

**VOCM OPEN LINE WITH PADDY DALY**  
**APRIL 25, 2019**  
**START TIME: 20:05**

**PD:** Good morning Kim Churchill, you're on the air.

**KC:** Hi good morning Paddy. How are you doing.

**PD:** Very well, how about you this morning.

**KC:** Well you know...I'm calling you obviously with good reason. The last time we spoke was quite sometime ago about the needs of deaf children in this province, in particular, our own child. But what I wanted to talk to you about this morning is something that I believe your listeners need to know about. It's blatant discrimination and disregard that our government is having towards our deaf children in this province. Over the course of the last number of years you know that our family has been fighting quite substantially advocating for support and services for our Carter. He is in a system, a mainstream school system, that is set up to deliver to hearing children and of course this setting children who are deaf or hard of hearing up for failure immediately because they don't have access to any of the support and services they should have had. Back in the Fall of last year you might recall we had a conversation about a new non-profit organization called CLASS which is set up to advocate, help parents and children who are deaf, hard of hearing and non-speaking in our province. CLASS had initiated a program called "Gain a Super Power" which consisted of teams of volunteers who were fully vetted as per Volunteer Canada screening guidelines and trained to visit agreed elementary schools during lunch period once a week for the entire school year. They were there to introduce sign language and the entire program was free. The goal was to bridge the communication gap between deaf and hearing students as communication gaps often exists between hearing and deaf people in general. This was very much a well sought-after program there were 33 elementary schools on the Avalon and 23 schools showed interest and wanted the program. So, 70% of our schools on the Avalon wanted this program and we were able to accommodate 8 with our volunteer resources. We decided to start our pilot project in October and one week before it started it was shut down. It was stopped by the Newfoundland Labrador English School District (NLESD) we inquired as to why that was and there were numerous emails that went back and forth in the beginning with respect to them wanting information about the program as they had not had any information about it because any programs that go into schools are decided upon and agreed upon by school administration. So, for example, its common for you to see Special Olympics, Para Sports, or Bricks for Kidz these types of programs happening in schools all over and these programs are agreed upon and approved by the school officials at that particular school. These programs do not go through the NLESD itself, this is not the norm, however, our organization was requested to do this. So, we did this because we obviously wanted the programs in the schools, and we knew there was a high need for it. We sent them the information and a month later we found out it was not approved because they said it went against the collective agreement with the teachers bargaining. We contacted NLTA and we spoke to Dean Ingram and the Executive Director Asst. Stephanie and we learned that this is not the case. They completely supported the program, they thought the program should be in the schools. They did not have any issues with it. They started an 8-month correspondence between NLESD, NLTA and ourselves with NLESD basically picking straws and every excuse and stall tactic they could come up with why this should not be in the school system. I'm not sure why they do not want to have this kind of support in the school system for the students. It's directed towards hearing students and the goal and objective is for the school community to become more inclusive. The public is always being told that the Department of Education and NLESD is all about, making our school community more inclusive and they are doing everything in their power to do the complete opposite. Not only that though Paddy, I also want to let the listeners know that over the last few years we have had an extraordinary amount of experience with various Ministers and events that we have attended and one in particular I feel compelled to also let people be aware about. Last October, Minister Coady organized a Town Hall on Education and it was done in conjunction with Minister Al Hawkins. I contacted Minister Coady prior to the event and asked if there would be an Interpreter for sign language at the event because I had a feeling that there would be some deaf members in the audience. I did not receive any response from her. I tried on Facebook, left comments and messages and never received any comment. So, when the event came of course there was no one

Interpreter at the event and we had at least one person that I was aware of that was in the audience that was Deaf. And, of course was unable to receive any of the information that was being explained that night. This is a government organized event for the public. For me this was a huge oversight, a disregard and disrespect of the Deaf community. I stood up and I ask why that did not take place and she told me that she was not aware of any emails or messages. Later her assistant would stand up and apologized and took blame for it. Now, while I was standing, I took the opportunity to talk about all the issues that have been happening with our own son as well as other children in the province because we do represent many families across the entire province. One story I talked about was an incident happening in central Newfoundland right now where a young child is deaf and is being taught outside of the classroom. They had a Teacher of the Deaf up until last June at which point that person left. When school started in the Fall last year that person was replaced by a teacher that does not know sign language. This child only communicates in sign language, that's their first language and they were removed from their classroom and classmates and is currently being taught in a 'closet'. This is what the parents have called the room that their child is in now. I felt it was extremely important to make Minister Hawkins aware that this situation is happening, and he quickly said no, those situations are not happening. There are no children in our province being taught in 'closets'. I asked him, if he wished to learn more about this child, what school it is, and he would like to learn about it and investigate it to speak with me afterwards and I would give him my information. I gave him my information after the meeting was over and to this day – so we are going back now to October until now, I've never received a phone call, email or any kind of inquiry whatsoever to learn about this child. So, I ask you Paddy and all the listeners out there, why are deaf children being so highly discriminated, neglected and abandoned by their government.

**PD:** Phew. I certainly have no answer for that but certainly a very important question. A couple of things. Just give us an idea of the numbers. You say you represent families and deaf children around the province, do you have any numbers that we can consider?

**KC:** Yes, we've got 326 students in the school system right now that are supposedly getting services and support. I say supposedly because if you think back to when we first contacted you. Carter at the time was only getting about 1 hour- 1.5 hours every 7 day cycle. So that's what these children are getting, only about an hour in a 7-day cycle. So, when you think about it, this is the only time they are getting access to their language and any kind of support and services to help them an hour out of seven days is nothing. That is setting up a child to fail I don't care who you are or what you say, there is no way a child can succeed in the education system if they are only getting taught a language an hour every 7 days. We are in schools as hearing people day in and day out and the majority of what we learn is incidental. All the children who are deaf or hard of hearing do not receive any incidental learning, so they are at a disadvantage right away. They don't have access to any role models in their schools, they don't have access to see people have conversations in ASL. They obviously don't have any classmates that are even able to have meaningful conversations with because they are not allowing anyone to even go in and introduce sign language to the students. And, you know it's interesting because we have had people say, you know its government so there's lack of resources, there's lack of funding and that's the excuse right. We get that a lot with a lot of things when it comes to government but Paddy, I have to challenge that because at one point that might have been a good excuse but now that we've offered a free program, completely vetted, completely organized and involved in the school community who requested it. What is the reason? It's costing them nothing.

**PD:** I got a question on that because I bet some of the students would love training or educational opportunity themselves for the hearing student to be able to communicate. A lot of students I'm sure feel terrible that they see their deaf classmate left and isolated. You mentioned collective bargaining there, so they told you initially that it fell in the collective bargaining and then later realized that was not true? Is that what I heard?

**KC:** Yes, so basically, they said in the beginning that the reason was because...they said in their email, and I kind of laugh when I look back at this because what they said was that they did "a comprehensive review". Of the submissions they asked me/ answer. They sent a number of questions that they asked CLASS to answer so the BOARD answered those questions and after a month they sent back an email and said they had done a comprehensive review and based on that review they could not approve the

program because it goes against their collective agreement and we were essentially going to be teaching children who were already being taught by teachers of the deaf, sign language. Now, if a comprehensive had actually been done they would have realized in our program materials that we sent them that our target was never deaf children it was always hearing children. There is not one teacher in this province that is teaching sign language to hearing children. So that was a complete false statement. Also, later there was an email that was exchanged that NLESD said that had the program been set up and organized so that it would only be focused on hearing children and it would preclude deaf children they could consider looking into this. This to me also, screams a lot of red flags because why would you, if you are in an inclusive education system, why would we set up a program and automatically going to tell children when they come to the door that we can take you, but we can't take you. We are not going to exclude anybody. That goes against every single thing that we are trying to do with our mission with this organization and we want all children to be involved. We are not going to stop anyone who would like to learn more about sign language. And, you would think that our government and you would think that the school system would be a partner and align with CLASS and be part of this new program and opportunity. We know, if you look at all the statics and research on all the benefits that sign language has for hearing children, you know – and for any language for that matter – how much it benefits us in boosting our brain and enhancing our cognitive development. And, one thing I want to tell your listeners because I'm sure you know but sign language is the only language that utilizes both sides of the brain. So, when you think about it, children that get exposed to using sign language are at a much higher advantage than any other child learning another language out there.

**PD:** It's incredible. Last question here Kim and this always comes across either out of my mouth or how I hear it as an uncomfortable question. We have the inclusive model and it doesn't seem to be working. We call it inclusive, but the children are not getting the services they need. Are Deaf children better served with a school for the deaf?

**KC:** You know what, originally when you asked me this probably about two years ago, I couldn't really answer you because I really didn't know the answer. My husband Todd and I have been through a lot over the last number of years with our fight and we have come very far in learning a lot and I've got to really sit back and think and wonder the same thing Paddy because we had a state of the art system there that was completely focused and targeted deaf children and meeting their needs we are in a system now where it is set up only for hearing children, they have absolutely no peer to peer involvement whatsoever because my child doesn't even know another child that uses ASL, he has no peers in his school, he has classmates and all his classmates can not communicate with him because they are not allowed to learn sign language. It's really frustrating for me. If the government would step up, do the right thing come out and be a hero for these children and make sure they get the resources that they need to have and I'm not talking about being given a Teacher of the Deaf an hour ever 7 days. Come on, no one is going to learn that way. They need to really sit down and recognize what they are doing because I guarantee you, we seen what happened with the residential school system recently with the Indigenous people and in 20 years time, would you not be surprised to see Deaf children come out and say "I was forced to go to mainstream school, I had to abandon my culture, I had to abandon my Deaf community, I had to abandon my language, they forced me to use an IPAD to speak."

**PD:** It's extraordinary and I'm glad you called on it this morning Kim, I really appreciate your time. We'll put this to the government, we're not talking about a couple kids, even if it was a couple kids, we have to do the best we can but 326 families and you're right, there is absolutely no way to succeed if you're given 1 hour of instruction every 7 days. I do appreciate your call this morning Kim, stay in touch.

**KC:** Thank you for your time Paddy.

**PD:** Take care, bye bye

**PD:** Wow. That's something else when you hear it articulated as Kim brought to the program this morning. Amazing.

**END TIME: 36:05**