

# THE ACCESSIBLE ENVIRONMENT



A review of the laws, programs, and issues affecting the disabled community

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## DRUG AND ALCOHOL OUTREACH PROGRAM

Available on the UMD campus is a drug and alcohol outreach program that is housed in the Health Service and Wellness Resource Center. This program is primarily for students and offers a variety of services, both educational and supportive.

Presentations, workshops and lectures on alcohol/drug use, abuse, and dependency can be arranged for University groups and the needs of the individual group making the request. Also, the outreach program provides a counseling, information and referral service for students who have any questions about their own or another's use of mood altering drugs.

For students who are in a recovery process the program coordinator can assist them with any questions, concerns about their dependency and act as a referral to appropriate supportive University or community resources. For further information or assistance call Peg Mold at 726-8155.

## RO-SU

REACH OUT--SPEAK UP (RO-SU), a student organization which functioned in the past in making the UMD community more aware of the needs and characteristics of persons with disabilities, may be revived. A number of students have expressed an interest in re-establishing the organization.

All interested people are urged to contact Handicapped Student Services, at 726-7965, or Library 135, so that we may determine whether there is sufficient

interest to call an organizational meeting. A physical impairment is not necessary for membership to the group.

## ACCENT AWARENESS-- DEAFNESS AND HEARING IMPAIRMENT

I. Brief Overview. During the past few years, a lot of attention has been focused on the rights of disabled people. Through legislation and efforts of many consumer groups, persons with disabilities are finally becoming recognized as valuable and equal members of society. One population which has not been as visible as many other disability groups is the deaf community. Although changes have been made (e.g., the development of captioned television news and commercials in sign language), these efforts have not always been explained to the general public. The elimination of many "sound barriers" for deaf citizens has been a major step forward in improving the quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

But what of the invisible barriers that still stand in the way of disabled citizens? Stereotyping and/or negative attitudes are still held by many individuals. These attitudes often obstruct independent, dignified lifestyles for disabled citizens. The attitudes may arise from fear or simple lack of knowledge about disability. Most importantly, these attitudinal barriers often go unrecognized, contributing to poor communication between disabled and nondisabled citizens.

This article will deal primarily with

the deaf and hearing impaired. The purpose of this article is to enhance awareness about deafness and hearing impairment, so individuals may interact more positively with deaf or hearing impaired persons.

## II. Deafness or Hearing Impairment--What are some of the differences?

Definitions: "Deaf" defines persons who do not have the ability to hear and understand speech.\* "Hearing impaired" defines those persons who have some ability to hear and understand speech. (It should be noted that these definitions are general terms.)

There are all degrees and several kinds of hearing loss. The very term "hearing impairment" refers to all varieties of hearing loss. Be careful not to group all persons with hearing loss into one category.

Since there are numerous degrees of hearing loss, it is inevitable that a classification system would emerge. Terms such as "hard of hearing," "pre-lingually deaf," "post-lingually deaf," "mild hearing loss," "severe hearing loss," and "profound hearing loss" can appear very confusing. It is important to recognize that each individual's hearing loss is different and affects them uniquely.

III. The Population. There are approximately 1.7 million deaf individuals living in the United States. Another 15 million Americans have partial hearing impairments, ranging from mild to profound hearing loss. Most people will either have some hearing loss in their lifetime or will have a close family member experience a hearing loss. The process of aging, alone, is responsible for a good deal of hearing impairment. Many people will not even realize the extent of the loss or its effects and therefore will not seek appropriate advice. Most people with hearing loss will face attitudinal barriers. Only the severity will differ.

This article is about those persons with severe hearing loss who are having problems achieving their full potential because of attitudinal barriers.

IV. Communication. The major handicap facing a person with a hearing impairment is one of communication; deaf persons rely upon their eyes for signals which represent ideas. The most commonly recognized method of communication is lip reading. The deaf

person can, with enough training and concentration, understand many spoken words by watching the lips and face of the speaker.

Another form of communication is done with the hands (manual). Here, thoughts are expressed by a combination of hand movements and positions. Manual communication (sign language) has many forms. Sign language dialects exist regionally within the U.S., and different spoken languages have different sign languages (Spoken French, Sign French). Where no sign exists for a thought, the word can be spelled using the manual alphabet. Each letter is formed by the hand (fingerspelling).

Deaf citizens also communicate with written language when lip reading and manual communication cannot be used effectively. Technology presently exists which allows standard telephones to be used with small typewriter-like instruments (called TTY's) that transmit printed words onto a panel. Both telephone users must have this instrument in order to use the system.

When a hearing and deaf person begin to communicate, sometimes they use pad and pen to understand each other. Because many deaf people speak, sometimes only the hearing person writes his/her thoughts.

Whichever form of communication is used--lip reading, manual communication (sign language and fingerspelling), or written language--deaf citizens can express themselves and be understood by hearing citizens when both are willing to try. Communication is the important thing.

## V. Common Myths About Hearing Impaired and Deaf Persons.

MYTH: All hearing impaired persons can read lips.

FACT: All of us, to some extent, rely on lip reading to understand our language. But even a practiced deaf listener can only understand 30 to 40 percent of spoken sounds by watching the lips of a speaker ("Deafness Briefs: Information on Deaf Adults," Galludet College, Washington, D.C. 20002). For example, words like "bump" and "pump" look the same on the lips but have totally different meanings. As with any other skill, the ability to read lips varies among individuals. Although the most accurate mode of communication with deaf persons is sign language, pencil and paper can sometimes be used as an alternative. Keep in

mind that your body language and facial expressions say a lot, too.

MYTH: Deaf people are not very bright because they have not learned to talk or use proper grammar.

FACT: Because the basic form of communication of the deaf community is sign language, many deaf persons have not mastered the grammatical fine points of their "second" language--English. This certainly does not indicate a lack of intelligence. Most deaf individuals do learn English usage and do have speech training, but they may find it easier to communicate in their primary language.

MYTH: Hearing aids totally correct hearing impairments.

FACT: Hearing aids are assistive devices which improve hearing in some individuals. The aids do not correct hearing. A hearing aid may enable a person to hear someone's voice, even though they may not be able to understand distinct words. The fact that someone is wearing a hearing aid does not necessarily indicate that the person can hear normally. A hearing aid merely lessens the degree of severity of a hearing loss.

MYTH: All deaf persons lack the ability to speak.

FACT: Many deaf persons speak, have normal physical vocal ability, and learn to use their voices in speech classes. But deaf persons cannot automatically control the tone and volume of their voices like normal-hearing people, because they cannot hear themselves speak. Even with years of training, a deaf individual may have speech which is difficult, at first, for the listener to understand. Most people can understand "deaf speech" once they become accustomed to it. Some deaf persons are shy about speaking in public because of the negative reactions they have received before. ("Deafness Briefs: Information on Deaf Adults," Galludet College, Washington, D.C. 20002).

#### VI. What Do You Do When You Meet A Deaf Person?

1. Speak clearly and distinctly, but do not exaggerate. Use normal speed unless

asked to slow down.

2. Provide a clear view of your mouth. Waving your hands or holding something in front of your lips, thus hiding them, makes lip reading impossible.

3. Use a normal tone unless you are asked to raise your voice. Shouting will be of no help.

4. Speak directly to the person, instead of from the side or back of the person.

5. Speak expressively. Because deaf persons cannot hear subtle changes in tone which may indicate sarcasm or seriousness, many will rely on your facial expressions, gestures and body movement to understand you.

6. If you are having trouble understanding a deaf person's speech, feel free to ask him/her to repeat. If that does not work, then use paper and a pen. Communicating is your goal. The method does not matter.

7. If you know any sign language, try using it. If the deaf person you are communicating with finds it a problem, the person will let you know. Usually your attempts will be appreciated and supported.

8. If a deaf person is with an interpreter, speak directly to the deaf person, not to the interpreter.

9. When talking with a deaf person, try not to stand in front of a light source (e.g., a window). The deaf person would find it hard to see your face, which would be silhouetted in the light.

10. Do not assume you have to exclude hard-of-hearing friends from all forms of recreation involving music or speech. It is true, concerts and operas may present problems, but movies, ballets, plays, and dances are often just as enjoyable to people with a hearing loss as to those with normal hearing. (Even profoundly deaf persons respond to vibration, and many are good and eager dancers.) For children, magic shows, pantomimes, and the circus are good choices.

VII. What You Can Do. The deaf and the hearing person have a common problem of communication. The deaf person relies on eyes and hands for language; the hearing person, on ears. Both have something to say and something to listen to. You can help improve the communication between deaf and hearing citizens. Here are a few suggestions.

1. Ask your church, civic organization or club to make provisions for sign language interpreters. Announce that the service is available so that hearing impaired people can request it.

2. When children ask about sign language that they see on television or in public, tell them that it is the language of the deaf and that many people talk that way.

3. When you see television shows, newspaper articles or magazines that portray deaf citizens as competent and able, send a letter indicating your support to the producer or publisher.

4. Encourage high schools, colleges and universities to offer courses in sign language. Such courses could be accepted as a foreign language requirement.

5. Support sponsors of television shows that are captioned or have sign language interpreters. Tell commercial sponsors that you are expressing your approval of them by using their products.

6. When you read or view a presentation portraying deaf people in a negative way (sick, unintelligent), write a letter stating your opinion to the involved newspaper, magazine, or television station.

7. Install a teletypewriter phone system (TTY) in your office or place of business. Advertise its availability.

8. Invite deaf citizens to give lectures or presentations at meetings, conferences, and workshops. Some will use their own voices and others will bring sign language interpreters.

9. When planning a meeting, remember that visual aids are very helpful to the deaf participant. If a film is planned, provide a written script, outline or summary of the film content.

10. Encourage friends and family to learn sign language.

VIII. References. The following is a brief list of materials which can improve your knowledge about deaf citizens.

Available from: Public Service Programs, Gallaudet College, Washington, D.C. 20002.

"Deafness Briefs: Information on Deaf Adults"

"American Sign Language: Fact and Fancy," by H. Markowicz

"A Look at American Sign Language"

"You and Your Deafness"

"What Every Person Should Know About

Hereditry and Deafness"

"A Look at Fingerspelling"

For additional information, contact:  
The National Association of the Deaf  
814 Thayer Avenue  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

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IX. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES.

"Potpourri of Resources for Educators and Counselors of the Hearing Impaired, in Post Secondary Education," available through Dominic T. Bozzeli, Education Specialist, National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY

A Guide to College/Career Programs for Deaf Students, available through Gallaudet College, Washington, D.C. 20002

Department of Communicative Disorders, 5 Home Economics Building, University of Minnesota, Duluth, Duluth, MN 55812, 726-7974.

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\_\_\_\_\_ I would be interested in being on the mailing list for this newsletter.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have some information, articles, etc. that I would like to submit to this newsletter.

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