

## [June Dixon-Millar writes about her life's work with Cued Speech](#)

**June Dixon-Millar**, the founder of The National Centre for Cued Speech (which was later re-named the Cued Speech Association UK – or CSAUK), retired earlier this year from the Management Committee. June's work has laid the foundations of Cued Speech in the UK and elsewhere. Her work is internationally recognised and for this she has received several awards. We are delighted that she has agreed to write this account of her work.

'I have been fascinated by speech and language as long as I can remember. I grew up in the cosmopolitan island of Trinidad where I heard nine different languages and saw different cultures around me. I was then sent to a boarding school in England where from the age of 13 we had to speak French all day. Periodically deafness crossed my path. After training at Homerton College and then the Department of Education for the Deaf at Manchester University I taught deaf children at a school for the deaf and was teacher-in-charge at a partially hearing unit. At the same time I also taught deaf adults for three evenings each week at the City Lit Institute for the Deaf in London. In 1969, when I had a young family of my own, Winifred Tumim (later Lady Tumim) asked me to teach her profoundly deaf daughter Emma privately for four mornings a week. In 1970 she asked me if I would consider using Cued Speech. As a lack of clear communication had slowed all my teaching I jumped at it. I also taught Anthony Jefferson and Alistair Adamson. Winifred went to America and spent a week with Dr Orin Cornett, the deviser of Cued Speech, and adapted it to British English. I spent two one-hour sessions with her and learned to cue in 20 hours from an audio cassette recording. Sadly, Winifred died in November this year; those who use Cued Speech owe much to her vision. I taught my three pupils to cue with ease and their vocabulary growth, language, reading and writing skills progressed remarkably as lipreading instruction and language became clear and their frustration and mine vanished.

'When in 1975 the children went on to their secondary education I sought help to establish a national centre for Cued Speech so that it could be made available to any families with deaf children, deaf adults and professionals. It was supported for three formative years by the charity KIDS. The Centre informed 39 counties in the UK. I ran a national Cued Speech conference, general courses and a residential course. I developed a Cue Club and taught Cued Speech at the City Lit to deaf and hearing adults. I lectured to various societies, institutes, hospitals, universities, polytechnics and educational authorities. I raised a question in the House of Commons on the reading ages of deaf children. In 1978 the Centre became independent, as originally intended, and became The National Centre for Cued Speech (NCCS) until 2001 when it became the Cued Speech Association UK.

'The NCCS was housed in my home until we acquired premises in Putney. My role was to promote, advise on and teach Cued Speech. I now became the fundraiser in addition to my other work. I continued creating and expanding my instruction material. Cued Speech is a means of enabling deaf and hearing people to communicate together. I determined that course participants would learn side-by-side, irrespective of their backgrounds, on equal terms, learning not only the skills but also each other's needs, difficulties and requirements. The course material consists of simple words and sentences (used with and by hearing children) for hearing people, also provided for deaf people supported by Cuescript, enlargement of all material for the visually-impaired, and instruction and diagrammatic sheets of how and where the vowel sounds are physically produced. These are vital for those deaf people who cannot hear vowel sounds, and those participants and overseas visitors who have great difficulty in discriminating between them. Specific emphasis on the vowels through games and quizzes relieved the difficulties, provided consolidation, lipreading practice, fun and relaxation, self-confidence and confidence in Cued Speech. These activities also helped parents to realise the difficulties their deaf children encountered without Cued Speech. Large wall charts and diagrams were made available to

place in the home and classroom. (Much of my teaching material is on a CD-ROM called 'Cued Speech Activities for Children' which is available from the Association.)

'With the help of native speakers and Dr Cornett I ultimately adapted Cued Speech into 12 languages, including Welsh. I created comparable vowel and consonant charts for each language so that each participant could compare the cues of his or her own language to those of English while learning to cue. It is becoming increasingly important that this provision continues as more and more people come from other countries to make their home in the UK. I kept in close contact with Dr Cornett until his death in 2002 and visited him and observed and lectured in the USA several times.

'The NCCS was the first national independent centre for Cued Speech to be established. I was later privileged to be invited to open the Raleigh Cued Speech Centre in America and eventually France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland and Canada established them too. This international growth is vital for the development of Cued Speech. I sought support to establish an international Cued Speech association which is now in the process of being formed.

'The children brought up and taught with Cued Speech in several schools and partially-hearing units were making remarkable progress in increasing language, vocabulary growth, lipreading, reading and innovative writing. The UK had never been in a position to undertake research and there were still no research results available. Eventually research became available to show that Dr Cornett's claims for Cued Speech as an extremely effective means of communication for the profoundly deaf child were justified: (1) that deaf children achieve high standards in vocabulary and language growth (Nicholls, 1979); (2) that profoundly deaf children achieve reading standards equivalent to hearing children (Wandel, 1989); (3) deaf children are able to internalise the spoken language of human society; (Alegria et al., 1989). Information on these and other research is available from the Association.

'Also in the 1980s volunteer Cued Speech instructors and I transliterated at the annual VOCAL interfaith services. We cued throughout in English and also some anthems in Hebrew and Latin. Deaf adults asked for a course in French at the NCCS and this was provided. The French approached me to help them to introduce Cued Speech into France. I was able to present my papers to them in French and I was honoured to be made a *Membre d'Honneur*. Their national association was established. I gave Cued Speech courses in English at summer schools in France, Belgium and Switzerland. There were visitors to the Centre, from home and abroad; some deaf children attended for individual Cued Speech instruction. Qualified parents of deaf children and teachers continued to give instruction in Cued Speech in their local areas in a voluntary capacity. Our video-recorded instruction material was distributed internationally. There was also an increasing interest among speech therapists, particularly in Belfast, who saw Cued Speech as a tool to help hearing children with speech and language difficulties.

'My husband Roger Dixon, who had given me great support, died in 1983. I later married Chris Millar and from then on called myself June Dixon-Millar. In July 1985 the NCCS moved to new premises in Canterbury which were officially opened by Dr Cornett.

'I transliterated at conferences and meetings around the country. Cued Speech transliteration was welcomed by deaf adults in Kent at the Canterbury Cue Club, Christmas Eve community carols, interfaith services and Remembrance Day services, functions, university open lectures and conferences, medical and legal procedures. Anthony Jefferson joined the staff and gave talks and taught hearing pupils from local schools to cue. In March 1990 The Cued Speech Choir cued the alto line of Handel's Messiah in Canterbury Cathedral, alongside Christchurch College choir. The video of this has inspired a number of people to cue at home and abroad.

'In 1992 50 Cued Speech users, both deaf and hearing, submitted evidence to a Commission of Enquiry Into Human Aids to Communication which subsequently reported that deaf and hearing people should have free choice to benefit from Cued Speech; that Cued Speech Facilitators

(transliterators) should be provided in Communication Support Units; training of Cued Speech Facilitators should be undertaken, and that they should be given status and payment equal to that of users of other forms of communication systems.

'I tried to retire in 1995 but had to continue as Director until Anne Worsfold could succeed me as in 1999. Since then I have continued to teach, write articles, give presentations, transliterate for a deaf lady in French and English on her French FE course and made supplementary material in French to accompany the course textbook, act as an adviser on Cued Speech to users both at home and abroad and to adapt Cued Speech for use with various languages. My husband, Chris, has been a tirelessly active assistant throughout; he chaired the Management Committee meetings for several years and was the company secretary from 2001 to 2009. We remained members of the Management Committee until we retired earlier this year but are still members of the Association.

'I am now enjoying my hobbies which are reading, singing in a choir, painting, geology and Egyptology (hieroglyphs) and travel. I shall always remain passionately interested in Cued Speech and the work of the Association.'

June Dixon-Millar