

Deaf-Blind Interpreting: Many Paths on the Road

By The National Task Force on Deaf-Blind Interpreting

There are many paths on the road toward becoming an interpreter skilled in working with people who are deaf-blind. While many interpreting programs around the country offer some amount of education in the area of deaf-blind interpreting, the amount of education ranges significantly from a single class session, to a course, to a program concentration. There are, however, various resources throughout the country available to assist one on their professional journey. This includes numerous volunteer opportunities that allow interpreters to become comfortable in the community, develop relationships that build trust, and learn about interpreting with deaf-blind people. The following list was compiled by members of the NTFDBI in the hope of supporting people who wish to expand their skills in order to provide services to a diverse population of community members. This list presents highlights of some of the opportunities available. The task force is seeking to gather and compile lists of all available training, volunteer and educational resources and opportunities. If there are resources you know of that we can add to these lists, please let us know at the address below.

Workshops/Trainings/Coursework

There are several cities around the country that have sizable and active deaf-blind populations and training opportunities. There are also workshops, varying in length, offered throughout the country. The courses and programs listed here are some of the more widely known programs but one is encouraged to contact other interpreting programs and service centers in their area for current offerings.

MA – Boston: The Boston area, which is home to a sizable and active deaf-blind population, has a program that funds training for Support Service Providers (SSPs) that was established by an act of the Massachusetts Legislature in 2001. The entity charged with this responsibility is the Deaf-Blind Community Access Network (DBCAN). Elaine Ducharme, director, can be contacted at educharme@deafinonline.org. Their website is www.deafinonline.org/services/dbcan.html.

The Northeastern University Interpreter Training Program includes a course about communicating and interpreting with deaf-blind people, taught by a Deaf-Blind person. For more information, please contact Northeastern University ASL Programs - asl@neu.edu. Their website is <http://www.asl.neu.edu>.

The Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) is currently developing a new workshop series. Scheduled to begin some time in the fall of 2008, this program is to train interpreters to work with deaf-blind individuals. Contact Janice Cagan-Teuber for more information - janice.cagan-teuber@state.ma.us.

MI – Brooklyn: Has an annual 'Deaf-Blind Workshop' which is a four-day experiential training program for interpreters and deaf-blind individuals. A limited number of out-of-state interpreters are accepted. Contact Jill Gaus for more information - jagaus@sbcglobal.net.

NJ – Union County College & Camden County College: New Jersey is one of the first states to require all educational interpreters to take a 3-credit course on deaf-blind interpreting strategies. Even though these courses are offered in NJ, a hybrid course (partially in person and partially online learning) is available to all interpreters. For more information: <http://www.camdencc.edu/eipdc/>.

NY – New York: The Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) hosts national training seminars on deaf-blind interpreting strategies. This training is held at the Helen Keller National Center in New York. This seminar will next be offered in July 2008. Contact Doris Plansker at <http://hknc.org/FieldServicesNTT.htm> for more information.

HKNC Mentorship Program – HKNC offers internships within their interpreting department. For more information: <http://www.hknc.org/images/DescriptionofServices2006May25.pdf>

WA – Seattle: Seattle has the most notable deaf-blind community in the country. It also possesses a very large number of highly skilled deaf-blind interpreters and opportunities to learn and work with the deaf-blind population. The Seattle Lighthouse for the Blind, the largest employer of deaf-blind people in the USA, hosts a Wednesday night Community Class where new interpreters can observe and/or interpret to the extent of their abilities alongside experienced interpreters. Contact Karen Park for more information - kpark@seattlelh.org. There are also mentorship opportunities at the Lighthouse. Contact Joey Graff for more information – jgraff@seattlelh.org.

Curricula/Training Manuals/Published Resources

Guidelines: Practical Tips for Working and Socializing with Deaf-Blind People by Theresa Smith. Sign Media, Inc. www.signmedia.com/

Deaf-Blind Communication and Community – videotapes, including interviews with members of the deaf-blind community. Sign Media, Inc. www.signmedia.com/

Interpreting Strategies for Deaf-Blind Students by Susanne Morgan Morrow. Training manual & DVD. The Ohio Center for Deaf-Blind Education. www.sscsco.org/ocdbe/

Interpreting with Deaf-Blind People Workbook by the Washington State Deaf-Blind Citizens. www.wsdabc.org/interp_workbook/interp_workbook.htm.

The AADB website has a resource list with a number of books, articles and videos that may be of interest. http://aadb.org/information/interpreting/interpreting_bio.html

The Deaf-Blind American, published by AADB – April-June 2007 issue focused on deaf-blind interpreting. Contact AADB if you would like to receive a copy of this magazine. Becoming a member will allow you receive this publication, free of charge, which is sent to members semi-annually.

Two of the articles from this magazine are available via links from their website –

Tips for Interpreters Working with Deaf-Blind Consumers-
http://aadb.org/information/interpreting/tip_for_interpreters.html, and

Tips for Deaf-Blind Consumers Working with Interpreters-
http://aadb.org/information/interpreting/interpreting_tips_for_deafblind.html

DB-LINK – National Clearinghouse on Deaf-Blindness - <http://www.dblink.org/>

The Interpreter's Friend website includes numerous resources for working with deaf-blind people. <http://www.theinterpretersfriend.com/db/rsorcs.html>

Getting Involved

Volunteer - Get involved with your local deaf-blind community. The most effective way to get involved and learn the ropes may be, as has been the case with the majority of interpreters working with deaf-blind people today, to volunteer. Most major metropolitan areas have a deaf-blind organization, events or a gathering center. Attending events sponsored by these organizations can help you meet people, observe, and talk with experienced interpreters.

Become a Support Service Provider - If you do not yet have the skills to provide interpreting services to deaf-blind individuals you may want to consider starting as a Support Service Provider (SSP). Doing so will allow you experiences and opportunities to get to know people and learn individual preferences, generally in more day-to-day settings (shopping, going to appointments and activities, etc.)

Find a mentor - If at all possible, find a mentor in your area who has expertise in deaf-blind interpreting. A mentor can guide you toward the skills needed to work effectively with deaf-blind people and provide entry into the local deaf-blind community.

Service Organizations

Below is a listing of some of the major deaf-blind-related organizations that provide information, services and activities to deaf-blind communities. There may be additional state and local organizations. If you are looking for deaf-blind organizations in your area, contact the American Association of the Deaf-Blind for more information.

American Association of the Deaf-Blind (AADB), National – www.aadb.org AADB is a national consumer organization of, by and for deaf-blind individuals and their supporters that provides information, advocacy and partnerships to improve the lives of deaf-blind people, as well as sponsoring national conferences attended by hundreds of deaf-blind people.

Deaf-Blind Contact Center (DBCC), Boston, MA - DBCC_MA@yahoo.com DBCC is a self-advocacy, self-support and social organization of, by and for deaf-blind individuals in the Boston area.

Deaf-Blind Service Center (DBSC), Seattle, WA - www.seattledbcs.org/index.html Located in Seattle, DBSC provides training for and coordinates a Support Service Provider (SSP) program as well as other programs that serve deaf-blind individuals.

Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) National/New York – www.hknc.org HKNC is a national training center for youths and adults who are deaf-blind.

National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB) National - www.nationaldb.org/ NCDB is a federally funded national technical assistance and dissemination center for children and youth who are deaf-blind. This website provides you with the link to the national clearinghouse on deaf-blindness.

Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf – Deaf-Blind Member Section (RID DBMS) National – www.rid.org & RIDDBMS@hotmail.com This member section is a self-sustaining group of interpreters interested in the education and provision of services to deaf-blind individuals. If you are a member of RID you can become a member at no additional charge.

Special Events

AADB conferences are usually held biennially and are a wonderful way to meet and work with a variety of people – deaf-blind people, other interpreters and Support Service Providers. You can contact the AADB Office at aadb-info@aadb.org, 301-495-4402 TTY/VP, or 301-495-4403 Voice for more information on their next conference.

An annual Deaf-Blind Retreat held at Seabeck (outside of Seattle) is a unique immersion experience with numerous opportunities for exposure and developing ones skills. For more information, contact dbretreat@seattlelh.org.

Other deaf-blind camps are held in various locations around the country. Contact the local deaf-blind organization in your area for more information or check this website: http://www.hknc.org/LINKS_camps.htm

Employment Opportunities

Anywhere there are deaf-blind people living and participating in the community, there will be a need for qualified interpreters. The amount and type of interpreting will depend on the size of the community and the corresponding number of deaf-blind people. Larger cities will have more opportunities and a broader range of settings where interpreters are used. It may be helpful to contact the interpreting agencies in the places you would like to live and ask about the need for deaf-blind interpreters there and the settings for which requests are most commonly made.

The members of the National Task Force on Deaf-Blind Interpreting hope this information proves useful to interpreters entering the field or wanting to enhance their skills in interpreting with deaf-blind people. For more information or if you have any comments or information/resources to add, please contact us at NTFDBI@gmail.com.

