

## Disability through the Eyes of an Intern

*A college student describes her internship experience at TRI and what she learned about the barriers faced and accommodations available for people with disabilities.*

My name is Rachel Vives. I am a junior at SUNY New Paltz originally from Long Island. I am a Sociology Major with a concentration in Human Services and minors in Deaf Studies and Disaster Studies. My internship with TRI is the first internship I have ever had. Starting with the pandemic, I have struggled a lot with online learning and was very nervous to see how I would adjust to a virtual internship. Although I was nervous, I was really eager to start. Jeanine is my supervisor, and her specific area is advocating for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. With my minor being deaf studies, I am interested in this field of work and want to learn more and possibly go into a relevant career in the future. Beginning this internship, I first started with writing a letter to the courts of Dutchess County, persuading them to possibly install a loop system in their courtrooms. My research then led into lawsuits and I researched the ADA website and my eyes were opened hugely to how discriminated people with disabilities actually are. One case I came across that was absurd to me, a blind individual tried to rent a hotel room but was denied because of not having “proper form of identification.” Since they were blind and therefore did not have a driver's license, the hotel did not accept their other form of identification. It was crazy to read because it had never occurred to me how often I use my driver's license and how this could sadly be a potential issue for people who can not obtain one. Reading these cases educated me and made me aware of things I had never thought about before.

I also had the pleasure of talking on the phone with Liz Gitlin, who is an attorney at New York Center for Law and Justice. She told me about some of the clients she has had living in shelters for almost 5 years, and how it is difficult for them to get interpreters to help them find a place to live, leaving them stuck in these shelters for so long. One thing I learned from her that I was unaware of is in the instance that the police or CPS shows up to the door of a deaf parent, it is an ADA violation to ask the child to interpret for the parent. I also learned what CDI's are, a certified deaf interpreter. This is helpful in the case that the individual's first language is not ASL. Jeanine has also told me how Liz has many clients that require a CDI. One quote I had written down to remember from my interview with Liz, “If you educate people and

tell them what is supposed to happen, I believe they want to do the right thing.” I also believe this is true and think that if institutions were more educated on ADA policies they would want to follow them.

Jeanine has also provided me with a Buzz bracelet. This device allows deaf individuals to be alerted of sounds around them. If the bracelet detects sound, it will buzz and you can change the settings with an app on your phone. It was interesting for me to use because it buzzed every time I spoke, whereas a deaf person would not be speaking as much as I. I think it's a great device for people who are completely deaf and don't speak. Jeanine and I agreed that we like the concept but for someone who uses their voice it could get irritating.

One more topic I want to address from my research is the assisted technology and varying resources for students with disabilities attending SUNY New Paltz. I took the time a few different days after my in person class to walk around campus and try to put myself in the shoes of someone with a disability. Some of my findings included: several elevators and ramps in the class buildings, as well as some of the dorms, a system of flashing lights that go off along with the fire alarm, and braille on all of the classroom signs for individuals who are blind. I have also emailed with a few faculty members from the DRC and learned about the technology that has been helping students with disabilities on campus. They have programs which can caption videos that professors post on blackboard, and real-time captioning for synchronous classes. There are also amplification systems in some classrooms, and different technology such as the Galaxy Trek GT-V, for students with mild hearing loss, and the Roger Pen. It was compelling to learn about the different resources provided by my college.

I have really enjoyed my time working with TRI and am so thankful for the learning experiences I have gained. The work I have done for Jeanine, as well as sitting in on the peer and staff meetings, has given me this role as a learner and even participator in the advocacy that TRI does. I will take these lessons I have learned and opportunities I have been given with me and apply them to my journey to discovering what I want to pursue in my life.