

Understanding Each Other

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I am happy to be here in Knoxville again. I have been fortunate to speak to the Orientation to Deafness program here several times. I want to tell Marcia that we are going to change the wording of her introduction in the future. Instead of saying we met in graduate school, we will say we went to school together. No years or dates. We just went to school together and have known each other for a long time.

I am a strong believer in communication access and that is part of what I plan to talk about tonight. I plan to sign for myself and I am wearing microphones for the assistive listening systems. I am also going to ask that the interpreters stay and interpret. I use Signed English and I know that some Deaf people prefer American Sign Language (ASL). I also tend to move around while the interpreter stays in the same place and is easier to follow. So with the captions on the large screen, assistive listening systems, interpreters, and my own voice and signs, I think we will be fine.

Let me start by sharing some of my life story. Why am I here? How did I become President of ADARA? How did I become a past president of the Association of Late-Deafened Adults (ALDA)? A friend of mine has a word to describe people who serve as the president of two national organizations at almost the same time. It is "FOOL". Maybe I am or may I am not. I will let you decide that at the end of the evening.

I am a person who became deaf when I was 18 years old. I grew up on an Iowa farm near a small town whose high school had 200 students. While growing up as a hearing person, I did not have any contact with people with disabilities. None! The first time I met someone with a disability was my grandfather who walked with a cane. I had no contact with people who were deaf. No contact with persons who were blind. I have no recollection of even seeing a person who was deaf. Not only was I not exposed to persons with disabilities, I had not met people of color either. I had no exposure to other cultures until I went away to college.

During my first semester in college, I became sick with a bad cold. I noticed I could not hear very well. I had a cold, cough, earache, sore throat, sneezing, the whole works. Of course, I did not go to a doctor. I hate going to doctors! I still hate going to doctors! So, 10 days later when my cold disappeared, I thought everything was fine. I went to class and I noticed I still could not hear or understand what people were saying in the classroom.

I could not hear, but you have to understand that it was not my fault. I did not believe I was becoming deaf. I could not accept that I was deaf or losing my hearing. It had to be someone else's fault. It had to be that there was a problem with the television. The volume control was broken. I could not understand the teacher because the teacher was mumbling. Other students in the classroom were talking

and making it difficult to hear. My friends were whispering because they did not want me to understand what they were saying. That was my experience. I will not go into depth about all the feelings at this time.

The reason I am here today is to talk about the different groups of people with hearing loss and to help develop an understanding of these groups. For persons who are Deaf, the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) has been around for a long time. It was established in approximately 1880. Self Help for Hard of Hearing (SHHH) has also been around for several years. What happens when a person becomes deaf? I knew nothing about those groups. There was nothing for me. I had never before met a person who was deaf. I did not know what to do. It was a very frustrating experience but I somehow managed to live through it. Tonight, as President of ADARA, I plan to discuss these different groups and hopefully, I will be able to help professionals in the field develop a better understanding of the different needs of these groups. That is my goal.

It was almost two years before anyone told me about any kind of services for persons who are deaf. I spent the first two years with no effective method of receptive communication. I now call those two years "communication hell", and I do not wish that type of problem on anyone. One of the most frustrating experiences you can have is to be living in a world where you know what is happening, but you can not understand. You see something happen, but you are only guessing at what people are saying.

Changes were forced on me. My old hobbies included listening to the radio. I could not do it any more. Throw the radio out of my life. Also throw out television, music, telephone, and talking with my parents. This was back in 1971; if they had TTYs, they were the big models, but I knew nothing about them.

I want to talk about the different populations and give you my definition or explanation of them. First is Hearing people, but I do not think I need to explain them to you. I have done deaf awareness training for professionals in other agencies. When I do that training, it is the first time they have ever been labeled as hearing. People who work with persons who are deaf or hard of hearing use that term all the time but outsiders have never heard it. I love putting labels on those people.

I describe Hard of Hearing people as those who are able to benefit from assistive listening devices or lipreading skills so that they are able to communicate through speech. They are able to benefit from assistive devices in some way.

I describe Deaf, or culturally Deaf people, as persons to be fluent in sign language, most often ASL. They are involved in Deaf groups and accept that they are deaf. They are proud to be deaf and do not see deafness as pathological. Communication is the issue for them.

For deafened, I will use two terms - deafened and late-deafened. I sign late-deafened using the signs "become deaf". People become deaf in different ways. It is not always sudden or traumatic like my hearing loss. I became deaf or acquired a severe hearing loss in 10 days. I was not ready for it and I did not know what was happening. Other people grow up with a mild hearing loss, and are able to function as hard of hearing. As the hearing loss continues to decline, they become audiologically deaf, and they are no longer able to function as a hard of hearing person. Assistive devices no longer benefit them for

understanding speech or assisting with lipreading. There are also people who start with normal hearing, become hard of hearing, and then deaf. It is a more gradual process.

I have described Deaf people as being able to communicate in some form of sign language. I have described Hard of Hearing people as being able to communicate with assistive devices. I like to say that deafened people do not have receptive communication and cannot communicate. They can not understand anything. Sometimes I feel that is really true, especially in the beginning stages of deafness. Most of the time, their only effective method of communication is writing and reading. That is why I am happy that technology has allowed the development of realtime captioning because without it, most deafened people would be lost. They could not function and could not be involved.

You may be aware of the different groups I have mentioned that provide support to persons with hearing loss - National Association of the Deaf (NAD), Self Help for Hard of Hearing (SHHH) and Association of Late-Deafened Adults (ALDA). Support groups are a very important issue. These groups were established to allow people to meet their peers, people with similar conditions. That is very important. One of the best healers is to meet someone else that has the same situation you do. Whether it is women's groups, Black groups, Hispanic groups, or deafened groups, it is important. People having something in common appreciate the opportunity to get together and discuss it. Compare notes, so to speak. With deafened adults, ALDA is the new kid on the block. It started in 1987 as a group that was set up to be a self-help support group. I was not involved in that initial group. I believe I was invited but I had come to accept myself as deaf and did not see the need for this type of group. I realized several years later how wrong I was.

To better explain this perception, allow me to give more details about my personal history. I believe my perception, at that time, of ALDA and becoming deaf is very similar to that of many professionals working with persons who are deaf.

I mentioned that I spent two years with no receptive communication. I went for what seems like 100 hearing tests and it took almost two years before someone told me about Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). Finally! A social worker at the hospital where my ears were being examined made the referral to VR. I was fortunate to have a good counselor. He did not blow me off. I had no receptive communication skills, but he was able to deal with me. He would write for me and provided me with the information I needed. He gave me information about this place called Gallaudet College. He also gave me information about National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), and all the different postsecondary programs that were established back in the early 1970's for persons who were deaf or hard of hearing. The term deafened was not frequently used back then. Someone just told me that deafened is not a word. They do not like it. I don't know if it is a word or not but I use it.

I decided that Gallaudet College best met my needs but I would need to learn sign language. I took one six-week class before I went to Gallaudet. I was very proud of myself and I could sign "My name is S-T-E-V-E". I was proud that I could sign that. I had no idea what was involved at Gallaudet. I will just tell

you that I had a real culture shock when I arrived at the Gallaudet campus. I was totally lost trying to understand the other students.

Something else happened that you need to be aware of, as maybe it happens with other people who have become deaf. I had grown up as a hearing person and, for some reason, I had developed a patronizing attitude toward persons who were deaf. The word deaf bothered me. I did not like it. I said I was hard of hearing because that term did not bother me. I could not make myself use the word “deaf” to describe myself at that time.

I am not sure why, maybe because I had grown up without exposure to persons with disabilities, I had developed a general attitude that people with disabilities were inferior to able-bodied people. When I was planning to go to Gallaudet, I had big plans for myself. I was going to be BMOC! Big Man on Campus. Because I had grown up hearing, I was better than all those people who grew up deaf. I was going to join the football team and become an All-American. All it took was one day on the football practice field to find out that if the other person weighs 250 pounds, runs fast and hits you, it hurts. Believe me, I did not do that well at football. I played some but I was not wonderful. I was lucky to get into the game and was nowhere close to being an all-American.

It is important for people working with the deafened population to understand that maybe they have this attitude. Perhaps they are not looking down on people who are deaf, but they are not comfortable with the term deaf. A recently deafened person may be especially uncomfortable with the term. It is very easy for them to withdraw, sit at home alone, and do nothing.

Another experience I want to share is related to assistive devices. For three to four months, I probably was able to function as a hard of hearing person. I really do not remember that time well as I was busy denying I was deaf. I look at my old audiograms that show a moderate hearing loss so maybe I was hard of hearing. I remember going to the store to buy a hearing aid. I had the belief that, if you become deaf, the cure is to buy a hearing aid. A hearing aid will solve all your problems so I decided to buy a hearing aid. My parents and I went to the store about five blocks from campus. The man gave me a hearing aid and let me test it. Now, understand that this was a very small store and he turned on the volume and talked to me. I could understand him and that was wonderful. The hearing aid works!

The salesman gave me a telephone and dialed the time. I picked it up and could understand the time. This hearing aid was going to solve all my problems. I walked back to campus feeling really good. But, when I arrived on campus, I found out I still could not hear the television. I still could not understand my friends in the dorm. The hearing aid broke on the way back to the dorm. I was not aware that environment plays a key role in the use of hearing aids. That a hearing aid is a cure for hearing loss is what I call a communication myth. The general public tends to accept this myth but it is not true.

Sometimes people who are deaf take the perspective that being hard of hearing is not a problem. Their hearing loss is mild so they do not have the problems that deaf people may face. That is not really true. Hard of hearing people do have special needs. They may need assistive listening devices. Before you assess the issues a hard of hearing person may have to face, it is important that you understand their

situation. Maybe they are working as a salesclerk where everyday communication is required with customers. That requires a lot of communication and sometimes, no matter how good your hearing aid may be or how good your lipreading skills may be, you are going to have a hard time communicating. It is important that professionals in rehabilitation understand that is probably a stressful situation for persons who are hard of hearing.

I have a 110 decibel hearing loss. I am more deaf than many culturally deaf people. After I quit attending a hearing college due to poor grades, I worked on a farm. The only person I had to communicate with was my uncle who knew I could not hear very well. I spent most of my day cleaning pig pens. You don't have to have receptive communications skills for that, just visual skills to avoid any angry animals..

In comparing my situation with that of the hard of hearing sales clerk, my hearing loss is more severe but who needs the most support or assistance? Probably the hard of hearing person because their work environment in the store is more stressful than working on the farm.

Because of all the time I spent cleaning pig pens, it is obvious why I wanted to attend Gallaudet. I wanted something better than going home smelling of manure everyday. I loved living on the farm and the work was helpful, but I did not have the aptitude to do it the rest of my life.

I was very fortunate to have support from my parents. They did not learn sign language immediately. They wanted to know why I became deaf and then checked out programs that would be helpful to me as a deaf person. I would not be here today if it were not for the support of my parents. It has been 25 years since I became deaf. They have taken two or three sign language classes. They still do not sign well but they have made the effort to learn. My four brothers have also taken at least one sign language class so I am fortunate that I had family support. I consider myself to be more fortunate than other people who have become deaf.

Now, let me return and talk more about ALDA. The organization started as a small group of 13 people who got together for beer and pizza in Chicago. It is still a tradition that when ALDA people get together, we drink beer. It is a requirement! Well, not really, but the idea is for ALDA to serve as a social outlet, helping people to get out of their homes, going out and enjoying themselves. I was not involved in the original self-help group because I did not realize the importance of peer interaction at that time. After graduating from Gallaudet, I worked for two years and then chose to enter Northern Illinois University to pursue a master's degree in Deafness Rehabilitation Counseling.

It was at that time I began to accept myself as a deaf person. People who knew me at Gallaudet would be very surprised to see that I am now involved in the field of deafness. When I took classes in deafness rehabilitation, I started to understand what had happened to me. I was able to relate many of my personal experiences to what was being taught in the classroom. I began to understand why I had felt so angry and why I did not want to talk with anyone during that time when I was losing my hearing. But... I did not learn that about myself until ten years later. And I only learned it because I happened to go to graduate school to receive special training in this area. Otherwise I would still be in the dark, not understanding why I felt different, why I was deaf and what was happening to me. I also began to

understand why people who grow up deaf do some of the things they do. Why they may have a hard time with English. I remember when I first arrived at Gallaudet, I could not understand why people would always pound on the table and then sign. It took me a long time to figure out that it is necessary to get attention from people before you sign or talk. Having grown up in a hearing culture, I was not used to that behavior but it is a necessary part of Deaf culture. I now do the same thing myself and love it!!

I have come to more or less accept myself as a deaf person. When I heard that people were starting up a self help group for deafened people, I thought, "Why bother? Just accept that you are deaf." I was not really interested. I was also in the process of moving out of state at that time so I had a good excuse for not attending.

A friend of mine from graduate school was the leader of that self help group. Did you ever have seven or eight deafened people in the same room and have to figure out a way to communicate? The people had varying degrees of lipreading skills and hearing aids that were not really helpful. No one could really understand each other for group communication. I was not there but I have heard the story that how they communicated was through the use of a ditto machine. A person would write something, make copies, and pass the paper around for people to read. Another person would write something and the process would be repeated. I assume that was a true story.

I tend to believe the story because, after moving back to Illinois, the one thing that impressed me most about ALDA groups was the effort the individuals made to communicate with each other. I have never seen so many people be patient with each other. The ALDA communication philosophy is "whatever works". Whatever is successful. Many times that meant writing notes. Realtime captioning was not as well-developed as it is today. Fortunately a person involved with ALDA was a computer expert and he happened on to the idea of using computers for "ALDA Crude". ALDA Crude involved using a computer program with large print and hiring a typist who would type what was being said in the group. This was much more effective than the ditto machine but still had limitations because very few people can type as fast as people can speak. How many people do you know who can type 150 words per minute? People in ALDA groups using ALDA Crude would learn to speak for a short time and then stop to allow the typist to catch up. It is fortunate that court reporters later became involved and realtime captioning has advanced to the levels you are seeing here tonight.

As President of ADARA, it is important for ADARA to recognize the different groups involved. If you are a member of ADARA, you know that instead of calling ourselves the American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association, we are now known as *ADARA, an Organization of Professionals Networking for Excellence in Service Delivery to Persons Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing*. One reason we modified it is because we want ADARA to be open to professionals in social services, human services, independent living, mental health and education working with person who are deaf or hard of hearing. People would previously see the word rehabilitation in the title and think it does not relate to them.

It used to be acceptable to use the term deaf alone. Hard of hearing people felt this term was not recognizing them so we have changed to deaf and hard of hearing. The term hearing impaired was also

used but deaf people do not find the term “impaired” to be acceptable. Deaf and Hard of Hearing is supposed to be more politically correct. One of the first persons to see the new title was a fellow ALDA board member and the first thing she said to me is “Why didn’t you include deafened in the tag line?”. Being politically correct is a pain but hopefully people will understand we are referring to all persons with hearing loss. I do not have an answer on how we can satisfy everyone but we will try.

To return to speaking about some differences in the three groups. I recently started teaching a class in Deaf Culture and the term “think hearing” was discussed. For a long time my friends would refer to me as a person who “thinks hearing”. I accepted that description because many of my behaviors, actions and responses are based on how a hearing person would react. When I use the sign doorbell, I automatically sign pushing a doorbell. A Deaf person may use the sign flashing light. Perhaps this is an example of different perceptions based on different experiences.

When I started teaching the Deaf Culture class, I learned of other meanings for the sign “think hearing”. Some Deaf people use this sign to indicate a person who is opposed to ASL and prefers the created Signing Exact English systems. I am not opposed to ASL so I do not feel that meaning applies to me. It does not apply to many deafened adults. Deafened adults are not opposed to ASL although they often choose to learn Signed English rather than ASL since it is easier for them.

Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deafened individuals have many similar goals. One of these goals is communication access. I do not think there is person in this room who is opposed to communication access. I doubt any of you want me to take off the microphones, shut down the captioning and stop signing. While we all have the same goal, the methods of providing communication access for all these groups, however, are not always compatible.

Most Deaf people prefer the interpreter to be near the speaker, if the speaker is not signing. I know I do as I like to be able to see both at the same time. Most Hard of Hearing people prefer that the interpreter be away from the speaker because it is a distraction. They need to focus on lipreading and hearing. Now, when you set up realtime captioning, you do not always have a sophisticated video system so you need an overhead projector with a screen. Deafened people prefer a darkened area so they can read the captions easier and also want to see the speaker. Deaf people need the light to see the interpreter. Hard of Hearing people need the light to lipread. How do you satisfy everyone and still have communication access?

We are fortunate that access seems to be successful tonight. We have the advantage of sophisticated equipment and a large room but it is not always easy to do. I can remember speaking to an SHHH group in Nebraska. They asked me to hold the microphone that was linked up to their assistive listening system. I always sign and talk at the same time. They told me I did not need to use sign language but I could not stop signing. It is my normal way. But how do you sign well with a microphone in your hand? I did it for that group but there were no people there who were dependent on sign language for communication.

I am happy to see that PEC is using realtime captioning for the plenary sessions. I am happy to see that other organizations have also started to use more realtime captioning. However, I believe ALDA and

ALDA conventions are still the only sites where realtime captioning is used for every meeting and every workshop. ALDA could not be successful without realtime captioning. Reading captions is less stressful than lipreading or trying to hear. I think many hard of hearing people prefer captioning too. Many deafened people have not had exposure to sign language. Many people who have become deaf at 40-50 years of age grew up in a time where sign language was not considered appropriate, so they are reluctant to start learning sign language. If deafened people do learn sign language, it is more often a form of conceptually accurate signed English rather than ASL.

I would like to share with you an example of deafened people using signs that are not conceptually accurate. When ALDA was first set up, people started to sign the full name, Association of Late-Deafened Adults. How did they sign late? Most often it was the sign with your forearm pointing down from elbow. This means late or not yet so people were often signing “Association of Not Yet Deafened Adults”. That was wonderful! That is why I explained the signs I was using involve *become deaf* rather than *late deaf*. However, I have seen the “late” sign used by prominent Deaf professionals so it is not only deafened people who use this inaccurate sign.

Recently, the Research and Training Center on Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing at the University of Arkansas did a study on ALDA members and the communication strategies they use on the job. Approximately 350 people replied and it was found that 65-70% use lipreading for communication. Only 20% stated they use sign language or feel comfortable using sign language. Only 5% of those responding said they were not interested in learning sign language.

Many deafened adults are not fluent in sign language. Personally, I have seen more deafened people become interested in learning sign language after they have had exposure to it. I have seen them start to use it with other deafened adults because they see that it can work. It is easier than trying to write to each other. However, at work or at home, they depend on lipreading and other methods of communication. I feel that 20% response is very good because that is a larger percentage than I observed at my first ALDA convention in 1990.

It is important to remember, that while more deafened individuals are learning sign language, sign language is NOT THE ANSWER. I repeat, for a person who has become deaf, sign language is NOT THE ANSWER. The same is true for persons who are hard of hearing. Learning sign language is not the answer. Learning sign language may be helpful, but professionals have to realize there are other issues the individuals must address. They need support and adjustment counseling. What any person who has gone through acquired hearing loss needs is appropriate, realistic information. Many of these people have dealt with what I call the “communication myths”. They have tried hearing aids. They have read the ads that say “If you can hear sounds but not understand speech, this hearing aid is for you.” That is part of the problem. I know it was part of my problem. Not being able to understand speech is the problem for many persons with hearing loss. You get a hearing aid and you still can not understand speech. Your comprehension score may improve but not enough to allow you to function in all situations.

People need to understand that hearing aids are assistive devices, not corrective devices. You buy glasses and most of the time the glasses help you see more clearly. Glasses work for me. Hearing aids never worked for me as far as speech comprehension was concerned. I was more aware of my environment with a hearing aid but my comprehension scores showed minimal increases.

The second communication myth is that if the hearing aid does not work, it doesn't matter because all deaf people can lipread. The general public believes that. People who become deaf or acquire hearing loss believe that lipreading is the answer. Now, really, it is not. You can only see about 33% of the sounds that are said.

Most people believe these myths about hearing aids and lipreading. I know I believed them. Hearing aids did not help me and I volunteer myself as one of the worst lipreaders ever. The only sentence I can lipread is "Can you read lips?" and that is because I have been asked that question a thousand times in the last 25 years. Practice makes perfect.

If you fail with a hearing aid and you fail at lipreading, what is left? People tend to emphasize the negatives of deafness. They focus on the things they can not do. I felt many emotions personally. I love sports. I spent all my free time listening to baseball, football and basketball games on the radio. After I became deaf, I could not do that any more. The social adjustments and trying to tell my friends I was deaf were very stressful. What are they going to think when I do not understand them? I did not admit that I was deaf. I was good at faking it, laughing when they laughed and playing the game. I am still very good at faking it. Not all my high school and hometown friends know that I am deaf.

Professionals need to be aware of these emotions and the need for assistance in adjusting to deafness. All persons with hearing loss, Deaf, Deafened or Hard of Hearing, have to start being more assertive and saying we do not understand. Professionals need to be prepared to provide the necessary assistance in teaching this skill. I admit I do not practice what I preach and do not admit when I do not understand. I have more or less developed an attitude that I don't care that I don't understand. As long as I do not get a strange look, I know my bluff answers are accepted.

People with hearing loss also need to learn to deal with hearing people who say "bye bye" or "sorry" and leave you after you tell them you are deaf. That has happened to me often. I have good speech so many people do not believe me when I say I am deaf. I guess deaf people are not supposed to speak well.

Professionals need to recognize the benefits persons with hearing loss can receive from meeting their peers. I have already talked about ALDA, SHHH, and NAD. There are also other groups such as the Alexander Graham Bell Association. You have to select the group or groups that may be most appropriate. Most of the time, people with recently acquired hearing loss will have no information about these groups. They need assistance and I believe that contact with peers is one of the best remedies. That was my personal experience and I think other people agree with me. I know that I felt much better about myself when I went to Gallaudet and saw 1,000 other deaf people. I realized that I was not the only person who is

deaf. I am not the only person who uses sign language. Of course, I did not understand 900 of them because they were using ASL, but they were still using sign language.

For some reason, I was never embarrassed about using sign language. Some people who become deaf or hard of hearing do not want to learn sign language. It is my feeling that it is their choice. They need to know what their options are. If they want to rely on lipreading and hearing aids, that is fine, but there may be limitations with these choices. Of course, beginning signers will not understand everything either. If the person learns sign language, where will he or she use it? Where will they be able to practice? There are not Deaf clubs in every city.

There is also the issue of comfort. What will happen to a beginning signer, if deafened or hard of hearing, who goes to a Deaf Club? Because the person will not be fluent in sign language, it is very likely he or she will not feel comfortable. Most of the Deaf people there will be polite but they will not always sign slowly or repeat themselves for the newcomer. This creates a feeling of discomfort. Similar situations will occur to the deafened person who socializes with hearing friends. To some degree, people will speak slower, but not all the time. Group conversations are difficult to follow and it is awkward to ask people to repeat themselves more than once.

Those are the situations I was facing when I discovered ALDA. It is hard to describe the feeling I had when I first became involved with an ALDA group. Something clicked and I knew I would fit in. I had become comfortable with Deaf people but I was more comfortable with deafened people. We had the same experiences. We had families who did not sign well, husbands or wives who did not sign, parents who did not sign, and other common frustrations. I do not think anyone has done a comparative study but I am willing to bet that the situation with deafened adults and their families is very similar to born-deaf children and their parents. I feel the family responses would be similar in regard to communication. Other adjustments would be different but I feel communication results would be similar.

People who become deaf or hard of hearing need support from their peers. They need support from the professionals working with them. They need information. The big problem we have is the time gap between acquiring hearing loss and receiving appropriate services. That is a large problem and I do not have a solution for you tonight. One suggestion would be to train all the audiologists. Train them to give information about vocational rehabilitation, ALDA, NAD, and SHHH. I have tried that and had limited success. The joke is that audiologists only listen to other audiologists and we are still trying to figure out who the ear doctors listen to.

There is a need for more court reporters skilled in providing realtime captioning. The technology has been developed but court reporters have not yet been trained to use it. They do not always have the right software or hardware that will allow them to do this. The demand for realtime captioning is increasing, in part due to requests from deafened and hard of hearing consumers. The National Court Reporters Association has developed a certification test for realtime captioners. There are only about 400 certified realtime reporters in the United States. We think we have a shortage of sign language interpreters but the situation is more severe with certified realtime reporters. The cost of providing realtime captioning

is expensive. The normal rates fall in the \$100-125/hour range but the overall cost must be weighed against the benefits of having a transcript of meetings.

State agencies need to develop policies for providing realtime captioning that is similar to the provision of sign language interpreters. I found out at this conference that California State University at Northridge has a full time captioning coordinator and 11 hourly captioners. I think that is great. It is wonderful to see a university providing that type of communication access. We need more programs to do that.

The important item I am trying to emphasize tonight is to understand the people you are working with. Use the “whatever works” communication philosophy. It is very difficult to provide counseling services to a person with no receptive communication skills. I cannot give you the best answer on how to do that because it will vary according to individual and the resources available. You may want to write everything. You may want to use a computer in your office and type for the person. If you are skilled at sign language, writing and typing requires more effort but you need to use a system that works.

Become aware of the support groups that are available in your area and provide information on the national organizations as well. As I said earlier, SHHH, ALDA, and NAD can provide invaluable personal support for individuals and are available at national as well as local levels.

My presentation tonight has been a bit slanted in providing the deafened person’s perspective. I have received substantial benefit from my involvement with ALDA. We are starting to establish our own ALDA culture. Anyone who wants to observe this culture should attend ALDAcon, an ALDA convention. The idea is to put deafened people in a situation where they can meet each other and communicate comfortably. We show them they can do the things they used to do before becoming deaf. They can still dance. They can still sing. ALDAcon features a karaoke party and it becomes wild. We have captioned songs from the 1960's and 70's. It is wonderful. The advantage is that most of the people there are deaf so when you start to sing, it doesn't matter because people can't hear you. I can remember singing “California Girls” and blowing off steam. People who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing can have fun. It is important for them to have positive views of life.

It is important to understand each other. That is the goal of ADARA. That is the goal of ALDA. It should be the goal of any group that is working with persons who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.

Thank you.