Tuesday Plenary Session

No Longer Invisible: Toward Culturally Sensitive Services for the Deaf

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Objectives:

1. Identify effective methods for the practical application of concepts related to improving the delivery of services for persons with developmental disabilities.

2. Discuss the ethical issues related to persons with developmental disabilities

3. Identify and emphasize attitudes that enhance the opportunities for persons with DD to achieve their optimal potential

4. Develop strategies to promote community inclusion in meeting the needs of persons with developmental disabilities.

Notes:
What do we mean by “Deaf”? 

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Why this project was undertaken

Methodology

BACKGROUND
- Oralism vs. sign / medical vs. cultural minority
- Oppression of Deaf
- Most Deaf people have hearing parents
- Lack of accessibility
- Deafness as disability?
Applies to all populations and all parts of the state

Essential Problems
- Services are not accessible
- When provided, service is so poor that it further traumatizes the persons

Reasons for Poor Services
- Low-incidence
- Low-income
- Difficulty advocating for themselves or family member
- Social, communication, cultural life experience issues
- Services assume mastery of English
• Deaf are a small % of the population but are over-represented in their need for MH services.
• Reasons:
  – Families don’t learn ASL
  – Oralism
  – Oppression/Discrimination
  – Victimization
  – Lack of role models
  – Deafness/DD
  – Sexual abuse

**FINDINGS**

• Staff who don’t know sign language or just know a few signs.
• No contact with the Deaf community.
• Unrealistic expectations about lip-reading.
• Misdiagnosis

**Findings – Cont.**

• Over-reliance on medication for emotional issues
• Reluctance to use interpreters
• No understanding that English is a Deaf person's second language
• Hearing people make decisions for Deaf people
Findings – Cont.

• Medical model dominates
• Psychiatrists and physicians are some of the worst offenders
• Assessment tools not designed for the Deaf

Findings – cont.

• Misunderstanding facial expressions and manual gestures
• Administrators unknowledgeable
• Don’t live near each other

Findings – cont.

• Unaware of resources
• Lack of awareness of technology
• Reminders via telephone
• Lack of coordination with MSD
• Lack of knowledge of Deaf issues/culture
• No outreach
• “There is nothing for us.”
Culturally affirmative means more than accessibility.

- Recognition of and respect for the Deaf community and ASL
- Mental health in a deaf person means accepting and being proud of being Deaf
- An understanding that communication is THE central issue
- Deaf people must be involved in creation of their own services
- Willingness to look at one’s own biases

Those that think they don’t have problems serving the Deaf have the most problems serving Deaf people.
Staff must be fluent in ASL... even better if they are Deaf

- Effective communication
- Role models
- Opportunity to improve language skills
- Less likely deafness will be pathologized
- Person feels safe
- Credibility
- Entree into the Deaf community

Where to find signing staff?

How to know if the applicant’s sign skills are good enough?
Where to live?

Deaf people want to be with or near other Deaf people.

Community

Deaf people’s community needs to include the Deaf Community.

What about inclusion?
Access

• We must insist on certified interpreters at PCP meetings, medical and psychiatric visits, even if the person says it’s ok not to get one.
• Many people recognize that people with physical disabilities need accommodations to access services but not Deaf.

Things you should know about Deafness

• There is a range of hearing loss that affects a person’s ability to process sound
• Hearing aids only amplify what the person can hear anyway
• CI replaces sound with electronic impulses that require the person to learn their meaning
• Deaf people have varying ability to produce effective speech

Things you should know about Deafness (cont.)

• Just because a Deaf person can speak does not mean she can read lips
• If a person does not learn a language by a very young age, he will generally not be able to reach his potential; the longer a person goes without language, the more likely he will have global difficulties in life.
• Some deaf people never learn to sign and do not identify with the Deaf Community
**Things you should know about Deafness (cont.)**

- Deaf people who grow up 'oral” usually learn ASL as an adult
- Deafness is much more common among people with developmental disabilities than the general population
- Deaf people are 2-3 times more likely to have experienced sexual abuse than those with other disabilities

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**Things you should know about ASL**

- Little in common with English (Word/sign order, “to be,” “idioms,” tenses, use of space and movement, adverbs, etc)
- Facial expression
- Visual learners
- Makes use of space, direction and motion

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**Things you need to know about Deaf culture**

- Defined by the use of ASL
- Total acceptance of oneself as Deaf
- Cherish manual communication
- Don’t think they have a disability
- Are proud to be Deaf
Things you need to know about Deaf culture

- Norms, humor, history, traditions, poetry, theatre, heroes and values
- Sports
- School for the Deaf
- Church
- Clubs
- Technology
- Don’t call them “hearing impaired!”

Conclusions

- Serving deaf people is very different from serving hearing people.
- Service providers must make a concerted effort to learn about Deafhood, Deaf Culture, recruit staff who are fluent in ASL, and locate nearby Deaf organizations.
- Service providers who are serving just 1 or 2 deaf individuals must be willing to work cooperatively with other organizations so that people live with or nearby others with whom they can communicate.

Oakland County’s Efforts

- Study and report
- Stakeholder meeting
- Bring Board on board
- Deaf Mental Health Advisory Board
- Deaf advocate on Board of Health Home
- Creation of Deaf Specialist positions