

# Perspectives: Idaho Audiology and the Deaf Community

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## Background

Roughly 466 million people across the world have a hearing loss requiring some form of aid (WHO, 2019). Some of these people who are deaf and hard of hearing have formed a culture and community known as the Deaf Community.

The relationship between audiology and the Deaf Community has not been portrayed as good due to the conflicting perspectives on hearing loss and its treatments. The Deaf Community stands on the foundation that their deafness is something about which to be proud, something that makes them who they are – they don't need to be "fixed" (Clason, 2017; Kaplan, 1996). Audiology focuses on diagnosing and appropriately treating hearing loss, by any means available.

The long history between the Deaf Community and audiology has not been the best. However, this shared history can explain the current state of interactions between these two groups.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study is to compare the perspectives that Idaho audiologists and the Idaho Deaf community have of each other, gather information on prior interactions, and form an understanding of these groups' current relationship.

Based on this information, possible solutions to improve interactions, if necessary, will be provided.

## Methods

Two surveys were created with the help of professionals in each field.

Deaf Community survey: 19 questions, disseminated via the North Idaho Deaf Club and the Pocatello Deaf Community Facebook pages along with assistance from the Idaho Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CDHH); total of 47 surveys were submitted but 9 were removed due to incompleteness.

Audiology survey: 22 questions, disseminated to Idaho audiologists via email address; total of 42 audiologists submitted a survey but 3 were removed due to incompleteness.

## Acknowledgements

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## Building bridges between audiology and the Deaf Community by analyzing the current interactions.



This QR Code allows access to a Google Doc containing graphs, survey analysis, and more references for any person who wishes to learn more.

## Results

Overall, the surveys combined showed many interesting differences between the Deaf Community and audiologists in Idaho. The most concerning was that the Deaf Community has a definite distrust of audiologists in general. While audiologists are taught about the Deaf Community and potentially American Sign Language (ASL), they rarely feel confident in putting that knowledge into their practice, as they lose that information over time and with other studies. Their shared history has unfortunately left deep wounds but both sides seem willing to learn. Both surveys show that both groups must find ways to reach out and interact better, putting knowledge into practice and choosing a better relationship.

## Discussion & Future Directions

History has not been kind on the relationship between the Deaf Community and audiology in general. What trust exists is fragile and strained. However, that does not mean it is a lost cause. Both sides can learn and grow. Both sides can work together to improve the relationship.

For audiologists, the Deaf Community has claimed feeling oppressed and unheard. Many have had limited success with hearing technology. Perhaps sharing resources, such as ASL and Deaf mentors can be utilized. Making patients and their families aware of resources offered by the Idaho Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing or the Idaho School for the Deaf and Blind might help provide extra supports. Perhaps when discussing technology, audiologists could approach the conversation a different way, so the conversation no longer feels like the audiologist is pushing for technology as the only way but rather one option.

Understanding Deaf values and needs is another avenue for improvement. State and national organizations such as ASHA and AAA require continuing education credits (CEUs) to maintain licensure. Perhaps CEUs regarding the Deaf Community, its culture, and available resources can be offered. Audiologists can reach out and join in Deaf Community events, often found on their social media pages. Audiologists can advocate on behalf of the Deaf Community on issues like insurance coverage, price of technology, educational challenges, and civil rights based equal access to services as envisioned by the ADA.

However, research in this area is limited. The suggestions provided above are a few ideas gleaned from the open-ended survey responses on both sides. Further research into the interactions and how to improve them is a must if this relationship is to improve.

Ideas gleaned from the survey for the Deaf Community were to create a weekly email newsletter or a periodic flyer highlighting services that are readily accessible to Deaf individuals. Dissemination of cultural and community events may include audiologists providing encouragement to participate and engage with the Deaf Community. Particular emphasis can be offered for large or significant events encouraging hearing individuals, including audiologists, to attend and participate alongside Deaf members of the community. Through direct interaction and communication, both groups can move beyond their collective prior histories and improve relationships through engagement and understanding.

## References and Other Information

Clason, D. (2017) The importance of Deaf culture. *Healthy Hearing*. <https://www.healthyhearing.com/report/52285-The-importance-of-deafculture>  
Kaplan, H. (1996) The nature of Deaf culture: Implications for speech and hearing professionals. *Journal of the Academy of Rehabilitative Audiology*. XXIX, 71-84.