1. Introduction

- Whist training staff members about the audiology service, it became apparent that a number of staff had hearing loss themselves. I felt these staff may benefit from further support from the Trust. I therefore initiated a service improvement project to develop a Trust Hearing Impairment Staff Network.

2. Methods

- The project involved collaborative working across departments, including Human Resources, Equality and Diversity, IT and Audiology.
- The aim was to establish a pathway for staff with hearing loss to readily access support and advice.
- Having identified that there was a population at the Trust with hearing loss, we advertised a meet up group for peer support, which then evolved into a platform for a focus group on how to improve the workplace for those with hearing loss and a bi-monthly meet up group.

3. Results

- Early interventions that lead on from the focus group included:
  - Subtitles added to the Trust induction training videos
  - Developing a robust pathway for BSL interpreters to be booked for training
  - Deaf awareness training rolled out for managers
  - Phone free access to IT support
  - Advertising the peer support network
- The group evolved and we set up regular support group, with an agenda of guest speakers with topics like tinnitus, listening equipment, troubleshooting hearing aids and British Sign Language classes.
- Key attendance: Staff with hearing loss, Equality & Diversity, IT and Audiology
- Over the past 5 years that we have been developing this Network, we have helped support over 70 staff members
- Leading on from this, we have made a huge step forward developing a pathway for staff with hearing difficulties to get support in house:
  - Self Referral or via Equality & Diversity
  - Report (see example template) shared with GP to facilitate a referral for local audiology support.

4. Discussion

- NELFT take pride in being a leading disability confident employer. The feedback from staff with hearing loss has highlighted how they felt listened to, supported and valued.
- Paediatric Audiologists enjoyed the varied work of seeing adult staff members and networking across the Trust.
- Our Hearing Impairment Staff Network has been a great success and we would love to inspire other Trusts across the country to develop something similar to better support those with hearing loss working for the NHS.