in such contexts. Many deaf people have very successful careers and employers need to see real-life examples to lose their fear of hiring someone who is deaf. The Sound Advice website hub actively provides case studies of mainstream employment for LSL graduates internationally, technology use, dialogue with employers on workplace concerns and the constructive addressing of daily challenges.

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