

NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING COMMUNITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

A project of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community Coalition of San Francisco in partnership with the City and County of San Francisco Mayor's Office on Disability.

Research Project Implementation:

LCSW

Nancy Moser, Director
Daniel J. Langholtz,

James R. Brune, Needs Assessment Project Assistant
University of California Center on Deafness

Fiscal Agent:

Nancy C. Grant, Youth Supervisor
Hearing Society for the Bay Area, Inc.

Needs Assessment Review Committee:

Steve Crabiel, Toolworks
Mary Skyer, Independent Living Resource Center
Robert I. Roth, Deaf Counseling, Advocacy and Referral

Agency

October 19, 2001

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why We Did the Needs Assessment

A deaf woman goes to the emergency room at the hospital because of a serious illness and requests a sign language interpreter. The woman waits six hours before a sign language interpreter arrives at the hospital.

A hard of hearing woman attends a required training at her government job. The presenters pace around and their faces and mouths can't be seen. There is a noisy fan running during the entire meeting. The presenters forget to use the FM system microphone. Several people talk at the same time during the discussion segment. There are no written notes of the meeting. Later, the woman is reprimanded by her boss for not following the procedures that were presented at that meeting.

A deaf man is arrested by the police. The police officer verbally reads him his Miranda rights. The deaf man shakes his head indicating that he can't lipread and did not understand what was just said. The police officer then shows the man a printed copy of the Miranda rights. The deaf man, however, cannot read English well and because he does not want to antagonize the police officer, he nods his head in response to reading the Miranda card even though he does not fully understand what he has just read.

A woman brings her deaf 10-year-old son to the hospital. The mother speaks only Spanish and her sign language skills are minimal. The boy screams and struggles and seems to be in pain. His mother does not know what is wrong. The hospital staff speak to the mother in Spanish. The boy is taken away while his mother, crying, goes to a waiting room. No one tells the boy what is happening.

According to the 1997 data from the United States Census Bureau's Survey of Income and Program Participation, 2.2% of the American population had severe hearing loss. Using this percentage for San Francisco, this means that 17,088 residents had severe hearing loss (the 2000 U.S. Census reported a San Francisco population total of 776,733). This population of deaf and hard of hearing San Franciscans is quite diverse. Their age ranges from infants to seniors, their ethnic diversity reflects the rich cultural mix of our City, and they reside in every neighborhood. Some were born hearing and are native speakers of English – you might not even notice their hearing aids. Some can't afford hearing aids, or batteries to make them work, or other assistive listening devices which help them get up on time, use the telephone, or know when someone is at the door. Some are fluent signers in American Sign Language; others know only the signs of their native country; others know only gestures. Some can read and write; many can not. Deafness and hearing loss have a significant impact on communication: on learning to talk or sign

in any language, on learning to read and write, on having access to the services and technology that make communication between deaf and hearing people possible.

Those of us who live and work in the deaf and hard of hearing community are not surprised about the four scenarios mentioned above. As a community, we believe that the “hearing world” of San Francisco needs to understand and be accountable for its accessibility to deaf and hard of hearing San Franciscans. As a community we also know our own strengths which we can build on as individuals, agencies, and as a community.

This project is a badly needed first step in building a bridge between the deaf and hard of hearing and hearing worlds. Its purpose is first to give a credible and collective picture of the experiences and concerns of deaf and hard of hearing people. Equally important, it is intended to guide this great City in including us and in being responsive to the deaf and hard of hearing members of our community. We identify strengths to build on as well as gaps in services and limitations in access to public and publicly funded programs and services.

What is the Deaf & Hard of Hearing Community Coalition of San Francisco?

The Deaf & Hard of Hearing Community Coalition of San Francisco is a network of city and community based agencies and service providers that was first convened in December 1998. The Coalition meets quarterly to address the needs of deaf and hard of hearing individuals and their families. Its mission is “to represent the strengths and act upon the needs of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities of San Francisco.” The Coalition recommended a needs assessment proposal to the City in order to adequately evaluate and prioritize the needs of deaf and hard of hearing individuals and their families and identify strengths and gaps in services and access to services. In January 2001, the Mayor’s Office on Disability allocated funding for this project to the Hearing Society of the Bay Area, and the UCSF Center on Deafness (UCCD) was contracted to conduct the needs assessment. A Coalition committee provided input and oversight to the process.

How We Did the Needs Assessment

Data was collected through face-to-face contact either during individual interviews or focus groups with a total of 151 participants. Traditional written surveys were not utilized so as to respect the communication and cultural needs of this population. Group participants included a cross section of the population: ethnic minorities, deaf, hard of hearing, parents of deaf and hard of hearing children, service providers, sign language interpreters, teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing, audiologists, and ADA Coordinators for City Departments.

The focus groups generated information regarding the strengths of services and access to services in San Francisco, gaps or areas for improvement needed for deaf and hard of hearing San Francisco residents, and recommendations for improvement or change.

Individual interviews were conducted in order to obtain information from consumers or provider groups not well represented in the focus groups.

Summary of Survey Findings

This project amassed a vast amount of data and attempted to capture a cross-sectional “snapshot” of the diverse needs of the many communities within the deaf and hard of hearing communities. Strengths identified by the participants emphasized the competency of already existing specialized programs for deaf and hard of hearing individuals and efforts by specific departments or programs to provide appropriate access.

Overall responses from the assessment indicated the serious need for improved communication access and access to publicly funded programs and services, improved capacity for service provision among deaf and hard of hearing community based organizations, and improved and ongoing cultural competency training.

- ❑ Communication access for emergency situations, medical appointments, and general publicly funded and city services needs to be adequate and consistent. Lack of cultural competency and resource awareness among providers and the lack of available emergency interpreting services are serious, ongoing concerns.
- ❑ There is an inconsistency or absence of appropriate and reasonable accommodations by employers, both City departments and private employers. This impacts productivity and opportunities for promotion for deaf and hard of hearing employees.
- ❑ There is a lack of coordinated resources and objective information from service providers for parents whose child has just been diagnosed with a hearing loss.
- ❑ TTYs are not available in public places including crucial locations such as hospitals and courts.
- ❑ There is a serious shortage of sign language, oral, and trilingual interpreting services. This is a result of a dwindling interpreting pool and rising costs of interpreting service fees.
- ❑ Improved culturally competent and linguistically accessible services needs to exist at various public sector programs, as does community education regarding hearing loss and self-advocacy.
- ❑ The emergency, on-call-interpreting services needs to expand to adequately meet the needs of legal, medical and psychiatric emergency situations.
- ❑ Ongoing cultural competency training for City Departments needs to occur.

Final Recommendations

Recommendations based on the findings from the Needs Assessment were categorized under four specific areas:

- 1) Create a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Access Coordinator within the Mayor's Office on Disability to provide technical assistance, referrals, and information about resources for deaf and hard of hearing individuals, service providers, and civil service employees. This person would be a key link in ensuring that services are available, accessible, ongoing, of high quality, and adequately funded.
- 2) Improve communication access in publicly funded programs and services by establishing a system for arranging, paying for, and monitoring the quality of interpreters, real-time captioning and other appropriate technology.
- 3) Build the capacity of deaf and hard of hearing community agencies which have expertise in serving the needs of deaf and hard of hearing people. These community-based organizations should partner with public and publicly funded programs to ensure access.
- 4) Establish a system for ongoing training for working with deaf and hard of hearing people, including cultural competence, communication and other skills. Training should include a monitoring component to ensure ongoing successful program/service access to deaf and hard of hearing individuals and their families.

Acknowledgements

The Hearing Society of the Bay Area and the UCSF Center on Deafness would like to acknowledge those who participated in the Needs Assessment Project:

- ❑ Deaf and hard of hearing and hearing individuals and service providers who contributed their valuable time to be interviewed and participate in the focus groups.
- ❑ The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community Coalition of San Francisco's Need Assessment Review Committee:
 - Jim Brune, Daniel Langholtz, Nancy Moser, *UCSF Center on Deafness*
 - Nancy Grant, *Hearing Society for the Bay Area*
 - Steve Crabel, *Toolworks, Inc.*
 - Robert Roth, *Deaf Counseling and Referral Agency (DCARA)*
 - Mary Skyer, *Independent Living Resource Center*
- ❑ The Mayor's Office on Disability for their support of this project

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