



Deaf Community Action Network

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Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) Refugees, Immigrants, and Asylees (RIAs) Fact Sheet

- A 2015 study by Nationalities Service Center and Thomas Jefferson University found that 7% of refugees “had documentation of hearing loss” which they believed “was probably an undercount.”
- Sign language is NOT universal. The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) has identified over 150 different sign languages. Providing American Sign Language (ASL) ‘interpreters’ for Deaf people new to the USA is often as ineffective, as providing an English-only interpreter for hearing RIAs.
- Although most of the ‘language line’ services in the US have as many as 240 spoken languages available, none currently offer more than ASL for those who rely on sign language.
- Sign language is not a ‘summary form’ of spoken languages, nor are sign languages limited in their ability to express highly scientific, religious, poetic, and other intricate or abstract concepts.
- DHH people are as diverse as any other group. Some use sign language but many do not. To find out what their communication preferences might be, it is best to ask them and not assume.
- In the USA, DHH people function in most of the same roles as those who can hear. They are doctors, lawyers, car mechanics, athletes, parents, scientists, pastors, social workers, Uber drivers, teachers, even firemen and police officers.
- In developing countries, DHH often do not have the same educational opportunities, nor do they have the exposure to a visual language which is especially critical for deaf people. This results in severe language deprivation and has life-long consequences.

- Important facts about speech reading:
 - Only 30 % of English sounds are visible on the lips; the others are made mostly in the throat, tongue & roof of the mouth. “Teddy Kennedy” for example, does not show on the lips at all.
 - Those who can benefit some from speechreading generally have some hearing as well.
 - Speechreading English does not work at all if English is not your first language.
- In the USA, most DHH people acquire licenses and drive. Some countries still do not allow DHH people to drive, to marry one another, work certain jobs, provide adequate schooling, etc.
- There is no direct connection between being DHH and having mental health challenges or intellectual disabilities. For those that are further challenged there are far fewer, accessible services to assist them. DHH in developing countries do often experience violence and trauma unique to their situation on top of the typical refugee experiences.
- DHH RIAs often struggle even more than hearing RIAs, facing communication barriers in families, school, and community. Those barriers become worse with new languages, cultures, and laws.
- Most resettlement agencies do not have the time, expertise, funding, or language ability to focus on DHH RIAs in contrast to the resources available to the hearing family members. Therefore, the hearing family members are more likely to be able to get a job and support their family.
- Most larger cities in the USA have sign language interpreting agencies and human services agencies and social groups that focus specifically on people who are DHH and their families.
- In the USA, several agencies and organizations that already have dedicated services for DHH RIAs have formed a DHH RIA Coalition to:
 - Educate and support other organizations involved with DHH RIAs so they can provide more effective services
 - Support each other in providing/improving their own direct services for DHH RIAs