



Employment and Employability Needs of The Deaf Community in Peel And Halton Regions

THE CANADIAN HEARING SOCIETY
LA SOCIÉTÉ CANADIENNE DE L'OUÏE



 *The Centre*
Skills Development & Training



Halton Social Planning Council

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Funded by



Human Resources
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Acknowledgment

The Centre for Skills Development & Training acknowledges the support of project partners and community stakeholders in producing this report. Special thanks to The Canadian Hearing Society, in particular Toni Lemon, Regional Director of Waterloo and Peel Regions, and Donald Prong, Program Manager of The Canadian Hearing Society of Peel, for the leadership their organization provides for the deaf community and for their assistance in reaching out to the deaf community in order to make this study possible. In addition, a special note of thanks to Gary Malkowski for his deep insights into the world of deaf people. I wish to recognize the contribution of our Project Coordinator, Heather Marsden, who models excellence and professionalism in both our deaf and hearing communities. Also, thank you to the Halton Social Planning Council, in particular Dr. Joey Edwardh, Executive Director, and Lien Le, Research Associate, for undertaking this research project and ensuring that the result would be reflective of our community and would provide a solid foundation upon which all stakeholders could build their employment services to persons who are deaf.

The research was conducted with the participation of members of the deaf community, business leaders with experience in hiring deaf employees, and a broad range of community organizations. The participation of all is greatly appreciated.

I also wish to express my gratitude to Ursula McDermid and John Del Monte of Human Resources Development Canada for their support of this study and their belief that this information will assist policy analysts and service providers in ensuring that persons who are deaf and hard of hearing have access to relevant, high quality services.

Kathy Mills, Study Project Manager
The Centre for Skills Development & Training

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Introduction

Preface

The Centre for Skills Development & Training developed and implemented a program called *Deaf Doorways* from 1995 – 2000, in partnership with several organizations, including The Canadian Hearing Society. Changes have caused project partners to take a step back from the model developed in the mid 1990s and re-evaluate the current employment and employability needs of those who are deaf and hard of hearing in our community. Before moving forward it is important to know what services, training, and supports would not only enhance the employability of deaf people, but also retain them in their employment.

While consideration of special needs is acknowledged to be important for all persons with disabilities, it is also acknowledged that there are issues unique to deaf and hard of hearing people that make the provision of service particularly challenging. In the past, The Centre structured and adapted *Deaf Doorways* on information that was largely anecdotal and informal – albeit from sources close to the deaf and hard of hearing communities. No significant information specific to the deaf community in the regions of Peel and Halton exists; no research has been documented that provides clear direction on employment and employability needs in this region, and how these needs can be met.

As a result of this need for information, The Centre, The Canadian Hearing Society of Peel, and the Halton Social Planning Council partnered to develop and conduct a research study that would assist in understanding the employability and employment needs of the deaf community.

This study, *Employment and Employability of the Deaf Community in Peel and Halton Regions*, focuses on deaf persons who use American Sign Language (ASL) as their major means of communication. This sector of the population constitutes a cultural and linguistic minority within our society. The study looks into both the problems deaf people encounter in finding work, and the problems and challenges they face in maintaining stable employment.

Goals

The study goals were:

- To identify the employment and employability needs of deaf people in Peel-Halton-Dufferin regions.
- To identify employment and career preparation programs and service gaps.
- To identify skill training needs among the deaf population.
- To recommend measures that could alleviate gaps.
- To increase the general public's awareness of the needs of the deaf community.

Research Team

The research team consisted of five members:

- Kathy Mills, Projects Manager,
The Centre for Skills Development & Training
- Donald Prong, Program Manager,
The Canadian Hearing Society of Peel
- Joey Edwardh, Executive Director,
Halton Social Planning Council
- Heather Marsden, Project Coordinator,
The Centre for Skills Development & Training
- Lien Le, Research Associate,
Halton Social Planning Council



Two team members are from the deaf community, including the project coordinator, whose insights, experiences, and compassion have brought interesting and valuable information to the study.

Research Protocol

Members of our team developed a research protocol for this study. Two important elements of the protocol should be highlighted here.

- Unless otherwise indicated, the protocol limited research to deaf people who use American Sign Language (ASL). The research did not deal with hard of hearing and deafened persons.
- Direct communication methods were used to approach deaf community members. At the beginning of the study, active deaf community members informed the research team that a one-to-one approach is the most effective tool to obtain vital information from the deaf community.

Research Standards and Ethics

All activities listed in the study methodology were conducted in English and American Sign Language. The Project Coordinator facilitated all the meetings. There was always at least one ASL interpreter present. All the interpreters came from Ontario Interpreter Services at The Canadian Hearing Society of Peel. Approval was obtained from all study participants to have discussions recorded. The research protocol guarantees anonymity to all respondents. As required in any research involving human participants, deaf community members signed written consent forms at the beginning of group interviews and focus groups. Their comments and observations are the basis of the qualitative data used in this report, but as individuals they remain anonymous. All data collected was transcribed and verified. Transcripts of interviews have been checked against the tapes by interviewers.



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 (Malkowski, 2001, May, p. 2). According to the 2001 Census, the combined population of Peel and Halton was 1,364,177. If the Canadian Hearing Society's estimate of the size of the deaf population of Canada is applied to these two regions, approximately 13,600 deaf people who use sign language live in Peel and Halton.

In Ontario, American Sign Language (ASL) is the most commonly used sign language among deaf people who sign as their principal means of communication. Many advocates for this community write the word "Deaf" with an upper case "D" to refer to the culture and community of ASL communicators. When "deaf" with a lower case "d" is used in that context, the reference is widened to refer to the audiological condition of lack of hearing (Barnett, 2001, p. 14). This broader category also includes persons who become deaf after learning speech (deafened) and/or deaf persons who communicate orally. The importance of this distinction is to keep in mind that the deaf minority not only faces communication barriers in its relations with the predominant "hearing" society, but also cultural barriers related to differences of outlook, customs, and perceptions of human relationships. However, this capital D convention is not universal, even in the deaf community. We do not use it in this study to distinguish between different sectors of the deaf population.

This study focuses on the experiences and perceptions of deaf people, as they tell their stories, through sign language interpreters. We tried to avoid any editing approach that would compromise the idiom and nuances of the expressions of deaf interviewees.

The deaf community has its own culture, as expressed in its literature, poetry, rituals, humour, and theatre. It also has social rules that differ from those of the majority hearing culture, and these differences sometimes result in confused interactions between hearing and deaf people (Barnett, 2001, p. 15). This factor sometimes leads to misunderstandings and even strife in the working environment.

Deaf Education, Training, and Employment

In preparation for our field research, our team consulted various secondary sources to obtain background information in Canada, and more particularly, Ontario, about the general situation of deaf people attempting to enter the labour market and stay active once employed. Below are some of the salient aspects of that situation:

- **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** (Beaton, 1990, p. 10; Canadian Hearing Society, 2002, February, p. 3; Malkowski, 2002, April, p. 3).
- **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** (Beaton, 1990, p. 10).
- **Deafness is not a disorder, health impairment or threat to the health and safety of others** (Malkowski, 2002, September, p.p. 1-3).
- **86% of deaf Ontarians are under-employed or unemployed** (Roots and Kerr, 1998, p. 19).
- **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 the deaf job seekers** (Canadian Hearing Society, 2002, February, p. 3; Malkowski, 2001, May, p. 3).
- **There is a general lack of knowledge of the labour market among deaf people** (Beaton, 1990, p. 11).
- **Few deaf people have access to extensive and appropriate employment information and training opportunities** (Beaton, 1990, p. 11).
- **There is a lack of exposure to a wide range of vocational opportunities; therefore, deaf students need more support in career choices and planning to go beyond some traditional and limited occupations** (Beaton, 1990, p. 11).

- There is a serious decline in the enrolment of deaf Canadians at post-secondary educational institutions due to multi-barriers: reduced government funding, increased tuition fees, and no subsidized accessibility supports (Malkowski, 2002, March, p. 2).
- A Special Topic Series publication analyzing Statistics Canada’s Health and Activity Limitation Survey data from 1986-87 indicates the following educational levels for “persons who are unable to hear in one-person conversations” (Roots and Kerr, 1998, p. 16):
 - Less than Grade 8 52.0 %
 - Secondary 24.4
 - Post-secondary 7.9
 - Certificate/Diploma 13.1
 - University Degree 1.7
- The Ontario Ministry of Education and Training’s Literacy Survey of Ontario’s Deaf and Hard of Hearing Adults, 1998, reported 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. This finding reflects their relatively low level of education and low literacy levels. According to the Canadian Council on Social Development, in general, persons with disabilities receive lower wages than persons without disabilities. This is evident in the statistics found in Table 1 below.

Table 1:

Hourly Wage Rates for workers with and without disabilities by Age Group and Gender, 1993, 1995, 1998						
Person with Disabilities	16-34		35-49		50-64	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1993	\$ 12.89	\$ 9.73	\$ 17.71	\$ 13.08	\$ 17.78	\$ 12.80
1995	\$ 10.89	\$ 9.38	\$ 15.63	\$ 11.98	\$ 18.40	\$ 10.86
1998	\$ 12.38	\$ 11.43	\$ 16.07	\$ 12.36	\$ 18.92	\$ 12.00

Person without Disabilities	16-34		35-49		50-64	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1993	\$ 14.28	\$ 12.62	\$ 20.30	\$ 14.48	\$ 19.69	\$ 13.57
1995	\$ 14.38	\$ 12.01	\$ 20.48	\$ 15.07	\$ 20.01	\$ 14.54
1998	\$ 14.00	\$ 12.00	\$ 19.62	\$ 15.05	\$ 20.00	\$ 14.11

Source: Canadian Council on Social Development using Statistics Canada’s Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics

A review of the literature shows that deaf workers also have few opportunities for promotion as compared to hearing workers.

- **Financial insecurity is a problem for deaf youth. It is an issue for deaf youth studying at vocational and training institutions because they must arrange for and pay the cost of accommodations as government funding is no longer available. Also, increased tuition fees, and dramatic reductions in government funding adversely affect deaf youth who attend post-secondary institutions in Canada and the United States. In addition, funding that exists has shifted from student grants to loans (Malkowski, 2002, March, p. 2).**
- **The Canadian Hearing Society reports in March 2002 that it continues to receive complaints from deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing post-secondary students and their parents about access to post-secondary education. Recently, they have been issued tax bills for income support they have received to hire sign language interpreters and captionists. Many are being taxed on disability-related support and out-of-country bursaries. Students attending foreign institutions have received Revenue Canada tax bills ranging from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per year (Malkowski, 2002, March, p. 1).**



Connecting to the Deaf Community: Methodology

Our efforts to connect to a broad and representative cross-section of deaf people in our regions met with some initial limitations. The project began in April, but by the time the team was ready to reach out to the deaf community, summer was upon us. Some prospective key informants and deaf community leaders were away. In particular, two events for deaf people in July drew away potential group participants – International Deaf Way II in Washington, D.C. and the National Canadian Deaf Conference in Newfoundland. In addition, in March and April (2002) the support staff at the E.C. Drury School for the Deaf went on strike. This strike had an impact on our Milton group interview, which targeted students from E.C. Drury and its literacy upgrading program, “Adult Continuing Education” (ACE). We had to cancel the session, as we were unable to reach the students.

This research project was conceived originally as a tri-regional Peel – Halton – Dufferin study. However, throughout the study we were unable to interview members of the deaf community residing in Dufferin, or any Dufferin businesses hiring deaf workers, or service providers in Dufferin who support deaf people¹. Therefore, the evidence flowing from this study only reflects the situation in Peel and Halton regions. However, as evidenced by the different kinds of interviews conducted, the study succeeded in gathering significant input from deaf persons and others regarding job-search and workplace experiences of deaf people.

This study employs a multiple methods approach that includes:

- The Mayfest deaf festival questionnaire
- Group interviews
- Focus groups
- Service provider key informant interviews
- Employer key informant interviews

Each method is described in detail below and copies of questionnaires and guidelines used for interviews are found in Appendices 4 to 9 of this report.

¹ Applying The Canadian Hearing Society estimate of the percentage of the Canadian population who are deaf and use sign language, there are approximately 500 deaf people who communicate with sign language in Dufferin.

Mayfest – The Annual Deaf Community Event

Mayfest is the largest annual, one-day event of the Toronto deaf community, held every spring. This year marked Mayfest's 28th anniversary. It is estimated that thousands of deaf people and friends came to this year's event, which took place at the St. Lawrence Market in downtown Toronto. Participants came from all over the province of Ontario, and from the United States, to socialize, find out what training programs are currently being offered, and to look at the newest technical devices. A wide range of community organizations and agencies serving deaf people made their presence felt on the scene with booths, displays, and promotional materials.

Our study team also participated in Mayfest. From our information table, the research team invited deaf residents of Peel-Halton-Dufferin, between the ages of 16 and 65, to participate in our study by filling out a questionnaire. Deaf team members reached out to their peers by walking throughout the crowd and encouraging individuals who matched our target group to participate in the study. The Mayfest questionnaire solicited general information about participants: age, gender, education, and employment status. Fifty-four individuals responded.

Group Interviews

The next method utilised to approach the deaf community was a series of group interviews, organized in June. Four group interviews were hosted at different locations where deaf people congregate: Mississauga (2), Milton, and Brampton. Hosting locations were local places familiar to deaf people such as the offices of The Canadian Hearing Society or the Centre for Skills Development & Training. Employment Access in Peel sent a letter and the project flyer to 172 deaf, deafened and hard of hearing clients. Employment Services of The Canadian Hearing Society of Peel sent an information letter to 61 deaf clients. As a result of these efforts, 18 deaf persons participated in these group interviews. The twenty questions asked at the group interviews focussed on generating the following information: (i) demographic profile, (ii) employment experience, and (iii) solutions to issues associated with their employment experiences. These were structured questions that required both written responses and discussion.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were also used to learn about the views of the deaf community. Focus group discussions allowed us to collect data on the employment experiences of deaf individuals. The focus groups explored employment-related factors such as age, gender, education and training, technologies, health, and family issues. Three focus groups were held in July in Mississauga, Brampton, and Milton, at the same locations as the group interviews. Promotion to encourage participation in the focus groups occurred through the Mayfest list of participants, key informant interviews, a web site of the deaf community, local newspapers, and word of mouth. Sixteen deaf persons participated in these focus groups. Participants were asked five questions that related to their experiences as deaf job seekers or employees.

Service Provider Interviews

Service provider interviews were an important vehicle contributing to the development of a comprehensive understanding of the employment and employability needs of deaf people in Peel and

Halton. We targeted each respondent because of his or her specific position in employment services provided to the deaf community. Seventeen service-provider interviews were conducted. Three interviews involved more than one respondent, which increased the total number of respondents to 21. These selected persons represent three types of agencies: mainstream (2), cross-cultural serving all disabilities (6), and those delivering services exclusively to deaf, hard of hearing, and deafened persons (9)². The experiences of these respondents vary from direct client services (10), to program or service supervision (6) or advocacy (1). Most interviews took place in the office of informants, usually lasting two hours. Conversations were based on a list of questions designed by the research team.



² Mainstream agencies are public services and non-profit organizations funded by the government that offer services to the general public. Cross-cultural (cross-disability) service providers provide services to people with disabilities. Both of these kinds of agencies generally lack specialized training in service delivery to deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing consumers, such as interpreter services; and generally lack an understanding of issues of deaf culture (Malkowski, 2002, September, p. 14).

The important information provided by these individuals allowed us to understand their experiences in working with deaf people, such as the challenges, service gaps, and suggestions that could lead to policy and program development to enhance employment opportunities for deaf workers. All the informants were invited to attend our preliminary findings meeting held in September to garner further insights on the findings and the policies and programs needed. That feedback has been integrated into this report.

Employer Interviews

We conducted employer interviews in order to achieve a better understanding of the relationship between deaf workers and the workplace environment, targeting those who actively employ deaf persons in their operations. Employment Access in Peel sent a letter to introduce the study to 36 employers. The Canadian Hearing Society-Employment Services in Peel gave the research team their list of nine companies, to make a total of 45. Out of that total, 11 employers responded to our study, but we interviewed only ten due to time constraints. All employers provided an overview of their products and/or services, and some also provided project interviewers with a company tour. Our conversations were not restricted to a description of company and employer experiences in working with deaf workers, but also explored how to improve employment opportunities for deaf people.

Discussing the Findings: Employment and Employability Issues

This section develops an understanding of the employment and employability needs of the deaf community in Peel and Halton. The qualitative data collected from all study participants have been presented in three profiles: **community members, service providers, and employers.**

Through the Lens of the Deaf Community

Profile of Deaf Community Participants

This study contacted a total of 88 deaf people through Mayfest, group interviews, and focus groups. The following figures illustrate the characteristics of the community participants:

Figure 1

Gender of Community Participants

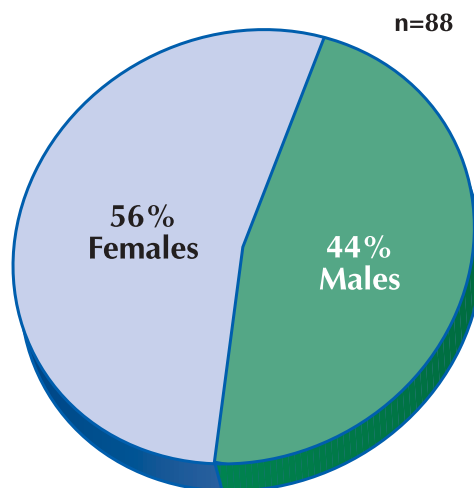


Figure 2

Age of Community Participants

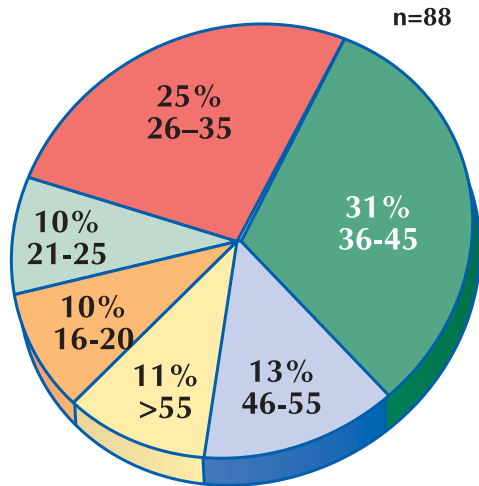


Figure 3

Residence of Community Participants

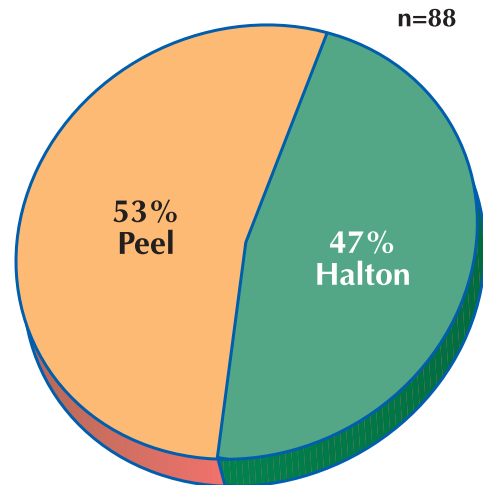
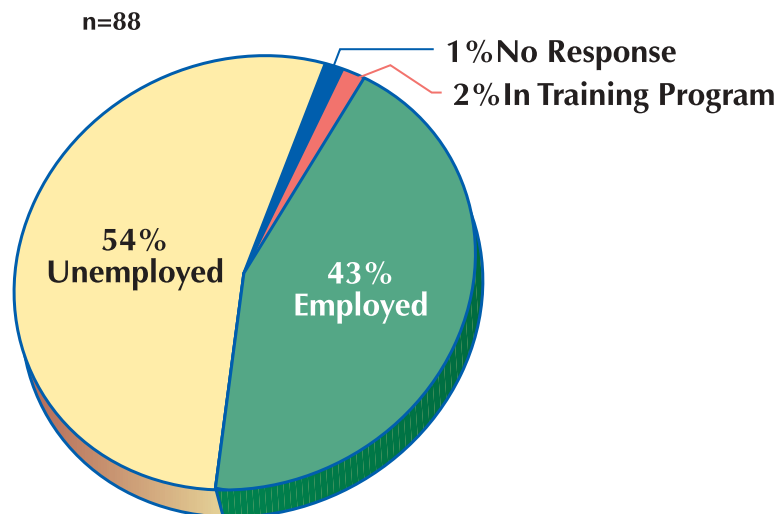


Figure 4

Employment Status of Community Participants



The Deaf Worker: Experiences

Communication: Barriers to Labour Market Participation

Communication barriers are considered by the study respondents as a most important difficulty for a deaf person in job seeking.

Hearing people are usually able to speak easily and independently, to the point that they take oral communication skills for granted. Deaf people, however, have to rely on accommodation supports, such as interpreters, TTY/TDD, Bell Relay, or note taking. Each of these means of communication has its own disadvantages as indicated below.

- Note taking is time-consuming and requires literacy skills.
- TTY/TDD and Bell Relay are not fully known by the general public, or are not fully used at employment agencies due to lack of knowledge or their inconvenience for hearing workers.
- Interpreter service is the most problematic and has a direct influence on the deaf community in issues of employment and employability. In community gatherings, participants share their frustrations about this service:

“Sometimes we got a job interview but not an interpreter, because the interpreter should be booked two weeks ahead of time.”

Sometimes we got a job interview but not an interpreter, because the interpreter should be booked two weeks ahead of time. How could we do that? There were cases where we had gone through all the hiring process and got a four-week training course but could not find an interpreter, so we could not get the training. It meant we could not get the job.

I worked with a company [where] I had no problem for a number of years. But after a while, there were people from university and college. They were technicians. Then the place told me they could not do this or could not do that for me. They could not afford interpreters. In meetings if there was some info that needed more clarification and no interpreters were there, I had to interject. Eventually I was laid off.

A high percentage of my friends always complain about the availability of interpreters. They showed up for job interviews and waited and waited, but the interpreters did not show up.

A deaf person at my workplace was let go because of interpreting issues. His work was more detailed and specialized than mine. The interpreter came in. My boss wanted him [the interpreter] to be there for eight hours a day but [the interpreter service] only covered 2 or 3 hours a day... Because that person did not receive full training, he was let go.

Literacy

Low literacy levels also impede deaf people from finding and maintaining employment. In an interview with staff at an agency working with deaf literacy issues, the staff explain that many deaf people have literacy skill levels of one and two. These are the lowest levels and research suggests that location in these levels affects an individual's life chances as demonstrated in the strong relationships among education attainment and income and regular employment (Halton Social Planning Council, 2002, p. vi). Not knowing how to read or how to write a resume can create a serious job-search barrier for deaf people. The majority of study participants feel that they need literacy upgrading and skills training programs:

They don't have interpreters available there. When I come in I have to write back and forth. It's so embarrassing because they don't understand.

It would be nice if we had ongoing programs with literacy issues.

“It would be nice if we had ongoing programs with literacy issues.”

Skills Development and Training

Deaf job seekers have far less access to skills-development training programs than hearing people:

We need something specifically designed for deaf people.

I took a training workshop before, but along with hearing people. It was sometimes difficult because I felt that I was not on par with them. I would rather have at least two, three, or four deaf people with me to make the environment much more comfortable, rather than being the lone deaf person.

“We need something specifically designed for deaf people.”

The “one-size-fits-all” model is not suitable for most deaf adults. Their backgrounds, employment skills, and needs are different from

“It’s tough to get jobs because we cannot communicate. That’s the bottom line.”

each other. Some participants, however, have a strong resistance towards training programs. Some deaf immigrants, who had work experiences in their country of origin, have had a hard time finding similar jobs in Canada. They share their views with emotion:

I’ve had training and I have a lot of experience. I know what I am doing. Why do I need to go back to training, back to school, back to college? I am too old for that. Why don’t I just get a job? I need support there.

I have lots of experiences working with computers and computer-design. But it’s impossible to find a job. I don’t think we need to upgrade anything. It’s tough to get jobs because we cannot communicate. That’s the bottom line.

Deaf Youth: Educational Opportunity and Career Development

At high school, career vocational services for students and deaf youth are limited due to lack of resources. A comment of a teacher at E.C. Drury School for the Deaf illustrates some of the issues related to vocational services:

[We] need more counsellors who are deaf or can communicate well with deaf students and are knowledgeable about employment programs. A youth employment service had an office in Milton a few years ago and we were able to make referrals to them for our graduating students and students seeking summer employment.

This service has been closed.

Deaf youth also face educational challenges due to few choices for post-secondary schools and programs. One participant summarizes the views of many of the young respondents:

There are no higher education institutions for deaf people in Canada. That’s why we have to go to the States.

Another deaf participant comments:

I have a deaf son. He is 18. After graduating from high school he was shocked, he does not know what to do. As you know, once

“[We] need more counsellors who are deaf or can communicate well with deaf students and are knowledgeable about employment programs.”

students graduate the school is no long responsible for anything. But they should provide more in-depth guidance in terms of interviewing skills, making cold calls, and so on. My son kept saying, 'What am I supposed to do? How can I find a job?'

What happens when a career centre is closed? At one time, a career centre with full access for deaf clients including using ASL was located close to the deaf school. Many students and graduates accessed this service. The closure of this service had a significant impact on deaf job seekers, especially youth. One deaf job seeker relates the following situation:

The Career Development Centre on Main Street in Milton helped me with my resume, but it was closed down so I had to go all the way to Mississauga. They don't have interpreters available there. When I come in I have to write back and forth. It's embarrassing because they might not understand and you have to modify things so they can understand. They look at you like you cannot communicate. The Milton walk-in employment centre had so many workshops and help in resume upgrading. People even signed there. What happened to it? Funding was cut? Why? So many deaf people went there.

Finding the Job

According to all study participants, it is hard for deaf individuals to find jobs, even with adequate education and training. Their words capture their difficulties:

I got a diploma in finance assistance and accounting... I graduated with high marks. I sent resumes to various places but got no response. I guess they look at me as deaf, not an individual with skills and experiences. I remembered HRDC had a job fair. They advised agencies to hire deaf people and offered to provide subsidies. But even with that, I did not get responses.

I have problems finding a job. I have skills. I have a good network. I have a resume. I sent it out 80 times, I talked to counsellors seven times, and I also walked into different places where my hearing friends told me there were job opportunities. When I got there, they looked at my resume, and said they would call me. I never got their calls.

"I guess they look at me as deaf, not an individual with skills and experiences."

Some participants explain that it is even harder for deaf immigrants to find jobs:

I am frustrated because I immigrated ten years ago to Toronto from [country] where I already had job experience. I wanted to get the same job in Toronto with computers. They told me that I had to take more training, that they had communication problems with me, that my communication skills were poor. I had to look for another job, and could not be hired for the same thing.

I worked on buses in Europe for a couple of years and had experience. When I moved to Canada, I wanted to apply for the same job with [company] but they said they could not hire deaf persons because of safety issues. I tried to say 'I got the skills, that the work was with one machine...' but they kept on saying 'we can't, we can't, sorry!' I ended up looking for another job.

Some participants in this study have spent up to twenty-four months looking for work. Two respondents say they were unemployed for ten years. They would appreciate ongoing job-search support from employment agencies. It was common in the community meetings to hear comments such as the following:

“It’s not easy for deaf people at all to find a job on their own especially when there is a lack of resources and support!”

It’s not easy for deaf people at all to find a job on their own especially when there is a lack of resources and support!

Deaf people use different ways to search for work. The most common way that study participants use are newspaper ads, Internet job banks, and employment agencies. Employment Access and the Employment Services Program of The Canadian Hearing Society are the most used by participants in our study.

Employment Supports

While appreciative of employment services, half the participants are not satisfied with the services they receive at employment offices or agencies. The reasons are various. Some explain that the process of getting employment support is often complicated and time-consuming:

I went to [an agency] to see if I could get assistance from them, maybe they could find a job for me. They said they would

because they offer job finding, but they went on strike. So I really had a hard time. Eight weeks went by. I phoned them again. They were too busy. I just can't seem to get help anywhere.

I heard of [an agency] but their process is so long I gave up.

A community participant describes a frustrating experience with the employment support process, one that resembles that of many of the participants:

It's related to accessibility. When I went to a government office lots of things happened: get a card, fill out the form, stand in line... So when I got there, they pointed me towards another line to a window. Then it was my turn. The person talked to me through a window. It's very frustrating. They could not open the window for me. They said I had to call first for an appointment. I said why did they ask me to stay in line. I don't understand why people have to call for an appointment. It should be on a first-come, first-serve basis. So then I went to where my Dad works and used the phone to ask them [the government office] for a contact person to make an appointment. It was busy signal, busy signal, busy signal. I tried the whole morning but the line was busy, busy, busy. So I could not get through to make an appointment. I thought, 'I have to talk to somebody'. I went back to the office. I could not get things done in person. I tried to phone for an appointment, but the line was always busy. When I got back to that office they were playing computer games. They played games while people went back and forth for the services. I was shocked! I thought that by going there in person I could solve the problem, but they kept on saying I needed an appointment. Then I could not get through by phone. I am deaf. I cannot use regular phones. I had to find the special type [TTY/TDD] to phone them. They said I had to find another way. 'Find another way!' They have to help me out!

Participants offer other reasons for their dissatisfaction with employment services in the region. The agency's mandate may be limited and, therefore, it may not be able to respond to their expectations. There is limited funding for training and interpreter services, the counsellor may exercise excessive control over the deaf person's choice of career and/or other aspects of his/her employment plan, or the counsellor may have little knowledge of the labour market. The following comments touch on these problems:

"I heard of [an agency] but their process is so long I gave up."

"They said I had to find another way. 'Find another way!' They have to help me out!"

“They were in control of the decisions that decided my future. They tell me what to do. I have to follow them...”

I was working but I was not satisfied with the job. So I made an appointment with [an agency] to talk about changing careers. I also mentioned I should go back to school. The counsellor said, ‘no, I was ready to work and find a job.’ Several months later, they said I could go for training, but it was too late to fill out the application. I could not get in the program I want. They don’t think ahead.

I was interested in training but [the agency] counsellor said no. They were in control of the decisions that decided my future. They tell me what to do. I have to follow them...

I got support from [an agency] but I need more because I feel that they don’t do a whole lot. It’s a slow process. The slow response that I got makes me feel that it’s a way of wasting my time.

Today at [that agency] I find that you totally look on your own, you find a job for yourself. They don’t really help.

Because they are from a minority culture, deaf study participants strongly believe there should be some cultural connection at employment offices and agencies to guarantee that service is delivered effectively and that deaf individuals feel comfortable. The following two comments allude to that concern:

There should be some people working at employment offices who know deaf people and deaf culture.

We need to have deaf people working at employment offices so we can get help right away. We don’t always have interpreters available there. That’s the most important thing because we need someone who knows our culture and our language.

“There should be some people working at employment offices who know deaf people and deaf culture.”

At job fairs, another public place that many deaf people use to look for employment, study participants also miss that cultural connection:

At job fairs, most of the things are for hearing people. It’s frustrating for deaf people. I can’t get support there, so I give up.

About a month ago we had job fair for the Brampton area, but it was not for deaf people. We could not communicate, so it did not work out.

Employers: Perceptions and Stereotypes

Employers' attitudes and perceptions of the capabilities of deaf persons are considered barriers for deaf employment opportunities.

These barriers lead to employers' unwillingness to hire deaf people as illustrated below:

I went to a job interview. I told the lady to speak slowly because I am deaf. She was shocked and she said straight out: 'I am sorry, I cannot hire deaf persons!'

I know [someone who] graduated from Engineering at George Brown. [This person] gave a resume to a company in Oakville, and took training with them...[This person] has the skills and could do the job. But communication was a problem, a huge problem. [This person] had to find another job and was very upset.

In my resume I listed my experience and education, and also the Bob Rumball Centre for the Deaf and my contact number through Bell Relay. I sent out or handed it out to 42 places, but got no response at all, not even a thank you note or letter. So I decided to change my resume. I deleted the part that said I am deaf and asked them to contact me through a fax number. I sent this to the same companies. I got some response. That was interesting enough. I think the barrier was there, the fact that I was deaf.

Employers often have a lack of understanding of deaf culture and may not know how to, or are unwilling to communicate with deaf people:

He [the employer] said that he could not hire deaf people because he did not know how to communicate.

Or employers may cite safety issues or accommodation costs:

Big companies... are places where you might have opportunities with forklifts or in the warehouse. But they are concerned about insurance and safety. They don't want to hire deaf people because it's related to cost.

“[The employer] said that he could not hire deaf people because he did not know how to communicate. ”

Treatment in the Workplace

Many deaf people face difficult and harsh conditions, including abuse from employers or co-workers:



Sometimes they [employers] expect deaf people to work harder, without a break, because they think we don't interact or socialize because we don't hear.

I worked in an environment where hearing workers talked and signed behind my back, which caused me to feel very uncomfortable.

Employers said I did a good job but co-workers asked me to slow down. This made me feel very uncomfortable and lousy. The workers then started picking on me.

There are also the feelings of isolation:

My co-workers never made fun of me but the fact that I was always on my own was frustrating and I felt so isolated.

When the hearing people were chatting and having a good time at lunch time, I just had feelings of rejection and isolation.

Some participants believe that they are not treated fairly:

I saw recently hired hearing people get full-time positions. I worked so hard, worked over-time, worked any shift they asked me, and have always been punctual during my three years working there, plus one year of training. But I only got one-year contracts. Then, one year my contract ended, and they did not want me any more.

I found an assembly job through the Internet with [a company] in Toronto. They hired me without an interview. I lived in Guelph. It was two hours driving each way, seven days a week from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., a 12-hour shift. After two weeks I had to quit.

“When the hearing people were chatting and having a good time at lunch time, I just had feelings of rejection and isolation.”

Finding Another Way: Suggestions For Change

Many suggestions for change emerge in the interviews with deaf participants. For example:

We should have job fairs just for deaf people.

Job fairs should be advertised at deaf schools, and interpreters should be provided.

Deaf participants suggest some alternatives for information communication to make their job search easier. For example:

We are deaf so we are not familiar with ads on television or radio. So employers should have a more inclusive way to advertise jobs.

What we need is a Job Finding Club!

In an effort to change employers' negative attitudes and perceptions towards deaf people, study participants express the need to have someone to advocate on their behalf, as in the following two comments:

We would like to have someone who can act as our advocate at job interviews, talk about cross-cultural information and cross-cultural barriers, and how to help companies to realise that it's OK to hire deaf people.

We need people specialized in working with hearing employers to convince them to hire us.

Moreover, changes in legislation are mentioned, especially concerning employment equity. For example:

We need some kind of equal hiring policy developed that could compel companies to hire us, so we do not have to be on Employment Insurance or welfare.

I think government should adopt laws that require companies to hire a certain percentage of people with disabilities...Companies that have



deaf employees should automatically provide necessary equipment such as TTY, and ask no questions what we are using it for, or why we use it.

Job-ready community participants appreciate job development and job coaching. One participant observes:

What we need is job development. It's a waste of time to have training.

However, those who are not job-ready because of low literacy skills or of limited skills, want to have more training programs. For example:

I would like to have more training such as computer training and trades training.

We need training such as on self-esteem.

Participants prefer Mississauga as the location for training because of a high concentration of deaf people and the availability of a good transit system, especially compared to the inadequate system in Halton. All study participants agree that the length of training courses should depend on topics offered and participants' educational background. This perception is related to the need for life-long education and new training opportunities.

Through the Lens of Service Providers

Profile of Service Providers

As mentioned previously, 21 persons from 17 community-based agencies and government programs serving the deaf community agreed to participate in our interviews. The time length that these respondents have worked with deaf people ranges from under five years (three persons) to more than 20 years (two persons).

Figure 5 on the next page shows the services provided to deaf clients in the agencies these respondents represent, and how many of those agencies provide each service.

Figure 5

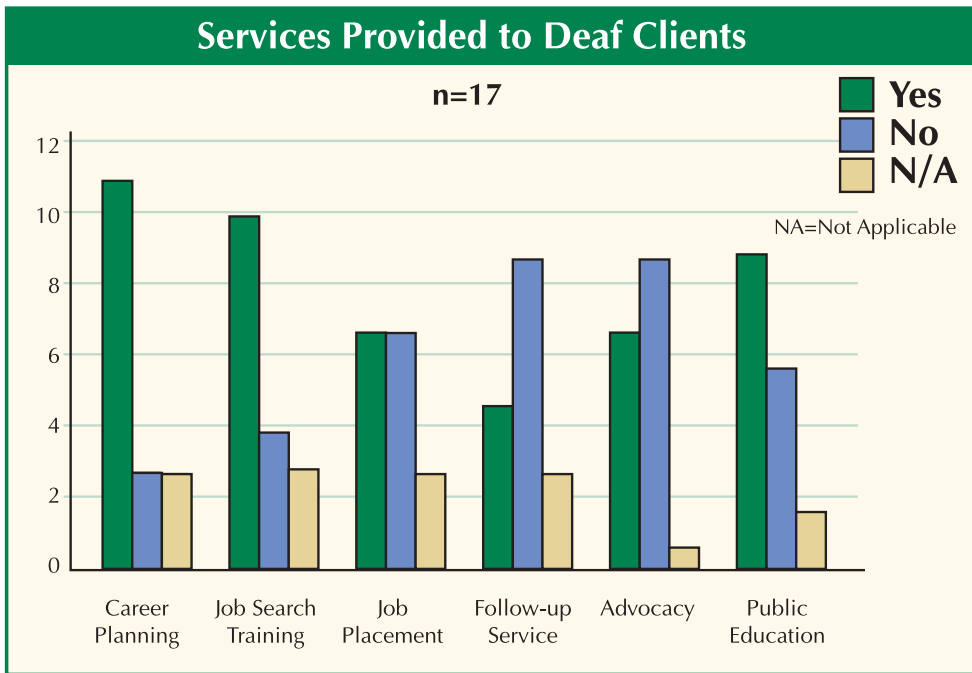


Figure 6 below shows the means of communication used by the 17 agencies to serve deaf clients.

Figure 6

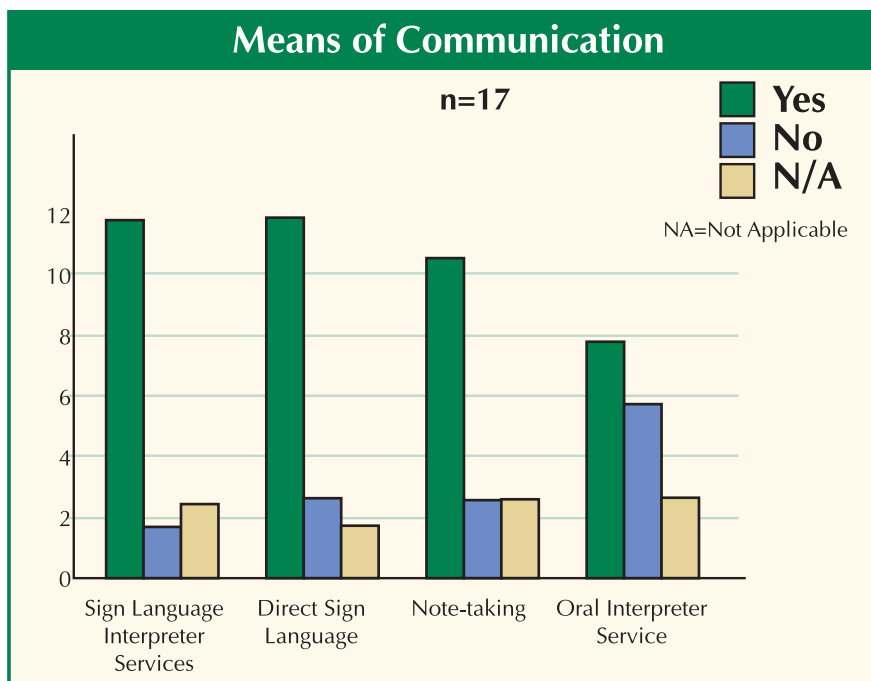
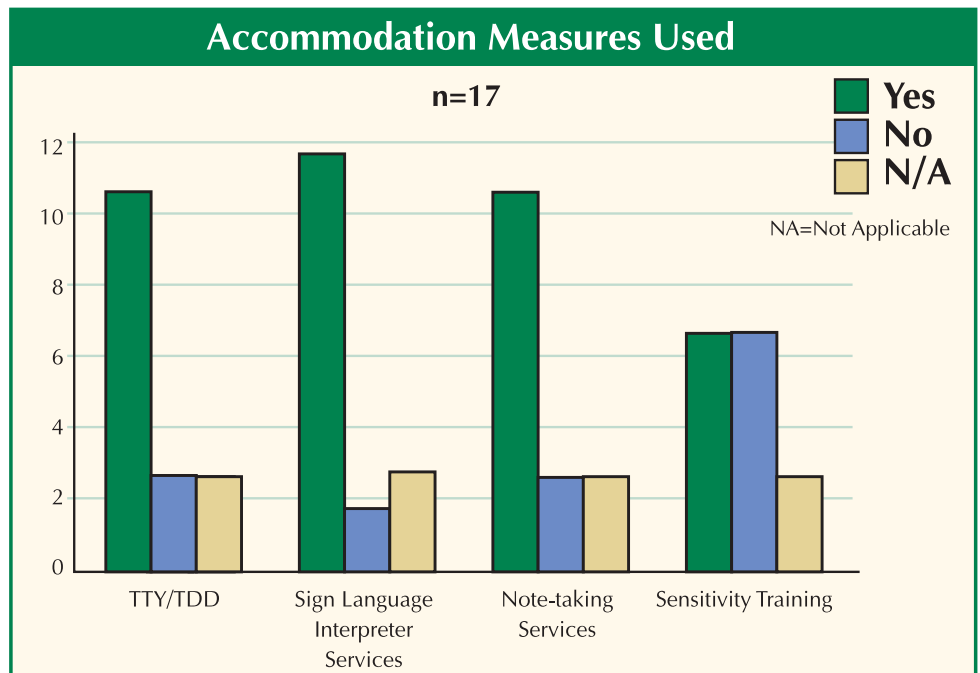


Figure 7 below shows how many of the service providers we interviewed are using one or more of four measures (TTY/TDD, interpreter services, note-taking services, and sensitivity training) to accommodate deaf clients.

Figure 7



Communication is a primary challenge. As deaf community members note, flexibility and access to interpreter services is the most dramatic issue that influences the quality of service provided.

Challenges of Working with the Deaf Community

Interpreter Services: Flexibility and Frequency

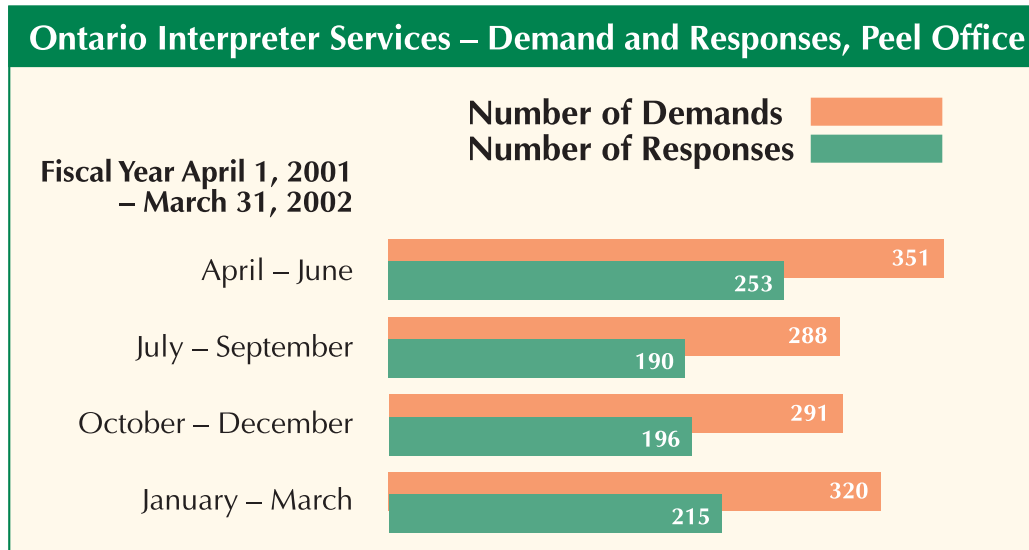
The challenges that these service providers encounter are varied. **Communication is a primary challenge. As deaf community members note, flexibility and access to interpreter services is the most dramatic issue that influences the quality of service provided.** According to key informants from a cross-cultural employment agency, obtaining adequate funding for interpreter services is one of their greatest challenges in providing accessible services to deaf clients. A service provider from an agency recommends that:

[Government should] provide more dollars for interpreter services for clients to take training to enhance their skills.

There is a severe lack of qualified ASL interpreters. According to the Peel office of Ontario Interpreter Services (OIS), the primary provider of qualified interpreters, there is an imbalance between service demand and number of registered interpreters. The following table demonstrates the disparity between demand and response:

There is a severe lack of qualified ASL interpreters.

Table 2:



Source: Canadian Hearing Society, Peel Region

The service cannot satisfy increasing requests because of their limited source of qualified interpreters. According to Sue Jardine, Booking Coordinator for the Ontario Interpreter Services of the Canadian Hearing Society of Peel, a total of 33 interpreters are registered with their service. However, they are all freelance professionals and hence are not available to OIS on a regular basis. Of the 33, only approximately 15 work for the Peel office on an ongoing basis.

Other ways of communication such as TTY/TDD and Bell Relay were considered time-consuming and are not widely used by the public. In summary, service providers feel that service provided to the deaf job seekers required considerable time and investment because of communication and cultural barriers.

Literacy and Skills Development: Impact on Labour Market Participation

“It is not easy to find a job in this competitive labour market when you do not even have the basic skills of reading and writing.”

Literacy is another big challenge. A provider of job placement services observes:

In general, I have found that many deaf clients have limited academic skills, particularly in writing and reading comprehension.

Moreover, having a low literacy level may influence a deaf person’s self-esteem:

Sometimes clients...feel they have a barrier. They say ‘I cannot find a job. I am deaf. I cannot do it.’ Sometimes they just give up and leave. I think a lot of it is self-esteem. It’s very low.

There are limited employment opportunities for deaf people in the labour market.

It is not easy to find a job in this competitive labour market when you do not even have the basic skills of reading and writing.

In regards to employment, service providers note that deaf people do not often hold highly skilled or professional occupations. This observation is sustained by the literature, which suggests that deaf people normally hold occupations that are unskilled, semi-skilled, or manual.

A service provider who works as a job developer comments:

Deaf people need to get skills training for any job. They hit the glass ceiling because they always do the labour work, there’s no moving up.

Another service provider adds:

[Deaf] clients should improve their skills to access many of the available jobs in the current economy, such as improved computer skills or skilled trade training.

A key informant, who serves people with disabilities, believes that personal choice could lead to limited types of occupations:

“clients should improve their skills to access many of the available jobs in the current economy, such as improved computer skills or skilled trade training.”

I have found that deaf clients are reluctant to work with potentially dangerous equipment or tools such as knives and machines, and they shy away from work involving lifting, carrying, and bending. Employment planning is extremely difficult in situations where client cognitive or academic skills are limited, and they have few, if any transferable skills. When the job seeker wants to avoid physical work activity, the process becomes almost impossible. It is important to point out that this is also true of clients who are not deaf.

Understanding of Agency Role

A number of service providers feel that they have difficulties in their interactions with deaf job seekers and some of them attribute this to the deaf job seekers' lack of understanding and awareness of many employment-related issues. Some of their comments are related below.

A key informant from a cross-cultural employment agency explains that deaf individuals need to understand better the mandate and practices of agencies serving them. This person states:

Clients must understand our agency's 'competitive' concept...We do not provide job placement. Rather, we empower clients with skills to enable them to: (i) receive a competitive wage, (ii) apply directly with employers, and (iii) eventually perform a job independently.

Another problem concerns the limits of program budgets and eligibility rules:

Clients must understand that yes, at this agency we have money for individual training but it has a limit.

Yet another issue is the role of employment counsellors and the limits that exist around their work. They believe their clients often have unrealistic expectations. For example:

It's so frustrating when clients come in and expect me to solve their problems in one visit. They must understand that I have other clients to serve.



“...deaf and hard of hearing clients seem to have a narrower understanding of their limitations or needs, and how this impacts on their employability.”

I feel a lot of time clients come in and they want a job NOW. They are not ready to do the preparation plan beforehand. I understand that they need money and they need to find a job, and that it's frustrating. But they cannot expect me to help them without doing the planning strategies first.

In addition, counsellors suggest that deaf job seekers' lack of understanding of the current labour market does not make their work easy. The following comment summarizes the sentiments of many counsellors:

Many clients, not just deaf and hard of hearing clients, lack awareness of current labour-market expectations. However, in my experience, deaf and hard of hearing clients seem to have a narrower understanding of their limitations or needs, and how this impacts on their employability.

Volunteering: Social Contribution and Workplace Awareness

Some suggested volunteering as a way of gaining experience in, and insights of the work environment. For example:

Deaf people should do volunteer work to get to know the workplace.

Some deaf service providers express their concerns about the quality of life of deaf youth. In their observations, deaf youth today do not connect with the broader community. They are reluctant to involve themselves in community issues, which they could do through volunteer work. One consequence of such reluctance is that many young deaf people miss out on experiences that would help to familiarize themselves with norms and standards of the work environment, and to relate socially with hearing people. The concerns of these informants are captured below:

“graduates ... do not have any concept of leadership skills or community responsibility.”

In the 80s and 90s, deaf youth went to schools and were very active in school and community activities, and got lots of experiences. Most of them got leadership skills through school and community involvement. Now, graduates ... do not have any concept of leadership skills or community responsibility. Their attitudes are horrible. It's the 'just-find-me-a-job' attitude.

Attitudes and Behaviours: Understanding Workplace Norms

Some portray certain attitudes and behaviours that are negative and unacceptable in the work force. A key informant from a cross-cultural agency speaks to this issue at some length:

One of the main challenges, I believe, is attitude and behaviour. We have had a number of clients placed in jobs. But recently one of them walked off the job after a lot of support had been given and a lot of work had been put into getting the job, and maintaining the job. One day the person just got up and left and did not seem to appreciate the idea that a lot of resources had been poured into having him there. And the only explanation he would give me was that he was bored.

An element regarding people with disabilities is that they don't seem to appreciate that we are getting jobs for them in this competitive labour market, that they need to move a little bit, and employers need to move a little bit to make accommodations. A part of that accommodation is accepting ways that employers have, accepting that they [deaf workers] have to make an effort to get along with people in a way that is acceptable. We have a young man whose behaviours are not acceptable in terms of gesture, rudeness, and so on.

Anyone with disabilities, in a sense, lives in their own world until they decide to move into the competitive world. Always there is a bridge, if you will, in terms of what they have to give up – be it someone with a mental illness or a physically disability – where they have to let go of some of the ways they think and behave in order to relate to what we call 'the whole'. I would say that with all the clients that we have, so far we have been least successful with this particular disability.

One key informant suggests deaf high school students develop attitudinal and behavioural practices in high school that are not conducive to the workplace. They do not use their time properly and usefully at schools, and do not take responsibility for their job search:

During planning sessions, students come to school for socialising... Sometimes the kids are afraid to try [looking for

“...they don't seem to appreciate that we are getting jobs for them in this competitive labour market, that they need to move a little bit, and employers need to move a little bit to make accommodations.”

jobs]. *It's easier to stay here [at the school]. All of their friends are here.*

Similar attitudes are found in vocational training programs. A staff member at a cross-cultural agency reports:

There was an attitude 'Oh, yah, we can have this training and if we don't use it, that's OK. We can take the summer off. We can spend lots of time playing. We can do what we want'. There is some kind of message saying 'it's OK to take the training and it's also OK not to follow-up'.

Some service providers are themselves deaf and as such have a particular understanding of the limitations of the deaf community. The biggest challenges that this group encounters are how to empower deaf people, how to see deaf people get better jobs, and how to create greater collaboration and partnership among specialized, mainstream, and cross-cultural agencies. Such inter-agency collaboration will contribute to the development of a continuum of service to deaf persons rather than isolated, disconnected, and discontinuous service.

Service providers describe two distinct deaf groups that face two different types of challenges. The age group 22 years to 35 years, the first-time-hired group, faces the frustration of being underemployed in low-wage jobs. The age group 35 to 50 years, the not up-to-date group, faces limited job mobility, and ultimately, unemployment because their skills have not kept pace with changing technology. Also, interpreter services for training are frequently not available. This is a major barrier to acquiring and maintaining employment, as already discussed in a previous section.

Challenges: A View From Service Providers

Social Policy Shift: VRS to ODSP

On June 1, 1998, the Social Assistance Reform Act became law. It replaced the old social assistance programs of General Welfare Assistance and Family Benefits Allowance with Ontario Works³; and

³ Ontario Works (OW) is for all individuals who are financially eligible for social assistance, and who do not fit into the new disability program. It requires recipients to participate in one or more of the following three activities in order to receive social assistance: employment support, community participation, and employment placement (Halton Social Planning Council, 1998, Section 2).

replaced the Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) program with the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) with its two parts: the Income Support Program and the Employment Support Program. (Halton Social Planning Council, 1998, Section 1).

The Ontario Disability Support Program is for people with a physical or mental impairment who are eligible for social assistance. The ODSP-Employment Support Program is not mandatory and replaces the Vocational Rehabilitation Services program. Its purpose is to provide people with disabilities with techniques or strategies to obtain and maintain employment (Halton Social Planning Council, 1998, Section 7).

Prior to 1998, the VRS program of Ontario's Ministry of Community and Social Services⁴ provided four kinds of services to job seekers with disabilities: (i) individualized vocational, educational and skills assessments, (ii) training plans, (iii) negotiated job placements, and (iv) client progress monitoring. Accommodation support was provided for these services. This program required clients to comply with their vocational plan.

Now, under the ODSP-ES program, clients are responsible for: (i) setting employment goals, (ii) identifying and co-ordinating any needed training, (iii) interviewing and selecting job developers and coaches, and (iv) arranging payment for any assistance provided. These responsibilities force deaf clients to participate in a complex process of multiple activities. This is a challenge for deaf job seekers who have communication barriers and low literacy skills.

Service providers indicate that the replacement of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) program by the Ontario Disability Support Program-Employment Services (ODSP-ES) has not increased educational opportunities for deaf people. One service provider summarizes the thoughts of many colleagues:

My number one, strongest opinion is that they need to re-establish the VRS program that is no longer there. The VRS program worked in the past. We have seen that more deaf professionals have gone through the VRS program and now with the change over, the number of deaf professionals is dwindling. People are not going to colleges and universities.



“There has been a huge shift and the deaf professional... is almost extinct.”

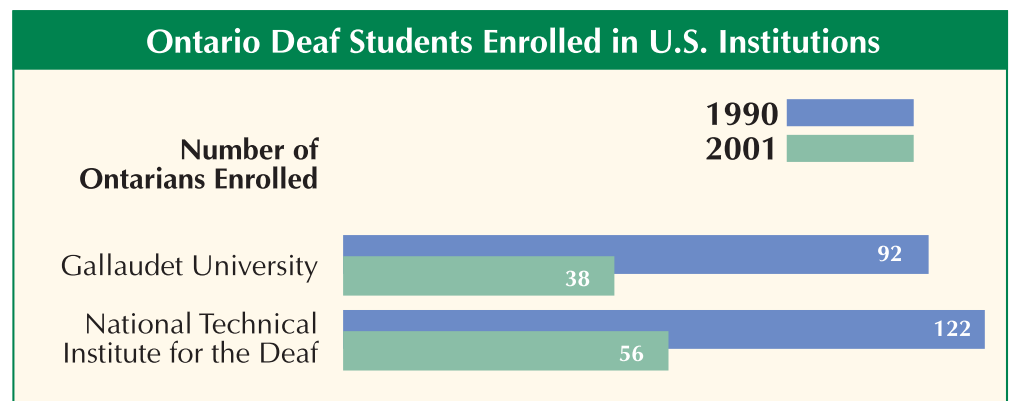
⁴ In April 2002, the Ministry's name changed to the Ministry of Community, Family and Children's Services (MCFCS).

[Therefore,] they are not in positions of professional power. It just makes it harder for individuals to get an education now. And I would say in general, directors or people who are in positions of power within the deaf community came through the VRS program. I talked to those who are in ODSP and they found that it is extremely difficult to just make ends meet. To even consider getting a degree is impossible. And the deaf professionals, they are role models in the deaf community. And now the number of role models is dwindling, and what of the youth? Whom do they look up to? There has been a huge shift and the deaf professional...is almost extinct.

These policy changes have hindered access to programs and services by members of the deaf community. They have contributed to:

- Restrictive and limited funding for deaf people to enrol into any post-secondary institution of their choice. The admission offices of Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in Rochester, N.Y. confirmed that the number of Ontario students enrolled in their institutions is declining dramatically. This enrolment decline is shown in the following table.²⁰⁰¹

Table 3:



Source: Canadian Hearing Society, Peel Region

Without improved access to education and training backed by effective accommodation support, the trend evidenced by this table will certainly deepen. The following issues will adversely affect the skills development and academic training of deaf people:

- Youth have to borrow tuition fees from the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) and pay them back, whereas VRS covered tuition costs with little or no obligation to pay back.
- Lack of qualified teaching staff at deaf academic and continuing education programs.
- Lack of qualified interpreters for post-secondary institutions.

Educational Options for Career Development

In the area of education and training, there are other dilemmas that service providers pointed out as challenges for deaf community members. They are:

- Few, if any career-related or vocational programs exist for students who graduate from E.C. Drury School for the Deaf.
- Lack of support and communication from local School Boards to deaf schools to provide better student services and access to more resources. A key informant from a cross-cultural employment agency shared the following observation:

One thing you should document is that the local School Boards in Peel and Halton do not communicate with the school [E.C. Drury] and they do not share any resources at all.

- Potential closure of the Adult Continuing Education (ACE) program, a literacy upgrading program at E.C. Drury, due to lack of funding. Fears related to the possible closure of this adult education initiative were raised:

This program is not considered mandatory. It still exists because of its success. There is no money even to buy basics such as textbooks or gym equipment.



Employment: Systemic Discrimination

Many service providers believe that deaf people face systemic issues in the area of employment. Some think that lax implementation of the Federal Employment Equity Act and the 2001 Ontarians with Disabilities Act by government agencies and corporations is a serious problem. There is a need for greater vigilance and monitoring to assure that the intent and provisions of that legislation are met. A staff member at a specialized agency revealed that this organization

has assisted clients in filing 400 cases with the Ontario Human Rights Commission in the last few years. Half the cases were resolved, but the other half dropped their cases due to the long process. In two cases, the staff intervened to negotiate with employers so that deaf workers maintained their jobs. Without this support, those workers would have been laid off.

Service providers outlined the limitations of the various programs funding employment services to the deaf. They believe that:

- **The Ontario Disability Support Program has strict eligibility requirements thus limiting access to the program.** In addition, training is restricted for program participants who are not ready to work. As one service provider comments:

It is my view that ODSP is more restrictive [than previous legislation] for persons with any type of disability...As a system, it [ODSP] is less tolerant of those who may not be job ready...Some of the challenges I have experienced with deaf clients would raise questions about their work readiness... Although costly, some of the vocational services such as employment preparation training, life or social skills training, career exploration, job search programs and job maintenance or support should take place prior to applying for ODSP.

“As a system, it [ODSP] is less tolerant of those who may not be job ready”

- **Ontario Works (OW) has no accommodation policies and guidelines that are applied consistently at local regional offices, making it more difficult for deaf people.** The two OW offices interviewed had different practices: one office provides interpreters, while the other considers “deafness” a cultural issue and does not provide interpreter services beyond the initial interview. Deaf clients are responsible for communication when visiting their office, not the institution. One service provider observes:

I found it is very difficult to find out the number of deaf clients that we served because we do not track specific disability... The staff who looks after the cultural interpreter services identified another problem that we have with deaf clients. It is the way the current policy is written. When clients meet with a caseworker for the

first time, we provide a cultural interpreter. This is where deaf clients can fall under. After that appointment, they are asked to bring a friend or a relative to interpret for them. That barely works out with deaf clients.

- The Opportunities Fund⁵ has restrictive eligibility rules. This funding benefits deaf people who are not working. However, Employment Insurance (EI) clients cannot access it.

In addition to restrictive regulations, the employment support procedure is complicated and time-consuming for any job seekers. For example, one service provider states:

Employment Insurance (EI) clients are not eligible for ODSP Employment Supports when their employment insurance runs out. These clients then apply for ODSP Income Supports but must wait for approval. In other circumstances, if a client was previously on ODSP Income Supports and then finds a job, his/her file is closed. If the person is laid off or fired, he/she must reapply for ODSP Income Supports.

Another service provider commented on the length of the process:

ODSP works for clients who are not in a hurry to get jobs and who can take time to go over steps. But it is a long process and there is a long delay if clients have any change such as moving.

“I think there is a real need to create a deaf-friendly environment by having deaf workers on-site.”

Access to Deaf-friendly Environments

Service providers concurred with their deaf clients that the lack of “deaf-friendly” staff at many employment service agencies is a factor that increases access barriers and decreases service efficiency.

I think there is a real need to create a deaf-friendly environment by having deaf workers on-site.

⁵The mandate of the Opportunities Fund is to generate innovative activities that help persons with disabilities that are not eligible for employment benefits under the Employment Insurance Act. These employment activities are intended to help persons with disabilities to prepare for, obtain, and keep employment or self-employment. It is funded by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC).

Technology: Access or Barrier

Service providers interviewed noted that there are still jobs available for people with disabilities. However, **constant changes in technology create more employability challenges for deaf people because:**

- Deaf job seekers' skills are not up-to-date.
- Multi-task skills are commonly required in the work force.
- There is more and more competition in the labour market for low-end jobs as a result of downsizing.
- Informal networking decreases with the use of computer communications such as pagers or e-mail. A deaf service provider expressed how the informal networking really helped him to job search years ago:



It was my experience to have a very close connection with the deaf community through deaf clubs or even informal groups of friends, relatives, and neighbours. I remember we used to gather at someone's house to socialize. It was a closely-knit community where information could be exchanged quickly and easily. Today technology with all the fancy things like captioned television or computers keeps people home. The network decreases so the informal support also decreases, leaving deaf individuals somehow isolated and vulnerable.

Through the Lens of Employers

Company Profiles

Among the ten companies interviewed:

- Five are in sales and services, one in public services, and four are in manufacturing and distribution.
- Six have less than 50 employees, three have between 50 and 100 employees, and one has more than 100 employees.
- Eight of the companies employ one deaf worker, one company employs two deaf workers, and one company has eight deaf employees.

- Two companies have written policies related to hiring people with disabilities.
- One company provides all types of accommodations: TTY/TDD, fax machine, pager, buddy systems for emergencies, visual signs, and interpreters for hiring, training and meetings. One workplace provides TTY/TDD and visual fire alarms for the public.
- All companies provide fax machines, buddy systems, and visual signs.
- Four companies have employees who can communicate with deaf workers using rudimentary sign language.
- Nine companies use interpreter services for hiring and training, but the frequency of use of this service is dependent on cost. Six companies mention that they would use the interpreter service more often if it were less expensive and more accessible. However, one employer has decided not to offer this service because of cost.

Employers' Comments: Working with the Deaf Community

According to the employer survey, good performance skills and positive working attitudes are keys to securing employment.

These employers do not consider deafness as an employment disadvantage. One company has deaf employees who travel with a hearing co-worker providing customer services throughout Canada and the United States.

The process by which deaf workers are hired varies in these companies. In one large company, the hiring policy clearly states: "...the agency is committed to hiring people with disabilities." However, not all employers are so progressive. One employer, for example, has chosen not to offer any accommodation to staff or prospective employees.

Management decided not to do anything extraordinary about recognition of any special needs groups. There is a union in the workplace. Therefore, it is difficult to have any special rules for any group because everyone is equal within the union. To keep it operational, the ethic is to modify work to suit the person on duty.

“It is difficult to have any special rules for any group because everyone is equal within the union.”

Some agencies have job placement programs in place, which give deaf individuals opportunities to prove themselves and obtain permanent employment. However, in several companies, employer awareness of the deaf community is the deciding factor in enabling deaf job seekers to get hired. These employers either have previous contacts with deaf people, or have an educational or career background such as teaching that helps them to relate to the deaf culture.

Accommodation of the needs of deaf people often is believed to be cost prohibitive. The costs of accommodation devices are, in fact, quite reasonable, as one employer points out:

Every place has a fire alarm. To hook up an alert system costs \$150 dollars. For a TTY/TDD hook-up to a computer, the cost is \$160 dollars.

However, such costs do lead some employers to resist installing them:

Some employers do not hire deaf people because extra cost will be added...and choosing hearing people is faster.

Employers reflected on how companies can be assisted in hiring deaf workers. According to these employers, sensitivity training for managers and employees should be provided to private sector employers. In addition, subsidized job-training and job-coaching services, as well as readily available information on accommodations and costs would be useful. Employers interviewed believe a combination of these measures would greatly reduce employer resistance to and anxiety about hiring deaf people. As one employer states:

“It would be wonderful if legislation could help to increase the number of people with disabilities to be employed.”

It would be wonderful if legislation could help to increase the number of people with disabilities to be employed. The majority of organizations and companies do not know the possibilities for job placement. More education is needed around this. Also, people are so ignorant about the deaf community.

Some employers interviewed argue that deaf workers need to “sell” themselves, and that they need to interact more with hearing

workers. They suggest that the attitude of many deaf individuals, who expect to be treated differently, does not work well in the current competitive labour market. Therefore, assertiveness training and communication strategy workshops for deaf workers would be useful.

Attitude happens with everyone. But some deaf people say 'I am deaf' as an excuse, which is not appropriate in the labour market.

Deaf people, when they are frustrated, should not say 'I am stupid because I am deaf.' Some hearing people may think that, but not all.

“Attitude happens with everyone. But some deaf people say ‘I am deaf’ as an excuse, which is not appropriate in the labour market.”



Conclusions and Recommendations

The voices of the deaf community, of service providers and of employers cry out for “finding another way” to include deaf individuals as productive members in society. The study participants have different lenses by which they view the issues of employability and employment of the deaf community. While each group contributes special insights, they concur that enormous barriers prevent the incorporation of deaf individuals into active employment. The study documents:

- **the difficulty of “getting in the door” to become a new hire.**
- **the streaming, due to educational credentials, into low wage, few benefits, entry level employment with little opportunity for a better position.**
- **location in marginal employment which limits the social, educational, and economic opportunities of deaf individuals.**
- **few educational opportunities for skills development and for personal growth and satisfaction.**
- **communication barriers, principally the lack of access to interpreter services and technological accommodation devices, that exclude deaf persons from active integration into the world of work.**
- **public policy at both the federal and provincial levels that inadequately allocates public dollars to develop programs that serve the deaf community effectively.**
- **social attitudes and stereotypes about deaf persons which further isolate them both at work and in the community.**
- **attitudes and behaviours of members of the deaf community often lead to further social and economic marginalization.**

In an effort to enhance the employability and employment opportunities of the deaf community, this study recommends:

Employment Supports

1. That a simplified system be adopted to ensure that deaf people can navigate the various programs and services within the employment support system.
2. That a full continuum of employment assistance services and programs be provided to deaf job seekers. For example:
 - employment related literacy
 - career assessment, career planning, labour market realities, resume writing, interview techniques and follow-up, goal-setting, and assertiveness training
 - job coaching to facilitate the transition of deaf job seekers into the workplace, such as assisting deaf job seekers understand employer expectations, and learning the job
 - job maintenance, along with skills development, be provided to deaf workers to ensure continued employment.
3. That community-based career services be established in Milton to provide support for deaf youth and deaf adults.
4. That sensitivity training be made available to organizations that hire deaf employees, including training for employers and staff as well as assistance in identifying communication barriers along with solutions to them.
5. That employment development services for the deaf be created to contact potential employers and reduce attitudinal and systemic barriers faced by deaf job seekers.



Education, Skills Development and Training

6. That government at all levels support the development of and access to education and training programs that enhance the opportunities of deaf individuals to become active participants in the labour force and to pursue ongoing careers.
7. That colleges, universities, and training institutions ensure equal access to programs and services to deaf people.

8. That accommodations are funded for deaf people accessing post-secondary education and skills training.
9. That English literacy programs designed for deaf learners be made available to deaf people in Peel and Halton.
10. That computer training be made available to enable deaf people to become part of the telecommunications revolution.
11. That leadership skills be taught to deaf youth in schools and training courses.
12. That the Volunteer Centres of Peel and Halton and others be funded to develop programs that encourage volunteerism in the deaf community, especially for deaf youth. This program would introduce deaf people to workplaces, albeit in the non-profit sector, in order to enhance their experiences with workplace practices and to promote public awareness of deaf culture.

Communication: Interpreter Availability

13. That the Government of Ontario ensures that adequate and appropriate interpreter training is made available.
14. That adequate and flexible funding for professional sign language interpreting services for deaf consumers be made available to government offices, service providers, and employers.

Policies and Procedures

15. That all employment services ensure they have accommodation policies and guidelines in place, and that staff are trained in delivering accessible services to deaf clients.
16. That Federal, Provincial and Municipal government offices ensure they have accommodation policies and guidelines in place, that they are consistent across offices, and that they are fully implemented.
17. That employment agencies and government offices equip personnel who work with deaf job seekers with knowledge

of the employment issues facing deaf job seekers and an understanding of deaf culture.

18. That information sharing tools specifically for deaf job seekers be developed. These could include:
 - a “plain English”, “deaf friendly” brochure outlining specific government employment programs, such as Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, Employment Insurance, and Opportunities Fund
 - a CD-ROM and video to present the information from the brochure using ASL, also available on the Internet.
 - A web site to accommodate deaf people in search of work. The web site will include information from the brochure, information about current employment programs and workshops, accommodation products, a list of deaf-friendly employers, current job openings and other information.



Legislation

19. That the Government of Canada ensure that appropriate legislation is in place to guarantee equal opportunity to employment for deaf persons:
 - ensure full implementation of the Employment Equity Act
 - develop a Canadian Disabilities Act.
20. That the Government of Ontario ensure that a program with characteristics similar to the Vocational Rehabilitation Services program be developed to guarantee deaf youth, who are academically accomplished, the opportunity to study in Canada and/or the United States at post-secondary institutions for deaf people.
21. That the Government of Ontario ensure that adequate structures are put in place to ensure full implementation of the new Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

Further Research

22. That further study be conducted on the employment challenges facing deaf youth and the services available to assist them in their job search as they leave the school system.

23. That further research be conducted with employers to understand the barriers to employing deaf people as well as their use of and need for subsidies for wages and accommodations.

Afterword

This report on the employability and employment needs of the deaf community in Peel-Halton identifies recommendations for further action in six key areas:

1. Employment Supports
2. Education, Skills Development and Training
3. Communication: Interpreter Availability
4. Policies and Procedures
5. Legislation
6. Further Research

The research consulted with the deaf community in Peel and Halton and those who support its employment needs, including employers. We have turned the emphasis from “them” to “us”: from a former attitude of “What do they need?” to a more contemporary perspective of “What do we need?” Project partners see this report, with its content and recommendations, as a springboard to action by ALL STAKEHOLDERS. The organization of the report allows all to evaluate their current efforts and results and potential for focussed improvement.

Change will come through the cooperative, coordinated efforts of all stakeholders.

Project partners—The Canadian Hearing Society, The Centre for Skills Development & Training, and The Halton Social Planning Council—are committed to working to this end.

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“Change will come through the cooperative, coordinated efforts of all stakeholders.”

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Appendix 1: List Of Research Team Members

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Projects Manager
The Centre for Skills Development & Training

Donald Prong

Program Manager
Canadian Hearing Society of Peel

Joey Edwardh

Executive Director
Halton Social Planning Council

Heather Marsden

Project Coordinator
The Centre for Skills Development & Training

Lien Le

Research Associate
Halton Social Planning Council

Appendix 2: List of Service Providers

Annette Sultana

Career Counsellor/Vocational
Rehabilitation Consultant
Ability Solutions

Chris Kenopic

Executive Director
Ontario Association of
the Deaf

Dave Regis

Educational Coordinator
Student Services
E. C. Drury School for
the Deaf

Donald Prong

Program Manager
The Canadian Hearing
Society – Peel

Gary Malkowski

Director, Consumer-
Government Relations
The Canadian Hearing
Society – Toronto

Karen Rockwell

Executive Director
Goal: Ontario Literacy for
Deaf People

Karla Drossos

Project Manager
DisAbilities Plus

Kathleen Lockyer

Job Coach
Barrier-Free Communication
to Employment
The Canadian Hearing
Society – Kitchener

Kelly Jeffrey

Social Assistance Analyst,
Ontario Works
Region of Peel

Kevin Stoakley

Job Coach
Barrier-Free Communication
to Employment
The Canadian Hearing
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Larry Makinen

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Academic Continuing
Education for the Deaf

Meg Stewart (*)

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Mike Bennett

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Nadine Lauren

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Ministry of Community and
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Paul Harvey

Employment Specialist
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Sandra Prowse

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Ontario March of Dimes

Sandra Welch

Manager, Ontario Works
The Regional Municipal
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Sheran Johnston

Employment Supports Specialist
Ministry of Community and
Social Services

Star Ristow-Bell

Program Director
Employment ACCESS

Tarryl Tamlin

GSS Counsellor
The Canadian Hearing
Society – Peel

Appendix 3: List Of Employers

Andrea Robinson

Operations Supervisor
UPS Logistics Group – Oakville

Colleen Weber

Manager
Roots – Heartland Town Centre, Mississauga

Denise Bourdages

Manager
Silkline Designs Inc. – Mississauga

Donald Mills

Director of Library Services
Mississauga Central Library – Mississauga

Janice Kron

Human Resources Manager
CPI – Communications & Power Industries – Georgetown

Jim Carroll

Human Resources Manager
Sherwood Dash – Brampton

Sandy Hayashi

Sales Floor Manager
Chapters – Square One, Mississauga

Shirley Burgher

Assistant Manager – Wire Payment Department
Royal Bank Business Service Centre – Toronto

Suzanne Algar

Human Resources Assistant
The Regional Municipal of Halton

Tony Silli

Marketing Co-coordinator
Microcomputer Science Centre Inc. – Mississauga

Appendix 4: Mayfest Questionnaire

Are you living in Peel-Halton-Dufferin?

Are you in the age of 16 to 60?

Are you working/looking for job/in training programs?

If you say YES to those questions, please fill out this survey. Please circle the appropriate answer:

- 1- Gender:** Male Female
- 2- Age:** 16 to 20 21 to 25 26 to 35
36 to 45 46 to 55 older than 55
- 3- Do you have children?** No Yes, how many? _____
- 4- Live in:**
- 4a- Peel area:
Mississauga Brampton Bolton Caledon
Other: _____
- 4b- Halton area:
Oakville Burlington Milton Halton Hills
Other: _____
- 4c- Dufferin area:
Orangeville Other: _____
- 5- Education:**
Some high school High school graduate College
University Some skills courses
Other: _____
- 6- Employment:**
Working (go to question 7)
Looking for job (go to question 9)
Taking skills training programs (go to question 10)

7- What kind of job do you have now?

8- Are you happy with your job? Yes No, give reasons:

9- Looking for a job:

9a- What kind of job do you want? _____

9b- Do you have a resume? Yes No

9c- Is someone helping you look for a job? No Yes, who?

9d- Do you need job skills? No Yes, what are they?

10- What skills training programs are you taking?

11- Are you happy with the training? Yes No, give reasons:

12- Do you want to help us with this research?

No Yes, please give:

Name: _____

E-mail: _____

TTY number: _____

Thank you for your participation.

Appendix 5: Questions For Group Interviews

Please circle the right answer.
Questions with (*) will need discussion:

- 1- **You are:** Male Female
- 2- **Your age:** 16 to 19 20 to 25 26 to 35
36 to 45 46 to 55 older than 55
- 3- **You have:**
3a- children under 12 years: No Yes, how many? ____
3b- children older than 12 but still dependent
(i.e. special needs): No Yes, how many? ____
- 4- **Your education:**
Some high school Finished high school College
University Some training courses ONLY
- 5- **Have you got any training (in addition to public education):**
No Yes, what are they? _____
- 6- **Your literacy level:**
Reading: Very good Good Sometimes need help Low
Writing: Very good Good Sometimes need help Low
Math: Very good Good Sometimes need help Low
- 7- **Your income comes from:**
Ontario Works
Ontario Disability Support Program
Other: _____

- 8- How long have you been looking for a job?**
_____Years _____Months _____Weeks
- 9- Where do you look for job openings?** (Please choose all that apply)
- 9a- Newspapers Ads
 - 9b- Internet Job Banks
 - 9c- Job Fairs
 - 9d- Personal Networking
 - 9e- Employment Agencies
- Name of Agencies: _____
- 10- In your opinion, what are the difficulties that deaf people have when looking for a job?** (please choose 5 answers that happen most frequently)
- 10a- Cannot read or write
 - 10b- Do not know how to make a resume
 - 10c- Do not know where to apply
 - 10d- Cannot get interpreter service for job interview
 - 10e- Cannot get interpreter service for job training
 - 10f- Have no skills for the job
 - 10g- Have physical limits to do the job
 - 10h- Working hours are too late
 - 10i- Wage is too low
 - 10j- Transportation problem
 - 10k- Childcare problem
 - 10l- Personal problem
 - 10m- Do not feel happy with employment counsellors/agencies
 - 10n- Employers are not willing to hire deaf people
 - 10o- Government policies
 - 10p- Other:_____
- 11- In your opinion, what types of work are deaf people normally interested in?** (please choose 3)
- 11a- Office
 - 11b- Factory
 - 11c- Warehouse
 - 11d- Food Service
 - 11e- Transportation

- 11f- Maintenance
- 11g- Bank
- 11h- Other: _____

12- Are you currently in any training programs?

No Yes, name of program: _____
Name of agency: _____

13- In your opinion, what kinds of training would help deaf people to get a job? (please choose 3)

- 13a- Career Planning
- 13b- Resume Writing
- 13c- Networking
- 13d- English/Math upgrading
- 13e- Preparing for Job Interviews
- 13f- Personal Skills Assessment
- 13g- Computer Literacy
- 13h- Making Cold Contacts
- 13i- On-the-Job Training
- 13j- Job Development
- 13k- Hidden Job Market
- 13l- Entrepreneurship
- 13m- Other: _____

14- How long should training programs be?

_____Weeks _____Months _____Years

15- The city you are willing to go for training:

Mississauga Brampton Milton
Other: _____

***16- In your opinion, what service needs are not being met?**

***17- What would you like to change in government policies to make employment better for deaf people?**

Appendix 6: Questions For Focus Groups

- 1- **What challenges have you faced when looking for jobs?**
- 2- **What do you think are the reasons for those challenges?**
- 3- **How can work force situations be improved for deaf people?**
- 4- **What do you think are the main employment goals of deaf people?**
- 5- **What kinds of training do you think could bring the most benefit to deaf people?**

Appendix 7: Questions For Service Providers Interviews

Date:

1- Name & Title:

2- Length of Time working with deaf clients:

3- Name of Agency:

4- Type of Agency:

Federal:_____ Provincial:_____ Municipal:_____

Private:_____ Non-profit:_____ Other:_____

5- Programs Agency Offers:

6- Population Groups in the deaf community that agency serves:

6a- Gender: Male:_____ Female: _____

6b- Age: Adult:_____ Children:_____ Seniors:_____

6c- Ethno-cultural:

7- Types of Employment Services provided to deaf clients:

7a. Career planning: _____

7b. Job Search training: _____

7c. Job Placement: _____

7d. Follow-up services: _____

7e. Advocacy _____

7f. Public Education: _____

7g. Other: _____

8- Number of self-identified deaf clients served for an employment related purpose in the last 12 months:

of employed clients: _____

of unemployed clients: _____

of students in a post-secondary program: _____

Other: _____

9- Age groups of deaf clients served for an employment related purpose in the last 12 months:

15 to 20:_____ 21 to 25:_____ 26 to 35:_____

36 to 45:_____ 46 to 55:_____ older than 55:_____

- 10- Geographic residence of deaf clients in the last 12 months:**
- 10a. Peel:
Mississauga:_____ Brampton:_____ Caledon:_____
- 10b. Halton:
Oakville:_____ Burlington:_____ Milton:_____
Halton Hills: _____
- 10c. Dufferin
Orangeville: _____ Other: _____
- 11- Accessibility of services provided to deaf clients:**
- 11a. Telecommunication device for deaf people (TTY/TDD):_____
- 11b. Sign language interpreter services: _____
- 11c. Oral interpreter services: _____
- 11d. Note-taking services: _____
- 11e. "Sensitivity" training:_____
- 11f. Other:_____
- 12- Communication methods used to serve deaf clients:**
- 12a. Verbal speech/Speech reading: _____
- 12b. Sign language (direct): _____
- 12c. Sign language interpreter: _____
- 12d. Gesture/home signs: _____
- 12e. Note taking: _____
- 12f. Other: _____
- 13- 13a- What types of challenges have you encountered while providing services to deaf clients?**
- 13b- What types of challenges do deaf clients encounter when accessing your services?**
- 14 - 14a- What social and economic events in the past five years have impacted on the employment and employability of deaf clients?**
- 14b- What can government do in social policy to enhance employment and employability of deaf people?**
- 15 - 15a How can organizations support and maintain deaf employees in their staff?**
- 15b- In general, how can vocational services be improved for deaf clients?**
- 16. - What are your recommendations on employment accessibility for deaf people?**
- 17- Other**

Appendix 8: Questions For Employers Interviews

- 1- **Company's general information:**
 - i- Length of operation
 - ii- Types of products/services
 - iii- Number of employees/deaf employees
 - iv- Policies related to disabilities
- 2- **Types of access to support deaf employees**
- 3- **Types of challenges with deaf employees**
 - v- At hiring process
 - vi- During employment
- 4- **Solutions to challenges**
- 5- **Suggestions to deaf people regarding employment**
- 6- **Other**

Appendix 9: Consent Form

I, _____, voluntarily consent to participate in the research, "Employment and Employability Needs of the Deaf Community in Peel-Halton-Dufferin".

The purpose of the research and the nature of my participation have been explained to me. I understand that I will participate in a focus group, facilitated by research team from the Centre for Skills Development & Training, Canadian Hearing Society (CHS) and Halton Social Planning Council & Volunteer Centre (HSPC). Any questions I have, have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that my participation will be anonymous and confidential.

I understand that the results of this research will be reported in a final report to Human Resources Development Canada, to the Centre for Skills Development & Training, CHS and HSPC, and through recognized scientific reporting mechanisms such as journals and conferences.

Signature of Respondent: _____

Date: _____