Hi! My name is Kristy Hopkins and I live in Cardiff with my family - my partner Elin and our children Macsen (17) and Ffion-Haf (13). I work full-time as a Specialist Teacher of Deaf Children & Young People and I’m currently working towards my British Sign Language (BSL) level 4 qualification. Born hard of hearing, I know only too well the barriers faced by people who are D/deaf, especially through sport. Our daughter was born profoundly Deaf and has herself already faced many challenging situations – all caused by her Deafness.

During my spare time, I am an avid sportsperson who plays international rugby for Wales Deaf; a squad of D/deaf women who recently took part in the Rugby 7’s World Cup Championships out in Cordoboa, Argentina.

It really was such an honour and a privilege to put on the red shirt and play in the Rugby World Cup Deaf 7’s out in Argentina. To represent my country was a dream come true! With family, work and other social commitments, training was extremely demanding - with way too many 5am starts! However, it has all paid off as both the men’s and women’s teams have come home as World Champions!!

As a family, we have faced many challenging situations all caused by being Deaf so my hope is that we have inspired the next generation of D/deaf children; to help them realise that they can achieve anything their hearing peers can and that there are no barriers when it comes to Deafness in sport. Playing in the World Cup was a once in a lifetime experience for me and one that I will cherish forever. I want other D/deaf young people to experience that same feeling too.

Playing deaf rugby certainly has it’s challenges though. We have to remind our coaches about simple deaf awareness such as facing us (the players) when talking, ensuring they have everyone’s attention before coaching begins and repeating instructions. On the pitch, the challenges continue during play when you’re constantly trying to get each other’s attention by waving hands, shouting and signing!

However, a highlight was being able to meet other deaf players from other countries! It was originally perceived that we may have been faced with difficulties communicating with our different signed languages, however, due to the visual nature of a signed language, there were very few barriers.

My aim throughout the tournament and continues to be, to raise as much Deaf Awareness as possible. Deafness is an invisible disability, so it can be difficult with comments such as ‘you don’t look deaf’ or ‘you don’t sound deaf’ but Deafness has a huge spectrum. What people don’t understand is that there are different levels of Deafness ranging from mild to profound. There is a big misconception that Deaf people only use Sign Language in order to communicate. Communication methods and preferences vary from person to person - some use only sign language, others prefer to use speech and some Deaf people use both sign and spoken language. It’s important to remember that there is no one size fits all when it comes to Deafness!

If there are any Deaf people interested in partaking in Deaf rugby, they are advised to contact: info@walesdeafrugby.co.uk