

# Working with an interpreter or communicator guide for deafblind people

## About this factsheet

This factsheet is part of RNID's **communication** range. It is written for someone who has regular contact with deafblind people and needs to organise communication support for them. In this factsheet, we concentrate on the communication needs of people with acquired deafblindness. For help and advice about the communication needs of people who are born deafblind, please contact Sense (see *Further information* for contact details).

Read this factsheet to find out about:

- Deafblind people and how they communicate.
- What an interpreter or communicator guide does.
- When to use an interpreter or communicator guide.
- Tips for working with interpreters or communicator guides.
- Booking interpreters or communicator guides.
- How much they charge and how to get help with paying for their services.

At the end of this factsheet we give you details of organisations you can contact for further information.

If you would like this factsheet on audio tape, in braille or in large print, fill in the *Want to know more?* form at the end of this factsheet and send it to RNID.

## **About deafblind people**

Deafblind people have a combined sight and hearing loss, which makes it difficult for them to communicate, get around and access information. The causes of deafblindness vary. For example, some people are born deafblind and some become deafblind because of an illness, accident or old age – these are people with acquired deafblindness. This means that different deafblind people have different degrees of sight and deafness, and not all deafblind people communicate in the same way. Some deafblind people may use a combination of methods to communicate. Before booking communication support, ask the deafblind person or find out how they prefer to communicate so you can book the right type of communication support.

## **How deafblind people communicate**

- Some deafblind people with a little useful sight and hearing use speech, hearing aids and lipspeakers to communicate.
- People who are used to communicating in British Sign Language (BSL) and who then lose their sight will prefer to continue communicating in BSL if they can still see some signs. Even if they can't see signs, they may prefer to communicate using hands-on signing. This is where they follow signs by holding or touching the hands of the person signing. This group of people includes those who were born deaf or became deaf in early life. For more information, see our leaflet, *Introducing British Sign Language*.
- Some deafblind people with limited or no sight or hearing communicate using the 'Block Alphabet' method. This involves tracing out the alphabet in capital letters on the palms of their hands, or other part of the body, depending on what they prefer. It is a simple but slow method for communicating.

- A quicker method of communicating is the 'Deafblind Manual Alphabet'. It is similar to the Standard Manual Alphabet used with BSL. Words are spelt out on the fingers and hands of the deafblind person. You can learn the Deafblind alphabet in half an hour. With practice, you will be able to have a conversation at a reasonable speed with a deafblind person. Contact the RNID Information Line for a copy of our *Deafblind Manual Alphabet* card.
- Very rarely, some deafblind people use Tadoma, where they place their hands on the speaker's lips or throat to feel vibrations.
- More and more, deafblind people are using technology to communicate. For example, you can easily use a computer to create a large print document, which is useful for deafblind people with partial sight. Deafblind people who read braille can use special equipment to output documents in braille. Text synthesisers can read out text for deafblind people with partial hearing.

### **What does an interpreter or communicator guide do?**

Deafblind people communicate with the help of an 'interpreter' or 'communicator guide', depending on the situation. Generally, interpreters provide communication support in formal situations and communicator guides in informal situations.

### **When to use an interpreter or communicator guide**

Interpreters provide communication support at events such as:

- Medical appointments, including a visit to a GP (family doctor).
- Business or work appointments and meetings.
- Conferences.
- Training courses.

Communicator guides provide communication support for:

- Making a shopping list and going shopping.
- Social events such as social clubs.
- Writing a letter.
- Making a telephone call at home.

The roles of an interpreter and communicator guide will sometimes overlap because there are more communicator guides than interpreters.

### **Tips for working with interpreters or communicator guides**

When you have booked communication support, it will help to get the best out of the interpreter or communicator guide if you plan ahead. If possible, you should give them information about the booking in advance so that they can familiarise themselves with the subject matter and any specialist terminology.

If you have booked an interpreter for a formal occasion, you should meet some time before the booking begins to discuss communication arrangements. For example, it is important to book a room that is big enough to comfortably accommodate everyone and possibly a guide dog as well. You also need to make sure that the room has good lighting and that there are no interruptions.

You will need to allow additional time for meetings as the communication methods used by deafblind people can make meetings longer by 50 to 70%. However, remember that the interpreter or communicator guide has a right to rest and meal breaks so you should confirm these with them.

## **Booking an interpreter or communicator guide**

You can book through an agency, communication services unit (CSU) or by contacting freelance people direct.

The Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP) produces a directory of people who provide communication support, agencies and CSUs. This directory includes information about registered interpreters who use the deafblind manual alphabet only. It does not include interpreters who use hands-on signing. To book interpreters who also use hands-on signing, contact Deafblind UK or other agencies and CSUs listed in the CACDP directory.

RNID has a number of CSUs around the country and they can also provide interpreters for deafblind people. See *Further information* for contact details of your nearest RNID CSU.

Make sure you book qualified people. The qualifications for deafblind communicators vary so ask for advice when you book.

## **Code of Practice**

All interpreters and communicator guides for deafblind people should conform to a professional Code of Practice and keep information on assignments strictly confidential.

## **How many people will you need to book?**

A deafblind person needs one-to-one support. This means that you will need to get three deafblind interpreters or three communicator guides if there are three deafblind people. In a long meeting, you may need two interpreters for one deafblind person. This will allow the interpreters and

the deafblind person to get regular breaks throughout the meeting.

### **How much do they charge?**

Recommended rates of pay vary, so it is best to check with the agency, CSU or freelance person when you book. Agencies and CSUs may add a fee for booking communication support and handling the paperwork.

### **Help with paying for an interpreter or communicator guide**

Deafblind people usually won't have to pay for communication support they need. The following tells you about the different ways there are to pay for communication support.

### **The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA)**

The DDA may require service providers such as hospitals and GP surgeries to provide communication support. If you do need to organise communication support for a deafblind person, let service providers know in plenty of time. For further information, see our factsheet, *The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) – a guide for deaf and hard of hearing customers*.

### **Help for students**

Deafblind students may be able to get help to pay for communication support or their education provider may have to provide it. For more information, see our factsheets:

- *Benefits and allowances – information for deaf and hard of hearing students aged 19 and over.*
- *Deaf and hard of hearing students in Further Education – your rights under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.*
- *Deaf and hard of hearing students in Higher Education – your rights under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.*

## **Disability Living Allowance**

A deafblind person may be able to claim Disability Living Allowance (DLA) if they need help to communicate with other people. See our factsheet, *Disability Living Allowance – information for deaf and hard of hearing people*.

## **Access to work**

The Government's Access to Work scheme may help to pay for communication support for a deafblind person at work or, if they are unemployed, for interviews. For more information, see our factsheet, *Information for deaf people in work or looking for work*.

You can contact the RNID Information Line for more information about help with paying for communication support.

## **Further information**

### **Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP)**

Contact CACDP for a list of registered interpreters who use the deafblind manual alphabet.

CACDP, Durham University Science Park, Block 4, Stockton Road, Durham DH1 3UZ.

Tel: 0191 383 1155. Textphone: 0191 383 7915. Fax: 0191 383 7914.

E-mail: [durham@cacdp.org.uk](mailto:durham@cacdp.org.uk) Website: [www.cacdp.org.uk](http://www.cacdp.org.uk)

## **Deafblind UK**

Contact Deafblind UK for a list of interpreters who use hands-on signing.

Deafblind UK, National Centre for Deafblindness,  
John and Lucille van Geest Place, Cygnet Road, Hampton,  
Peterborough PE7 8FD.

Tel: 01733 358100. Textphone: 01733 358858. Fax: 01733 358356.

E-mail: [info@deafblinduk.org.uk](mailto:info@deafblinduk.org.uk) Website: [www.deafblinduk.org.uk](http://www.deafblinduk.org.uk)

## **Sense**

Contact Sense for help and advice about the communication needs of people who are born deafblind.

Sense, 11-13 Clifton Terrace, London N4 3SR.

Tel: 020 7272 7774. Textphone: 020 7272 9648. Fax: 020 7272 6012.

E-mail: [enquiries@sense.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@sense.org.uk) Website: [www.sense.org.uk](http://www.sense.org.uk)

## **Further information from RNID**

### **RNID Communications Services Units**

RNID Communication Services Units can book interpreters for you in your area:

#### **Central**

Tel: 01296 392294. Textphone: 01296 392295. Fax: 01296 381103.

#### **Cymru**

Tel: 01792 324477. Textphone: 01792 324455. Fax: 01792 324422.

#### **London and the South East**

Tel: 020 7296 8064 or 0207 296 8066. Textphone: 020 7296 8065.

Fax: 020 7296 8083.

#### **Merseyside**

Tel: 0151 236 4497. Textphone: 0151 236 3830. Fax: 0151 236 3150.

**North East**

Tel: 0161 242 2263. Textphone: 0161 242 2371 or 01642 312 355. Fax: 0161 242 2317.

**North West**

Tel: 0161 242 2368. Textphone: 0161 242 2371. Fax: 0161 242 2317.

**Northern Ireland**

Tel: 028 9033 1320. Textphone: 028 9033 1320. Fax: 028 9032 7616.

**Scotland**

Tel: 0141 550 5760. Textphone: 0151 702 5734. Fax: 0151 702 0608.

**South West**

Tel: 01225 873590. Textphone: 0800 622401. Fax: 01225 874246.

**South Yorkshire**

Tel: 01709 372163. Textphone: 01709 372182. Fax: 01709 373643.

**West Midlands**

Tel: 01902 423717. Textphone: 01902 423716. Fax: 01902 714456.

If you want to find out more about some of the subjects covered in this factsheet, you may wish to get the leaflet, *Communication services for deaf and hard of hearing people*. We also have a card that illustrates the Deafblind Manual Alphabet.

The RNID Information Line offers a wide range of information on many aspects of deafness and hearing loss. You can contact us for further copies of this factsheet and the full range of RNID information factsheets and leaflets.

**RNID Information Line**

RNID Information Line, 19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL.

Tel: 0808 808 0123. Textphone: 0808 808 9000. Fax: 020 7296 8199.

E-mail: [informationline@rnid.org.uk](mailto:informationline@rnid.org.uk) Website: [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)

Alternatively, fill in the *Want to know more?* order form at the end of this factsheet and return it to RNID.

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## **RNID Information, May 2003**

### **Acknowledgement**

**This factsheet was produced with the help and advice of Sense.**

## Want to know more?

This factsheet is available in **audio tape**, **braille** and **large print**. We can also send you more information on many of the subjects covered in this factsheet. Just tick the boxes below, tell us what you particularly need to know about, or see our website at **[www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)**

### Please send me:

#### ***Working with an interpreter or communicator guide for deafblind people***

- audio tape  braille  large print
  
- The RNID *Publications Catalogue*.
  
- Information about RNID Typetalk and BT TextDirect.
  
- Details of RNID communication services in my area.
  
- RNID's fundraising leaflet. RNID relies heavily on donations from, individuals, companies, trusts and fundraising events. Our leaflet shows how *you* can help.
  
- Details on supporting RNID's future work with a legacy.
  
- Information on how to take part in RNID campaigns.
  
- A copy of the RNID Sound Advantage *Solutions* catalogue, giving details of equipment for deaf and hard of hearing people.
  
- Other information – please tell us what you would like to know.

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We are always keen to know what our customers think about our publications. If you have any suggestions for ways we could improve this factsheet you can use the space below. Please send your suggestions to the address overleaf.

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Please send this information to: (Please write clearly using block capitals)

**Title (Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss) First Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Surname** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**Postcode** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-mail** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone** \_\_\_\_\_ **Textphone** \_\_\_\_\_

Your contact details will be held on our database so that occasionally we can send you information on our work. Please tick this box if you do not wish your details to be kept on the database.

We will use any information you give below to monitor requests for this factsheet and help us tailor our services to your needs. You do not have to give this information, but if you do, please tick this box to confirm we may keep it on our database.

**Tick all boxes that apply**

**Is the information:**

- For you
- For a friend or family member
- A professional enquiry

**Are you?**

- At school or below school age
- A student
- Working age
- Retired

**How would you describe yourself?**

- Profoundly/severely deaf
- Hard of hearing
- Hearing
- Hearing aid user
- I have tinnitus
- I have balance problems

**If we could provide it, would you like to receive information in a different format? Please use number 1, 2 or 3 to show your preferred choice.**

- Videotape in British Sign Language (BSL) and with subtitles
- E-mail
- Face-to-face

**If we could provide it, would you like information in another language?**

- Yes. Please tell us which one.

**Please return this form to: RNID Information Line, 19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL or order from our website at [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)**