



Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH) Refugees, Immigrants, and Asylees (RIAs)

Fact Sheet

- A 2015 study by Nationalities Service Ctr & Thomas Jefferson Univ found that 7% of refugees “had documentation of hearing loss” which they believed “was probably an undercount.”¹
- Sign language is NOT universal. The World Federation o/t Deaf identified over 150 different sign languages. So, providing American Sign Language (ASL) ‘interpreters’ for Deaf people new to the USA is often as ineffective, as providing an English-only interpreter for hearing RIAs.
- Although most of the ‘language line’ services in the US have as many as 240 spoken languages available, none currently offer more than ASL for those who rely on sign language.
- Sign language is not a ‘summary form’ of spoken languages, nor are sign languages limited in their ability to express scientific, religious, artistic, or other intricate or abstract concepts.
- DHH people are as diverse as any other group. Some use sign language but many do not. To find out what their communication preferences might be, don’t assume, bu ask them.
- In some developing countries, DHH often do not have the many educational opportunities, nor do they have exposure to a visual language critical for deaf people. This can result in severe language deprivation with life-long consequences.
- In the USA, most DHH people acquire licenses & drive. But, some countries still do not allow DHH people to drive, marry one another, work some jobs, etc.
- In the USA, DHH people function in most of the same roles as those who can hear. They are doctors, lawyers, car mechanics, athletes, parents, scientists, pastors, actors, social workers, Uber drivers, teachers, even firemen and police officers.
- Important facts about speech reading:
 - Only 30 % of English sounds are visible on the lips; the others are made mostly in the throat, tongue & roof of the mouth. “Teddy Kennedy” doesn’t show on the lips at all.
 - Those who benefit most from speechreading generally can hear!
 - Of course, speechreading English doesn’t work at all if English is not your first language.

- There is no direct connection between being DHH and having mental health challenges or intellectual disabilities. For those that do, however, there are far fewer, accessible services to assist them. So, for DHH RIAs who also have experienced violence or trauma, their road to recovery is even more challenging.
- DHH RIAs not only struggle with communication barriers in the community but, unlike most hearing RIAs, they also almost always struggle communicating with their own families.
- Most resettlement or immigration agencies don't have the time, expertise, funding, or language ability to focus on DHH RIAs. So, hearing family members are more likely to be supported first for jobs, basic needs, and other support.
- Most larger cities in the USA have sign language interpreting agencies, human services. and social groups that focus specifically on people who are DHH and their families.
- In the USA, several agencies and organizations that already have dedicated services for DHH RIAs have formed a DHH RIA Coalition & aim to establish a national Resource Center to:
 - Educate and support other organizations involved with DHH RIAs so they can provide more effective outreach and service to often overlooked sub-population
 - Support each other in providing/improving their own direct services for DHH RIAs
 - Acquire proportional funding for DHH RIAs services and grow the number of organizations providing those services.

DeafCAN! has worked with DHH RIAs from 27 different countries and assisted many to pass their USCIS Citizenship tests, including those from Bhutan, India, Iraq, Liberia, the Philippines, and Syria. DeafCAN! also helps those subjected to physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse, and partners with many organizations for healthcare, housing, employment, education, and legal support.

All DeafCAN!'s services with DHH RIAs are free. English, ASL, citizenship, and general acclimation classes, and socials, are held in both NE Phila and West Chester. For more information visit www.DeafCANpa.org or, to make a referral, contact BillLockard@deafcanpa.org, 484-477-6489 (cell text facetime) - or 484-319-4245 (VideoPhone).