

Barriers, Solutions & Best Practices for Deaf Persons in Niagara with Employment Goals



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Gay Douglas
Literacy Link Niagara
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Background

In 2014-2015 Simcoe/Muskoka Literacy Network (SMLN) and Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy (MTML) were partners in a project called “Enhancing Transitions – Client Perspectives”. This project was funded by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (now the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development - MAESD). Literacy Link Niagara staff were involved in the project as project manager and focus group facilitators.

The objective of the “Enhancing Transitions” project was to learn the perspectives of EO learners and clients who have experienced transitions between Employment and Literacy services: the barriers they encountered and suggestions for improvement.

Nine focus groups with a total of 80 clients were conducted over the month of November. Three focus groups were conducted with participants from the Deaf stream, two with Francophone clients and three with Anglophone clients. One key finding from this research led to this project:

Clients in the Deaf focus groups identified numerous barriers in their transition to the next step, whether to another service provider or to employment. Clients in the Anglophone stream did not identify any such barriers.

Deaf participants had identified these barriers:

- Communications are often not available at employment services programs or employers in the appropriate language (ASL) or in preferred modes (text, e-mail)
- “Revolving” or “closing doors” because some services and employers are unaware of what accommodations were necessary, available or legally required.

- Lack of knowledge and resources (money, staff, and time) as underlying reasons that accommodations were not made.
- Lack of formal policies and practices in place to ensure that accommodations are made.

Because LLN staff had participated in the earlier project, we wanted to take a closer look locally, to better understand the experiences of Deaf learners in Niagara.

Project purpose

No research has been documented that provides clear evidence of employment barriers, solutions and best practices in the Niagara region.

This study, “Barriers, Solutions and Best Practices for Deaf Persons in Niagara with Employment Goals” examines the barriers Deaf people encounter as they access employment services programs or try to get a job. It also examines which strategies and resources may assist them.

This project’s results will be shared with its funder, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD). Based on the project’s findings, we will develop a “Best Practices Working with Deaf Clients” tip sheet and a workshop for employment services providers.

Glossary of terms

Deaf: is generally used to describe individuals with a severe to profound hearing loss, with little or no residual hearing. Some deaf people use a spoken language and speechreading, combined with their residual hearing and hearing aids, communication devices, and/or cochlear implants to communicate. Others use a signed language, such as American Sign Language (ASL) or la langue des signes québécoise (LSQ).

Deaf culture: is the culture of Deaf people based on a signed language and values, traditions and behaviour norms specific to the Deaf community. Deaf culture offers a strong sense of belonging and takes a socio-cultural point of view of deafness, rather than a pathological perspective.

Deafened: describes individuals who grow up hearing or hard of hearing and, either suddenly or gradually, experience a profound hearing loss. Deafened adults usually use speech with visual cues such as Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) or computerized notetaking, speechreading or a signed language.

Hard of hearing: is generally used to describe individuals whose hearing loss ranges from mild to severe, and occasionally profound. Hard of hearing people use speech and residual hearing to communicate, supplemented by communication strategies that may include speechreading, hearing aids, a signed language and communication devices. The term “person with hearing loss” is also used by this constituency.

- Canadian Hearing Society, <http://www.chs.ca/glossary-terms>

Throughout this report the term “Deaf” is used to represent all the definitions, above.

Executive Summary

Deaf persons in Niagara face a range of barriers in accessing employment. Many Deaf adults lack a strong educational foundation because of their experiences as Deaf children in an educational system designed for hearing children. Many Deaf persons do not read or write English well, and not all Deaf persons understand and use American Sign Language. As a result the education, skill and employment levels of the minority Deaf culture ranges widely, and lag behind those of the hearing majority.

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), while clearly articulating expectations, laws and standards, is not strictly enforced. Its relevance and value to Deaf persons is ambiguous. The Act should facilitate greater accessibility and opportunities for Deaf persons, but attaches the label “Disabled” to Deafness. However, many Deaf persons do not consider themselves disabled, because they are mentally and physically “able” - to learn, communicate and work.

When trying to find work Deaf persons often encounter employers who are generally uninformed and unwilling to consider hiring them. They may believe that communicating with Deaf persons would be too much trouble and expense, without knowing there are practical solutions to enhance communications and that there may be measurable benefits to their company, both financial and cultural.

There are many Deaf persons who are motivated, skilled and ready to work. Attitudinal barriers, lack of knowledge and systemic discrimination often prevent them from reaching their potential.

The Deaf Community

According to The Canadian Hearing Society, one in ten Canadians experiences some degree of hearing loss, and one in ten Canadians with hearing loss are deaf people who communicate with sign language, usually American Sign Language (ASL). Based on this data, we can estimate that there are approximately 357,000 profoundly deaf and deafened Canadians and possibly 3.21 million Hard-of-hearing Canadians.

If this estimate is applied to Niagara, approximately 43,000 people who are Deaf, Deafened or Hard-of-hearing live in the region, 4,300 of which use ASL.

Many members of the Deaf community tend to view deafness as a difference in human experience rather than a disability or disease. Many members take pride in their Deaf identity. Deaf persons, in the sense of a community or culture, can then be seen as a minority group, and therefore some who are a part of this community may feel misunderstood by those who don't know sign language or understand the culture.

For the most part, those outside of the Deaf community are unaware of this cultural self-identity and simply classify deafness as a disability. This is not surprising since Deaf persons qualify for federal Disability Tax Credits and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), to name just two specialized programs designed for persons with disabilities.

The eligibility criteria for ODSP describes a Person with a disability as

- “the person has a substantial physical or mental impairment that is continuous or recurrent and expected to last one year or more

- the direct and cumulative effect of the impairment on the person’s ability to attend to his or her personal care, function in the community and function in a workplace, results in a substantial restriction in one or more of these activities of daily living, and
- the impairment and its likely duration and the restriction in the person’s activities of daily living have been verified by a person with the prescribed qualifications.”

- Ontario Disability Support Program Act, 1997, S.O. 1997, c. 25, Sched. B, 2009

This definition takes the approach that Deaf persons have a continuous impairment that severely restricts their activities of daily living and the ability to function in the community or at work.

One might question if this is substantially the case or if systemic attitudinal and societal barriers keep Deaf persons classified as “disabled” rather than providing them with the same educational, communications and employment opportunities as hearing persons.

1991, Premier Bob Rae and his NDP government established an employment equity commission and two years later introduced affirmative action to improve the numbers of women, non-whites, Aboriginals and disabled persons working in the public sector. For a short while it resulted in more employment opportunities for Deaf persons. The policy was controversial, as it set quotas for companies to hire from the “disadvantaged” groups. It cost the NDP support among its unionized working-class base of support and ended when Mike Harris became Premier in 1995. No similar Ontario legislation has been proposed since.

Dr. Paddy Ladd is a Deaf scholar, author, activist and researcher expands the view of deafness as a culture to include disability. He describes Deaf persons as “dual-category”

members of both disability and language minority groups, who have deeper needs than a disability model alone allows for.

“The Deaf community has its own culture expressed in its language, literature, rituals, humour, and theatre. It has social rules that differ from those of the majority hearing culture. These differences sometimes result in confused interactions or misunderstandings between hearing and Deaf persons.”

- Employment and Employability Needs of the Deaf

American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreters

ASL-English Interpreters are trained professionals who facilitate communication between a Deaf person who knows ASL and a hearing person.

The ASL interpreter serves as a vital communications link between the Deaf person and the hearing world. There are two professional associations representing ASL interpreters in Ontario: The Ontario Association of Sign Language Interpreters (OASLI) and the Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada (AVLIC). An interpreter can be a member of both or neither. Neither organization sets a standard of professional skill or ethic for its members - the profession remains unregulated.

As a result, a wide variety of skills, training and credentials exists among ASL interpreters. The fees they charge also vary. It is often unclear whose obligation it is to pay for the interpreter – the Deaf person, the agency from which they may be accessing services or the employer.

The Ontario Interpreting Service, operated by the Canadian Hearing Society, operates an interpreter booking system. They have established a screening tool to set a standard of skill, which not all interpreters can meet.

Interpreters may work for an organization like a school board or college or be self-employed.

There are a number of weaknesses in the interpreting field which are articulated below in a position paper from the Canadian Association of the Deaf. These include

- not enough interpreters (particularly well-qualified ones)
- too few training programs with rather low standards for passing students

- the proliferation of agencies that recruit unqualified and under-qualified people who merely “know (some) Sign language” and pass them off as fully-qualified professional interpreters at a price that undercuts the prices of legitimate, qualified interpreters
- insufficient funding for interpreting services, which causes many requests for their services to be turned down for financial reasons
- lack of information and awareness about costs of interpreters, especially in the workplace, which causes many employers to refuse to provide the interpreters because they do not know of funding sources or business expense deductions that would underwrite these costs
- lack of clarity and widespread understanding of the rights of Deaf people to interpreters

Deaf Employment Services in Niagara

The Canadian Hearing Society (CHS) offers the largest employment service for Deaf persons in the province, offered at 15 CHS locations across Ontario. They help Deaf, Deafened and Hard-of-hearing persons find a job, and works with employees and employers to put the right supports in place. These services are free-of-charge to job seekers aged 16 and over.

Niagara does not have a CHS office and the closest office is in Hamilton.

There is just one program in Niagara specifically for Deaf persons, and it is not necessary for them to have an employment goal to attend. Niagara Adult Literacy for the Deaf (NALD) is a Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program funded by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD). Learners select one of 5 goal paths, independence, secondary school credit, post-secondary education, apprenticeship or employment. NALD is free of charge, managed by the District School Board of Niagara and operates at 36 Page St. in St. Catharines.

There are eight Employment Ontario-funded Employment Services (ES) in Niagara serving the general population, and two Employment Assistance Services (OEAS) specializing in working with people with disabilities. They all provide employment counselling, workshops, resume-writing and job opportunities.

“Low literacy levels may impede deaf people from finding and maintaining employment.”

- Employment and Employability Needs of the Deaf Community in Peel and Halton Regions, The Centre for Skills Development & Training, 2002

“Claims about the “un-employability” of Deaf people are unacceptable. The real causes of high unemployment in the Deaf community are hearing patronization, inappropriate educational methodology, and systemic discrimination.”

- Canadian Hearing Society

Education of Deaf persons

The creation of adult literacy programs for Deaf persons is a natural result of the inability of the regular school system to meet their learning and communication needs as children.

Deaf children in regular schools often have significant difficulty communicating with their teachers, all of whom are non-Deaf. In addition, in a class with twenty or thirty students of varying needs and abilities, these teachers are not equipped to provide the special attention and communication needed by a Deaf student.

Support services for Deaf children in regular schools are insufficient. Tutoring in ASL is seldom provided, even in cases where educational authorities admit that ASL is the first language of a Deaf student. As with any first language, a child must have constant exposure to their first language environment. A child who does not receive such exposure is at risk of not developing their natural first language, which can result in literacy and cognitive problems in the future.

It is extremely rare for a Deaf student to have the full-time services of a qualified ASL interpreter. If interpreters are provided, they may not be certified. Interpreters work only in the classroom, leaving the child to try their best to communicate in the playground and after school.

The Deaf child in a regular school is usually isolated. Research indicates that a mainstreamed Deaf child is usually the only one in the classroom, and often, in the entire school. This may have had a significant impact on their social skills and ability to interact with others. These issues continue throughout the Deaf child's educational experience.

Ontario offers schools for Deaf children in 5 locations across the province. The child can learn among other Deaf children with whom they share a language and a culture, but there may be long periods of separation from family.

“Deaf children are frequently deprived of early exposure to a fully accessible language and as a consequence, may develop incomplete knowledge of any language. Deaf children...require the provision of sign language from infancy onward in order to achieve linguistic and other developmental milestones comparable to hearing children. In this way, sign language planning in early intervention and education for deaf children is linked to fundamental human rights.”

- Framing Deaf Children’s Right to Sign Language in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Jennifer J. Paul, J.D., Kristin Snoddon, Assistant Professor, School of Linguistics and Language Studies, Carleton University, 2017

In 2006, Statistics Canada conducted the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS), a national survey funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) and conducted by Statistics Canada designed to collect information on adults and children who have an activity limitation, that is, whose everyday activities are limited because of a condition or health problem.

The following data reflects the highest educational attainment reported by Canadians 15 years of age and older who reported having a hearing limitation, including persons who are completely Deaf, Deafened, Hard-of-hearing or have some hearing loss.

- 50.2% had high school or below
- 17.5 had a trade or apprenticeship certificate
- 20.1% had earned a college degree or certificate
- 7.5% had a Bachelor’s degree
- Less than 4% had earned a degree higher than a Bachelor’s degree

There are no Deaf Universities in Canada. There are three in the United States: Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., The National Technical Institute for the Deaf in Rochester, New York and The Southwest Collegiate Institute for the Deaf in Big Spring, Texas. George Brown College, in Toronto, offers a variety of programs for Deaf persons, from Literacy and Basic Skills to diploma programs.

In 1998 the Ministry of Education and Training's (fore-runner of the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development) conducted their Literacy Survey of Ontario's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Adults and found that "Deaf, Deafened, and Hard-of-hearing individuals are less likely to be employed and that they earn less, on the average, than other Ontarians."

- Canadian Association for the Deaf at <http://cad.ca/issues-positions/education/>

"I got my degree at a Deaf University in the states and came back to Canada to work and raise my family. I'd like to pursue my Master's or a PhD here in Canada but there's nowhere to go.

- Interview participant

Employment of Deaf persons

These statistics summarize the representation of Deaf persons in employment:

- Deaf people are underrepresented in government departments and agencies, as well as in professional and administrative occupations. They are generally found in unskilled, semi-skilled, or manual positions
- The majority of Deaf people hold low-wage jobs with few benefits and little job security in entry-level positions, and have little potential for growth or advancement
- 86% of Deaf Ontarians are under-employed or unemployed
- There is a lack of understanding of deafness among employers. Their expectations, perceptions, beliefs, and behaviours regarding employability of Deaf people create attitude barriers for Deaf job seekers
- Few Deaf people have access to extensive and appropriate employment information and training opportunities

- Employment and Employability Needs of the Deaf Community in Peel and Halton Regions, The Centre for Skills Development & Training, 2002

In 2014-15, The Canadian Association for the Deaf conducted a formal survey of 365 Deaf Canadians. 60% Deaf Canadians were either self-employed or short-term contract workers, 24% of them part-time. The number of unemployed Deaf Canadians was 40%, a rate 32% higher than the general unemployment rate.

Project methodology and results

The project was conducted over 3 months, from January-March, 2017. Most of January and early February was spent developing the project plan, conducting research and meeting with the project advisors.

Most of the focus groups, interviews and surveys took place in March. As of the writing of this report, information continues to be collected and this report will be updated as new information is received.

This project employed multiple methodologies including

- a) Focus group – learners
- b) Focus group – professionals
- c) One-to-one interviews - professionals
- d) Employment service provider online survey
- e) Employer online survey
- f) Provincial LBS instructor and learner online survey

Each method is described below and copies of the questions are included in the Appendices.

Focus groups

2 focus groups were held, one with Deaf learners in a Literacy & Basic Skills (LBS) agency, one of which was employed, and one with professionals who work with Deaf clients or learners.

Booking an ASL interpreter for the learner focus group went smoothly. Booking an interpreter for the focus group of professionals provided some insight about the importance and under-supply of interpreters.

Nine professionals had confirmed their attendance for the focus group, three of whom are Deaf. Of the three confirmed Deaf participants, two are instructors in LBS programs that serve Deaf persons and the third works in a provincial association of LBS programs that serve Deaf persons.

Numerous attempts were made to book an interpreter for the professionals' focus group through a number of sources, without success. Four business days before the focus group, an interpreter finally confirmed attendance, and then cancelled the day before the focus group was scheduled. As a result it was necessary to “un-invite” the Deaf participants.

They were invited to participate instead in one-on-one interviews.

a) Focus group with professionals

In the focus group with professionals, a wide variety of perspectives were shared by staff persons who work at

- an employment program for persons with disabilities funded by the Ontario Disabilities Support Program (ODSP)
- a regional literacy network
- the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD)
- a deaf-blind learning program
- a Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program for Deaf persons
- a MAESD-funded employment program that works with persons with disabilities

The list summarizes the most common overall findings, followed by comments made by focus group participants.

Barriers

i) Communications differences

- Deaf people don't use a verbal language – it's that simple
- Not all deaf people sign or can read lips
- It's hard communicate for an interview, even if the person reads lips, if the interviewer has moustache or beard the client may have problems reading lips
- Some Deaf persons have poor written skills, need help in grammar and sentence structure
- ASL has different dialects depending on where people have learned it – for example Newfoundland has its own dialect

- To get ahead Deaf people need to have multiple languages – ASL, written English, their native language in sign and written

ii) Education and skills gaps

- Even if they get hired, it's difficult for deaf people to get ahead since online training and in-person training is usually written at a high level of complexity of English
- The education that most Deaf people receive is inferior to hearing people - older people had an even worse time of it, many went to residential schools
- Even if a Deaf person graduated from high school, it's often a certificate not a diploma
- Many have a dual diagnosis - mental health or learning disabilities, it's hard to get ahead

iii) Discrimination

- Employers will say safety is an issue
- Some deaf people have overprotective parents who may or may not be Deaf themselves
- Their support network can sometimes hold them back – family, friends, children who want to protect them or speak for them
- Deaf people feel marginalized and are discriminated against which impacts their self-esteem

iv) Lack of awareness

- Employers lack flexibility, awareness, accommodations, sensitivity
- They don't know who pays for the interpreter and how much ahead you need to book or how to book

v) Lack of qualified, accessible ASL interpreters and funding to pay them

- One employment service provider gets \$800 a year to stretch over all clients' accommodation costs

Solutions

i) Education and Awareness Training

- Help employers and employment agencies better understand the culture and communication issues for Deaf people - even something like having some basic ASL signs on a poster in the office
- Some funders allow flexibility when paying for client needs – specific to client – client may not need childcare but needs an interpreter instead
- Access to labour market information and skills development – where do they go?
- Employers and coworkers need to learn sensitivity, put effective policies and practices in place, provide for social opportunities
- Provide ASL training in Employment Ontario programs
- Follow the AODA legislation, become more knowledgeable, eliminate bias and discrimination
- In Niagara – provide sensitivity training, access to equipment, technology and interpreters – we have local people who have skill set in ASL and sensitivity and can provide this training
- Help employment services with a plan to serve Deaf persons - not just responding but preparing, planning for that particular client
- Confront ODSP myths about what Deaf persons can or cannot hear

ii) Communications strategies

- One to one program instruction works well
- When working with a Deaf person, use the first few meetings to develop communications methods and processes and agree upon it
- Allow the staff person to use a cell phone at work to cover safety issues

iii) Programs and services design

- Provide all employment programs with employer incentives to take on a Deaf worker
- Implement co-op opportunities for Deaf learners/clients
- Support and advocate for the learner/client long term

Who's doing good work in this area?

- MTO can help Deaf people get their driver's licence
- ODSP's Transitions to Employment program has an interpreter budget and long-term support up to three years – they've had good success helping Deaf people get jobs and advocating for them
- The cities of Oakville and Milton have strong services for Deaf persons – look there for good practices

b) One-to-one interviews with professionals

We were able to re-schedule one-to-one interviews with two of the three Deaf participants who were unable to attend the focus group due to the lack of an interpreter. This list summarizes the most common overall findings, followed by comments made by focus group participants.

Barriers

i) Lack of knowledge

- People say it's too much trouble, work and money to communicate with a Deaf person - tell them how to book an interpreter and the benefits – they just need exposure and experience

ii) Attitudes

- What I hear as a standard response from young and old is I'm not being hired because I'm deaf and people talk they say I'm stupid and it self-perpetuates
- People are not willing to find a solution - they are too busy and they don't know and they don't want to know - there's so much negativity that it causes mental health problems with Deaf persons - overwhelming effects on self-esteem and having to overcome negative experiences
- So many myths and stigma about Deaf people, they make assumptions - employers do it and professionals do it, doctors do it - my doctor called me Deaf and dumb - I am not disabled or handicapped because I am Deaf
- Hearing employers tend to hire hearing people - #1 cause of mental health issues is oppression in education, in community, in workplace

- We are minority cultural group like Francophone and Indigenous people and those other cultures – they are the first to understand and support our rights

iii) Programs and services design

- Employment Services set up to reach target numbers of people exiting - short term connection with the program
- Focus on stats versus quality
- Attitudes in Employment Services (ES)
- Deaf people are being discriminated against – attitudinal adjustment needed
- Not approached the same as a hearing person
- ES is their own network, internal systems, not fighting for the rights of Deaf, ES keeping up stats
- Are deaf getting jobs in skill areas or slotting in with limited group of employers and menial jobs that are available
- ES doesn't have the tools to prepare Deaf clients for workplace – “this is what I need and why” gap on both sides (ES and employment)
- Sensitivity cross-training needed for both LBS and ES – LBS may not have strong employment knowledge, understand deaf but not employment - Mainstream ES know job market and employers but not sensitive to culture
- Victim is deaf person who just wants a job
- Deaf LBS has problems too - instructors lack bilingual teaching - some instructors cannot read English
- Learners sometimes pigeon-holed by instructors – real world experience lacking
- Creative work – new strategies for teaching beyond deaf experience
- Fall back to old ways – some instructors threatened by new approaches, improvement not perceived as valuable – due to habit – oppressed negative cycle
- Where's the leadership in the Deaf community? Hard to get the LBS community to respond

- Need to re-energize-reboot the Deaf LBS community, immerse ourselves in training, not enough resources to develop new approaches, bring instructors together, flat outcomes, not enough investment from MAESD in Deaf LBS

iv) Communications challenges

- Helped to interpret at the age of fourteen in a legal case, my friend could have lost her son because she could not read letter from lawyer – literacy, language or communications issue or all three?

v) Systemic government issues

- Lack of trust, hope, vision
- Short term solutions for long term problems
- No success stories told or requested anymore
- Stuck - trickle-down effect to programs
- Just check the box - system should be a web not a box
- Shift from MAESD to employment outcomes - get the stats up – stats vs quality
- Lots of Deaf grads of residential Deaf high school are going to LBS after graduation – should be working on degree, instead up upgrading – Why? What diploma are they getting?

vi) Learner issues

- The way society looks at me – not as an equal
- Discrimination and also sometimes a sense of entitlement
- Some Deaf people can be demanding in terms of accommodations needed – need to keep it simple at first
- Many have no trust, hope, vision - often reflect attitudes at home and in community

vii) Deaf community issues

- Need new leadership
- Nowhere for me to get higher degrees – nowhere to go- cost of interpreters
- US is better - colleague had to leave Canada to advance education – now working on PHD, CEO of a University
- Under-employed, undervalued, a ceiling – limits because of deafness whether highly skilled and credentialed or not
- Need deaf people in government
- Women’s rights? Yes - What about Deaf rights?
- Is Deafness a disability or culture? - depends on philosophy and perspective –my identity but there ARE barriers, I’m not treated fairly, not on equal ground
- Did a test with a hearing colleague – equal education/similar resume we both applied to the same ten jobs – she was contacted by all ten, me, one
- Rae government had equity policies
- I cannot get a job in government – why don’t I get an interview? - is it comfort with communication? access? - makes me question
- I can speak and have some hearing - in a discussion where I’m trying to make a point and the interpreter can’t keep up I just speak – shocking shift – now I’ve met them on a level playing field, now we’re having a conversation, now they’ll listen
- I sometimes speak for another Deaf family member who does not speak after their communications have been frustrated, and then people listen – “so sorry, problem rectified” they listen to me because I can speak

viii) Employer issues

Changes that need to take place so more employers hire:

- Change attitude
- There are laws – you cannot discriminate – human rights and AODA
- Promote awareness
- Look at the person's skills and experience, not the fact that the person is Deaf
- At some staff meetings – Deaf person must attend but no interpreter provided, just sits there

ix) Interpreter issues

- Get stuck in one setting, not involved in PD, no policy or standards not enough, not all skilled
- Depends on the professional area they're interpreting in – may not be familiar/comfortable
- Even most ASL training is by the book curriculum, no innovation
- Court interpreters – low standards, don't know how they're screened/hired, should use Ontario Interpreter Service s

x) Underlying causes behind the barriers with both ES and employers

- Ignorance
- Fear - deer in headlights
- Awareness of Deaf culture/needs
- Understanding the law
- They don't know how to communicate

Solutions

i) Communications strategies

- Provide simple solutions to communications challenges: Example full day training at employer, they need interpreter. Short meeting they just need to have pens paper, things like lighting systems - problem solved
- My parents are Deaf and struggled everywhere - at the age of twelve I was going to the bank to interpret for them - need to make a better system and stop the frustration
- Provide the Deaf person with a variety of means to communicate – what works
- Communication awareness would be 80% of the way to success
- Understand levels of communications needs - write notes back and forth in clear language, texting, interpreter not always necessary but important they are accredited

ii) Accommodations

- Have a database of interpreters and contacts - not all interpreters have credentials and or can translate complex communications
- Young man learning to use a forklift, concerns about him being on the floor when a forklift was being operated – so he does not go on the floor when the forklift is being operated only when he is operating it - a simple accommodation
- Fire alarms can be equipped to add a flashing light instead of just noise
- Deaf people do better with less visual distractions they are visually hypersensitive - think about that in terms of employee/office location

iii) Programs and services design

- Always refer clients to Transitions to Employment, they know how to educate employers, accommodations in resources and they have resources
- Hands-on practical activities

- Focus on quality programming not just stats

iv) Education and Awareness training

- Need to understand who has the obligation to provide interpreter
- Do a daylong training with Employment Services with a Deaf presenter who can speak to the real issues, sensitivity, how to book an interpreter - communications issues resolved
- Check pool of funding available from United Way for interpreters

Who's doing good work in this area?

- Rainforest Café has a Deaf employee, when someone comes to back door there's a sign asking people to ring the bell because we have a Deaf employee and that sets off a light system
- Does MAESD cover interpreter cost? They are covered through Ministry of Citizenship and Ministry of health
- Transitions to Employment
- The casino has Deaf and Autistic employees - they really believe in diversity
- Sobey's

c) Literacy & Basic Skills (LBS) Learner focus group

A focus group was held with three Learners, one of which is employed and the other two who have employment goals. The list summarizes the most common overall findings, followed by comments made by focus group participants.

Barriers

Attitudes

- Lack of awareness, sensitivity, accommodations
- hearing versus Deaf cultures
- Limits placed on what Deaf can or cannot do
- Other people's perceptions
- You cannot win if you disclose on your resume that you need an interpreter - they throw it away and you show up without an interpreter they won't take the time to understand you - just give me a chance
- It's discrimination and lack of knowledge about deaf culture
- I'm not disabled but employers think I am

Program and service design

- If we get a job it affects our ODSP
- Went to an employment service for people with disabilities was not a good situation, they never contacted me back - they couldn't help or support me
- We need more programs to advocate for us

AODA is not used

- Government created AODA out but they're not enforcing it or making people comply with it

Technology

- Can be an asset or a barrier - get to know me face-to-face for what I can do

Lack of interpreters

- Sometimes I can't get an interpreter when I need them

Solutions

- Take the time to know the Deaf person
- I can overcome my challenges I have the ability and the mindset to do it I feel I can be successful if someone will give me a chance
- It is still my dream to work for the railroad - I'm going to still keep applying and keep trying
- We need to provide proof of what we can do, like portfolios that document our experience, that can advocate and speak for us
- People need to learn different ways of communicating - I may not be able to phone my employer to let him know I'm sick, but I can text him

Who's doing great work in this area?

- I went to Transitions to Employment and they provided options - they helped send out my resume, they were persistent and advocated with for me with the employer, I got a job
- Tim Hortons

- McDonald's
- Wendy's
- Walmart

d) Employment Services Program online survey

A link to an online survey was sent to the 8 local Employment Ontario Employment Service Providers to identify how and how often they interacted with Deaf clients. As of April 15, 2017, four had responded.

When asked how often their programs encountered a potential client who is Deaf, Deafened or Hard-of-hearing, three respondents stated “a few times a year”. One respondent stated “In the past 20 years, two times.”

When asked if all of their program staff were sensitive to the Deaf culture and the needs of clients who are Deaf, Deafened or Hard-of-hearing, three individuals stated “Yes” and one stated “I’m not sure”.

When asked if their program had a staff policy or protocol for responding to a potential client that is Deaf, Deafened or Hard-of-hearing, three stated “Yes” and one stated “No”. One individual commented “The protocol would be no different than serving any other client presenting with a communication barrier. We would implement supports to allow for access to services.”

When asked if their program budgets included American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter costs, one person answered “Yes because of AODA policies.” Three stated “No”. Each respondent had a different reason.

- “Because it is not specific to interpreter cost but funds available to assist those with disabilities to access employment assistance.”
- “Have not had any clients that need an interpreter in 10 years.”
- “It has never been required. We work with those that support individuals in such a way that we join services. It is not necessary to ask for dollars.”

When asked if a Deaf client requested an ASL interpreter would they know whether or not the agency or the person should pay for the interpreter all four answered, “Yes”.

When asked if they would know how to book an interpreter three answered “Yes”.

When asked if they knew the cost of booking an interpreter

- Two answered “Yes”
- One answered “Maybe”
- One answered “I'm not sure”.

When asked if their programs were currently serving any Deaf clients four answered “No”.

e) Employer online survey

A link to an online survey was sent to 7 local employers who have hired Deaf persons. As of April 15, 2017, none had responded.

f) Provincial LBS instructor and learner online survey

A link to an online survey was sent to 47 Deaf Literacy & Basic Skills (LBS) service sites across Ontario. The survey was open to both Instructors and Learners in LBS programs. As of April 15, 2017 ten persons had responded. This low rate of response may be due to the fact that during the time period of this project, staff of The Canadian Hearing Society (CHS) were on strike. The CHS operates 25 programs at locations across Ontario and were invited to participate in the survey.

Barriers and challenges in Employment Services Programs

The survey asked respondents to identify key barriers or challenges that Deaf persons face when using an employment program to help them get a job. Respondents could answer more than once.

- Ten respondents identified lack of resources and/or accommodation strategies
- Nine respondents identified communication challenges
- Eight respondents identified lack of knowledge about Deaf culture
- Six respondents identified lack of sensitivity
- Six respondents identified lack of understanding that Deaf people want to work
- Six respondents identified that these programs are designed for hearing people

One respondent commented, “The world is full of people who have no knowledge with deaf people. We struggle to get jobs because they won't hire us because they lack in missing information about how good deaf people are at jobs, etc.”

The survey asked what were the underlying reasons for these barriers and challenges. Respondents answered:

- Myths or misconceptions about Deaf people are common within the hearing community, and I wonder if employment services truly understand the needs and strengths of the Deaf community?
- Employers and coworkers don't know enough of the deaf culture or maybe don't want to take the time to learn how to.
- Communicate with the individual. Employers might be afraid for the individual's safety.
- The barriers Deaf people face are the lack of communication with hearing people. They miss a lot of info what is said from hearing people that it can lead misunderstanding.
- Accommodation issues
- Yes, both Most companies do not understand to barrier or challenges with deaf people they do not know about deaf people who want to work but they do not hire..... It is hard challenges...
- Lack of knowledge in deaf community. CHS (Canadian Hearing Society) should be going out and educate them about deaf and deafblind.
- Lack of education and training. When employment programs are developed only the mainstream hearing population is considered for service.
- Lack of sensitivity training - how to respond when an accommodation is being requested and denied.
- Deaf can't work because they can't hear or they don't want to know the experiences they have in other countries.

The survey asked respondents to identify what employment programs could do to improve their services for Deaf people. Respondents answered:

- Take cultural sensitivity workshops provided by qualified Deaf people or agencies that routinely work with Deaf people.
- Provide training for staff and other employers. Get to know the language and find different ways to communicate and adapt their workplace environment to suit the individual's needs.
- Be more open about accepting people in their workplace even if there is a communication barrier.
- It would be really nice if hearing people would be willing to learn sign language that they can communicate with Deaf people much better. :)
- Teach employers how to accommodate deaf people . Deaf people have no issue about themselves. Just big issue with Employer!
- Employment programs should teach companies that Deaf people want to work.
- Access to funding for interpreting support - job development
- Breakdown barriers and provide specialized accommodations.
- Try to work with the company but it is hard to communicate with them when they resist it.

Barriers and challenges with employers

The survey asked respondents to identify key barriers or challenges that Deaf people face by potential employers when trying to find a job. Respondents could answer more than once.

- Nine respondents identified lack of resources and/or accommodation strategies
- Nine respondents identified communication challenges
- Eight respondents identified lack of knowledge about Deaf culture
- Six respondents identified lack of sensitivity
- Four respondents identified lack of understanding that Deaf people want to work
- Six respondents identified that these programs are designed for hearing people

Three respondents commented:

- “We have to educate hearing people that Deaf people tend to be blunt and straight-forward in their communications. We would like to educate them that Deaf Culture and Hearing Culture both are very different. Hearing people can always ask Deaf people more info about their culture and they would be happy to explain.”
- Need interpreter ASAP for job interviews. We miss out because employers need hire immediately and no patience waiting for an interpreter
- Fear of the unknown - make assumptions about ability of the candidate

The survey asked what were the underlying reasons for these barriers and challenges.

Respondents answered:

- Hearing people have sometimes been raised to think that Deaf people (or pretty much anyone that fits in a minority group) "need help" instead of treating them as equal human beings.
- The hearing world is very different and they may not understand the deaf world, so the deaf individual might be scared to apply for a job or go into an interview.
- If Deaf people get hired, they would be nervous and would not be sure what to do when they want to work with hearing people because they miss the info what is said from hearing people. We would always encourage hearing people to try to communicate with Deaf people by writing back and forth. Make sure it must be simple English instead of advanced English.
- Communications. Interpreters need. Employment counsellors at CHS are not becoming aggressive in helping us find jobs.
- Lack of education, lack of support / access to funding for interpreters for meetings / training
- Attitudinal Barriers and Financial Status- cost for providing accommodations

The survey asked respondents to identify what employers could do to make it easier for Deaf persons to find work. Respondents answered:

- Listen to what their needs are, and focus on their strengths instead of what they can't do.
- Making a connection with a deaf literacy organization in their community, seeking out the deaf community. Making a connection with CHS for assistance on working with someone who is deaf, or hard of hearing.
- Accessibility is the key that employers can find Deaf people find work.
- Teach themselves about how to accommodate deaf people.
- Get educated !!! Deaf and deafblind awareness. CHS should go out and present about deaf and deafblind
- Be an ally - introduce potential employers. Provide soft-skills training where deaf people can develop and have the required skills ready for a job.
- Help them get a job by giving the employers what is accessible for them they don't want to pay for the device or interpreter

The survey asked who is doing great work hiring Deaf persons. Respondents answered

- Deaf literacy programs, employers who have hired deaf individuals.
- Canadian Hearing Society and Northern Lights who are the people that help Deaf people find jobs.
- Everyone as long they understand the accommodations
- I wish Literacy can help to find JOB for them and best time for training
- Some deaf find their own jobs
- Canadian Hearing Society

- No one at the moment.

Respondents were asked to make any final comments they wished. They answered:

- It's time. Let's level the playing field and give everyone an equal opportunity to succeed and be productive members of society.
- Recycled boring issues. Tired of it.
- From what I hear is that the deaf and deafblind feel CHS is not helping us or not doing a good job.

Conclusions and recommendations

There are significant attitudinal and systemic barriers in place preventing deaf persons from effectively accessing employment services and becoming employed. The following recommendations may enhance Deaf persons' access to both.

1. Strengthen and enforce AODA legislation to ensure that all organizations are providing full access to persons with disabilities and the Deaf community.
2. Place more Deaf people in positions of power in corporations and government.
3. Ensure ongoing education and marketing targeted to businesses and employment services programs to
 - increase awareness and sensitivity to the Deaf culture
 - remove myths and stereotypes about Deaf persons
 - provide practical communications strategies
 - reduce concerns about safety issues and the time, effort and costs of accommodation
4. Re-design employment services programs to offer the scope of services necessary to support Deaf clients including
 - sufficient funding for interpreters for assessments, job interviews, job training and job retention
 - communications strategies with the client that they can use with an employer, in an interview and on the job
 - advocacy with employers to consider hiring a Deaf person, and if hired, on the job training and coaching when needed and training to co-workers on communicating with a Deaf person

- extending the time a client may stay in the program so that they can continue to call on the program for support, advocacy or resources after they're hired
 - co-op placement opportunities for Deaf clients and incentives for employers so that Deaf clients can demonstrate their skills and develop communications strategies on the job
 - working more closely with local Deaf LBS agencies, to better understand Deaf culture as well as the needs and the potential of Deaf clients
5. Provide sufficient funding to employment services programs for the cost of interpreters. Establish more efficient and flexible interpreter booking systems to meet Deaf clients' needs, especially when required on short notice, i.e. for a job interview or training at work.

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Simcoe-Muskoka Literacy Network, Enhancing Transitions – Client Perspectives project at <http://literacynetwork.ca/projects/enhancing-transitions-client-perspectives-project/>

Canadian Association of the Deaf at <http://cad.ca/issues-positions/employment-and-employability/>

Canadian Hearing Society at <http://www.chs.ca/>

Appendices

Questions asked in focus groups, interviews and online surveys

a) Questions asked in the focus groups with Learners and Professionals, in one-to-one interviews with Professionals and in the provincial LBS Instructor and Learner online survey

1. What barriers or challenges do Deaf persons face
 - when trying to get a job or
 - when accessing employment services?
2. What do you think are the reasons for those barriers or challenges?
3. What can employment programs do to improve their services for Deaf persons?
4. What can workplaces do to provide greater opportunities for Deaf persons?
5. Who's doing great work in this area?
6. What other comments would you like to make about this issue?

b) Questions asked in the Employment Services Program online survey

1. How often does your organization encounter a potential client who is Deaf, Deafened or Hard of Hearing?

Options: Once a week Once a month A few times a year Not sure Other

2. Are all of your staff sensitive to the Deaf culture and the needs of clients who are Deaf, Deafened or Hard-of-hearing?

Options: Yes No Not sure Other

3. Do you have a staff policy or protocol for responding to a potential client that is Deaf, Deafened or Hard-of hearing?

Options: Yes No Not sure Other

4. Do you include American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter costs in your annual budget?

Options: Yes because... No because... Not sure because...

5. If a Deaf client requested an ASL interpreter, would you know...

- whether or not your agency or the person should pay for it?
- how to book an interpreter?
- the cost of booking an interpreter?
-

Options: Yes No Not sure Other or comments

6. Are you currently serving any Deaf clients?

Options: Yes No Not sure Comments

7. What information and resources would help you serve Deaf persons with employment goals? Choose all that apply.

Options:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------|
| Sensitivity training to the Deaf culture | Communications strategies |
| Understanding how to book an interpreter | Funding for interpreters |
| Draft policy/protocol to support serving Deaf clients | Other |

Questions asked in the Employers of Deaf persons online survey

1. What do you think are the barriers or challenges that Deaf persons face with some employers when they try to get a job? Answer all that apply.

Options:

- Communication challenges
- Lack of resources and/or accommodation strategies
- Lack of understanding that Deaf people want to work
- Lack of sensitivity
- Lack of knowledge about Deaf culture
- Concerns about safety of person and/or co-workers
- Lack of knowledge about accessing an interpreter
- Lack of funding for interpreter costs
- Other or comment

2. What do you think are the reasons for those barriers or challenges?

3. If another employer asked you HOW TO OVERCOME the barriers or challenges that Deaf persons face when they try to get a job, what would you say?

- How to overcome communication challenges
- How to overcome the lack of resources and/or accommodation strategies
- How to overcome the lack of understanding that Deaf people want to work
- How to overcome lack of sensitivity
- How to overcome lack of knowledge about Deaf culture
- How to overcome concerns about safety of person and/or co-workers
- How to overcome lack of knowledge about accessing an interpreter
- How to overcome lack of funding for interpreter costs

4. What can employers do to provide greater opportunities for Deaf persons?

5. What motivated you to hire a Deaf person?

6. Please tell us about the challenges and the benefits of having Deaf persons as employees.

7. Would you recommend that other employers consider hiring Deaf persons? Why or why not?

8. Comments and suggestions