

# Deafblind 21-year-old is public speaker



■ DANIEL Patrick with interpreter Steve Rose as he speaks at the House of Commons



**This week is National Deafblind Awareness Week, when UK deafblind charity Sense - [www.sense.org.uk](http://www.sense.org.uk) - based in Clifton Terrace, Finsbury Park - celebrates the fact that everyone, deafblind people included, has hidden talents. There are events and exhibitions running through the week**

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**DANIEL is led into the room by Julia, his interpreter. They move carefully, accustomed to negotiating space together.**

She is small, with short blonde hair. Daniel is tall, a real physical presence. You wouldn't pick them out as an obvious pair.

But appearances are beside the point in this relationship; the only part of Julia that matters to Daniel is her hands, as it is through these that he communicates.

Daniel and Julia "speak" to each other using Deafblind Manual Alphabet, spelling out words in each other's hands; each letter, as well as some of the most commonly used words, has a particular sign and place.

Daniel and I shake hands: he touches my wrist, feeling my watch and the edge of my sleeve.

Julia explains that it helps Daniel to visualise the person he is speaking to. I feel strange in this situation, as if I am taking advantage of Daniel because I can see him and he can't see me, but I must remember that for him this is totally normal.

I ask Daniel about his childhood and home life. He lives with his parents in Brixton and has travelled with Julia to Sense's offices in Finsbury Park for this interview.

His parents are partially sighted but there is no history of deafblindness in the family. Daniel has been deafblind since the age of eight. Now 21, Daniel relies on an interpreter for almost all human interaction. And even with Julia's expertise, face-to-face communication is not an easy task.

DMA is a slow process, as each word must be spelled out and mistakes are easily made. Our interview lasts over an hour and very often my questions are repeated or rephrased. When Daniel gets tired his signing slows down, making it difficult for Julia to understand him and interpret.

But we struggle on together and I get to know a little about this remarkable young man.

Daniel first got in touch with Sense at the age of nine, when he went on holiday with the charity.

Each summer Sense takes 120 deafblind children and adults on holiday, 200 volunteers and leaders creating a safe and

# DANIEL REVEALS HIDDEN TALENTS

supportive environment.

It was on holiday with Sense that Daniel first met other deafblind people, allowing him to escape the isolation his condition creates.

Since then he has been on holiday with Sense every year. The plan for this summer is a personalised trip to Paris that he is helping to organise himself.

The holidays have led to Daniel becoming very involved with Sense. Last year he spoke at a reception hosted by the charity at the House of Commons as part of See Me Hear Me, a project that aimed to empower deafblind people to campaign for their rights.

Daniel is ambitious, both on a personal level and for the deafblind community.

He has built a website ([www.lifelesskey.com](http://www.lifelesskey.com)) where you can find his science-fiction writing, FAQs about Daniel and deafblindness, pages on DMA and how to use it, and links to other websites.

It is a fascinating window onto his personality and priorities, really giving a sense of who Daniel is and what he wants.

Unsurprising then that Daniel is very enthusiastic about the website; it is his chance to shine, relatively unhindered by his disabilities.

For a computer-phobe like me, creating a website is fairly impressive.

When you take into account that Daniel built his without the ability to see and hear, you have to recognise it as a tremendous achievement.

When you then consider the paradox of a deafblind person finding success as a public speaker, the message of Sense's Deafblind Awareness Week becomes clear: whatever a person's limitations and however unlikely and difficult something may seem, there are hidden talents just waiting to be encouraged and helped to thrive. Daniel Patrick is proof.

## Quit smoking before your op

THE WHITTINGTON Hospital is offering a new service designed to help smokers who are waiting for operations quit before they go under the knife. Quitting smoking speeds up the time it takes for wounds to heal, makes bone mend faster and decreases the number of days needed to recover from surgery. The hospital in Magdala Avenue, Archway, is offering a number of different methods to help quitters including nicotine replacement and the drug Zyban. Call the Stop Before Your Op team on 0800 093 9030 for details.