The Deaf Community:

The Forgotten Population

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What If…

New Orleans police officers force two young men to the ground to find out if they are armed. The two men try to explain they are deaf….

Deaf People :
The Forgotten Population

- Who remembers to tell deaf people something is happening?

- Who remembers that people with hearing loss may be confused and afraid?

- Who thinks of the little things that make the difference – like pads of paper to write on or batteries for hearing aids?

Deaf People :
The Forgotten Population

When the 1991 ice storm cut off power to parts of Monroe County for more than a week, Matt Searls found himself writing notes to utility crews, firefighters and police who happened to come down his road in Pittsford to find out what was going on.

Searls, who is deaf, had no electricity to watch captioned television and couldn't hear a portable radio for recovery updates.

Deaf People :
The Forgotten Population

There was no table set up for a representative and or interpreters to be on site in the medical area to assist people who needed batteries, make arrangements for those who need hearing aids or provide resource information on where to get assistive listening devices. A box of several batteries donated by a local hearing aid company was left with the medical staff but no one could find it when I inquired about it.

Deaf People :
The Forgotten Population

"I didn't know Hurricane Charley had changed direction. It was supposed to go to Tampa, but it changed direction to Punta Gorda," said Richard Schuler, 44. He and his wife, both deaf, rode out the storm in their Pine Island home before heading out into flooded streets to try and get to a shelter. "We were very scared. We couldn't understand the local TV news and we didn't see any closed captioning. We didn't know what was going on."

Deaf People :
The Forgotten Population

- People who are deaf and hard of hearing face four big hurdles:
  - Preparedness information is not accessible
  - Warnings are not visual or presented in a manner that people can access
  - Response "forgets" they can't hear
  - Recovery services are not sensitive to their needs

Myths About People with Hearing Loss

Myth:

a) popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone; especially : one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society or segment of society

b) b) an unfounded or false notion

From Merriam's Dictionary

Myths About People with Hearing Loss

- People with hearing loss can hear if they try hard enough
- Expressive and receptive communication skills are symmetrical
- Sign Language is like English
- There aren't many people who are deaf

Myths About People with Hearing Loss

"He hears me when he wants to!"

"I understand her just fine!"

"Why can't I write? They know how to read."

Statistics on People With Hearing Loss

- One in ten people have a hearing loss great enough to impact their lives: Almost 500,000 people in Alabama.
- Three out of 1,000 are Deaf: many of them use American Sign Language only
- American Sign Language is the third most commonly used language in the United States. (Only English and Spanish are encountered more often)

Statistics on People With Hearing Loss

Hearing loss is often called the "Invisible Disability" because is it not obvious to most people

A Word About Terms

- Certain terms are considered derogatory and should not be used
  - Deaf and dumb
  - Deaf – mute
  - Hearing impaired (sometimes offensive)

Vulnerable Community

- The Deaf community is vulnerable to disasters because:
  1. They will likely not get warnings in time
  2. During a disaster they will have a harder time getting information about evacuation plans and location
  3. After the disaster they have much difficulty accessing recovery services

Usual Coping Skills Inadequate

- The usual coping skills fall apart in times of disaster
  - Reliance on friends and neighbors
  - Family
  - "Make do"
- Connect deaf and hard of hearing survivors to systems that can help
  - Key: The systems have to be able to communicate effectively

It's About Communication
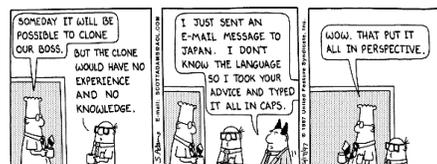
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Three Common Mistakes

- Emergency responders who are not familiar with Deaf people often:
  - Don't consider that deaf people are visually oriented rather than aurally oriented
  - Often think communication is symmetrical
  - Confuse poor English with poor language.

Three Common Mistakes

All information comes through the eyes, not the ears
"I understand you just fine so we don't have a problem…"
Fail to recognize that American Sign Language is not a manual code for English!

"But I DO Communicate, Right?"

- Some people assume communication happens but barriers exist
  - Myths about sign language and interpreters
  - Underestimating language dysfluency
  - Reliance on "Lipreading"

> The average deaf person understands only 5% of information through speechreading (Raifman and Vernon, 1996).

"All Deaf People Can Lipread, Right?

- Speechreading is more art than science!
- Only 30% of English phonemes are visible on the lips
- Many words look alike – leading to misunderstanding
- You have to have mastery of the language in order to speechreading well

"All Deaf People Can Lipread, Right?

Speechreading is extremely dependent on external factors:

–Lighting

–Stress or illness (And times of disaster are high stress!)

–Context

"A Guessing Game"

What's this?
As soon as you recognize it, put your hand up…

It's not always so obvious…
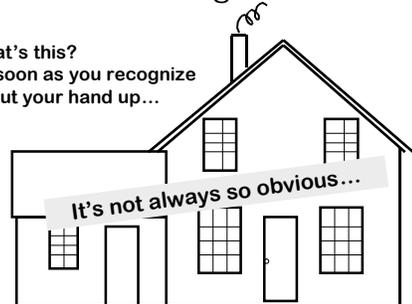
"Closure Skills" are Critical

"A Guessing Game"
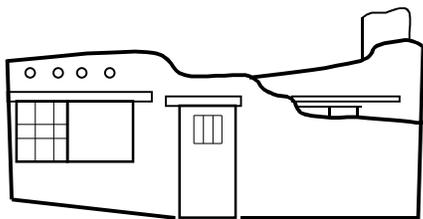
You have to know the context too!

"A Guessing Game"

You have to know the context too!

"A Guessing Game"

Relying only on speechreading for communication is a poor strategy!

You have to know the context too!

"A Guessing Game"

Distress is exacerbated by frustration encountered when communication is absent

...ng only on ...hreading for ...unication is ...or strategy!
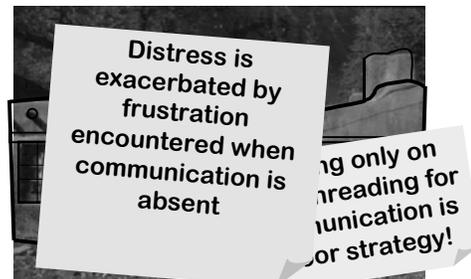
You have to know the context too!

Programs and Services Must Be Accessible

- *Under Title II of the ADA State and local governments (and the programs they fund) may not refuse to allow a person with a disability to participate in a service, program, or activity simply because the person has a disability.*

Planning on the front end is critical

Programs and Services Must Be Accessible

- *Areas in which accommodations can be made include:*
  - Modifications in policies, practices, and procedures
  - Furnish auxiliary aids and services when necessary to ensure effective communication,
  - Operate their programs so they are readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities.
  - May provide special benefits, beyond those required by the regulation, to individuals with disabilities.

One Way To Think About It

- Three Stages

Follow Up

Response

Preparation

Ask, "How will you ensure effective communication at each stage?"
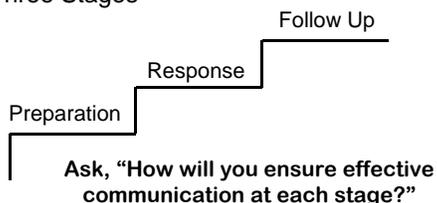
Before Disaster Strikes

- Identify community partners
  - Local Deaf civil, faith and social organizations
    - Alabama Association of the Deaf (and local chapters)
    - National Association of Black Deaf Advocates
    - Local Deaf Churches
  - Service Agencies
    - Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services
    - Alabama Department of Mental Health Office of Deaf Services

Before Disaster Strikes

- Invite them to be part of local planning efforts
- Develop ways to get warnings out
  - Has to be in forms that people can access
    - At minimum, make sure all PSAs are captioned
    - Work with local TV stations to be sure weather alerts are captioned
  - In some locations consider a specific form of special alert system
    - Text pagers are common

Before Disaster Strikes

- Pre-plan response to include communication access at critical points
  - Shelters
  - Hospitals
- Develop an emergency communication avenue

Crisis Lines:
Are You Prepared?

- Crisis lines are often the first point of contact for people in need
  - People who have hearing loss are at significant disadvantage
    - Can't hear well if at all
    - Lack of information
    - Poor literacy skills
    - May not have electricity to run adaptive telecommunications equipment!

Crisis Lines:
Are You Prepared?

- Crisis lines are often the first point of contact for people in need
  - #1 complaint from deaf people: "Hang ups"
    - Deaf Community does not trust "TTY accessible" phone lines
      - Providers are poorly trained in using TTYs anyway
    - Providers don't know how to use Relay

Crisis Lines:
Are You Prepared?

- Crisis lines are often the first point of contact for people in need
  - #1 complaint from d...
    - "...

Another Approach: Cole County, Missouri Sheriff Department's leetext@colecounty.org Program

accessible" phone

TTYs anyway

A Novel and Inexpensive Approach

People who are deaf or are hard of hearing can have trouble communicating with law enforcement when they need assistance. With that in mind, the Cole County Sheriff's Department has started a way for hearing-impaired citizens to contact the department more easily. An e-mail address, leetext@colecounty.org, will allow deaf and hard of hearing individuals to send e-mails via their cellular service. It will be monitored constantly by several computers in the sheriff's office. The address stands for the Law Enforcement Emergency Text service. Sheriff White said the service is costing almost nothing to taxpayers. His office worked with Cole County Information Services Director Ted Suess to get the program up and running.

Sheriff Greg White, Cole County (MO), set up what may be the nation's first continually monitored emergency response mode for Deaf people.

Before Disaster Strikes

- Find critical concentrations of deaf people in your jurisdiction
  - Schools with large numbers of deaf kids
    - State School for the Deaf, large mainstream programs
    - Check with universities which may have deaf students

Before Disaster Strikes

- Have a plan specifically in place to deal with large concentrations
  - Help set up a CERT team within that particular location
    - Alabama Association of the Deaf would be a good partner
  - Pre-arrange interpreters
    - Agreements in place with agency prior to disaster

During the Disaster

- Think: KISS
  - Don't expect high level communication strategies to work well
    - Picture books can be very effective – especially if you have time to prepare, i.e. hurricanes
  - Have you thought about reverse 911?
  - In areas with large Deaf people, activate a local CERT team to work with you
  - Safety first – but with sensitivity!

During the Disaster

- Shelters can be scary places when you can't communicate
  - During Katrina, arrangements were made to have group home staff work at one shelter in Mobile Many Deaf people went there, but not all
    - Funnel Deaf people to a pre-identified shelter
    - Train the shelter!
  - Remember public address systems are worthless for deaf and hard of hearing people

Making Shelters Appropriate for People Who are Deaf

- Think about:
  - Pre-positioning interpreter services
    - Can be video relay interpreting if infrastructure is there
  - Making sure there is some form of telecommunication access available
  - Little things like batteries for hearing aids go a long way…
  - Do NOT depend on public address systems!
  - Be sure ALL your media is appropriate and captioned
  - Have information about programs that can help available

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KEY THOUGHT
If hearing people can hear it
Deaf people should see it!

After the Disaster

- Direct deaf survivors to services which have communication access in place
    - These should have been identified in your planning stages
    - Make use of Deaf CERT teams and specialized programs
        - Office of Deaf Services can assist with crisis counseling
        - Other programs can be helpful

Questions?

- Handouts and documents can be downloaded from MHIT website

    http://tinyurl.com/m2dtk4

Contacting the Office of Deaf Services

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Region II
Region III
Region IV
Office of Deaf Services Regions

Important Resources

- National Association of the Deaf's Emergency Preparedness website http://www.nad.org/site/pp.asp?c=foINKQMBF&b=99539
- Emergency Preparedness and Emergency Communication Access: Lessons Learned Since 9/11 and Recommendations http://www.nad.org/atf/cf/{A2A94BC9-2744-4E84-852F-D8C3380D0B12}/DHHCANEmergencyReport.pdf
- Community Emergency Preparedness Information Network (CEPIN) Project http://www.cepintdi.org/
- http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/ep/part3a.htm
- http://www.ada.gov/emergencyprepguide.htm
- http://www.aadb.org/information/emergency_preparation/emerg_plan.html

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