

**Paddy Daly VOXM OPEN LINE Thursday September 7, 2017**

**PD: Paddy Daly**

**KC: Kimberly Churchill**

**PD:** I was going to Line 6 good morning caller you are on the Air

**KC:** Hi Paddy, how are you doing

**PC:** I'm very well thanks how about you?

**KC:** I'm OK, I could be doing a bit better. I want to call in for a couple reasons. I think that many of your callers are going to be fairly surprised at what I am about to tell them. We have a son who is 6 years old and has started grade 1 this year. He is profoundly deaf and he has been using (ASL) American Sign Language as his language, his communication. So, he has been taught sign language since he was 5 months old and for years, leading up to school that was what he was being taught on a regular basis through a Deaf Itinerant. When he started school last year we immediately started having some issues with him not receiving adequate proficiency in ASL with a Student assistant. We tried to address those concerns and it ended up being a very long drawn out year basically of communication through working with the school, working with our MHA, working with the NLESD, working with the Department of Education but, fast forward a year later and I have to tell you that when I dropped my son off yesterday morning he had no Student Assistant. My child is in a wheelchair he has cerebral palsy and, as I had mentioned, profoundly deaf. If any of your listeners have children in school system could imagine for one second how it would feel to send their child to school for 6+ hours a day and not have anyone there who could understand their child...their needs...if they needed to go to the washroom, if they are cold, are they hurt...how would you know? How do you know if your child is hungry? How would you know if they were hurt? How would you know if they needed anything? If they wanted to get their bookbag, anything, if they needed a crayon or pencil. They depend 100% on their Student Assistant. The Student Assistant for my son has to have a level of proficiency in ASL due to the fact that THAT is his language that is how he communicates. The teachers in the school, because the school for the Deaf closed down so many years ago, none of the teachers in our school have proficiency in ASL and so we rely on a Student Assistant to help bridge that gap and help with being able to communicate, pass that information on. If a teacher was to ask our son a question yesterday how would that happen? He wears Cochlear Implants so he can certainly receive information but he is non-verbal, he can not speak, so if he was going to respond no one would know his answers, no one would be able to understand. So as a mother, as you can imagine, it's extremely frustrating it's extremely heartbreaking to know that he was in for an entire day yesterday dealing with this and the isolation that comes along with that. We found that last year when he started school, we were going through a similar situation and only in a matter of a week he came home and he started shrugging his shoulders. We started to sign and speak to him, he would shrug his shoulders to us. We found out very quickly that he started to regress. He stopped using his signs and we learned what was happening was in the school system because he wasn't surrounded by other people in the class as he came from daycare where many kids were signing with him including the teachers, he went to a school system where there was no signing.

**PD:** It's an extraordinary story. Just a couple questions so people can get more information here. Is there such a thing as ASL proficient assistant and it just wasn't available on day one or two and he will indeed be accommodated? Is that what's going to happen here?

**KC:** Yes. The NLESD will post internal/external job and request that the people applying for these jobs have a certain level of proficiency and based on that they will do testing. I think the Newfoundland & Labrador Association for the Deaf does the testing and assessing the individual based on their skills and determines what they are qualified for. So that was something that had been done for some time and stopped then reinstated this past summer.

**PD:** There's an additional layer of complexity with Student Assistants when even when your child is accommodated, your son, and you have an ASL proficient Student Assistant, if and when the Student Assistant is sick or whatever the case may be, the call-in procedure is based on seniority not necessarily familiarity with the school and the processes, not familiarity with the student and their specific needs. So, this can always have the potential to go sideways even if you get the best and most kind hearted and proficient in ASL Student Assistant on the face the earth.

**KC:** Absolutely and even when they take their breaks there is not someone there to fill in who has ASL. So, we found out this morning when his alternative transportation picked him up that he has a Student Assistant temporarily until next Tuesday at least and she has no ASL. So, we know that for an entire week our son is in school, all day, six plus hours a day, with absolutely no way to communicate with anyone.

**PD:** It's remarkable and it's in no way shape or form appropriate for your son and the family to go through this as he goes into grade one. With this all said and done, is the inclusion model the best for your son and you know and I asked this with all the right intentions...it has never been my want to think or say that the inclusion model can't work but currently it's not working. Is the right place for your child in a school for Deaf children or in the schools as is today?

**KC:** Well I'm coming from a background that the school for the Deaf was already closed so I'm not familiar with what the structure of that was, however, we are involved with the Deaf community and I do know that everybody has extremely high regard for the Newfoundland School for the Deaf and feel that obviously that is where our son should be had that not been closed. With, the inclusion model can work. It's just that the resources are not being put in place in enough time or in the right area where they should be. Now we had a conversation that started a year ago, this is not something that just started a couple days ago. A year ago, everyone knew that he required somebody with a level of proficiency. We shouldn't be surprised on the first day of school to walk in and find out that besides the fact there is no Student Assistant at all but that no one has even been hired. I was watching the news last night I saw Dale Kirby come on and he was discussing advocacy and how important it is that a parent does advocate because they have to be there for their children. I thought to myself, wow that's interesting because he certainly has not responded to any of our emails that we have sent out over the course of the past year. We have asked for meetings with Dale Kirby, we have tried to work with our MHA who has tried to intervene with Dale Kirby and we have tried to reach out and speak to him about this matter and have all gone completely unnoticed and he has been unresponsive. So, I just find this extremely interesting and I would love to take this opportunity to reach out to Dale Kirby right now and say to please contact us to have a meeting with you and discuss this in person. As far as we're concerned it should not be an "Us vs Them" situation. This should be, we are all on the same team, we are all trying

to support children to get the proper education, what they are entitled to. My son has a right to get the same education that everyone gets and he was pushed into grade one Paddy, from Kindergarten, with not even a quarter of what the other kids got because of the lack of proficiency and support and assessment that was provided to him last year.

**PD:** It's all too common it's absolutely unacceptable. If we're going to have an inclusion model be the feature of this province it's mandatory that it's got to be done right. I mean the stories they infuriate me and they break my heart. At this exact same time Mr. Kirby has been tagged already on my Twitter feed. I hope that you'll stay in touch with us give us an update when and if there's one available and it's not just about the assigning of a student assistant now with the appropriate skills, it's all the gaps that you rightfully point out - when that person is on a break or when the person is sick and how that results in still accommodating your sons needs which is what we're here to do. I really hope speak to you again I hope that you bring us some good news after a productive meeting with Mr. Kirby and others.

**KC:** Thank you so much I appreciate it.

**PD:** That's a classic tale. Remarkable. We're running out of time this is something that we can be building on and I will pick it up tomorrow morning.