



‘Once upon a time on the web...’ Launch of new website for people with hearing loss.

A group of Hampshire lipreading tutors, lipreaders and techno-wizards has joined forces with local writers to develop an exciting new website, which uses short stories to help people with hearing loss.

‘Stories for Lipreading’ (www.storiesforlipreading.org.uk) is a new, free website for people with hearing loss, which offers the chance to practise lipreading skills and enjoy some good writing at the same time. Lipreading is a vital method of communication for people with hearing loss: it is a way of recognising lip shapes and patterns - as well as facial expressions and context – to help make sense of conversations.

‘Stories for Lipreading’ provides films of short stories being read aloud by trained lipreading tutors. There are printable sheets to accompany each film, so lipreaders can choose how much support they want in reading each story.

Opportunities to practise lipreading at one’s own pace are hard to come by. Lipreading classes can be difficult to access for a variety of reasons, including scarcity of provision.¹ Even for those already attending a class, it can be hard to find opportunities to practise away from the hurly-burly of everyday life. There are surprisingly few online resources which are free of charge and in UK English, and most of those are aimed at beginners.

‘Stories for Lipreading’ aims to help fill this gap so that those with hearing loss - especially those who already have some experience of lipreading - can develop their skills in the comfort of their own homes. Sandy Marlow, lipreading tutor and one of the founders of ‘Stories for Lipreading’, explains, ‘When people can’t access classes, this website will be a really valuable - and enjoyable – way to practise.’



Preparing a story video: Sandy Marlow and Barrie Wickens during a ‘Stories for Lipreading’ filming session

In fact, it was when a lipreader was unable to leave her own home that the idea for ‘Stories for Lipreading’ was born. ‘I was sad that one of my friends from our lipreading class had to miss so many lessons through ill-health and thought that there must be a way of creating something for her to be able to practise at home,’ says Annabel Hervey-Bathurst, one of the ‘Stories for Lipreading’ team (who suffers from hearing loss herself). ‘I was sure that, in this age of technology, it would be possible to do something to help. People with hearing loss often suffer from other

health problems, too, and can have difficulties with mobility, as

¹ RNID’s 2010 report suggested that there was sufficient lipreading class provision in the UK for only 5,000 people (approx 450 classes) – but there are now around 11 million people in the UK with some level of hearing loss.

Stories for Lipreading - Press Release



Some of the 'Stories for Lipreading' focus group with project organisers Sandy Marlow and Annabel Hervey-Bathurst (3rd and 4th from left).

well as isolation and depression, so I hope that lots of people will be able to enjoy accessing these stories from home. I'm an English teacher, so I love stories and know the power of a good story to take you out of yourself when you're feeling fed up – and I thought it would be much more fun to try to lipread something where you are longing to know what happens next.'

Many of the stories have been specially commissioned for the website, with writers generously donating and adapting their work. Winchester author Kath Whiting (<http://kathwhiting.blogspot.co.uk>) was

one of the first writers to contribute a story and says, 'I'm so pleased to have had my story chosen and excited to be part of

this project. The parameters are an excellent challenge for me!' Another of the website's authors is Barrie Wickens, who, being a lipreading tutor as well as a writer, understands exactly what lipreaders require from a story.

'Stories for Lipreading' is ideal for more experienced lipreaders, says Meg Finlayson, one of the lipreading tutors who helped to set up the project. 'It can give them the chance to practise lipreading longer phrases - with the big advantage that you can pause and rewind the film if you lose the thread. If only life was like that!'

Beginners to lipreading will find useful links on the website to get them started with local classes or a beginners' practice website. However, Meg points out, 'Many people who have had hearing loss for some time develop some lipreading skills without realising it, and may find that they can lipread more than they expect when they give our website a try.'

'Stories for Lipreading' is developing fast, with new stories being added regularly. Feedback from focus groups so far has been overwhelmingly positive – 'a really useful and fun resource', 'enormous potential', 'great idea' – and the 'Stories for Lipreading' team says, 'We are determined to keep improving and extending what we can offer. We are always on the lookout for talented writers and new stories – so if you'd like to contribute anything, please do get in touch via our website, www.storiesforlipreading.org.uk. We'd love to hear your comments and suggestions, too.'

If you'd like more information about Stories for Lipreading, please email us:
info@storiesforlipreading.co.uk.

We'd love to hear from you and will be delighted to help. We may also be able to arrange interviews with some of our team or provide further photographs.

Contact: info@storiesforlipreading.org.uk