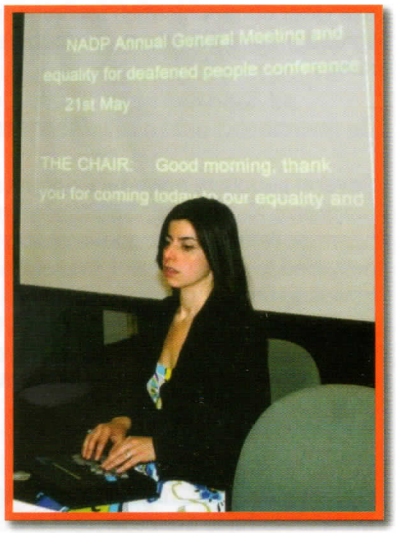
nadp

National Association of Deafened People

HOW COMMUNICATION SUPPORT CAN CHANGE THE LIVES OF DEAF PEOPLE

Deaf people don't want to be excluded from your activities, here are some ideas on how to ensure they are included.

Some of them are very simple – such as ensuring good lighting to help lipreading, and improving room acoustics. Others are more sophisticated – such as engaging professional Speech to Text Reporters to provide a real time text output of a meeting.



"Speech to Text Reporter at the NADP Conference"

All of them can dramatically improve the lives of deaf people.

This leaflet gives an overview of the types of support available, and how to engage and use them.

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How to help people who want to lipread

We all instinctively lipread to some extent and for some deaf people lipreading is their main method of communication.

There are other simple things you can do to help deaf people follow your lips:

- Sit at a sensible distance from them – preferably between 3 and 6 feet - and with good light on your face.
- Speak distinctly, but don't shout or over-emphasise your speech.
- Pause slightly at the end of each sentence to allow the lipreader to assimilate what has been said.

In many situations it can be helpful to employ a professional lipspeaker. He or she will silently repeat the speaker's message to the deaf person in a clearly lipreadable way, using facial expressions and natural gestures to help support the meaning. If requested, some finger spelling may be used to highlight the difference between words which look very similar on the lips. Lipspeakers are also able to use clear communication techniques with voice if the lipreader finds this more appropriate to his or her needs.

Remote support services

Several suppliers are now using Internet technology to provide services such as Electronic Notetaking, Speech to Text and BSL interpreting remotely, i.e. the operator listens to the conversation over a phone link and the transcribed material is delivered to the user over the Internet. Whilst these systems can potentially reduce travelling time and thence the cost of providing the service (especially for short meetings) it is important to be sure that the remote operator will have no difficulty in identifying speakers and what they are saying. This approach may be more appropriate for one-to-one meetings than for larger events.

Other forms of support

Some deaf people regard British Sign Language as their preferred language, and will wish to have the support of a BSL interpreter. Always check that the deaf person uses BSL before booking an interpreter – many don't!

A small number of deaf people use an English based phonetic gesture system called Cued Speech, and specially trained transliterators can be used to support them. See

http://www.cuedspeech.co.uk/

How to help people with Hearing Aids and Cochlear Implants

Huge numbers of people have moderate levels of hearing loss and use hearing aids. A few cheap and simple modifications to rooms can make it much easier for them to hear you.

Even with the best hearing aids the user is still very sensitive to background noise, taking simple steps to reduce this problem can dramatically increase the accuracy of their speech perception.

- Make a conscious effort to reduce extraneous noise – for example turn off background music when a deaf customer is trying to talk to you.
- Remember that most hearing aid users make a lot of use of lipreading, so having a glass screen between you and the customer is not helpful!
- Have small interview areas where deaf people can listen to you, rather than the background noise in a larger room.
- Provide carpets, soft furnishings (and ideally acoustic ceiling tiles) to reduce room echo, which often makes it impossible for hearing aid users to follow speech.
- All public meeting rooms and reception desks should be equipped with inductive loops or FM microphone systems.

Speech Recognition systems

Speech Recognition technology has taken huge strides over the last decade, and is for example, now used to create a high proportion of the subtitles seen on UK TV. It can also be used in various ways to help deaf people in their daily life. For example:

- Windows Vista and Windows 7 both include effective Speech Recognition engines, which can be used in conjunction with a plug in (USB) microphone.
- A version of the Dragon Naturally Speaking SR system can be run as a downloadable "app" on iPhones and iPads.

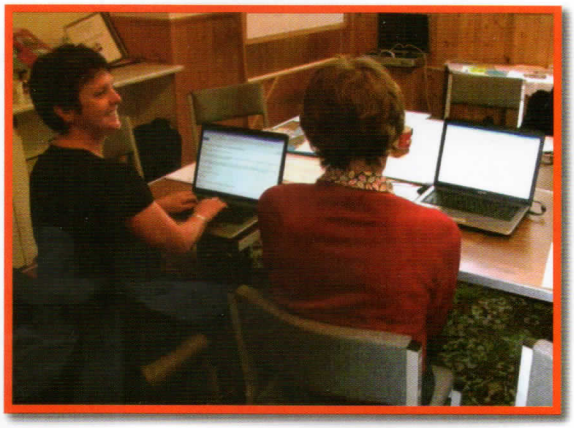
As the technology is moving so fast we recommend that you check various web sites for advice on the latest products.

How to help people who want text support

Most deaf people communicate in English, and some form of text based transcription system is usually their preferred support option.

Manual Notetakers are the simplest form of text based support, they use pen and paper to give the user notes summarising the key point of the meeting or conversation.

Electronic Notetakers use a laptop with a normal QWERTY keyboard, but with special software (such as the RNID developed Speedtext system) which allows them to use various short cut keys to insert frequently used words, phrases, and names (e.g. the names of speakers at a meeting) with a single keystroke. In this way a skilled Electronic Notetaker can usually produce text in the region of 70 words a minute, though one or two of them can achieve about 100 words a minute. This is significantly below the rate of conversational speech, and Electronic Notetakers will slightly simplify the speech and eliminate repetition to ensure that the deafened person sees the key messages. The output will be shown on a second laptop computer, or can be displayed on an overhead projector at a meeting.



Speech to Text Reporters listen very carefully to what is being said and break the words down into their phonetic components, and then use special keyboards to record "chords" representing the combinations of phonemes being spoken. A laptop computer then uses a dictionary to convert these chords back into English, which is displayed on the laptop computer or on an overhead projector. A skilled STTR can follow speech at about 200 words a minute, and can thus give a verbatim transcript of what is being said. See example of STTR output on front cover of this leaflet.

Why is support needed?

Deafness is one of the most common forms of disability around the world. In the UK over 8 million people suffer from mild or moderate deafness, of whom about 2 million have hearing aids. There are a further 700,000 people who are severely or profoundly deaf, which means that even with the best available hearing aids they have little or no ability to follow speech. A wide range of daily activities are only open to them if they are provided with a suitable form of communication support.

Many organisations should regard the provision of this support as being part of their normal activities:

- Organisations providing services to the public have duties under the Equality Act mirroring their duties under the earlier Disability Discrimination Act to make "reasonable adjustments" to allow deaf people to have equal access to their services. For example deaf people meeting their Doctor or Solicitor should be offered communication support.

- Public bodies have a further duty under the Act to promote the participation of people with disabilities in public life. For example deaf people wishing to attend local Council meetings, or become Governors of an NHS Hospital Trust are entitled to communication support as required.

- Employers have a duty under the Act to make "reasonable adjustments" to meet the needs of deaf employees, which can often include provision of communication support. (Assistance with this support can often be obtained from the Access to Work scheme operated by the Department of Work and Pensions).

- The Equality Act requires service providers and employers to be proactive in anticipating the adjustments needed to support customers etc with disabilities, the customer should not need to take the initiative.

- All DVDs – including those made within companies for training purposes – should be equipped with subtitles. Television systems in hotels and training colleges should be able to deliver TV subtitles.

The Government Equalities Office and the Equality and Human Rights Commission issue several Guidance booklets explaining these duties in more detail, see:

http://www.equalities.gov.uk

http://www.equalityhumanrights.com

The mechanics of providing support services

The NADP recommends that deaf people and service providers should always seek to use Language Service Professionals (LSPs) who are listed on the *National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People*, see:

http://portal.nrcpd.org.uk/search/

Registration confirms that LSPs are competent, ethical, and have agreed to abide by the NRCPD's Code of Conduct for Communication Professionals.

LSPs can often be booked through agency organisations, and details of these can be found in Factsheet 1 of the NADP Information Booklet:

http://www.nadp.org.uk/factsheet/fs01.htm

LSPs can also be located through the web sites of their professional bodies:

Lipspeakers:

http://www.lipspeaking.co.uk/index.html

Manual and Electronic Notetakers:

http://www.anpnotetakers.co.uk/

Speech to Text Reporters:

http://www.avsttr.org.uk/

In most parts of the UK LSPs are in very short supply, and will need to be booked well in advance.