

Workstream 6c: MSI Intervenor

---

**The future learning and  
development needs for Intervenor**

***January 2015***

<b>Authors:</b>	<i>Eileen Boothrord Steve Rose</i>
<b>Date:</b>	<i>January 2015</i>
<b>Version:</b>	<i>vP1</i>
<b>Status:</b>	<i>For Publication</i>

## Preface



This booklet was commissioned using funding provided by the Department for Education under contract with NatSIP, the National Sensory Impairment Partnership:



### Contact:

Lindsey Jane Rousseau, NatSIP Facilitator

T: 07711 030711

E: [lindsey.rousseau@natsip.org.uk](mailto:lindsey.rousseau@natsip.org.uk)

W: [www.natsip.org.uk](http://www.natsip.org.uk)

**Copyright** © NatSIP 2015



This document is copyright © NatSIP 2015, and is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. For more details please see <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>

You are free to share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format, adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially, under the following terms:

**Attribution** — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

**Share Alike** — If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original.

**No additional restrictions** — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

**The future learning and development needs  
for Intervenors**

or staff working one-to-one supporting a child or young person who is  
deafblind/multi-sensory impaired

*January 2015*

## Table of Contents

1.	Introduction .....	5
2.	Purpose .....	5
3.	Method .....	5
4.	Respondents .....	6
4.1	Respondents to the online survey targeted at Intervenor.....	6
4.2	Respondents to the online survey targeted at professionals who work alongside intervenor.....	7
4.3	Attendance at focus groups held at 5 regional network events.....	8
4.4	Total number of people who contributed .....	8
5.	Key learning .....	9
5.1	How are intervenors trained and supported now? .....	9
5.2	Intervenor tell us... ..	9
5.3	Quotes from Intervenor .....	9
5.4	Other professionals who work alongside intervenor tell us... ..	9
5.5	Quotes from Other Professionals .....	9
5.6	Local differences in training opportunities.....	10
5.7	Other pathways: .....	10
6.	Where has an intervenor made a difference? .....	10
6.1	Intervenor tell us... ..	10
6.2	Quotes from Intervenor .....	10
6.3	Other professionals tell us... ..	11
7.	What motivates intervenor? .....	12
8.	What continuous professional development and future training is needed? .....	13
8.1	Ideas about Content .....	13
9.	How can CPD be offered? .....	14
9.1	Other professionals told us... ..	14
9.2	Intervenor told us... ..	14
10.	What makes a quality service? .....	15
10.1	Were there other things that characterised their service? .....	16
11.	Recommendations .....	17
12.	Acknowledgements.....	17

## **1. Introduction**

Intervenors have been working, supporting deafblind and multi-sensory impaired (MSI) people in the UK for the last 20 years. There is an accredited training programme and there are regular national network events. As a distinct role in its relative infancy, there is a need to demonstrate the value that the role provides and scope the development needs of practitioners.

## **2. Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to find out from intervenors and the professionals who work with them about the ongoing learning and development needs for this group and gather example of good practice, with a particular focus on:

- future network events for intervenors
- identifying demand and content for an further level of intervenor training
- identifying examples of good practice and impact on young people

## **3. Method**

There were three elements to gathering information:

- an online survey targeted at intervenors and those working in a one to one role with a child or young person with deafblindness or multi-sensory impairment (MSI)
- an online survey targeted at professionals who work alongside intervenors in a supportive capacity
- Focus groups held at 5 regional network events

Consultation took place between October 2013 and June 2014. Online surveys were promoted through the NatSIP web portal, and via national and local networks co-ordinated by Sense, NOI and NatSIP.

Responses were collated and analysed to identify themes to address the following questions:

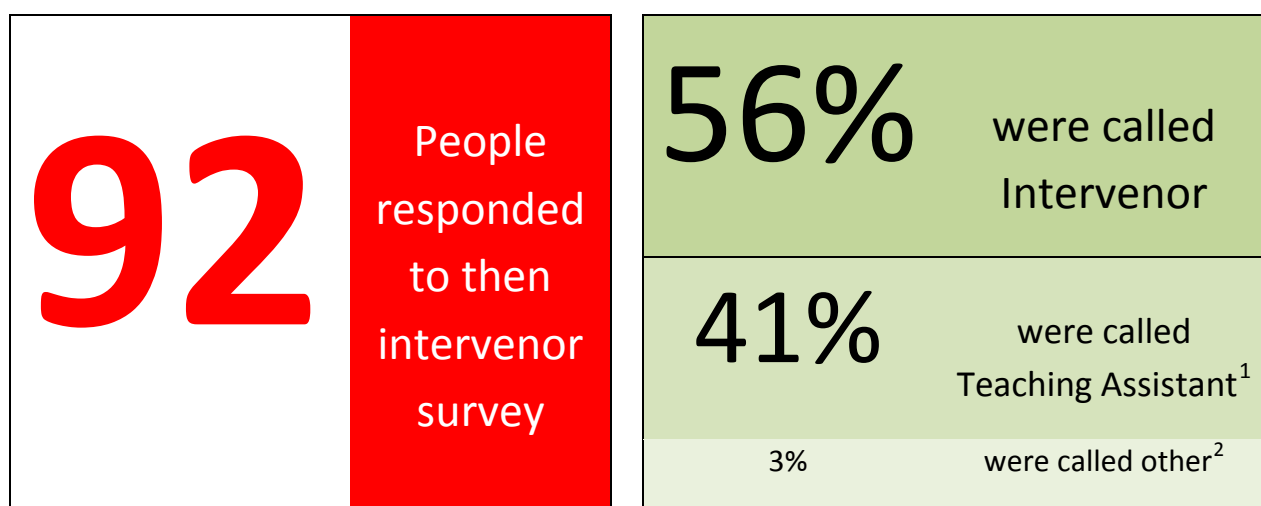
- How are intervenors trained and supported now?
- How has the role of an intervenor made a difference?
- What motivates intervenors?
- What CPD / future training is needed?
- How can CPD be offered?
- What makes a quality service?

## 4. Respondents

### 4.1 Respondents to the online survey targeted at Intervenorors

This survey was targeted at intervenors and those working in a one to one role with a child or young person with deaf-blindness/MSI.

There were 92 respondents. Of these, 56% had a job title of Intervenor, 41% had a job title of Teaching Assistant, and 3% had other titles.



Of these 92 respondents, 15% work in early years (0-5 years), 68% work in schools (6-16 years), 14% work in post-16 (16-19 years) and 3% work with adults (19 years and above).

0-5 years	6-16 years	16+ years	19+ yrs
15%	68%	14%	3%
work in early years	work in school	work with post 16	with adults

The largest number of respondents worked in special schools (68%) including residential settings. Significant numbers of others work either in mainstream education or resourced classrooms (10%) or in the community, or across community and education (18%). Two respondents worked in Colleges. Other individuals work in a care home, a university, Hospital Out Patient Department, and an LA Inclusion and Disability Service.

In undertaking the Intervenor role, with so many job titles and a wide range of work situations, it is perhaps unsurprising that they carry out a wide variety of duties - as required.

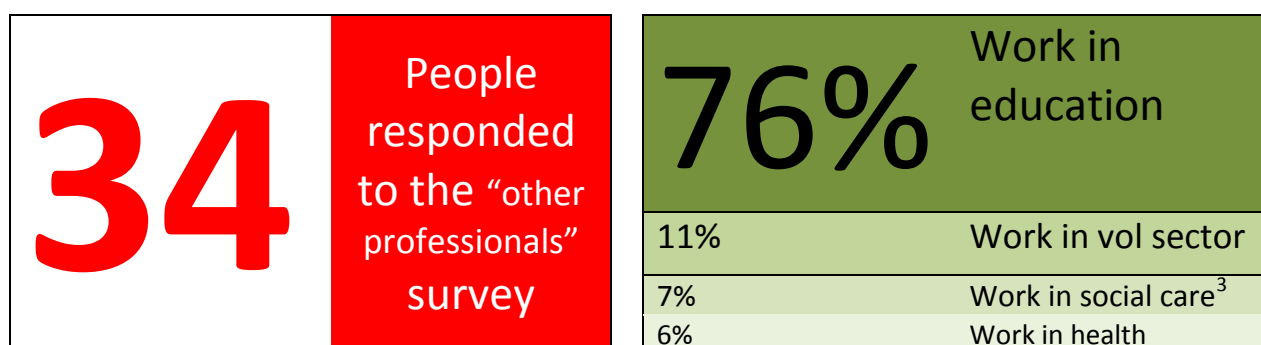
*"I do respite work too, which is always outdoors, shopping, travelling on public transport, park, etc.,"*  
-Intervenor

<sup>1</sup> Teaching assistant, learning support assistant or one-to-one support worker

<sup>2</sup> Other job titles included: teacher, cochlear implant therapist, higher level teaching assistant, vision impairment support worker, healthcare assistant, student support worker, communication support worker, child care inclusion officer, early years support worker, speech and language therapist

## 4.2 Respondents to the online survey targeted at professionals who work alongside intervenors in a supportive capacity - managers, commissioners, colleagues or other professionals

There were 34 respondents to the online survey targeted at professionals who work alongside intervenors in a supportive capacity. Of these, 76% work in education (including specialist sensory impairment services, Head teacher and class teachers,) 11% work in the voluntary sector, 7% work in social care, and 6% work in health.



Respondents work alongside staff at all levels, although none had strategic responsibility for services. The staff they refer to in the survey, the intervenors, work across the range of education provision, including special schools (76%), mainstream schools, as well as the home and community. Some staff support children/young people (YP) in MSI provisioned classrooms, or in specialist units within mainstream schools.

A smaller percentage of staff are deployed to work in colleges - both specialist and mainstream.

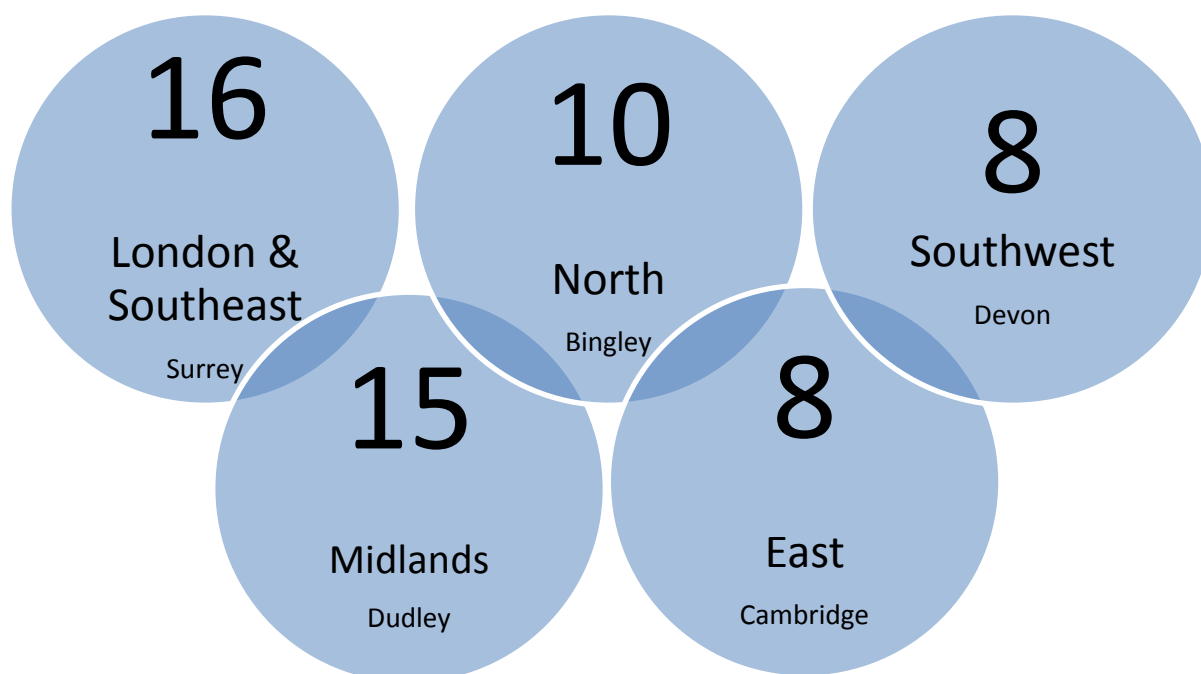
In the light of new policy developments, some (26%) provide an integrated service across social care and education.

<sup>3</sup> Up to 13% of respondents come from integrated education and social care services.

### 4.3 Attendance at focus groups held at 5 regional network events

Five regional focus groups were held:

- London and Southeast– 16 attendees
- North – 10 attendees
- Southwest – 8 attendees
- Midlands – 15 attendees
- East – 8 attendees



### 4.4 Total number of people who contributed

There were 153 people in total who contributed to the findings of this report.



## 5. Key learning

### 5.1 How are intervenors trained and supported now?

### 5.2 Intervenors tell us...

- Specialist training for the Intervenor role had been undertaken by 91% of respondents.
- The training was provided through their school, local authority specialist sensory support service (27%) or through the Sense Intervenor Course with an option for accreditation through the University of Northampton (54%).
- 5% reported taking Signature courses.

### 5.3 Quotes from Intervenors

*"It was vital to give me confidence to take on the intervenor role and maintain a high quality of practice"*

*"It has been invaluable as a good grounding for all the information required to support our MSI learners appropriately"*

### 5.4 Other professionals who work alongside intervenors tell us...

- 91% of respondents provide training.
- While most current staff received training, there is almost always a training need for new staff.
- Immediate access depended on local authority policy and availability of training.
- Some bought in external courses, others had competent and experienced staff to complete the training in-house and many reported a use of both.
- One authority offered "additional CPD [continual professional development] in HI [hearing impairment] and VI [vision impairment]" and not specific Intervenor training.
- Five respondents indicated they didn't offer specialist training specifically for Intervenors.

### 5.5 Quotes from Other Professionals

*"Whilst there are some areas that require additional input the training provides a good basis - we try to ensure all staff working 1:1 in education settings have attended the Sense Intervenor Course"*

*- Specialist Sensory Impairment Teacher*

*"Training is focused around specific child or young person and how to help develop their skills in the home or educational setting"*

*- Specialist Sensory Impairment Teacher*

## 5.6 Local differences in training opportunities

A variety of formal and informal training is offered and most commonly combined to specific local need.

The following are the most popular ways of delivering training, and are used interchangeably - depending on what is required:

- school - based training in both the maintained and non-maintained sector schools (53%)
- training from the **local authority sensory support services**, MSI specialist teacher (or team) (52%)
- **Sense** Intervenor Course (included accreditation for some) (47%)
- a joint Sense/NATSIP initiative: developed out of the Regional Partnership arrangements the RCE (**Regional Centre of Expertise**), provides an introduction to MSI, which is not specifically for Intervenor, but six respondents use it as part of their training.

## 5.7 Other pathways:

- **On-line INSET** (which has been developed under the auspices of NatSIP by MSI professionals) has been used as an introduction by 3 respondents.
- **Signature** courses specifically “Guiding and Communicating with Deafblind People Level 3” was mentioned by 2 respondents.
- The Deafblind Diploma (by **Deafblind Studies**) was accessed by social care staff often working with young adults.

## 6. Where has an intervenor made a difference?

### 6.1 Intervenor tell us...

- 71% of intervenors submitted an example of how they felt the role of an intervenor makes a difference to children and young peoples’ achievements.
- A thematic analysis of 27 detailed examples revealed that intervenors felt they made an impact on young people’s lives in the following areas:

▪ Academic achievements	11	(11%)
▪ Communication	14	(51%)
▪ Independence	12	(44%)
▪ Mobility	5	(22%)
▪ Trust	6	(19%)

### 6.2 Quotes from Intervenor

*“Providing sound for a profoundly deaf and disabled child under 2 yrs, and getting very clear indications from him, and from his family/carers that it has already significantly enhanced his quality of life”*

*“Being an intervenor you get to know the child very well, their likes & dislikes and what they respond to. During activities in school I give him opportunities to respond at his own pace & support him along the way”*

*“The child that I work with is now walking independently through tracking and sighted guide has so much confidence and self-belief”*

*“Due to the way I know the learner (because of the nature of the intervenor role), I am able to scaffold her growing communication with others - I help her to find her voice and have the confidence to use it for herself. It is a privilege to be an intervenor, to have a working relationship with a learner and have such a direct impact on the quality of their access”*

*“Seeing people become more independent - especially in accessing public services and transport. Initially, the young people I have worked with have needed lots of support and reassurance in accessing these areas, but overtime, as confidence develops, they begin to take the lead”*

### 6.3 Other professionals tell us...

Other practitioners were asked to identify where they felt intervenors added value to the support provided to children and young people. Of the 34 respondents:

- Assisting child progress (82%)
- Sharing skills and knowledge (79%)
- Adding benefit to team working (73%)
- Bridging with the child's family (61%)
- being involved in decision making (3%)

One respondent did not indicate that intervenors brought any added value

*“They play a fantastic role where children are encouraged to develop their skills and parents receive good support about knowledge, emotional matters and where to seek further help”*

*- Sensory Support Team Leader in Education*

Half of the respondents also offered examples of practice that they are proud of. A thematic analysis of these responses identified the following themes:

- Intervenors are recognised as valuable member of a specialist team
- Providing support that makes a real observable and measurable difference to progress
- Supporting other colleagues to learn and change their work
- Making personalised 'tools' for learning
- Bridging with families and team members

*“We have children who are achieving alongside, if not beyond, that of their mainstream peers, thanks to the excellent support these children receive”*

*- Specialist Sensory Impairment Lead*

*“The intervenor is an advocate on behalf of the child to systems, management, and others using a questioning attitude- making me think (and schools' think) about whether the way we've always done it is right!”*

*- Specialist Sensory Impairment Teacher*

*“Pupil results? Lots! A young pupil in early primary school with very severe visual impairment and significant hearing loss who is now included in her mainstream class rather than being on the side of it - her intervenor advocates for her to class teachers and is helping her to learn to do this”*

*- Other practitioner*

*"The quality of provision for the CYP who are deafblind has improved greatly - from intervenors making 'Little Rooms' and vibro-tactile areas, to designing individual tactile timetables and sensory stories. There is more general awareness of the needs of CYP who are deafblind and how to support them"*  
- Specialist Sensory Impairment Teacher

*"As a special school we have a cohort of 5 deafblind/MSI pupils and a host of other pupils with sensory needs. We have trained up staff with the skills necessary to be intervenors so that each of these 5 pupils has at least 2 intervenors who know them well. Time and money has been allocated to this minority group both by the school and the LEA so that each of the pupils has 1 to 1 support and 1 has 2 to 1 support throughout the day including lunch times. This has benefitted the pupils as individual plans and personalized timetables are in place"*  
- Class Teacher

## **7. What motivates intervenors?**

Understanding the intervenors drive and motivation to undertake their role is useful in considering their learning and development needs. Intervenors were asked to what they felt were the key factors in motivating them in their role.

- Working with children is the primary motivation for intervenors (81%).
- They also enjoy being challenged to learn new things (72%).
- They enjoy working with families (48%) as part of a significant team (62%): whether working in school or the community. (45%)
- Some find it a tough and demanding job (21%).
- None of the 92 respondents is motivated by the salary!

The rewards are not financial, but come through the sense of achievement at seeing the progress of the child they are supporting. Their comments reflect their personal qualities: patience, belief in their role and pleasure in the trust their role bestows. They work for small steps in development and celebrate when these are achieved.

*"I enjoy seeing the child develop with confidence & abilities with the aid of an intervenor: to help them integrate with their peer groups: to give them time to learn new skills at their own pace: to support learning but not do it for them."*  
- Intervenor

*"Feeling a sense of accomplishment that what you do isn't for everyone but you do make a difference being there and genuinely being sought out by the child to actively communicate with you and helping to open up their world."*  
- Intervenor

## 8. What continuous professional development and future training is needed?

Most respondents would like to offer extensions to initial training. They agreed that many of the core areas on the original training courses could benefit from extension to create a second level course or a set of stand-alone modules.

*"I think that ongoing learning is important in all these areas"*

*- Intervenor*

As some areas of study may *not* be relevant to every intervenor, as they work with children from early years to adulthood, the focus of the design and development of new courses should take account of this heterogeneity. The opportunity to develop "practical" learning is highly valued.

*"...practical learning? [It's] how we make ideas, which are abstract, make sense and how to support this challenge, as a teacher planning for a child with MSI".*

*- Class Teacher*

### 8.1 Ideas about Content

Content	83/92 Intervenors	34/34 Other professionals	126 Both groups combined
Conditions that cause deafblindness and how they impact of child development	37%	44%	39%
Communication methods – practice and theory	61%	70%	63%
Mobility and orientation – maximizing potential	45%	58%	50%
Practical ideas to support independence	62%	61%	63%
Understanding sexuality and preparing for adult life	31%	50%	37%
Encouraging friendships	42%	70%	50%
Outdoor exercise and participation	32%	47%	37%
Understanding the eye and the ear	27%	32%	29%

## 9. How can CPD be offered?

### 9.1 Other professionals told us...

Ongoing continual professional development was recognized as essential to maintain the high standards the respondents reported.

*"All training needs to be on-going for the people working in this field partly because of new developments but also because each learner is so different that they need to be able to develop their ideas and network."*  
- Specialist MSI teacher

*"Intervenors on courses are always saying that there is so much to learn and they need more time to learn more - they often work alone and it can be difficult to keep thinking of ideas in that situation."*  
- Voluntary Sector Trainer

*"There was also an acknowledgement that the Intervenor's role can be isolating and managers and colleagues understand that more specialist support is required. "*  
- Specialist Sensory Impairment Teacher

### 9.2 Intervenors told us...

If the content was appropriate, respondents (67%) preferred local training and even indicated that might study on-line (67%) even though none had studied on-line in their initial training. Only two individuals said they had enough support already.

*Due to the location of most training it is difficult for me to attend some courses as I live and work in a remote place*

A big factor in taking additional training is their employers' willingness to support them. (70%) Policy about both training intervenors and providing additional training varies from school to school and from authority to authority. Some intervenors are paying for their own training.

*Training provided by employer with opportunity to undergo further accreditation, though unsure of whether or not I would be able to afford it and whether it could be paid in instalments instead of one big amount.*

*Due to funding constraints training is very limited at present*

*Funding is short in the local authority but I may be able to fund myself*

*"I am given opportunities for training only when employer decides"*

*My previous school funded my intervenor course and accreditation, however my present school would not fund any further MSI training as they didn't see the need, even though we have a 'MSI Unit.*

Intervenors are aware of the real cost of training, which involves travel costs and cover for their role if they away from work. They also understand the priorities that institutions have to training for low incidence children. They have a very practical and selfless attitude to this.

*No training is provided at present even though we have asked. It is a big organization and has to train the majority on relevant things ...and most common things. i.e. autism, manual handling.*

*I love my job and would love further training as I enjoy the training too (local would be good but I don't mind travelling) but I would prefer during the holidays and not during school time as I would have to be covered by a member of staff and this will be further cost to my school.*

*I can take time to attend the NOI training day but I know this places financial pressure on my organisation. I have previously attended in my own time though and would be happy to do some training in my own time especially if it was online*

## 10. What makes a quality service?

The professionals who work alongside, support or manage intervenors described the key factors:

High levels of respect for staff, families and young people, backed up with excellent training and a demand for high working standards characterises their services. They value their dedicated staff, encourage team work and make strategic and operational plans and stick to them. They understand the complex individual nature of the children and have made a conscious decision not to marginalise them, but create specialist support in spite of their challenges and low incidence. They are proud of their inclusive approach.

- Respect for staff children and families (83%)
- Respect for individuality (77%)
- Staff being listened to (58%)
- Good organisation (54%)
- and plans put into practice (64%)
- Demanding high standards and expectations
- Providing what families and young people want
- Experienced staff with good communication skills and dedication to their work

This is achieved through

*Excellent training and ongoing regular support*

*- Specialist Sensory Impairment Teacher*

*People working together to share experience and knowledge*

*- Special Needs Teaching Assistant*

*Individual pupil timetables and flexible staff, who are confident in using their initiative and can give good clear feedback to teachers and pupils*

*- Head teacher*

*Pupils with MSI are in different classes in school but the authority supported 2 teachers at the school to have mandatory training. I visit weekly the MSI and HI pupils in an advisory capacity. This involves liaising with Intervenor*

*- Class teacher responsible for MSI and Hearing Impairment*

## 10.1 Were there other things that characterised their service?

*Respect for the whole family of a child with MSI*

*- Sensory Support Team Manager*

*[An] understanding of diversity and commonalities in deafblindness [and] joint working with social services*

*- Specialist Teacher based in a School*

*The intervenors I work with are fantastic at implementing communication strategies. I imagine the training was good but also they were probably selected for their attitude and their dedication*

*- Speech and Language Therapist (NHS)*

*Everyone's voice is valued and we - teaching and non teaching staff discuss children and YP [young people] regularly case by case. All involved can make suggestions*

*- Support Service Manager*

*Developing children so that they make excellent progress and that all working with them maintain high expectations of them*

*- Specialist Sensory Impairment Lead*

*A flexible service available when people want it, including evenings and weekends*

*- Manager, Specialist Services*



## **11. Recommendations**

### **1. Explore the development /maintenance of local network events to provide local continuous professional development for intervenors on a range of topics**

Intervenors and other professionals have identified the value of local network events as a way to share ideas and provide local network opportunities. This is in addition to the national annual network event provided by the National Organisation of Intervenors.

### **2. Explore the development of a pilot study of online modules to support intervenor training**

Current developments in online learning and the shift towards flexible learning products combined with the views gathered in this project suggest that online modules may be an effective tool in continuing to support intervenors past initial training. These would not be a replacement for face- to- face training but a supplement in key areas of development. It is suggested that topics that may be of relevance to explore include working as an intervenor in a mainstream setting, early years setting or during transition.

### **3. Explore the development of an advanced intervenor training course, building on the content of the current accredited intervenor programme**

There are different approaches to delivering intervenor training, although at least 50% utilise the accredited intervenor training provided by Sense in partnership with the University of Northampton. There is a clear demand for a course to support intervenors past the initial training phase. This could be a combination of face to face and online modules identified above, with advanced study regarding communication, independence, social relationships and mobility amongst other subjects.

## **12. Acknowledgements**

This support pack has been developed by NatSIP, the National Sensory Impairment Partnership, under contract with the Department for Education (DfE) in England for provision of specialist information, advice, support and training to improve the outcomes for children and young people with sensory impairments.

The pack has been developed with support from a wide range of colleagues. We would like to thank all those who have contributed their own resources and time and energy to developing this resource.

NatSIP partners who were involved in undertaking this project included:

- Sense (A national charity supporting and campaigning for people who are deafblind and those with sensory impairments)
- National Organisation of Intervenors (NOI)
- Surrey Physical Sensory Support Service (SPSSS)

Working group:

- Eileen Boothroyd (Lead investigator)
- Jenny Fletcher (NOI)
- Steve Rose (Sense)
- Pam Todd (SPSSS)