

LOCAL NEWS

Super Bowl shot, Oscar nomination showcase deaf Americans



Courtesy DEAF C.A.N.!

Dylan Secord, a clinical social work for the Sylvan Lake-based DEAF C.A.N.!, a support and advocacy agency for the deaf, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing. (Courtesy DEAF C.A.N.!)



Social worker Dylan Secord is delighted by Royal Oak resident and deaf rapper Sean Forbes' second Super Bowl appearance and deaf actor Troy Kotsur's supporting-actor Oscar nomination for the film "CODA."

"Coda is a really nice movie, it's cute," he said. He knows and has worked with Sean Forbes. "It's wonderful to see him spotlighted in the community. It's about time. For so many years we've discounted deaf people and finally our foot is in the door."

Secord, 30, works for DEAF CAN!, a Sylvan Lake-based non-profit which provides counseling, support, interpreting and advocacy services to about 5,000 deaf, deaf-blind and hard-of-hearing people each year. Deaf C.A.N.! also hosts youth programs and is home of a unique HIV program for deaf people, supported by the federal Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program.





Courtesy DEAF C.A.N.!

Dylan Secord, back right, with coworkers from DEAF C.A.N.! a support and advocacy agency for the deaf, deaf-blind, and hard of hearing. (Courtesy DEAF C.A.N.!)

Statewide, he said, there are about 50,000 deaf residents, and another 400,000 people with some type of hearing loss.

If he'd been born in the 1980s or earlier, life would have been "much more challenging to me as a deaf person and a deaf professional. I'm not saying everything is perfect," he said. "Deaf people still experience discrimination."

Trying to get hired remains challenging when companies don't have much more than basic American with Disabilities Act accommodations. That's a form of audism, he said, is the term for discriminating against the deaf.

Hearing people can sometimes be impatient or rude. Secord says he assumes



“I’m not a monster. I just use my hand to communicate,” he said, laughing. “I promise, I’m not going to slap you.”

People expressing pity or suggesting medical procedures to restore hearing to deaf adults need to know, he said, “We’re not broken. I’m 30 years old. Do you want me to throw out the only language I’ve used for 30 years?”

He said he doesn’t judge those who pursue assistive technology or medical procedures to improve their hearing, though, because in the deaf community, as in the hearing community, people have different wants, desires and needs.

Some misconceptions hearing people have about deaf culture, he said, include thinking that ASL is some kind of code for English or is a type of broken English.

American Sign Language (ASL), which uses gestures and physical movements to communicate, is widely used in the U.S. and English-speaking parts of Canada and considered one standard for communicating and interpreting. Globally, more than 250 different sign languages are used, with the range of differences in dialect, grammar, and symbols English-speaking hearing people experience with spoken and written language in other countries.

“If we were to visit France, Spain or Thailand, those specific countries have their own signed languages,” he said. “I would be at loss just like you would be because the languages are very different.”

Secord said he was born hard-of-hearing and eventually lost his hearing altogether as a child.

He teaches four levels of ASL at Oakland Community College. This two-and-a-half year associates degree in applied science aims to give students entry level interpreting skills and get them ready to take the state-required certification exam.

Those who pass can find jobs in fields of education, medicine, law, governmental, and the general community. OCC’s program, one of the four associate degree programs in the nation that is accredited through The Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education (CCIE). Sixteen universities have CCIE accreditation for four-year programs; none are in Michigan.

ASL interpreters are retiring at a quicker pace, Secord said, so he’s hoping the growing prominence of deaf people in daily life and in the media will translate to



The US Dept. of Labor estimates that nearly 11,000 ASL interpreters will be needed each year through 2030, a 25 percent increase in the job opportunities. ASL interpreters and translators across the US earn between \$35,890 and \$79,440; in Michigan, wages typically fall between 52,000 and 57,000 annually.

<https://bit.ly/ASLinterpreters>

Michigan has a shortage of interpreters. Secord cited a case where an interpreter drove 300 miles to help a deaf person with a court case. The services are critical for deaf, deaf-blind and hard-of-hearing people who need medical care or are experiencing a medical crisis.

Secord said anyone who wants to learn more ASL or deaf culture without signing up for a full college program can find lots of free resources online. He said it's important to find those free online classes taught by a deaf person who uses ASL as their first language, rather than a hearing person.

Whether or not anyone reading this wants to learn ASL, Secord has one request.

"Please, please, please: Look at us as normal people. We're not broken. We're very proud of who we are," he said. "We have a rich culture, a rich language, and a rich history. Don't treat us differently. Treat us as equals."

DEAF C.A.N.I. is at 2111 Orchard Lake Rd., Suite 101, in Sylvan Lake, and online at deafcan.org. People can support this non-profit with direct donations, or through Kroger or Amazon programs.

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