

**Media Release
For immediate release**

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HOSPITAL TAKES BABY FROM DEAF PARENTS

The Children's Hospital at Westmead has removed a three-month-old baby from her parents last week without warning or appropriate communication. The parents, April Joseph and Anaru Hayward-Semenoff, who are both profoundly deaf and use Auslan to communicate, were completely unaware that the hospital had concerns for the child's safety until the meeting when they were told their baby and five-year-old child were being removed to foster care.

"It is outrageous that the hospital did not effectively consult with Anaru and April (the parents) at all or use a sign language interpreter until all the decisions had already taken place," said Deaf Australia CEO Mr Kyle Miers, "It is our understanding that the interpreter for the final meeting was qualified but inadequate and unsuitable for the meeting; the mother requested a different interpreter but the request was ignored by the social worker there."

"This failure of the hospital interpreting system was a disaster for the parents and this little family, who were then not able to adequately communicate their perspectives, feelings or needs or defend themselves, let alone be involved in making important care decisions for their child."

One month ago, baby Akayla was rushed to hospital following a seizure and swelling on the brain due to internal bleeding. The doctors operated; some time later Akayla woke from her coma and began to recover. During the recovery period, doctors at the hospital suspected the parents were unfit, but did not discuss their concerns with the family at all; instead starting proceedings to have the children removed.

Baby Akayla is currently in foster care, with Asher living with April's mother. April and Anaru are now only allowed to visit the children under strict supervision, even on Asher's fifth birthday last week. Anaru also had to miss his first Father's Day with his daughter.

"Westmead Hospital has failed in their responsibility to ensure the basic human right to communicate," explained Deaf Australia NSW President Ms Jordanna Smith, "This has resulted in a heartbreaking situation for this family, which could have been avoided if the hospital had arranged interpreters and consulted the parents from the very beginning. The primary goal should be to support families to stay together."

April and Anaru are due to attend a court hearing on Friday; however they have no idea how long the court proceedings will be and when they will be able to be a family again.

"Even as we move one step forward with the NDIS and empowerment of people with disabilities, incidents like this take us ten steps back and further away from an inclusive society. It is simply unacceptable, especially from a public service," said Deaf Australia President Mr Todd Wright.

Deaf Australia (national) and Deaf Australia (NSW) Inc regularly advocate for many deaf people around the country who have experienced severe discrimination and have been denied access to vital health care services as a result of lack of interpreting services and communication.



“The Government of NSW, through the Children’ Hospital at Westmead, has failed in their duty of care to this family,” said Mr Miers, “Deaf people deserve equal opportunity to make decisions and be consulted about their own life and family; but we cannot do this when hospitals continue to refuse something as basic as providing access to interpreters.”

Deaf Australia is calling for:

- The NSW Health Minister to intervene to ensure that the Children’s Hospital at Westmead provides appropriately qualified interpreters to work through this issue with the family as quickly as possible so that the welfare of the children is not further disrupted any longer than necessary.
- The NSW Health Minister to make Deaf awareness and cultural training mandatory for all hospital staff.
- All hospitals in Australia to immediately write and enact appropriate policies to deal with interpreters for medical situations to comply with Australia’s responsibilities as a signatory of the United Nations Convention of the Right of Persons With Disability and prevent incidents like this from happening again.

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