

Strengthening Employment Pathways for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals

DEAF EMPLOYMENT
SUMMIT



RIT

National
Technical
Institute for
the Deaf

June 7-9, 2023

Rochester, NY

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Message from
JOHN MACKO



In February 2019, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), Gallaudet University, Communication Service for the Deaf (CSD) and National Association of the Deaf (NAD) came together to start planning for the inaugural Deaf Employment Summit (DES) in May 2020. The pandemic's appearance in early 2020, however, meant the summit had to be postponed indefinitely. Instead, eight webinars were hosted with over 1,800 participants nationwide.

The invitation-only summit took place on June 7-9, 2023, at the Rochester Institute of Technology, with over 100 employers, policymakers, advocates, and educators. Inspired

by the Harkin International Disability Employment Summit, we focused on strategies, showcasing success stories and employment resources for employers and deaf and hard of hearing individuals, improving employment opportunities and hiring of DHH individuals, and enhancing the quality of employment.

This report provides an overview of the many nuggets of wisdom, real-life experiences, and ideas and goals shared throughout the summit. I hope you enjoy this report. Gratitude goes to all of our planning team members, participants, volunteers, and supporters. I look forward to seeing you at the next summit.

For more, visit the Deaf Employment Summit website at

www.rit.edu/ntid/nccc/des

Participating Entities

- ACCES-VR
- Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services
- Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind
- Amtrak
- Apple
- Bender Consulting Services
- Boeing
- City of Chicago: Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities
- Communication Service for the Deaf
- Convo
- CSAVR-NET
- DCARA
- Deaf in Government
- DEAF-CYBERCON
- Department of Labor-DEWS-Genesee Co. Career Center
- Disability Rights of California
- Dow
- Gallaudet Innovation and Entrepreneurship Institute
- Gallaudet University
- GE Aerospace
- General Dynamics Bath Iron Works
- General Dynamics Mission Systems
- HII-Mission Technologies
- Huntington Ingalls Industries
- INKQUIRY Visuals
- Innivee Strategies
- L3Harris Technologies
- M&T Bank
- McDonald's Corp.
- Microsoft
- Mission Technologies
- NAD
- National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
- NTID (various departments)
- New York State Capitol
- New York State Department of Labor
- North Wales Borough
- Office of Mayor Malik Evans
- Ohio State University
- Pfizer
- PNC Financial Services Group
- Proctor & Gamble
- Prudential
- RochesterWorks
- SourceAmerica
- Starkloff Disability Institute
- State of Arkansas
- T.S. Writing Services
- T-Mobile
- Tobyhanna Army Depot
- University of Texas
- U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
- U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (ED/OSERS)
- U.S. Department of Defense
- U.S. Department of Labor
- U.S. Department of Transportation
- U.S. Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- Wilmington Trust
- ZP Better Together

DEAF EMPLOYMENT SUMMIT PLANNING TEAM



- John Macko, NTID
- Zainab Alkebsi, NAD
- Dr. Denise Kavin, NTID
- Charles MacFadden, CSD
- Taja Brown, CSD
- Dr. Julie Tibbitt, Gallaudet University
- Howard Rosenblum, Esq., NAD

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- Lucinda Levine of Crowley and Co. for her outstanding graphic recording work. Her visual illustrations and capture of information conveyed were an invaluable part of the summit.

Summit Overview

The goal of this summit was to bring together employers, policy-makers, advocates, and educators to strategize how to increase the job market participation rate and the employment rate of people who are deaf or hard of hearing over the next decade. The summit focused specifically on:

- Raising awareness
- Discussing challenges
- Identifying strategies
- Sharing resources
- Celebrating successes.

All presentations were held in NTID's Lyndon Baines Johnson Hall and the CSD Student Development Center.



100
Participants



66
Entities



21
Speakers



→ Mission



Increasing employment for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

→ Vision



Showcasing success stories and employment resources for employers and deaf or hard of hearing individuals, and to improve their quality of employment.

Webinars During the Pandemic

Eight webinars were held during the pandemic with over 1,800 participants. Topics included:

- *May 21, 2020: Working Remotely: Best Practices for Deaf and Hearing Employees*
- *Sept. 10, 2020: Deaf/Hard of Hearing Employees During COVID-19 Best Practices*
- *Dec. 3, 2020: Hiring Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Employees Now and Beyond*
- *March 11, 2021: Dos and Don'ts of Accommodating Deaf Employees: From an Access Service Perspective*
- *June 29, 2021: Career Advancement — Best Practices for Employers and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Employees*
- *Oct. 7, 2021: Reasonable Accommodation Models in the Workplace*
- *Oct. 27, 2022: Deaf and Hard of Hearing Contractors in the Workplace*
- *March 9, 2023: Infinity & Beyond: Learning How to Leverage Deaf Gain*

The webinars may be viewed at www.rit.edu/ntid/nccc/des/webinar-programs.

Wednesday, June 7, 2023

Day One



The ADA and the Harkin Summits: My Stories

The Honorable Tom Harkin

Retired U.S. Senator

It was only appropriate that the historical Deaf Employment Summit, inspired by the Harkin International Disability Employment Summit, began with a keynote by the Honorable Tom Harkin, retired U.S. Senator from Iowa. The Harkin International Disability Employment Summit has occurred annually since 2016 and has gathered private employers, government leaders and disability advocates from around the world to address the barriers to competitive, integrated employment for persons with disabilities.

The two-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee Harkin also was a key sponsor of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which was signed into law on July 26, 1990. Perhaps most importantly, Harkin has an older deaf brother.

Harkin mesmerized participants with stories of his career and Frank, his brother. He also set the tone for the summit by noting that in a study, aggressive hiring of people with disabilities demonstrated a 28% increase in revenue for companies with 30% higher margins and twice the net income after five years.

When working on the ADA, Harkin said, "I made sure the first title was employment. Because I always felt that employment was key. It was key to full participation. It was key to equal opportunity. It was key to economic self-sufficiency, the goals of independent living, the four goals of the ADA. Employment was really the key to it."



Harkin pointed out that there is an "old sort of perception that hiring a person with a disability is sort of a social obligation, meeting your corporate social responsibility. I don't like that. I never liked that." Harkin Institute strives to combat this by educating people that "hiring persons with disabilities is not just a social commitment but is value added to companies," he said.

He closed with an inspiring story about his brother's mid-career change that happened because someone was willing to hire a deaf person. According to this employer, Frank, Harkin's brother, ended up being the best employee at that company. Frank's outstanding work in ethics, reliability, quality, and know-how influenced the company to increase its number of deaf or hard of hearing employees.

To learn more about the Harkin Institute, visit www.harkininstitute.drake.edu.

Thursday, June 8, 2023

Day Two



Welcoming Remarks

Mayor Malik Evans
City of Rochester

On June 8, the Honorable Malik Evans, mayor of the City of Rochester, kicked off the day by welcoming attendees to the area. He shared highlights about area attractions and the city's high population of deaf people per capita, encouraging visitors to kayak downtown to pick up some coffee.

Mayor Evans then reminded attendees, "When we look at the world through the different lenses, what we learn and the ideas it generates can be astonishing."



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When we look at the world through the different lenses, what we learn and the ideas it generates can be astonishing.

Mayor Malik Evans
City of Rochester





The Deaf Summit: Origins & Goals

John Macko
*NTID Co-op & Career
Center Director*

Dr. Gerard Buckley
*NTID President & RIT
Vice-President
& Dean*



Summit Chair John Macko, along with NTID President Gerard Buckley shared the Deaf Employment Summit (DES) background and goals along with its history.

DES was originally scheduled for May 2020, but the worldwide pandemic forced the team to reconsider how to bring together hundreds of people to discuss the future of deaf and hard of hearing people in employment. Instead, the planning team offered eight webinars that reached over 1,800 employees nationwide. Thanks to the hard work by Communication Service for the Deaf (CSD), Gallaudet University, National Association of the Deaf (NAD), and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), the team came together to make this summit a reality three years later. The summit sponsors then took the stage to share a few insights.

Gallaudet University President Roberta “Bobbi” Cordano stated, “Education is critical to have a fair chance in the race of life. To have a fair chance in the race of life, you must start with education through teaching and learning.” Noting that employment barriers still very much existed, she added that this summit would be the first of many summits. “Employment is key to a healthy democracy. Employment is key to wealth creation. Employment is also key to having a strong country and a strong community.”



Employment is key to a healthy democracy. . . Employment is also key to having a strong country and a strong community.

*Roberta Cordano
Gallaudet University President*

NAD CEO Howard Rosenblum said, “We all need to have the collaboration and commitment from every person and also from each of our different communities to make sure that all of these individuals have equal access to employment. . . we’re really happy that we are starting this first drop in the bucket that will have a ripple effect on ensuring that deaf people have access to the employment that they deserve.”

CSD CEO Chris Soukup referred to Senator Harkin’s remarks, adding, “For the past 50 years, we’ve tried to create and support a world in which all deaf people are valued. It’s a simple mission. To create a world where deaf identity and the deaf community is valued for its unique experiences, perspectives, and lenses that they bring to the world.”

Soukup further emphasized: “Employment creates success stories, and those success stories change perception step by step and brick by brick to build a strong perception of deaf people and their deaf identities. Again, employment is key. It is everything.”

Macko summarized the summit’s main goals by sharing, “We learned that many of the companies are hungry for information, that they want to understand better how to communicate with deaf people. They want to learn some of the accommodations in a workplace that can be provided.” With this, the summit welcomed its keynote speaker, Dr. Carrie Lou Bloom.



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*John Macko
NTID Co-op & Career Center Director*



*Gallaudet University President
Roberta Cordano, Esq., and
NTID President and RIT Vice President
& Dean Dr. Gerard Buckley.*



Deaf People and Employment in the United States

Carrie Lou Bloom, Ph.D.

National Deaf Center at the University of Texas-Austin

Carrie Lou Bloom, Ph.D., shared valuable historical and current data-based insights about deaf people and employment in the United States during her keynote. As the director of the National Deaf Center (NDC), she and her team heavily rely on data from the U.S. Census and other sources such as the American Community Survey (ACS), which had a sample size of over 41,000 deaf people aged 16-64.

Bloom began, “We want to provide a better idea of where deaf people are standing within the United States, where the gaps exist, where we see challenges for employment for people, what systemic barriers are present.” She emphasized how data can help design better programs, better services, and better resources in this field.

The NDC created an online dashboard at www.nationaldeafcenter.org/dashboard to serve as a launch pad for dialogue and resources on employment among deaf people. She noted that the data is not necessarily thorough; it does not share data such as whether a deaf respondent uses sign language or spoken language or a respondent’s identity (deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, or hard of hearing).

In 2021, 46% of deaf people did not have jobs, compared to hearing people at approximately 30%. Although this number included people who did not want to work, Bloom said, “That number does still inform us that there’s a problem that we need to sort out and address. There are a lot of deaf people in this country who are not working and we want to know why that’s happening and make changes.” She suggested that this could



The problem is not deaf people. It’s the system.

Carrie Lou Bloom, Ph.D.

National Deaf Center

be changed through educational attainment, which leads to increased employment rates. “So how do we change this trend? One thing that we often see regarding employment is the role of educational training. The more education a deaf person attains, typically more employable they become.” For example, when deaf people have a bachelor’s degree, 70% of the time they are employed. Education also increases job earnings among deaf individuals.

Bloom then delved deeper into the data, such as why 42% of deaf people are not looking for work. Among these people are deafblind and deaf-disabled individuals, married people with children, white women with children, women of color with children, and young college students or recent college graduates. “This information helps us recognize those systemic barriers for these different specific groups of deaf individuals,” Bloom explained, noting that another factor is the type of work available to them, along with barriers such as low wages and workplace accessibility. For instance, 53% of Latinx deaf individuals work but for lower pay; however, more deaf people of color are looking for work than deaf people who



are white. Additionally, about half of deaf people have additional disabilities.

Furthermore, employment rates have not increased over time for deaf people. “We should be catching up to [our hearing counterparts] as a community of deaf people, but yet we are not. So that says to us that we are not doing enough. We need to work harder to get to parity,” Bloom said. However, employment has increased slightly for Black and Latinx deaf people (3.6% and 4.4%), deafdisabled and deafblind people (2% and 1.8%), young deaf people aged 16-34 (1.7-1.9%), and deaf women (1.5%).

“When we design services or support services, we need to look at the most marginalized populations and make sure they are getting served not just in jobs but in sustainable income too,” Bloom said. She then discussed how the type of work deaf people are often placed with don’t always have opportunities for career advancement, such as landscaping, office work, or personal care. Perhaps this is one reason that 10.5% of deaf people are self-employed, compared to 9.1% of hearing people.

When asked, 96% of deaf high school students said they said they would have paid jobs—yet this doesn’t align with the data.

Bloom said, “The problem is not deaf people. It’s the system.” System changes could include fostering autonomy among deaf youth, starting career exploration earlier, facilitating school and employer partnership, and supporting ongoing career development. These can be accomplished through training programs, camps, and small programs. “Changing the system is our responsibility,” Bloom said. “We construct our future. Do all deaf people have this opportunity?”



Panel: **The Employment Picture**



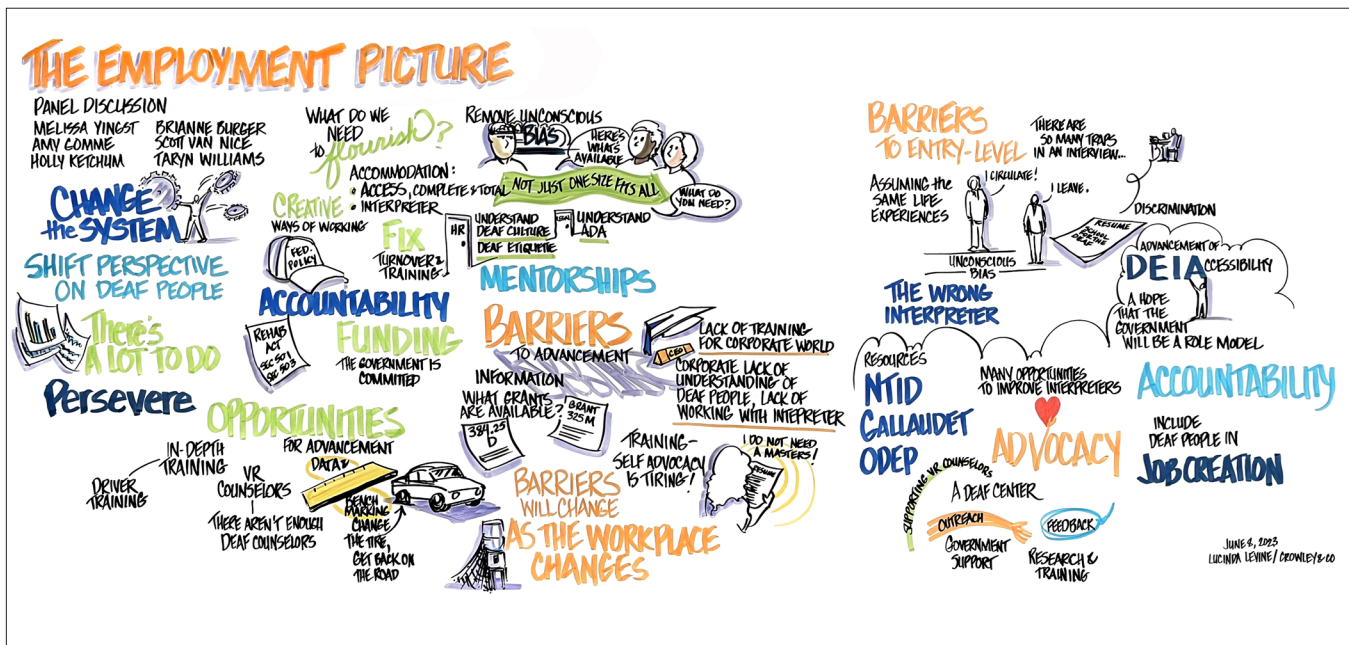
Brianne Burger, *U.S. Department of Education Liaison to the Special Institutions*; **Amy Gomme**, *DCARA Executive Director*; **Holly Ketchum**, *Arkansas Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Coordinator*; **Scott Van Nice**, *Procter & Gamble IT Director*; **Taryn Williams**, *U.S. Department of Labor Assistant Secretary for Disability Employment Policy*; and **Melissa Yingst**, *Moderator*.

Moderator Melissa Yingst began the panel with a discussion about accommodations in the workplace. DCARA executive director Amy Gomme noted how systemic barriers are in place from even before the interview, especially for those who may struggle with literacy. “That creates an obstacle right away, such as with the application itself,” she said. A deaf applicant may have to go through a cumbersome screening process, and then arrange to have interpreters for training or orientation. Once that is complete, there likely won’t be interpreters on the day-to-day job, which excludes the deaf employee from water cooler chats or impromptu meetings. “This means the deaf person lacks all the information in the workplace,” Gomme noted. “We are equal, so we must be provided the same access.”

Holly Ketchum, the Arkansas Services for the deaf and hard of hearing coordinator, cited

Amazon in Little Rock as an example. With 536 deaf employees there, a major obstacle is how high turnover is among the employees. “They’ll teach the hearing employees how to work with the deaf employees and then those hearing employees are gone and then they have to hire new hearing employees and teach them.” Ketchum cited difficulties, though, such as Amazon regulations not allowing deaf employees to text with their hearing colleagues. “Again, the problem of turnover and training is something that is prominent at Amazon and that happens a lot in hearing environments and that’s something that we do need to fix.”

Scott Van Nice, the IT director at Procter and Gamble in Ohio, emphasized innovation as a strategy. “Remove the culture of unconscious bias,” he suggested, identifying three possible solutions: have a person in human resources



become an expert on deaf people through training, make someone in the legal department fully knowledgeable about the Americans with Disabilities Act and identify a senior leader with direct influence on the CEO to become a “reverse” mentor. He said, “I think you start at the top and work down and I think that will make a more inclusive environment for the deaf and hard of hearing workers and the rest of the community as well.”

Taryn Williams of the U.S. Department of Labor suggested using federal policy as a way to make positive shifts in disability employment, such as utilizing the Job Accommodation Network, a confidential, free resource for employees and employers. They receive 40,000 inquiries annually, and provide technical assistance.

Brianne Burger of the U.S. Department of Education agreed, adding that the National Deaf Center is another terrific resource. She added that as a result of the Workforce Innovation Act, all states are required to use at least 15% of their federal funding to focus on people with disabilities, including deaf and hard of hearing people.

Other topics included accommodations that are not one-size-fits-all, ensuring that deaf people—not the employer—determine their



own accommodations, the lack of people of color who are also deaf in administration or ADA coordinator positions. Yingst then asked about opportunities for career advancement. Van Nice identified obstacles such as lack of opportunities, not knowing how to advocate for advancement, not having communication access to the right people, not having the necessary soft skills for corporate environments, not having access to incidental knowledge, not knowing legal rights or resources, and so on. This all could be alleviated through training.

Ketchum pointed out that vocational rehabilitation can also support post-employment, such as providing training for advancement or certification. However, Gomme stated that many individuals have traumatic experiences with the



Remove the culture of unconscious bias.

Scott Van Nice

Procter & Gamble IT Director

vocational rehabilitation system, especially with oppressive perceptions of deaf people among vocational rehabilitation counselors.

Williams added, “When we are developing innovation for what it means to actually hire. . . it is not sufficient to just say, ‘Give us a checklist,’ and we’ve checked off that community and therefore we know what to do. We need to engage in a robust process where every community is represented and understand that the disability community is not a monolith.”

Other topics discussed included barriers preventing deaf people from applying for entry-level positions, such as auditory-based application websites, phone-based interviews, unqualified interpreters, not being able to meet with interpreters before interviews, lack of funding, and lack of support.

Resources

ACCESSIBILITY & INCLUSION

- **Job Accommodation Network**
www.askjan.org
- **U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy**
www.dol.gov/agencies/odep
- **EEOC ADA Requirements for Individuals with Hearing Disabilities in the Workplace**
content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USEEOC/bulletins/344a013

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

- **CSD Works**
www.csdworks.com
- **Gallaudet University Career Success**
careerlibrary.gallaudet.edu
- **National Deaf Center**
www.nationaldeafcenter.org
- **NTID Co-op & Career Center**
www.rit.edu/ntid/nccc

OTHER RESOURCES

- **NAD Employment Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing**
www.nad.org/nerc
- **Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf Consumer Resources**
www.rid.org/about/resources/#fortheconsumer



Mini-talk: Innovating Skill Advancement for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals

Gary Behm

NTID Academic Affairs Associate Vice President and RIT/NTID Center on Access Technology Innovation Laboratory Director

Gary Behm worked for IBM for 30 years until he retired, and shared key lessons he learned while at IBM. "You have to continue learning new things everyday, so training on the job is really important. . ." he said. When in college, students have access to tutors, teachers, and resources, but on the job, these resources are not as plentiful.

Training is key for advancement and retention, even if supports are not in place at your workplace. Behm suggested something he experienced during his career at IBM: having signing instructors. "Back then, we had a lot of deaf IBMers, and IBM really recognized it

was easier to have direct instruction than to have interpreters for us. We had a lot of deaf instructors." He cautioned against assuming that all deaf employees hold similar skills, though. He shared how he did a training for a company that had 20 deaf employees; while communication was much easier, it was challenging trying to work with everyone's diverse work skills. It was still better than having to watch an interpreter all day long.

A terrific resource, Behm said, is the availability of boot camps at programs such as NTID, where you can acquire specific skill sets that companies are looking for, with signing instructors, and



Mini-talk: Optimizing the Workplace Experience for All Employees

Taja Brown

Human Resources & Employment Services Director
Communication Service for the Deaf, Inc.

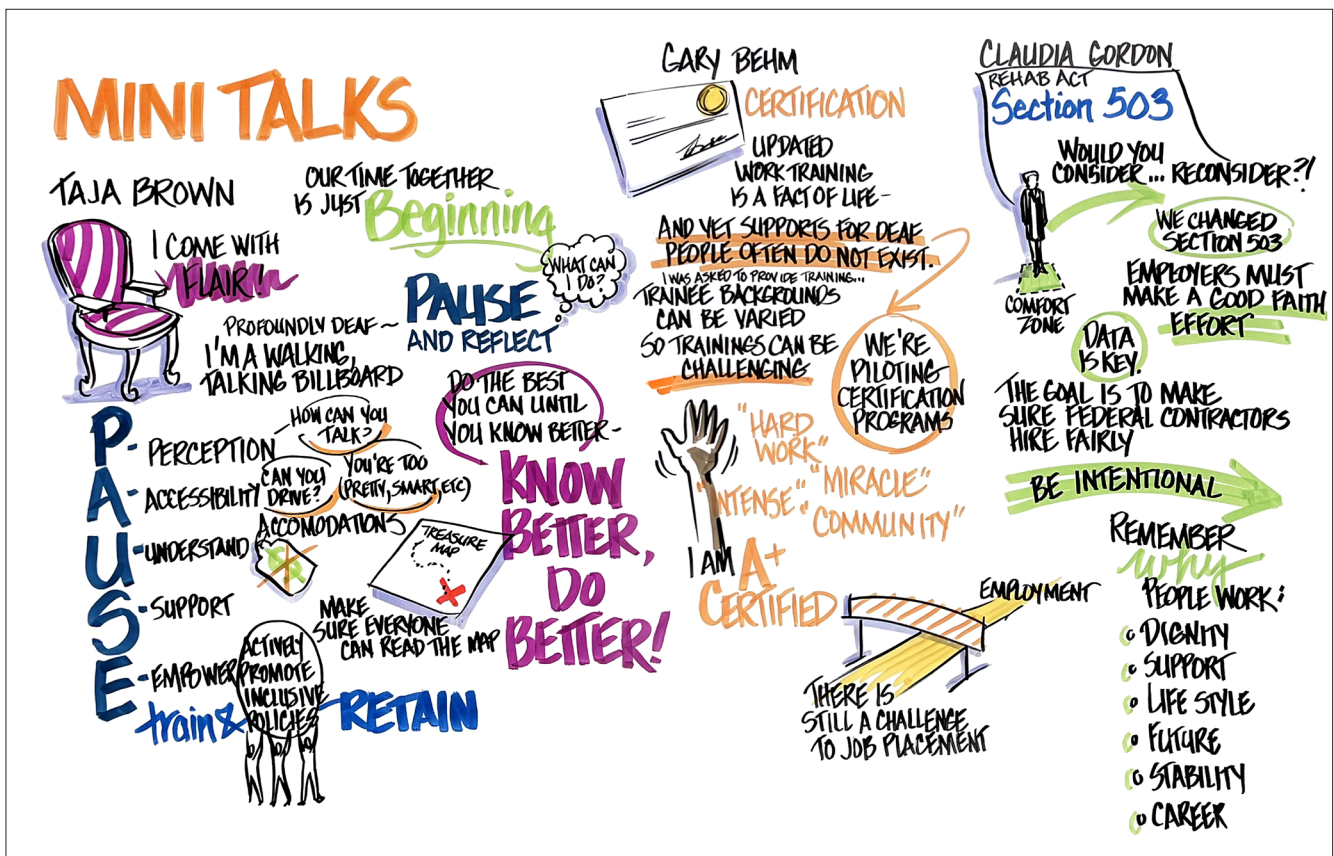


“We all share a common belief; we are all here because we believe that everyone deserves an equal chance in the workplace. We are here to talk about how to make that a reality,” said Taja Brown, the director of human resources and employment services at Communication Service for the Deaf, Inc.

Brown then provided a framework for creating an inclusive and thriving workplace using “PAUSE”: P for perception or how people perceive deaf and hard of hearing people, A for accessibility; U for understanding, S for

supporting, and E for empowering.

After providing helpful tips for each step, Brown reminded participants, “It starts with small steps: engage in open conversations with colleagues, promote accessibility and inclusivity in your workplace policies and atmosphere, champion the implementation of assistive technologies and accommodations, and advocate for the professional development and career advancement of individuals with disabilities. Remember, true progress is made through collective effort.”



Mini-talk: Section 503: What Does It Mean for Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Employees?



Claudia Gordon, Esq.

Senior Accessibility Strategist

T-Mobile US, Inc.



Claudia Gordon, Esq., was quick to emphasize that she wasn't talking about Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act. Rather, the lesser-known Section 503 prohibits federal contractors and subcontractors from discriminating in against individuals with disabilities in employment and requires employers take affirmative action to recruit, hire, promote, and retain individuals with disabilities.

The drawback is that the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission and the U.S. Department of Justice cannot act against a discriminatory employer until someone files a complaint. In 2014, a 7% hiring goal was added to this law, meaning federal contractors had

to proactively recruit and hire individuals with disabilities at all job levels, not only entry-level. "We had pushback," Gordon said, including on implementation and cost. "There were a lot of excuses, but data shows that it is working."

Gordon also echoed the common theme throughout the summit that data was key to implementing changes, which is why the government added two categories to pre-hiring and post-hiring for more data. "How else can we hold contractors accountable?" she asked.

The bottom line, Gordon said, is that employment "means so much more than just a paycheck." She also said, "We need to hold conversations, but taking action is even better."

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We need to hold conversations, but taking action is even better.

Claudia Gordon, Esq.

Senior Accessibility Strategist

T-Mobile US, Inc.



Mini-talk: The Impact of Long-Term Investments Leading to High-Value, High-Visibility Careers

Leah Katz-Hernandez

*Senior Manager, CEO Platform & Communities
Microsoft*

Leah Katz-Hernandez said she “wanted to see the quality of life get better for everyone, especially those who have been left behind in systems and establishment.” So she started studying special education policy in college.

In 2007, Katz-Hernandez volunteered with the Get Out the Vote drive although she didn’t think she was a major cog in the overall system. She was stunned, then, when she received an award for her work as a Hispanic/Latinx individual. “That was a turning point in my head, that what I’m doing is valuable to other people. That’s when I realized my work was part of a bigger investment that offered value for everyone, and created more opportunities for everyone.”

She later completed an unpaid internship that led to her becoming the White House’s first deaf West Wing receptionist during President Obama’s tenure. “Many had never seen or experienced working with deaf people before. I don’t speak; I sign instead, so it was a new experience for them,” she said. “I knew that, so I invested my energy in knowing them and making them feel comfortable to work with me. It was extra work, but it was valuable. They invested in me, too. That was valuable.”

Katz-Hernandez mentioned the importance of social capital in professional networking for her, which was a major factor in her career advancement. “Invest more time in relationships; you’ll become more successful over time by being invested in relationships. I emphasize,

invest more in deaf people and others from marginalized communities. It’s an investment with a return that will grow in value over time.”

Katz-Hernandez concluded with a prediction: “I think that social investment will become more valued and more meaningful in the future. It’s people who appreciate these particular things, as deaf people do naturally, who might possibly have a unique role to play in this fascinating era.”



I emphasize, invest more in deaf people and others from marginalized communities. It’s an investment with a return that will grow in value over time.

Leah Katz-Hernandez

Senior Manager

CEO Platform & Communities

Microsoft

Mini-talk: The Deaf Ecosystem



Dr. Khadijat Rashid

Dean of the Faculty

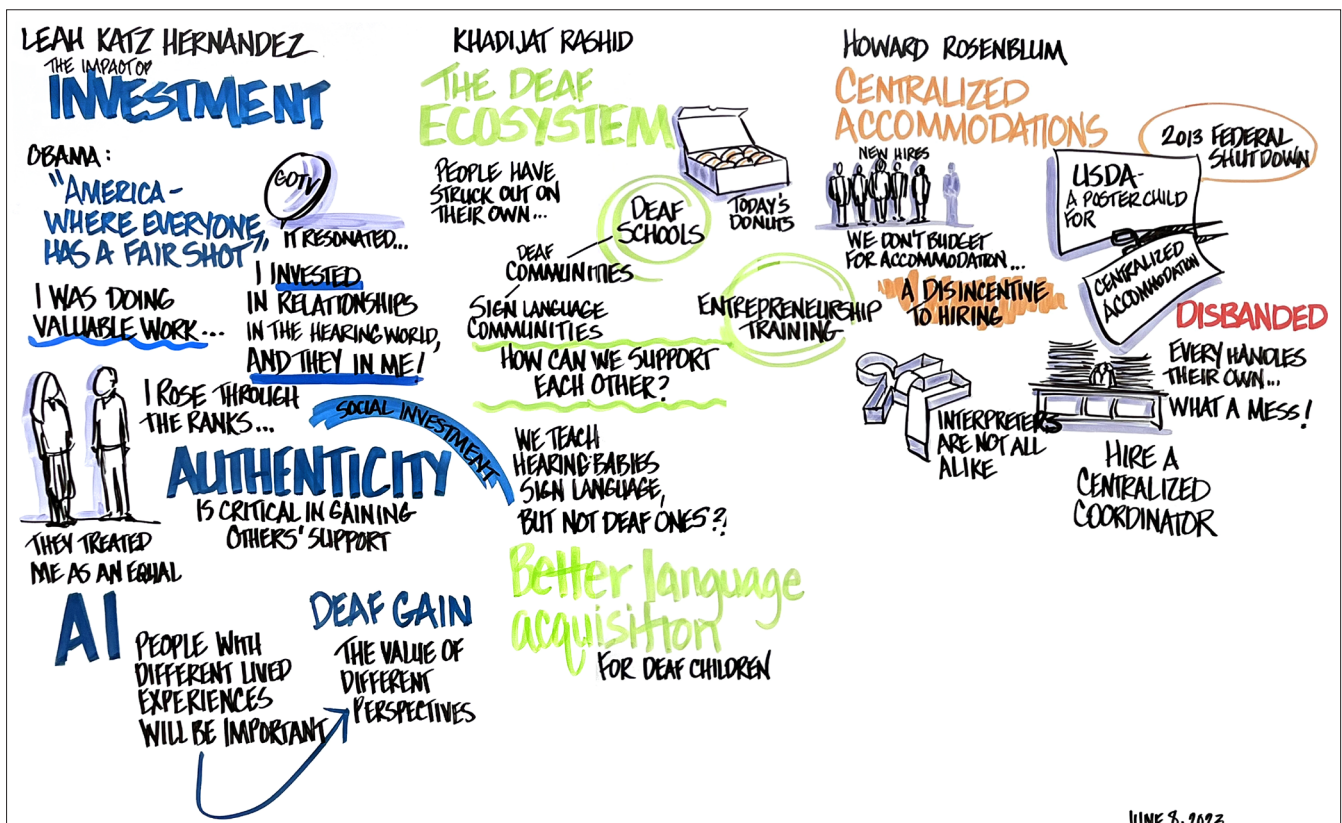
Gallaudet University

Dr. Khadijat “Kubby” Rashid shared insights about the deaf ecosystem based on conversations with Gallaudet University President Roberta Cordano and faculty Tawny Holmes Hlibok, Esq. The deaf ecosystem exists because of discrimination and misconceptions. Deaf people have been left out of education, passed over for jobs, experienced language deprivation, and more. On top of that, being deaf is considered a low-incidence population, comprising only one percent of all disabilities.

Deaf people have learned to adapt by striking out on their own and creating their

own intersystems. which has led to innovation, implementation, and signing communities supporting each other. However, Rashid said, “If we stay really insular as a small group, it won’t be effective. It’s important we reach out outside of the community and continue to develop ourselves.” Through deaf autonomy, education can help change deaf people’s employability and employment opportunities.

Rashid asked, “For those who are not deaf, consider how to support a thriving deaf ecosystem by supporting hiring, and training deaf people.”



JUNE 8, 2023



Mini-talk: Centralized Accommodations as a Solution

Howard Rosenblum, Esq.

Chief Executive Officer

National Association of the Deaf

Howard Rosenblum, an attorney who is the chief executive officer of the nation's oldest civil rights organization, believes in a centralized accommodations system. He cited President Obama's executive order that encouraged the use of a centralized reasonable accommodations system for the federal government.

Rosenblum cited the tendency of companies to factor in the cost of interpreters when considering the hiring of a deaf person. Most companies do not have this built into their budgets, so they choose a non-deaf person instead. He then shared the example of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which had such a system of centralized accommodations.

The USDA, the employer of many career employees who were deaf, was a model for a centralized accommodations system. When the government shut down in October 2013, the USDA's 20 years of this system fell apart because the agency ran out of money as a result. The USDA decided to change its system, and shut down that model in 2014. Previously, there was one person responsible for all accommodations. After the shutdown, USDA had 17 sub-agencies. So each of the 17 agencies had to learn how to handle accommodations, costs, contracts, and other logistics. Rosenblum said, "So I did what I do best: I sued them."

After eight years, the former USDA secretary came back under the new administration and admitted that the agency had made a mistake

in dismantling the accommodations system. They are working on it for every USDA location in the United States currently, and starting from scratch.

Rosenblum said the benefits of a central system are multi-fold. By having a coordinator, agencies and companies can save money and time, and even make profits. It is crucial to include accommodation costs, just like companies include costs for equipment, remote learning, software, and other items. Rosenblum added, "You may be hired as a charity case, and then you turn out to be the most productive member."



Break-out Groups: **Translating Talk into Action**

Participants were assigned to eight groups based on the six mini-talk topics. Each group was given a list of questions, and then each shared on stage the group's takeaways. The objective was to convert all the discussions into action items or ideas.

Group 1

QUESTIONS

1. Could Section 503 apply to your organization? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. Has your organization's deaf and hard of hearing employees been able to advance in their careers? What's working well? What could be better?
3. How are interpreting or captioning requests and associated costs managed in your organization? Could those costs be centralized at the enterprise level or should they remain within the deaf or hard of hearing employee's home department?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Have buy-in from leadership.
- Identify how to encourage people to reveal their disabilities when applying to meet Section 503's 7% requirement.
- Ensure equitable application processes and equal access for promotions.
- Provide training for supervisors and managers to better empower and support employees.
- Centralized accommodations systems do succeed.

Group 2

QUESTIONS

1. How could you use Section 503 to create additional opportunities for your deaf or hard of hearing job candidates or employees?
2. What barriers with accessibility, inclusivity, or accommodations are you aware of within your workplace? How are you mitigating them?
3. Do you see centralized accommodations as a solution for your organization? Why or why not? What steps would your organization need to take to implement the concept?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Not all participants were not aware about Section 503 until the mini-talk. Many are new to their jobs.
- Training, resources, and funding are a major gap in many entities.
- Many are not willing to self-disclose because of a fear of cost of accommodations. A centralized accommodation systems could be a safe space for their disclosure, without hiring managers knowing.
- A challenge is when an accommodations coordinator is in one location serving multiple locations.
- Many are excited to return to their employers and see about establishing a centralized accommodations system and somehow funding it.

Group 3

QUESTIONS

1. What additional steps can your organization take in the spirit of ADA or Section 503?
2. Which ideas put forward by our speakers or panelists could be successfully implemented in your workplace to improve deaf or hard of hearing employee accessibility and inclusion?
3. How can information sharing within your organization be made more accessible or inclusive for deaf and hard of hearing employees?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- To consider changes, funding had to be considered. Where will the money come from? Which budget classification?
- Start at the top, not at mid-level, for requests.
- Critical mass is helpful, but if you are the solo deaf employee, requesting such changes becomes problematic.
- A support system is key.
- Teach deaf and hard of hearing people how to work with interpreters during interviews and what to do if interpreters aren't good.
- Create pipelines through internships.
- Provide soft-skill training, both in college and at the workplace.
- Provide deaf instructors for trainings.
- Have leadership mandate training on how to work with deaf colleagues.
- Consider a buddy system where an experienced employee familiar with company culture and expectations can work with new employee.

Group 4

QUESTIONS

1. What ADA or Section 503 challenges do you have or foresee, and how might your organization overcome them?
2. Could the PAUSE framework be applied and adopted within your organization? What challenges do you foresee?
3. What are your thoughts regarding the deaf ecosystem? What information shared in that presentation was new or surprising to you?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- How do you embody the ADA and Section 503? Hire deaf employees. They are the experts.
- Assess organizations regularly to ensure inclusivity; it's too easy to become complacent.
- Reinforce breakdown of stigmas at the ground level, and have a point person in the organization dedicated to that.
- Listen to the person who needs the accommodation; don't assume what accommodations are needed.
- Document processes, and create enforceable guidelines, such as ensuring deaf participants have time to respond during meetings given the lag in translations or ensuring interpreters know the jargon for any meeting.
- Reframe feedback on "having to pay for interpreters," bring it around to how they spend money for other things that increases productivity.

Group 5

QUESTIONS

1. Does the data regarding the overall deaf and hard of hearing employment picture surprise you? Why do you think the data is what it is? How can we change this picture?
2. Has your organization observed any challenges in career mobility or promotions for its deaf and hard of hearing employees? If so, what steps has your organization taken to address them? How has it worked out for your organization? Alternatively, what has your organization been doing to mitigate those challenges?
3. Does your organization's procurement process allow for contracting with deaf or hard of hearing-owned/led organizations or independent contractors? If so, how? If not, what changes are needed? How would your organization make those changes?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- More information is needed about the data shared.
- Hearing people have better salaries because they go from job to job and build their experience. Deaf people often stay in one job by default.
- Career advancement often isn't a problem for the first one or two levels, but then it becomes problematic. This can be because of internal networking or opportunities that deaf people miss out on because of communication.
- Change the culture by having a centralized accommodation system.
- Many agencies at the federal government level are required to hire disability-owned entities for contractual work.

Group 6

QUESTIONS

1. Based on what you learned about the employment picture, what changes would you be willing to consider to create more opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing individuals within your organization? How open do you think your colleagues would be to making these changes?
2. What are your thoughts on closing the gap between training needs and opportunities vs. employment outcomes for deaf or hard of hearing individuals? What do you believe needs to be done?
3. Is your organization's procurement process sufficiently accessible for deaf or hard of hearing independent contractors or owned/led organizations to pursue contracting opportunities with your organization? If so, what did you do to make the process accessible? If not, what changes are needed? How would your organization make those changes?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Improve human resources training and management, especially on unconscious biases and interviewing, and expose them to ASL.
- Hold human resources accountable.
- A centralized accommodations system is a good tool.
- Have open-minded leadership.
- Be open to modifying job descriptions, such as "English speaking skills."
- Partner with educational and other companies for networking.
- Continue with the summit.
- Make self-disclosure safe.

Group 7

QUESTIONS

1. What additional steps could your organization take to be more equitable in its evaluation of deaf and hard of hearing job candidates for your organization's workforce needs?
2. What areas can our educational institutions do better to ensure deaf and hard of hearing people are properly prepared for the workforce? What training or professional development needs has your organization identified for its deaf and hard of hearing employees? How has your organization gone about ensuring they receive the needed training?
3. What did you learn thus far at the summit that you found to be most insightful? What ideas do you plan to share or implement when you return to your workplace?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A common statement during the summit was to bring in more deaf people or people with disabilities, but why expose them to trauma of being in an environment that's not accommodating for them?
- Many solutions are possible, but a lot has to happen before they can take place successfully.
- Language matters; don't be ableist. Don't use ableist language like, "Poor deaf people," or "We need help."
- Focus on how employers and employees can be successful instead of "helping."

Group 8

QUESTIONS

1. How can your organization make its interview, hiring, and promotion process more accessible for your deaf and hard of hearing job candidates? What challenges do you foresee in making those changes and how might your organization overcome them?
2. How well is your organization doing with ensuring its deaf and hard of hearing employees or job candidates have communication access through sign interpreting, captioning, or some other means?
3. What questions or concerns do you have that were not discussed or answered by our presenters or panelists?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Interviewing may be different between government and private entities. The intention is there for equality, except any time a person needs reasonable accommodations.
- Have prepared interpreters for panel interviews.
- Asking for accommodations can be anxiety-inducing.
- Job descriptions often focus on written skills even if it's not a priority on the job.
- Government entities have more resources and access than small businesses and nonprofits even with grants and assistance.
- Create space for deaf people in the workplace. This might mean changing the way you do business, hold a meeting or share information.
- Consider mentoring and mock interviews.



Friday, June 9, 2023

Day **Three**



Welcoming Remarks

The Honorable Joseph Morelle

U.S. Representative, 25th District, New York

U.S. Congressional Representative Joseph Morelle spoke fondly of his long-time partnership with NTID/RIT and NTID President Gerry Buckley. He then noted how NTID was established, with RIT's selection from a competitive pool of eight universities.

A co-sponsor of the Cogswell and Macy Act, Rep. Morelle emphasized that as a member of the House Appropriations Committee, he is dedicated to ensuring deaf people's inclusion and employability.



...continue to break down barriers in all segments of life and particularly around employment...

U.S. Representative

Joseph Morelle (NY)



Forum: **Everything You've Wanted to Ask But Were Afraid to Ask**

Howard Rosenblum, Esq.

Chief Executive Officer

National Association of the Deaf

The participants returned for the final day of the summit filled with questions and ideas from the previous two days. This forum, led by Howard Rosenblum, encouraged participants to come on stage and ask questions or share ideas. Their comments included:

- Vocational rehabilitation often will provide job readiness for youth and adults, either directly or via vendors.
- NTID and Gallaudet both have employment-related programs; Gallaudet's Career Center

has completed a framework for high schools, focusing heavily on soft skills.

- Integrate soft skills into the classroom, daily living, and job readiness training.
- NTID is developing a bachelor's degree in community development and inclusive leadership, focusing on soft skills.
- A lot of initiatives on paper focus on a company's business needs, and also require a lot of hard skills such as cybersecurity, IT, data analysis, statistical programming, etc.



We need to ask companies, “What can you do for us?”

- Geography does affect how deaf people seek employment; for example, a wheelchair user may prefer not to live in areas where there are a lot of harsh winters. There are stories from deaf people who turned down jobs because of the lack of a deaf community or accessibility. Others have quit jobs because of the lack of access to video relay services due to firewalls or remoteness.
- Even simple things like inaccessible entry points that rely on voice activation or phone calls are inaccessible for deaf people.
- The NDC dashboard has state-level data available, including geographical data.
- NTID, Gallaudet, and vocational rehabilitation agencies could become more creative and approach companies by saying, “We have four candidates who have these skills. We’ll provide interpreters. Hire them.”
- Become creative in interacting with the

companies and taking opportunities for students not only during interviews but also co-ops. Provide continuous training.

- Consider the fact that half of the deaf population also have other disabilities, including mental health.
- Many vocational rehabilitation agencies and colleges/universities will prioritize those who have multiple disabilities over those who only have one disability.
- Create a deaf-friendly workplace environment that brings in the necessary critical mass to expand the deaf workforce.
- “Just making people feel welcome in the workplace doesn’t resolve the issue of community needs.” — Howard Rosenblum
- What constitutes a critical mass? Eight deaf employees out of 6,000? It depends on many factors such as location, relationships, jobs, departments, company size, and so forth.
- Don’t hire deaf people in one department only; look across disciplines and departments.



- Ensure the workplace is ready for deaf people, including interns.
- Don't always rely on automated technology such as captioning or speech-to-text.
- Discuss hard of hearing people, too.
- Reach out to experts like NTID, NAD, Gallaudet, CSD, and deaf professionals.
- Policies and laws aren't as substantive as they should be, nor are people knowledgeable.
- Mentors are mentioned often, but a better word may be "sponsors" who are willing to invest in deaf people and give them opportunities to excel.
- Social security disability income (SSDI) or social security income (SSI) should be discussed as well. Many earn more on SSDI/SSI than if they were employed, and still get benefits. The problem is the system, not the recipients themselves.
- SSDI/SSI often can be more reliable than jobs, especially in the current job market. Many are afraid of losing their jobs. A solution may be to offer job-sharing, where two people can work in the same job but on a part-time basis. That way, they can still get benefits and be covered for health insurance.
- Currently, only 11% of deaf adults receive SSI, according to Carrie Lou Bloom.



Key Themes and Action Plan



Dr. Denise Kavlin
Assistant Dean
NTID Admissions,
Outreach and Special
Projects Division



Dr. Julie Tibbitt
Director
Gallaudet University
Office for Career Success

Dr. Denise Kavlin and Dr. Julie Tibbitt came together to share common themes identified throughout the summit along with potential action plans.

Participants discussed the summit's three goals and to develop action steps for achieving changes in their workplaces based on the following questions:

- What can you do within your sphere of influence to optimize the workplace?
- What employment supports do you feel are still lacking?
- What surprised you regarding information and data shared at the summit?
- Are you motivated by what you can do to improve the employment landscape?
- What tools have you gained for hiring and career advancement of deaf and hard of hearing individuals?
- Do you have a clearer understanding of what needs to be done to improve quality?

ACTION PLAN

- The DES work group will continue to work together and host at least two employment webinars each year based on the emerging themes (see page 32).
- Surveys will be sent to DES participants at established checkpoints to solicit feedback on the summit, share developments since

the summit, and recruit volunteers for a focus group.

- Survey results will calibrate the next steps and develop goals for the second DES, planned for 2025.
- Success stories will continue to be gathered and disseminated.
- Proposals for conference presentations will be submitted to share information from the DES.



Summit: Emerging Themes

ACCOMMODATIONS

- Not a one-size-fits-all approach
- Fatigue among deaf individuals

CAREER ASSESSMENT AND EXPLORATION

- Vocational rehabilitation partnership
- Good fit between individual and employment

CAREER MOBILITY

- Stagnation after first one or two promotions
- Advancement of hearing colleagues

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- Strong connection to positive employment outcomes.
- Provision to both hearing and deaf/hard of hearing

EVOLVING WORKPLACES

- New technologies
- Artificial intelligence
- Intersectionality

INCIDENTAL LEARNING

- Limited access to water cooler conversations
- Language deprivation
- Not just about jobs

JOB SATISFACTION

- Quality of employment
- Enrichment and opportunities

OPPORTUNITIES

- Certification programs
- Professional development led by signing instructors

RETENTION

- Loyalty to current employer
- Additional challenges if seeking other employment

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

- Hiring of people with disabilities
- Deaf ecosystem

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

- Work-based assessments carry an inherent bias.
- Helping vs. giving opportunities

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

- Insufficient DHH representation
- Insufficient funding and resources

Practical Ideas for the Workplace

- ✓ Implement one new strategy for recruiting, interviewing, hiring, training, integrating, and promoting DHH individuals in the workplace.
- ✓ Advocate for a centralized reasonable accommodation system and accessibility coordinator.
- ✓ Become familiar with resources and legislation beyond the commonly cited ADA, such as Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act, and identify how they can be utilized.
- ✓ Practice communication strategies that are more inclusive of all individuals.
- ✓ Identify training opportunities and solutions for DHH employees that can translate into meaningful, enhanced productivity within your organization.
- ✓ Consider deaf and hard of hearing employees for career advancement and mobility opportunities.
- ✓ Learn about and share success stories of deaf and hard of hearing individuals in various occupations.
- ✓ Take an active role by working with deaf and hard of hearing individuals to create more success stories.
- ✓ Support the deaf ecosystem by supporting deaf-owned businesses and leaders.
- ✓ Maximize and optimize technologies for access while also considering the use and impact, such as artificial intelligence.
- ✓ Keep in line with evolutions of federal policy, especially the Department of Education and their OSERS/OSEP resources for information on grants and opportunities.
- ✓ Develop working relationships with vocational rehabilitation agencies and non-profit organizations serving the deaf and hard of hearing community.



Closing Remarks

Andy Imparato

Executive Director

Disability Rights California

Renowned disability activist Andy Imparato wrapped up the historical Deaf Employment Summit with a few words of wisdom. He started by sharing a story about when he was in Washington, DC, presiding over the American Association for People with Disabilities (AAPD).

AAPD had a summer internship program for college students on Capitol Hill, and 16 years ago, one of the interns was Leah Katz-Hernandez. The person assigned to supervise Katz-Hernandez was a 25-year-old who had grown up with the Americans with Disabilities Act. He asked Imparato: "Excuse my ignorance, but what would a deaf person do in a Congressional office?"

Imparato suggested creating a major public-facing strategy that focuses on educating employers and the public about "what deaf people are already doing and the capacity of the deaf community and the contributions of the deaf community in every field of society." After all, the definition of *disability* was created for the Social Security Act. "We now spend \$500 billion a year on people with disabilities based on a 1956 definition," Imparato said.

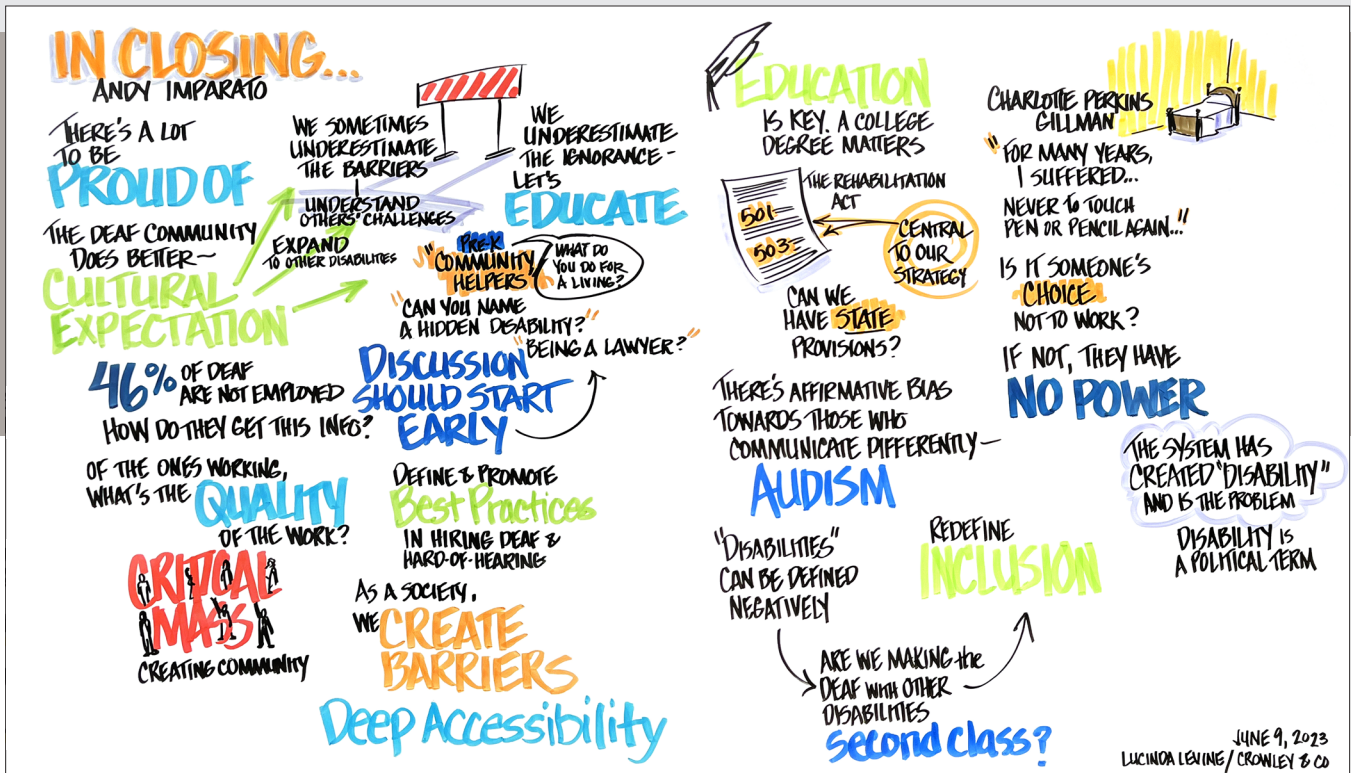
He emphasized the importance of starting early not just for deaf children, but also their hearing classmates. "Change their way of thinking about language access and thinking about access, period. Having an inclusive society should start in preschool. We should be having conversations with students in preschool about how we are going to set up this setting so that



everyone can participate fully," Imparato said. "As a society, we create barriers instead of deep accessibility."

By doing this, a core value system would develop that would eventually carry over into the workplace. Accessibility for deaf people can also transfer over to accessibility for other people, such as having one person speak at a time during meetings, not moving around the room too fast, making sure of visual access, and so forth.

Imparato added, "If we can identify and promote what we consider best practices and get a bunch of companies to commit to following our best practices, it can help to start to create more of a level playing field for deaf people and



create education." He supported the concept of building a critical mass, noting that the Disability Rights California has a \$46 million budget with 43 employees and 100 attorneys, including individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Imparato then talked about a feminist leader from Rochester, Charlotte Perkins Gillman, who wrote a short story, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, in 1892, when females who were perceived as having mental health issues were often institutionalized or put to bed, exacerbating the struggles.

... he concluded there was nothing much the matter with me, and sent me home with solemn advice to 'live as domestic a life as far as possible,' to 'have but two hours' intellectual life a day,' and 'never to touch pen, brush, or pencil again' as long as I lived. This was in 1887.

I went home and obeyed those directions for some three months, and came so near the borderline of utter mental ruin that I could see over.

Then, using the remnants of intelligence that remained, and helped by a wise friend, I cast

the noted specialist's advice to the winds and went to work again—work, the normal life of every human being; work, in which is joy and growth and service, without which one is a pauper and a parasite—ultimately recovering some measure of power.

Imparato concluded by saying the system has created "disability" and is the real problem.

”

We now spend \$500 billion a year on people with disabilities based on a 1956 definition.

Andy Imparato
Executive Director
Disability Rights California

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Report by



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