



ALDA NOTE #4 **LOCATING LATE-DEAFENED ADULTS**

Introduction. One of the promises that an ALDA Chapter or Group makes is to “maintain an outreach program which, at minimum, shall include ongoing efforts to identify and recruit new members.” Locating late-deafened adults will always be a high priority for ALDA. Both the individuals you locate and your group will benefit when new connections are made. The new person will join a supportive community, and your group will feel the revitalizing effects of the new member’s energy and enthusiasm.

Making yourself and your ALDA Chapter or Group known in your community will probably take a bit of work on your part and might not produce immediate results. It may help to think of this type of outreach as *sowing seeds*. Your work will yield results, but it may take a while to see them.

Where Do You Find Late-Deafened Adults? Late-deafened adults are everywhere. They can be found in major metropolitan areas, medium sized cities, small towns, and on the farm. They may be doctors, plumbers, lawyers, electricians, teachers, carpenters, computer programmers, truck drivers, artists, and so on. In fact, absolutely anyone in any kind of a job, trade, business, or profession can develop a hearing loss, and so can persons who are not employed outside the home, such as students, homemakers, or retired persons. The population of persons with a hearing loss includes both men and women, as well as people of all races, religions, nationalities, and ethnic origins. The simple truth is that almost anyone anywhere can become a late-deafened adult.

But, as has so often been said, deafness is an “invisible disability.” You normally can’t tell just by looking that a person is deaf or hard of hearing. And unfortunately, people with hearing loss can’t be found listed under a special category in such common reference materials as either your telephone book or your city directory. While they may be in the telephone book somewhere, they are not identified as having a hearing loss, so you’ve got to look elsewhere.

Listed below are various types of resources that may potentially help you locate late-deafened adults. Because of either ethical principles or laws concerning confidentiality, most professional service providers will not actually give you the names of people with hearing loss. However, you can often leave your name, address, and phone number, and ask

that they be passed on to any late-deafened adults who might be interested in ALDA, or ask that you be allowed to display an ALDA flyer or poster in the service provider’s office.

Medically Related Resources. Many physicians or other medical service providers may have patients who have either already become or are in the process of becoming late-deafened adults. You can get the information necessary to contact such medical service providers from the yellow pages of your telephone book or the state directories of relevant professional associations. Medical service providers who may have information about people with hearing loss would include:

1. **Otolaryngologists, Otologists, and Ear, Nose and Throat doctors (ENT’s)**
2. **Audiologists, Speech Pathologists, and Speech Therapists**
3. **Neurosurgeons and Neurotologists**
4. **Hearing Aid Distributors**
5. **Hospitals and Medical Clinics**

Educational and Social Service Resources. Many people with hearing loss will contact educational institutions or social service agencies while seeking rehabilitation information or services. Again, you can easily find the information needed to contact those educational institutions and social service agencies by looking in your telephone book.

1. Most state governments have a **Commission, Council, Division, or Department** that provides services to people who are deaf or hard of hearing. They may be able to provide some useful information to you.
2. Every state provides **Vocational Rehabilitation Services**, and there are some private rehabilitation service agencies in larger cities. Many public or private rehabilitation agencies have someone working specifically with the deaf or hard of hearing population.
3. In every state there is at least one **Center for Independent Living (CIL)** that provides community based services for persons with disabilities. In some places the name may be slightly different, but such centers often have a coordinator of deaf services.

4. **Social Security.** Some late-deafened adults seek Social Security disability benefits, and your local Social Security office may be able to help you contact those people.
5. **High Schools, Junior Colleges, Colleges, Universities, Vocational Educational Programs.** Special education administrators in high schools, colleges, and universities often have information about persons with hearing loss attending their institutions. In addition, some colleges and universities offer classes in deaf studies or sign language, and some people with hearing loss may take such courses.
6. **Mental Health Clinics.** Becoming deaf as an adult can be severely traumatic, and some late-deafened adults may seek psychological help. Some mental health clinics have counselors who work with persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.
7. **Senior Citizen Centers or Agencies on Aging.** A large number of older citizens experience hearing loss, and Senior Citizen Centers may be a useful resource..

Organizational Resources. Local resources vary tremendously. A reasonable starting point would be to browse through local listings in the *National Directory and Resource Guide*, a TTY telephone directory put out by TDI, Inc. to learn what deafness-related agencies, organizations, and associations have already established a presence in your area.

1. **The Association of Late-Deafened Adults, Inc. (ALDA)** may have a local ALDA Group or Chapter in your area. If not, then you should contact the national organization, as it may be able to provide your name to individual ALDA members in your area.
2. Most states will have both a state organization as well as local chapters of the **National Association of the Deaf (NAD)** and the **Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA)**. NAD and HLAA are the two largest organizations of persons who are either deaf or hard of hearing, and some late-deafened adults will certainly be among their members.
3. **Interpreter Organizations**, most notably the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). Interpreters often have indirect knowledge of late-deafened adults on the basis of their professional contacts with persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.
4. **Church Organizations.** Often local clergy have had contact with or provided services for people with hearing loss. It may be useful to contact your local council of churches.

5. **Support groups**, such as local groups of the Neurofibromatosis Network (NF) or the Acoustic Neuroma Association (ANA), may be active in your community. Some medical or social service agencies will be aware of them. If not, you can contact the national NF or ANA organization for assistance.

Advertising Resources. Contact local organizations and have your name added to their mailing lists, and remember that you can often place a free advertisement in their newsletters. You can offer to go to their meetings and give a presentation explaining what ALDA is all about.

1. **Local newspapers and community bulletin boards.** You can place notices in local publications or on bulletin boards of your local churches, clinics, hospitals, libraries, and colleges. Try to get human interest stories concerning people with hearing loss published in your local newspaper and shown on your local TV station.
2. **Conferences.** Distribute informational pamphlets at medical and professional conferences that are related to disabilities.
3. **Internet resources such as Facebook, mailing lists, and bulletin boards.** In this computer age, there are numerous electronic resources around the country and world devoted to the interests and needs of people who are deaf and hard of hearing. Take advantage of opportunities they offer to announce your search for late-deafened adults.

Making the approach. An effective outreach approach usually involves presenting the agency or individual with informational material (a letter describing your ALDA group, an ALDA brochure, perhaps photocopies of articles about ALDA or late-deafness) and a way for people with hearing loss to contact you. If appropriate, suggest making an informational presentation about late-deafness and ALDA to the target group.

Effective Follow-Up. The keys here are *repetition* and *reinforcement*. Contact your targets a few weeks after your initial approach and ask if they have any questions you can answer. Keep them posted regularly on the events you are hosting, and any workshops you are developing or presenting. Check back with them every couple of months and ask if they need additional brochures or other materials for distribution.

People – A Most Valuable Resource. Remember that people and “word of mouth” can be your most valuable resource at times. It is estimated that approximately one out of every ten persons in the United States is deaf or hard of hearing, so almost everyone knows someone who is deaf or has a hearing loss. Don’t be bashful about simply asking “Do you know anyone with a hearing loss?”