

# **Supported employment for people who are deaf: An overview of the unique needs and challenges**

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**Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation 13 (1999)**

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This article reviews the specialized needs of Deaf individuals in supported employment. The primary focus will be the discussion of common challenges and strategies for effectively providing services to Deaf people; both those with disabilities, and those who have immigrated to the United States from developing countries. Inclusion into the workplace, successful assessment, job placement, and ongoing support strategies will also be discussed.

Keywords: Deaf people with disabilities and employment, supported employment, cultural and linguistic minority groups

## **1. Introduction**

Since the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990, more and more people with disabilities are entering the workforce. Many people with disabilities achieve this milestone in their lives through the individualized assessment, job placement and training assistance provided by supported employment programs. Supported employment services have exploded over the last several years, providing opportunities for gainful and meaningful employment in ever increasing numbers. Students turning 22 no longer are greeted with the prospect of sheltered employment for the next twenty years. Instead, many vocational service agencies are determined to provide job placement services before individuals set foot into a restrictive work environment. In other words, supported employment has become the expectation instead of the exception.

As a result of this shift in focus, supported employment programs are utilizing a more holistic approach to meet each person's needs. This includes examining the role of the individual in their home and community, as well as their vocational needs, and integrating this information with equal emphasis into the concept of job development.

The type and duration of services each person will require in order to maintain employment are as unique as the individual. Each person in her own character and ability deserves services that reflect and value her potential as an individual. Our views and life experiences may be quite similar or vastly different from the people we see in our office. Therefore, a person's profile should also include an understanding of their culture and values. As vocational professionals from the dominant culture, it is important to be highly attuned to our own value system, to maintain impartiality in the decision making process [3,18]. This often means putting aside our value system, and opening our minds to alternate possibilities other than what we learned as members of the dominant culture (e.g, Caucasian, English-speaking, Hearing, non-disabled) [5]. Gaining and incorporating this skill into our everyday work may take time and practice. By including an individual's life experiences as a valued and integral part of the rehabilitation process, the professional relationship can be strengthened. The decision making power has to be given to Deaf people so that they can make the decisions that reflect their

preferences, not ours.

Recently, there has been recognition that many Deaf people are part of a distinct cultural and linguistic minority group. This recognition helps remove the diagnostic stigma of “disability” and replaces it with identity, pride, and empowerment [17]. The author recommends that vocational service agencies interested in providing services to persons who are Deaf, first gain an understanding of the cultural and linguistic aspects of Deaf Culture (as compared to the dominant culture). In this manner, vocational professionals can become attuned to the specific needs of Deaf individuals and support their decisions [12]. This will establish a positive framework from which to build solid working relationships, thereby providing more comprehensive services.

<b>Table 1 Characteristics of Deaf participants between 1994–1998</b>				
<b>Participants Represented</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1995</b>
Number of Deaf people served	20	17	9	8
Developmental Disability	4	6	3	3
Mental Illness	2	1	0	1
Learning Disabled	2	2	2	0
Challenging Behaviors	2	2	1	1
Immigrant	7	5	2	3
Physical	2	1	1	0
Deaf blind	1	0	0	0

<b>Table 2 Participants' level of education</b>				
	<b>1998</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1995</b>
School for the Deaf	6	8	4	3
Mainstreamed Public School	3	2	2	1
College Educated (2 yr degree)	2	0	0	0
Lack of formal education	9	7	3	4

Historical Background:

In 1987, the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), awarded a federally funded contract to WORK Inc. in Quincy, Massachusetts for the purpose of providing assessment, job placement, on-site training and support services to Deaf people and their employers in the Boston area. Over the past ten years, approximately 150 people have been served by this program. In the past four years, 54 people were served, 33 of whom were competitively employed into 43 jobs. Of these, 11 individuals lost their job and obtained a different one causing them to be counted into the next fiscal year as a participant. Following the assessment, approximately 4 people per year are referred for additional training or other services. At this writing, 25 of 33 individuals are still employed and five individuals continue in job development. This success rate has been significantly impacted by changes in the consumer population, job market and economy, and employer awareness. The program is staffed by two people, one of whom is Deaf and a native speaker of ASL.

As Table 1 illustrates, a significant increase in the number of individuals served has occurred since 1995. It was during the initial two year period that a change in the utilization of the allocated funds for this program came about through MRC. That change allowed for fee for service billing, increasing the flexibility of services and the number of people served annually from 8 to 17. Historically, the program had a two year wait list due to the limitations of the old billing mechanism. This was eliminated by the end of 1996. Presently, the average wait for services is 0–2 months once a referral is received and a funding source is established.

Recently, changes in funding allowed services to expand to include persons who are Deafblind. Community outreach has also been intensified, broadening the service area to include the Southeastern and Cape Cod regions of Massachusetts where limited employment resources exist for Deaf people with disabilities.

Many of the Deaf persons in supported employment have disabilities, while 40% of the people served by WORK Inc.'s program were immigrants from developing countries. As Table II outlines, a significant number of Deaf immigrants are referred for supported employment services. Language deprivation, lack of accessible formal education, and in some cases, devalued social status, contributed to these individuals arriving in the United States with poor reading ability and limited communication development. Many of these people arrived with no formal work history and had been taught to cook, clean, sew, or perform manual labor in their countries of origin. These individuals possessed desirable work skills and a solid work ethic, despite the fact that they were not given extensive career development opportunities in their homeland.

In urban areas, Independent Living Centers for Deaf people are meeting the challenges many new Deaf immigrants face by providing assistance to meet their needs.

Services can include ASL, English and Math classes, parenting and health seminars, drivers' education, and assistance with housing and other essential life needs. Some independent living centers have established programs to provide outreach and support services to minority Deaf persons. A local example is Project ALAS, a Deaf Latino program at Deaf Inc. in Allston, MA which provides services to the Latino and Hispanic Deaf communities in the Boston area.

## **2. Individual profile**

### **2.1. Communication**

One of the first areas to identify when considering the assessment and job development process for individuals who are Deaf, is the type of communication style they use. Establishing how each person communicates and providing individualized communication access is crucial. All too frequently, Deaf individuals' communication needs are not prioritized. This causes needless confusion and frustration for many Deaf people and can mean the difference between success or failure in employment.

Not all Deaf persons use speech or lip-reading. They may rely solely on visual communication such as ASL, Signed English, or Highly Visual Communication. Many Deaf individuals who use Highly Visual Communication are from developing countries and learned sign language after they immigrated to the United States. If a disability such as mental retardation is also present, a combination of visual communication such as natural gestures mixed with simple signs to make their needs known may be used. Objects such as pictures, calendars, clocks, maps, etc. can often be effective visual aids for the communication process. Interpreting must be specialized to meet the needs of the individual [7]. Certified Deaf Interpreters (CDI) are being utilized more frequently in a variety of settings. A CDI is a Deaf person who has completed extensive training regarding communicating with Deaf individuals. Other people may prefer to use a Computer Assisted Real Time Reporter (CART) who types the information into a computer. The Deaf person reads the information and types their response. There are endless possibilities for communication, which is why it is crucial to know the Deaf person's communication needs before testing, job interviews, meetings, and other situations occur. It is the responsibility of the service provider to meet the language needs of the Deaf individual, not the Deaf person's responsibility to meet our language expectations.

Providers need to be aware that there is a potential conflict of interest when an Employment Specialist doubles as an interpreter, perhaps compromising the quality of both services. It may also give an employer the misconception that she will be able to rely on you to interpret if the Deaf individual is hired. Advocates and program staff should make it clear to the employer that they will not permit themselves to be used to communicate performance appraisals or disciplinary action to an individual. If a problem should arise later resulting in legal proceedings, the agency staff could be held liable. Therefore, an Employment Specialist taking on the additional role of interpreter should be the last option, and it should happen only with the Deaf person's permission.

### **2.2. Assessment**

A comprehensive assessment is a well-known crucial factor in the career development process. By gathering information from a variety of sources, the Employment Specialist will gain a well-developed understanding of the individual's skills, abilities, and desires for employment [14]. These sources can include:

- The individual
- Family members
- Vocational and/or residential staff

- Historical records
- Prior employment information

Obtaining an individual's complete profile is important in achieving successful employment. While it may be possible to find immediate employment for the person, long term satisfaction and job retention will be increased if the assessment process is maximized. When working with individuals who are Deaf, it is important to explain clearly why the information is required and how it will be used to their benefit. (Of course, this should happen when working with anyone who is being asked to provide intricate details about their life and experiences.)

After reviewing an individual's work history and talking with the individual and other involved persons, a career goal may not be clearly defined. Perhaps the person has no established work history, has been in sheltered employment, or has not been able to maintain employment in the past. Alternative methods can be employed to identify areas of interest and further clarify vocational goals.

One form of evaluation WORK Inc. frequently uses is a situational assessment. First, a tour of the various work opportunities is provided. Arrangements are then made for the individual to participate in the selected area(s) for a 4–6 week period. During this time period, a sign language proficient staff person is assigned to work with the individual on a 1 : 1 basis providing training, language facilitation, and case management services. Upon completion of the assessment period, a report is written and presented to the individual and other involved persons. At this meeting, a career plan is developed that outlines the individual's personal goals and the course of continued services. This can either be a recommendation for competitive employment, or a specific needs assessment for continued career exploration and training. Persons who are not referred to competitive employment and require additional training are re-evaluated a few months later with the goal of eventual placement into a competitive job.

### **2.3. Interests**

First, the use of pictures showing various types of jobs can be a starting point to get a general sense of what the person might enjoy. Driving through the community and stopping at businesses that the person identifies as places of interest is also a method of identifying job interests. Many businesses are willing to give a brief tour of their operation (with an appointment) which is one of the best ways to not only make a new business contact, but also to give the individual a better understanding of what different companies have to offer. Sometimes these tours can turn into impromptu interviews!

### **2.4. Formal testing**

If an individual must complete a formal testing procedure as part of the assessment, the use of an ASL interpreter or an evaluator who is ASL fluent is essential [9]. In order to accurately interpret the information, the concept must first be established and the meaning of the message conveyed accurately, before correct answers can be procured [16]. Evaluation questions will often need to be contextualized first in order to obtain a complete answer from the Deaf person. This can be achieved by the use of expansion techniques such as giving an example or making a comparison.

Here again, providing communication access to meet the needs of the Deaf individual is a critical factor in order to achieve valid testing results. While it may present an additional cost to obtain a qualified interpreter, the validity of the testing can not be accepted when communication has been compromised. A communication evaluation may be beneficial to clarify an individual's communication needs. A Deaf evaluator who is a native speaker of American Sign Language is an invaluable resource to pinpoint specific components of the individual's functional language use. Rather than churning out a list of signs that the person recognizes, the Deaf communication evaluator can examine how the Deaf individual uses language receptively, expressively, and in conversation with others. When needed, the Deaf communication evaluator can recommend techniques for more effective communication.

There may also be a need for the individuals you serve to access qualified ancillary service providers in your area who are ASL proficient. Many agencies who work with Deaf people keep a resource listing of other service providers who are aware of the specific needs of Deaf persons. In Massachusetts, the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Boston provides a statewide listing of resources for Deaf people at no charge. Some of them are ASL proficient and may also be Deaf themselves. Seeking out these providers is usually well worth the effort.

### **3. Training and consultation services for employers**

Despite the increasing number of persons with disabilities entering the workforce, a significant degree of employer ignorance continues to exist. One such example was the employer who was contacted about an advertised dishwashing job in the back of a restaurant. The employer's response when he realized that the applicant was Deaf stated: "I can't have a Deaf person working in the kitchen washing dishes because there are open flames!" One of the factors contributing to this employer's ignorance was the fact that he was from another country where Deaf people are devalued and not expected or permitted to work. Responding to this type of employer requires an effective strategy that addresses the cultural bias that is present while simultaneously letting the employer know that the person is qualified for the position. An example of this strategy is presented below in Case Example I.

#### **3.1. Case example I**

The corporate office of a major fast food restaurant chain contacted the Work Inc. employment office asking for candidates to work in their new restaurant. A Deaf person who has a developmental disability and Attention Deficit Disorder wanted to apply for the position and was brought to the job site for an interview as agreed upon with the Human Resources Representative.

Upon arrival, the Regional Manager greeted the applicant with a look of dismay. He hesitantly asked us to return at another time as he did not know if could hire someone "like this". The Employment Specialist explained that the Corporate Office had clearly stated that they wanted to employ workers with disabilities and wanted to have interested applicants interviewed ASAP. The manager asked several pointed and inappropriate questions. The following is the dialogue that was exchanged between the Regional Manager and the Employment Specialist. Please note that the Employment Specialist remains calm and uses this situation to educate.

MGR: "At what age level does this person function?"

ETS: "Testing often labels people and accentuates what they can't do. This person is qualified to perform the essential functions of the job. Perhaps now might be a good time to fill out an application."

MGR: "Will he stick his hand in the hot french fry oil?"

ETS: "If this person were at risk of doing that, I would have brought another person. We carefully prescreen our applicants to insure that you are seeing a qualified individual."

MGR: "Oh."

Once the employer had all of the information about what the applicant could do and listened as the applicant described his employment experience, he offered James a full-time position as a salad and fajita maker. Shortly after James was hired, the employer realized that he did not have enough salad and fajita business so he began to cross-train James on other food stations. Within a two month period, James learned how to toast rolls, document wasted food, make salads and fajitas, wash dishes, and cook on the grill.

Considering that James is not able to speak and reads only a few familiar sight words, communication was a concern. His Sign Language incorporates both signs and gestures. His employer learned to communicate with him using gestures, simple signs, and adaptive visual aids. His employer also identified a co-worker who had a Deaf person in her family and knew some signs. When creating the visual aids, the Employment Specialist met with James at the employment office and typed words onto the computer screen which are commonly used in food service environments. James was then asked to demonstrate the correct sign for the word. Together, we were able to make different cue sheets that everyone could understand.

After four months, James became the full-time grill cook and replaced a non-disabled worker who was moved to another area. Today, he is in command of the grill for nearly his entire shift including the lunch rush, which requires the ability to manage several tasks at once and predict what is needed throughout the afternoon. Following the initial training period of three weeks, James has been able to consistently perform his work independently and is proud of his achievements. When the restaurant is not busy, he helps out where he is needed, and has since learned more job responsibilities without the assistance of an Employment Specialist. He receives a follow up visit from Work Inc. once per month. After two years of employment, James continues to be a valued employee and was selected as Employee of the Month for May 1998. He also participates in the company softball team. The same manager who once asked inappropriate questions out of ignorance now says he doesn't know how he'd get along without James. Due to his business success, a second Deaf individual has been hired and is also working independently.

### **3.1.1. Teaching methods**

Supporting Deaf persons in employment requires the ability to negotiate between two languages and cultures [4]. It also requires the ability to incorporate this knowledge into successful teaching methods that meet the needs of the individual and the company. Deaf people rely primarily on their vision to gain new information about the environment. They also may pay more attention to body language and facial expressions. The correct use of body language and facial expressions when communicating with Deaf people is just as important as knowing how to use sign language. Needless

misunderstandings occur when someone has a serious facial expression or threatening body posture but is signing a benign statement. In other words, it's not what you say but how you say it. Some Deaf persons with disabilities may become upset if someone signs the word "No" or "Wrong" to them. It may be helpful to show them what they have done correctly first and then show them the comparison between the correct and incorrect work. It may also be helpful to provide a sample of correct and incorrect work so they can self monitor the work and reduce the need for correction.

When teaching from a visual perspective, it is important to give the individual a demonstration of the task combined with signed or gestured instructions. Depending on the individual, he/she may need to observe you perform the task first, do the task alongside you, or do each step of the task with a visual prompt. Some individuals are able to complete the task with only signed or gestured instructions, particularly if they have prior experience.

The use of adaptive visual aids should also be incorporated into the job training process as soon as possible when communication support will be required ongoing. This is of particular importance when the Deaf employee is not planning to rely on note writing or speech reading. Some examples of visual aids are the use of copied Sign Language pictures paired with English words, which can either be short phrases or individual words depending on the communication style of the individual. Other examples include time charts, simple translations of lists using the individual's sight word recognition, color coding, or bar graphs. Each person's training needs are different. The key to success is achieved by utilizing individualized training techniques coupled with consistent communication access [6].

### **3.1.2. Technology**

From the first day on the job, it is essential to develop strategies to maintain job standards. In addition to communication needs, the individual's learning style, work speed and accuracy, stress tolerance, and social skills, are all factors to be incorporated into this process. Much of this information should be identified in the individual's assessment profile. Adaptive equipment should be used whenever possible to enhance communication and independence. For example, a vibrating watch allows people to monitor their work speed for an hour or remind them to return from break and lunch on time. This is a small but powerful tool. A vibrating text beeper can be used to page Deaf workers to a particular location in the building, or send instructions from the supervisor. Deaf employees can utilize fax machines and e-mail for both internal and external communication. A TTY (Tele-Typewriter) can be used along with a communication relay service when use of the telephone is required. Some of these adaptations will be of reasonable cost to the employer. On occasion, vocational rehabilitation agencies have purchased such items or provided funding for ASL interpreters for a limited time. Additionally, a PASS (Plan for Achieving Self Support) through the Social Security Administration can be used to provide money to pay for extended job support services, transportation, uniforms, and other items which the employer is not required to provide for under the ADA.

### **3.1.3. Employer concerns**

When speaking with employers, three of the most common concerns expressed by hiring managers are

- How will we communicate?
- What happens if there is a fire?
- How will the person deal with machinery?

Communication is often the employer's first concern. Many Deaf persons are highly adept at accommodating people who do not know Sign Language. Other Deaf persons with cognitive disabilities have learned over the course of their lives how to get their point across to others who can't sign.

One of the first steps to establishing communication is to ask the Deaf employee what communication needs they feel they will have on a daily basis once the Employment Specialist fades. With this information, the Employment Specialist can then arrange a Deaf Awareness Training, which can be customized to teach employers and co-workers about deafness, as well as workplace acculturation. The individual who has been hired may also wish to be a part of this process since he will be the one who knows his own needs best. Many Deaf people take great pleasure in sharing their language and culture with others. A Deaf person with a disability who may not be able to give a full presentation can co-lead the training event. For example, he could distribute Sign Language packets and then demonstrate the signs that are being taught to the group. He may want to describe the best ways to get his attention or how to teach new job responsibilities. These types of trainings are highly individualized to meet the needs of the Deaf employee and the company. This is also another area where Deaf program staff can be a valuable resource as teachers of their language and culture.

Sometimes corporations are not able to set aside enough time to have a training with all of the employees. Business needs vary, therefore it is important to remain flexible and creative in order to maintain a positive relationship. Since some companies have VCR equipment in their employee lounge, a video tape could be made and a copy provided to the employer to have for their employees to view while on break. Basic Sign Language for the work place, information about Deaf Culture, and simple role plays, such as the proper way to get a Deaf person's attention when they're working (i.e., tapping their shoulder, waving, flicking the light switch) could be included. It would be important to have the Deaf person participate in this process.

Critical to success is not allowing the employer to become overly dependent on communication support from the start. While it may be necessary for the Employment Specialist to provide some measure of communication support initially, it is desirable to tell the employer to attempt to use gestures with the Deaf employee while remaining available to clarify the message if needed. Offer suggestions while they are communicating with the person. Demonstrate how to use an object from the environment such as a clock, calendar or simple note or picture as a communication tool. The earlier this process is started, the sooner the employee and employer will be competent. Often it is not the Deaf employee's need to improve their job performance, but the employer's need to feel confident that they can communicate with the employee once the Employment Specialist is gone. This is also the best time period to discuss future situations when the employer will be responsible to provide an ASL interpreter (i.e., performance review) and why they can not rely on employment providers to interpret in these circumstances (liability).

Many employers voice immediate concern regarding fire safety. This is becoming less of a problem

with the passage of the ADA, requiring public buildings to install adaptive fire alarm equipment. In situations where this issue still arises, the employer has several options. They can purchase a strobing smoke alarm at a reasonable cost. In addition, they can also remind all employees aware of the need to look out for one another in the event of a fire, whether they are Deaf or not. The Deaf employee would also recognize danger in his immediate area and execute common sense if there is smoke or flames.

The use of industrial equipment or machinery generally does not need to exclude the Deaf employee from working in these areas or using equipment. Forklifts are often equipped with flashing strobe lights. The use of three way mirrors is also helpful to see around corners. Again, common sense should be the rule and for all co-workers to be alert in the workplace. However, this rule needs to be made explicit when a Deaf employee is added to the team.

### **3.2. Long term support**

While the intended outcome for each individual is successful employment, there can be barriers along the way that can cause someone to lose their job. This is why long term support is of such great importance. Long term support can consist of a variety of tailor made strategies that can include:

- Consistent contact with the individual and their employer. This can be a site visit, phone call or office appointment depending on needs and preferences.
- Periodic case meetings with the individual and people in their support network.
- Monthly peer group/social where successes and concerns can be discussed.

For some people, it may take two or more jobs before an obstacle can be hurdled and employment longevity achieved. The following Case Example illustrates this.

### **3.3. Case example II**

In 1995, Paulo, a 38 year old Deaf man from Latin America was referred to Work Inc. He had immigrated to the United States several years before to Texas but had recently moved to Boston. Paulo had completed 12 grades of school in his homeland. However, he had missed a great deal of information as there were no Sign Language interpreters provided. Consequently, his reading and math skills were below the fourth grade level. Paulo had participated in a vocational program in Texas where he worked in a transitional employment setting installing carpeting and air conditioners in addition to custodial work. He had also worked in a restaurant as a food prep worker until the restaurant closed. It was shortly after this that Paulo moved to Boston. He was living with a relative and had recently become a father. He wanted to become employed to support his new family.

Initially, Paulo wanted to work in a hotel. He applied for a full time dishwasher position at a nearby hotel. Shortly after this, he had an accident at home that injured his leg. This caused him to lose work time for surgery and a lengthy recovery. He often missed work due to physical therapy appointments and was inconsistent at letting his employer know about his need for time off. This created scheduling problems. Paulo did not notify Work Inc. staff that he needed assistance until he was notified that his hours were being reduced to part-time because of his sporadic attendance. He was angry at his

employer for not warning him of a policy that said his hours would be reduced after 90 days of not maintaining full-time hours. The policy had been briefly discussed during new employee orientation where a sign language interpreter had been provided. He stated that he did not trust this employer any longer and decided to quit his job.

Shortly after this, he landed a position in a grocery store as a stock clerk. His leg had fully recovered by this time. He continued to work for approximately three months. Without notifying anyone, he left his job. He later stated that he had felt pains in his chest and that he was certain it was because of the job. He had not explained this to his supervisor or the Employment Specialist who was following up with him. A meeting was scheduled with Paulo and his support network of service providers and family. He had recently completed a physical and was found to be in perfect health and repeatedly stated he wanted to work. This meeting focused on the recent events that had caused Paulo to leave his jobs. A discussion comparing Paulo's difficulties maintaining employment and employer expectations in the United States was presented. To be certain that he fully understood, a Certified Deaf interpreter was hired. Although the issues had been discussed repeatedly in the past, Paulo had not fully understood his difficulties with maintaining a job until this meeting occurred. A plan of action was developed and presented to Paulo which outlined the steps to be taken to keep his next job. This included the expectations of both Paulo and his Employment Specialist. In July 1997, Paulo was hired in a different hotel as a full-time laundry worker. This job paid \$9.00 hr to start, which was the highest paying job he had ever held. Paulo received two weeks of on-site support. He also had two Deaf co-workers who helped him out during the training period. Within six months of hire, Paulo moved into his own apartment, married and bought his first car. Although he requires periodic check-ins to help resolve issues and keep him motivated, Paulo has maintained employment for approximately two years.

### **3.3.1. Networking**

Another successful strategy for long term support is to form a networking group. For many years, WORK Inc. hosted a monthly dinner for the Deaf persons who were in job development or had recently become employed. They used these occasions for group socialization, as well as a forum to discuss job search experiences and offer support and ideas to their peers. Over time, this activity was augmented by having a Peer Breakfast each Monday morning. The individuals in job development enjoyed a Continental breakfast while reviewing the Sunday classifieds, preparing cover letters and making phone calls with program staff for 2–3 hours. By the end of the first nine months, the group was discontinued because everyone was employed and could no longer attend!

The needs of Deaf people with disabilities in your area can be identified and discussed by establishing a networking committee. In the Boston area, several such groups have formed in an effort to improve and expand services for Deaf persons across Massachusetts. One such group is the Department of Mental Retardation's Steering Committee for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. This committee formed in response to families, disabled Deaf persons, and service providers' concerns regarding the need for more services statewide that can accommodate the needs of Deaf persons with developmental disabilities. This committee meets quarterly and has grown to nearly 40 members. This is an excellent way to network amongst service providers and State agencies committed to improving services for Deaf people. It is also a problem solving and strategizing forum.

## 4. Staffing and employment outcomes

### 4.1. Recruitment

One of the challenges for agencies serving people with disabilities is locating and keeping qualified staff. The challenge is two-fold when working with a cultural and linguistic minority group due to the need for language fluency and cultural awareness. Working with Deaf persons is no different. Locating experienced staff who possess the language competency required to communicate fluently in both English and ASL often requires patience and a willingness to wait for the right candidate before filling the position. Many Deaf people in the rehabilitation system have lacked positive role models who share their same language and culture. Therefore, providing culturally sensitive and language competent program staff is the cornerstone of successfully serving the Deaf community. For many Deaf individuals, the common thread of shared language and culture is a strong bond and can be used as a positive rehabilitation tool.

Locating qualified applicants who are Deaf can be accomplished in a variety of ways. In addition to advertising in local newspapers, we have experienced success with recruitment through the following means:

- Mailings to area agencies with Deaf services
- Deaf publications which often have a classified section
- Gallaudet University (A University with predominantly Deaf students)
- The Internet- Deaf Community Web Sites
- Listing your agency in the Deaf resource guides or phone book
- Word of mouth (has been our greatest success)

In our experience, people who are both fluent in ASL and English have been successful because they can successfully navigate between the needs of the company and the Deaf individual. This has been an ongoing challenge for some of the Deaf staff, primarily because of communication barriers. Many employers do not have the time and/or patience to work through the communication process. Even with the use of a Sign Language interpreter, the Deaf staff frequently report that they do not feel they are on equal footing when it comes to calling on companies to look for jobs. Since every person's professional style is different and program needs vary, the need for flexibility for successful employment services is essential. Some of the alternatives that have been helpful are:

- Providing ASL interpreters for Deaf staff to make phone calls to companies and arrange interviews once per week
- Arranging a meeting with the company at a time convenient for the employer, using an interpreter
- Picking up job applications only and calling back t another time via interpreter or non-Deaf program staff
- Having non-Deaf staff perform the bulk of job development while the Deaf staff work directly with the consumer to follow up on assessment, ob interview preparation, application completion, and job coaching
- Deaf staff developing jobs by targeting businesses using the yellow pages, Internet job

boards, or newspaper ads and using e-mail, fax, or mass mailings to send resumes and cover letters

**Table 3**

**Jobs Held by Deaf Individuals referred to WORK Inc. by MRC**

Type of Job	Avg. Wage	1998	1997	1996	1995
Bookkeeper	\$9.00hr	1	0	0	0
Data Entry	\$7.00hr	1	1	1	0
Dishwasher	\$6.00hr	2	0	4	0
Grill Cook	\$6.00hr	0	2	0	0
Grocery Clerk	\$5.75hr	2	2	0	0
Health Services	\$11.00hr	0	0	2	0
Housekeeping/Janitor	\$7.00hr	3	4	2	0
Landscaping	\$7.00hr	1	0	0	0
Laundry	\$7.00hr	2	0	2	1
Mail Clerk	\$5.50hr	1	1	0	1
Manufacturing	\$5.50hr	1	3	0	0
Stock Clerk	\$5.75hr	2	1	0	1
Catering	\$7.00hr	1	0	0	0

**4.2. Employment outcomes**

As previously noted, between 1994 and 1998, 25 of 32 individuals have maintained their competitive jobs. Table 3 describes the types of employment and average wages earned.

**5. Summary**

This article reviews several interventions and strategies that are highlighted in Table 4. These helpful tips can provide guidance to vocational service providers committed to facilitating the inclusion of Deaf people from developing countries or those with disabilities into the workforce. While no one approach can address the needs of all Deaf persons, the common thread throughout has been the importance of getting to know each person's unique needs. This includes familiarization with their

linguistic and cultural background, so that employment services can be tailored to fit the unique needs of the individual. Providing Deaf individuals with clear, consistent communication access is the essential beginning. Without this cornerstone, communication will erode and eventually break down [13].

**Table 4**  
**Effective strategies for program success**

1. Identify individual communication needs and provide consistent communication access.
2. Obtain a complete profile that highlights abilities and interests.
3. Develop a resource guide of area providers who are qualified to work with Deaf people.
4. Investigate technological resources and adaptive equipment for the work place.
5. Clarify and maintain the role differences between Employment Specialists and ASL Interpreters.
6. Foster workplace acculturation by providing “Deaf Awareness Training” for employers and co-workers.
7. Identify and plan for long term support needs.
8. Establish or participate in area committees that focus on improving services for Deaf people.
9. Recruit qualified staff who are ASL proficient and culturally sensitive.
10. Provide opportunities for individuals in job development or employment to socialize with each other.

Finally, as vocational rehabilitation professionals from the dominant culture, we must “examine how our own cultural heritage, values and biases may effect clients from diverse backgrounds” [10]. This may prove to be a difficult task but it is a necessary for selecting strategies and techniques that are consistent with the life experiences and cultural values of individuals [10].

Based on our experiences with Deaf people from nine different countries, WORK Inc. staff have completed this process of self examination on a number of levels. This has included comparative studies of dominant and minority cultures, in addition to studying communication style differences between men and women in the United States and other countries. While this may seem to be an indirect way to improve services to people who are Deaf, the outcome has been employment success. Employment service providers considering program expansion to incorporate employment services for Deaf people need to carefully consider all of the factors presented in this paper when designing a program. Deaf people will then benefit from these services and reap the satisfaction and rewards of competitive employment.

## **Acknowledgements**

Grateful acknowledgement is extended to Karen Smith and Sandra Fisher for their support in the preparation of this article. Deep appreciation is extended to Kendra Timko for her dedication and expertise. The author also wishes to thank Cheryl Cormier and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, Statewide Employment Services office in Boston, MA for making this program possible.

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