

Deaf Fact Sheet

- The Deaf Community (DHH) is as diverse as any other group. Some use sign language but many do not. **To find out what their communication preferences are, don't assume, ask them.**
- For centuries, **communication barriers** for many Deaf people have led to incessant daily mistakes, misinterpretation (medical, financial, employment, family, etc.), misdiagnosis, and mistreatment that have caused and continue to cause every imaginable level of harm.
- To combat that history, Deaf people and allies have continuously worked to establish their own 'specialty' services and activities to provide respect, understanding, and equivalence. This ranges from schools for the Deaf, to Deaf clubs, churches, investment groups, athletic teams, Olympics, etc. Thanks to modern technology, the DHH now have their own **988 Suicide/Crisis line, Domestic Violence hotline, and multiple Deaf therapy organizations.**
- **Important facts about speech reading:**
 - Only 30% of English sounds are visible on the lips; the others are made mostly in the throat, tongue, and roof of the mouth. **Many words aren't visible on the lips at all.**
 - Those who benefit most from speechreading tend to be hearing college-educated speakers already fluent in their spoken language – not DHH people!
 - Of course, speechreading English doesn't work at all if English is not your first language.
- **Sign language is not a 'summary form' of spoken language.** nor are sign languages limited in their ability to express humor, science, religion, art, or any intricate or abstract concepts.
- **Sign language is NOT universal.** Linguists have identified 150—300+ different sign languages around the world. most countries have their own regional dialects. So, providing American Sign Language (ASL) 'interpreters' for Deaf people new to the USA is often as ineffective as providing an English interpreter for hearing people who don't know English.
- Although most of the 'language line' services in the US have as many as 240 spoken languages available, most currently offer only ASL for those who rely on sign language. *However,* some specialty interpreting agencies are now starting to provide some of those other sign languages through expanding global networks.

- **Native Deaf interpreters** are often an effective link between Deaf individuals and ASL interpreters in providing the clarity and nuances needed.
- **Around the world, D/HH people function in many of the same roles as those who can hear.** They are doctors, lawyers, car mechanics, artists, athletes, parents, scientists, ministers, actors, social workers, Uber drivers, teachers, even firemen and police officers.
- However, some countries still do not allow D/HH people to drive, marry one another, raise their own children, work competitive jobs, etc.
- There is **no direct connection between being DHH and having mental health challenges or intellectual disabilities.** For those that do have these challenges, however, there are far fewer accessible services to assist, and their level of care is often far from equivalent or best practice.
- **However, 95% of Deaf people are born to hearing parents who RARELY adapt to them and learn visual sign language.** So, after entire upbringings of language/relationship/learning deprivation modelled within their own families, many Deaf people can struggle with additional challenges that can have life-long consequences, especially without accessible support.
- One of THE foundations of health and human services is **COMMUNICATION**, but most 'mainstream' agencies don't have the time, expertise, funding, or language ability to provide the very special communication needed for Deaf individuals and families.
- Most larger cities in the USA have sign language interpreting agencies, and a few have minimal specialty MH/IDD human services. However, **rarely do any have the desperately needed services for the many other isolated and vulnerable Deaf**, such as those who are homeless, crime victims, inmates or returning citizens, refugees/immigrants/asylees, DeafBlind, and others.
- **Interpreters are not case managers or advocates.** In fact, their code of ethics requires that they remain impartial, avoid explanation or clarification, and not to 'help' except to interpret. In fact, even though they gain access to the most vulnerable people, their own code of confidentiality restricts them providing the connections, referrals, or information that may be needed to make connections to needed services.
- The **Deaf Community has developed** their own stories, legends, jokes, riddles, idioms, slang, folklore, puns, poetry, songs, rhythm, art, films, culture, and other linguistic and cultural expressions to maintain perspective, humor, and dignity within their lives.