



## Expanding Communication Access to the Deaf Community

How can you ensure communication access to a diverse **d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing (d/Deaf/HoH)** community? Start by becoming familiar with the various communication modes, technology options and accommodations used by this population, in addition to the different ways people identify themselves. Seek out partnerships with both State and community programs in your area that primarily serve the d/Deaf/HoH community. The more opportunities you have to interact with this diverse community, the more you will learn!

### Diversity in Identity, Communication & Education

There are **48,000,000** people in the US who are deaf or Hard of Hearing, while **3,000,000** people identify as big 'D' culturally Deaf and use American Sign Language (ASL). There are wide variations in cause and degree of hearing loss, age of onset, educational background, communication methods, and how individuals feel about their hearing loss. More than **90% of deaf children** are born to hearing parents and are not exposed to sign language until school age, missing a vital window of time for language acquisition. Alternatively, more than **90% of deaf parents** have hearing children, which can lead to communication challenges in families.

While special education promotes integration of children with and without disabilities as a least restrictive environment (LRE), Deaf cultural perspective holds that a language rich environment is best achieved through ASL. Therefore, a **LRE for deaf children involves access to information through sign language and interaction with peers**. Rather than an education offered solely through English or ASL, many in the Deaf community believe that schools can capitalize on a bilingual approach through **both ASL and written English**.

#### *"It is Good and Right to Be Deaf"*

Although some people may view deafness as a disability, the culturally Deaf community views itself as a **language minority** who can do everything except hear. Culturally Deaf people identify as **big "D" Deaf**. At the heart of Deaf culture is ASL, which has its own vocabulary, grammar and rules for syntax, as well as pragmatics that involve signs, facial expressions and body postures. ASL is the fourth most used language in the US. **Deaf culture** maintains a history of overcoming oppression, longstanding ASL storytelling transmitted across generations, and many other shared norms such as relying on touch and lights on for vision.