



*ALDAcon 2007—Rochester, New York*

**HARD OF HEARING/LATE-DEAFENED SERVICE PROVIDERS:  
ASK A LATE-DEAFENED PROFESSIONAL  
PRESENTER: CHRISTINE SEYMOUR**

**CHRISTINE SEYMOUR:** My name is Christine Seymour and in my role I'm moderator of the ALDA Late-Deafened Professional's Panel. I'm a communication advocate at the Hearing Speech and Deafness Center in Tacoma, WA and have been in advocacy for hard of hearing and late-deafened people for the past five years.

After losing my job in the hearing world I was invited by my peer and mentor, Edna Shipley-Conner, one of our stars of ALDA, to start a career in advocacy for late-deafened people in the San Francisco Bay area. I worked down there for five years, leaving my home in Washington and last year Hearing Speech and Deafness Center opened a new service center in Tacoma, WA and I was able to return home with my new career.

Right now I am the first person in the State of Washington ever hired under the Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing with hard of hearing and late-deafened experience. The first person who is not culturally deaf and that's what spurred having this panel today. There are very few service agencies out there that have peers who are hard of hearing or late-deafened to provide services to us. Most of the agencies are still having only services for the Deaf. We are hoping to see that expand.

So that's why I have invited a panel today of people who are hard of hearing and late-deafened that provide services to people like us, so that you will have a chance to ask questions and get some answers for yourself. What we will do today is have a very brief introduction of our panel members and they can tell us briefly a little bit about their hearing loss experience, what their jobs are, what kind of services they provide and then give you a chance to ask some questions that you would like to have answered. So I will start out right here very briefly and ask each person to give a brief hearing loss background and what service you provide in your job. We will start here.

**AMBER WILHELM:** I was going to sign and talk. Hello. My name is Amber Wilhelm. I work for a deaf advocacy service and created my own program called the Hearing Loss Advocacy Network.

I lost my hearing around 11 years ago on an airplane. So for the first year I didn't really do much about it and then I heard about Gallaudet University and transferred to Gallaudet and became involved in the

Deaf Community. So through this journey I arrived in Vermont and have set up a program that focuses on hard of hearing and late-deafened adults.

I do four different kinds of advocacy: Individual, systems, legal and technical advocacy. I also train mental health workers in Vermont about deaf, hard of hearing and late-deafened communication. I train them on what to do if they encounter hard of hearing or late-deafened people. And I help people going through divorce, child custody, domestic violence, sexual assaults, discrimination and I do a lot with the courts.

ESTHER KELLY: My name is Esther Kelly and my title is Hearing Loss Resource specialist for the Office of Deaf and Hard Hearing. I work for the Texas Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing. My office is housed in a Deaf Action Center in Dallas, Texas but the State of Texas gives me grant money to travel around the state giving all day workshops to audiologists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists and different professionals. I give one-day workshops and they receive CEUs, continuing education units, for the workshops on psychological, hearing loss and technology. This is what I have done for the last five years in 11 cities in Texas.

Then I do local presentations for the Department of Rehabilitation Counselors—as well as other places where I am needed. I train the Department of Rehabilitation Counselors because Texas is focusing now on specialty counselors. Not just deaf and hard of hearing counselors. Four times a year I hold all day training for those counselors on technology and how they can help people. Most of the money is provided to me to help vocational rehabilitation issues and things like that.

I also meet one-on-one in my technology center with hard of hearing and late-deafened people. We just listen to what their goals are, what they're trying to do and find ways to help them, and resources. Texas has a law that's unique to the whole United States, and that law says that anyone with more than a 55 db hearing loss in the better ear can go to any state or community college free for the rest of their life, and that's an awesome thing that is used for Bachelors, Masters, Doctorate and they don't stop you. You can go to college free in Texas.

So, you can move to Texas for four years, get your degree; no money We also have 6 DVDs on late-deafened and hard of hearing topics, one on technology, one on psychological and these are going in every library in Texas. In addition, all of the vocational rehabilitation counselors give them out to their clients

BONNIE O'LEARY: Okay. I will move this up. My name is Bonnie O'Leary and I work for Cheryl Heppner at the Northern Virginia Resource Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons in Fairfax, Virginia. My hearing loss story is very ordinary, nothing exceptional. I began to lose my hearing when I was in my 40s. It was a nuisance to begin with and then in about 1994 I started wearing hearing aids. I was self employed at the time and owned a recording studio. I really think a lot of what I was doing for a living was contributing to the problem in a big way, and eventually I had to sell my business in 2000.

At that point Cheryl hired me to come and work for her. The work that I do is fairly straightforward. I started out with seniors because I was instructed by Cheryl to find people with hearing loss and help them. In Arlington County in the City of Alexandria, we started there because hearing loss is a big

problem in the senior population. I give presentations to hard of hearing people. I have developed a coping series by presenting in a lot of different retirement communities and senior centers and assisted living facilities.

Part one is about the ear, how we lose our hearing. Part two is dedicated to hearing aids. Part three is dedicated to assistive listening devices. Part four is about living with hearing loss. We also talk about communication strategies and the emotional impact.

My other audience is hearing people because caregivers and supervisors and managers really need to know about the problems that are involved in communicating with people who have hearing loss. So I do a lot of work with them in training. A colleague of mine developed workshops that we give in the community called *Miscommunication or Missed Communication* where we essentially role play for an hour-and-a-half in different situations to show people the good strategies they need to use to communicate.

LOIS MARONEY: Good morning. My name is Lois Maroney and my hearing loss started when I was about 30 years old and coincided with an injury. Before I became deaf I was a Russian and French language teacher in New York. Then after struggling with accepting my deafness I decided to go back and get a degree in rehabilitation counseling. Then I went on and I became a licensed mental health counselor. I wanted to help other people cope with their deafness. In addition to using my counseling skills I continued to use my teaching skills because I think that in every teacher is a counselor and in every counselor there is a teacher. So I help late-deafened people learn sign language and communication strategies.

I teach classes like this and I also work with them on mental health issues. A lot of people have depressive disorders, anxiety disorders. I work with couples. I work with individuals. I also work with children. I thought I would just be focused on the late-deafened and hard of hearing people but as there were no counselors for the culturally born deaf they would come to see me. A lot of them have post traumatic stress disorders and I started helping them with that and they found out about me and I started doing domestic violence, parents in classes, and recently I did parenting classes through videophone for people that live in other parts of Florida because there are so few people that are licensed mental health counselors that can help the deaf.

I also teach fun things like I go into nursery schools and I will tell you, out of all the things I do, that's the scariest, when I have 20 two year olds who want to learn sign and then in the next class is 20 three year olds. They will let you know when you are boring real fast. But I have lots of diversity in my work and that keeps me happy.

I don't know if I said I teach communication strategy. I want to share that I am a VR vendor. So when the late-deafened and hard of hearing person goes to VR and asks for help, then they can refer them to me and I will teach them to sign or I will help them with their mental health issues. The agency I work for is Deaf and Hearing Connection.

Years and years ago when I was coming out of my depression I went to the director and said what are you doing to help late-deafened people and she said nothing but will you tell us what they need and show us. That's what I did. I got no money for it at all but for three or four years I started programs

there and now I am very happy to say we offer case management. We just became a VR vendor for job placement helping the deaf, hard of hearing and late-deafened find jobs. We teach the culturally deaf work readiness skills and often they need that.

We have a telephone distribution center and teach them how to use the different telephones. We also have hearing aid sales. We are a not-for-profit agency and offer workshops. As soon as I go home I'm starting one with "Living with Hearing Loss" and then also I go to other deaf service centers during the week and help those deaf service centers. I travel a bit and help them set up the programs.

The last thing I want to mention is that advocacy is so important in the community. I can help a late-deafened person and in that counseling session say you will be just fine and life will be wonderful for you but what happens when they go out of my counseling office? Life is not wonderful for them. I do a lot of advocacy work through the agencies I work with. And do things like captioning in theatres and I advocated for that and am on several boards. I went off the ADA Board and the government appointment to try to make the State of Florida accessible. Right now I am in the City of St. Pete and doing things like work-studies and giving training.

HEIDI ADAMS: Good morning. I'm Heidi Adams and I'm a community outreach specialist for the Center of Sight and Hearing in Illinois. I am a late-deafened adult and I had a late onset hearing loss. One of the ironies of my life is that I have Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Communicative Disorders.

The center is a community based rehabilitation program and we have had very close connections with the Deaf Community for many years. We also have a low vision clinic. Last year we opened our hearing clinic with an audiologist one and a half days a week. Beginning, October 1, 2007, he will be there four days a week.

We did some outreach and didn't have a large stream of hard of hearing people coming through our doors until they began to come through the clinic. So we have developed programs around that and I did some outreach prior to that in our local community college. We teach classes there. Some of those classes will be moving into the Center. I do some. The audiologist does some. We do things together. So that part of our center keeps growing. The major part of my salary is paid by a grant called PEP Net and a consortium made up of four regions and we are an outreach site in PEP Net Midwest. We are the only outreach site nationally that is not set in an academic setting, a two or four year college. We are the only ones that are a community based setting. And PEP Net works with institutions to help make them accessible for people with hearing loss. We do that through training, technical assistance and also create products that people can use, and I will be glad to talk to you about some of these products that we have on line.

I don't know what other details I can add at this point except that we also have something we call Simple Solutions, which is our demonstration and sales center for assistive technology. There is a lot of interest in that.

CHRISTINE SEYMOUR: Panelists: I want you to answer the next question in two sentences to encourage questions from the audience. I would like to know the most common challenge an individual client brings to you in your work and what is the one key to moving forward with hearing loss that you

have to offer clients? As an example, in my own work with individual clients I find the most common challenge recently in my work is people in the work force are coming to me with the fear of losing their jobs. The one key that I found in my personal life that I had to offer people is that I had to learn to allow myself to be a hard of hearing person before I could move forward with living with hearing loss successfully. I would like each of you to answer the two questions.

AMBER WILHELM: A common challenge is isolation. Vermont is very rural. A lot of my clients want to learn sign language but have no one to practice with.

Also I work with a lot of domestic violence victims. Oftentimes the abuser will take advantage of the person's hearing loss. The victim does not know what services are out there. So it creates more isolation for them because they don't know where to go.

Moving forward with hearing loss? I would say to be honest and don't apologize for your hearing loss. If you are the kind of person that needs to blame something, blaming is not a reason. No reason to apologize for a hearing loss.

ESTHER KELLY: I work with people of all ages in all situations in regard to hearing loss, and they come to me not wanting to lose the life they knew. And so that's the biggest challenge is that they have to realize realistically that there has to be some changes because the life you knew has some changes in communication.

So my challenge is figuring out how to encourage them realistically. I find, since they either want to continue in the work they're doing or find out what they can do now, that there is a need to find resources for them to continue to be gainfully employed. I am for technology and a huge believer in finding out the latest technology there is and using that, if that's possible.

BONNIE O'LEARY: The most common challenge I think is, because I'm dealing probably 75 percent with seniors, is that they can no longer communicate well. A lot of times with spouses, married 40, 60 years and how do I communicate now? It is shattering because the relationships are very, very challenged. I see a lot of that. Also, among the children, baby boomers, or my age, I can't talk to mom or dad any more. The relationships are changing. That's the common challenge I see.

LOIS MARONEY: The challenge that a lot of my clients face is that, and this is in the counseling section, is that they're dealing with hearing loss from a child ego state. It really hurts and hearing loss is another loss they have in life. Instead of being in the adult ego state and using problem solving, they can't seem to get out of that hurt little child. Thinking about all of that unfinished business and all the wounds magnifies the problem.

The key to moving forward is to try to get them out of that hurt child and move them into the adult ego state and teach them the skills that will help them to deal with their hearing loss, to get them to identify their feelings, to know what their thoughts are and then to change beliefs that are sabotaging their efforts to deal with their system.

HEIDI ADAMS: Unlike other people, we see a large number of seniors. We also see a huge amount of dual sensory loss, both vision and hearing. The question that I get most from people is when do you

know to get a hearing aid? I think the question is, how do I get started and what is the next step? Also there are a variety of issues like assistive technology, dealing with family, getting a hearing aid and being able to afford it. As a person who has personal experience with hearing loss, and my loss was hereditary and I grew up with a mother with hearing loss as well, I get pulled out of my office a lot of times for people that come to the reception desk for people looking for solutions, when they have a specific question.

CHRISTINE SEYMOUR: Now I would like to invite anybody in the audience, everybody in the audience to ask a question of any of our panelists.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Do you have to have a degree to do what you do? I don't have a degree in social work but I am interested in possibly working with hard of hearing people in the future.

ESTHER KELLY: Probably most of them here have a degree. I do not have a degree in what I do. I have a life degree what I do from experiences myself. I do have such experiences going to California for a month, and now I am an adjunct professor at a local college without a degree myself.

BONNIE O'LEARY: I do not have a degree, I have some college and I majored in English and have an Associates Degree. I am 61 and I have lived my life and I think life experiences account for a lot especially when you have lost your hearing. I did finish a Gallaudet course and I completed that in June. If you are really involved with people with hearing loss, you are gaining experience and if you are an intelligent person and love people and care, they are starting points. I do not have a degree and doing what I'm doing.

LOIS MARONEY: I don't think a degree would be needed to do case management services and also to teach sign language. If you would like to start working with a population maybe you could volunteer your services and that agency would get to see what your qualifications are, are your life experiences, and they might hire you. Case management, they teach sign and communication strategies in teaching people how to tell others what they need to communicate better. You have all of those skills because you have life experiences.

HEIDI ADAMS: I would like to comment on that. I think the peer experience is invaluable and the centers for independent living have made a fine art of that. I think, however, it is very, very important when working with your peers to know and recognize when a professional service is needed, when professional skills are needed and not get in over your head.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm curious. Is it easy to find -- people who are culturally deaf or look for them? I struggle with finding late-deafened people because sometimes a lot of them struggle with identity. They identify because they can't hear and were very cool people in the community and all that. What is your advice on identity? I'm still looking for people who are late-deafened.

HEIDI ADAMS: Hard to find them and hard to find hard of hearing people, believe it or not. I almost listed that as a challenge. One of the things that help pull hard of hearing people in is that we took our classes out of our own center initially. We actually went and talked to classes at the Center for Learning and Retirement and there you are tapping into a group of people that are out there, eager to learn, attend these classes.

Dealing with the hard of hearing population and getting them to come into the VR program is a chronic problem as well. In Illinois we find the key is that they want to deal with a counselor who has a hearing loss or a hearing counselor before they want to deal with a counselor who uses sign language. They are very often terrified and feel they can't deal adequately in the acceptance process. The key issue is to have somebody available who has walked in their shoes and tell them what it is like.

AUDIENCE: This might not be to the point but I am amazed at all the things that you people are able to do. I would like to ask Lois Maroney or whoever would like to answer, about how many hours a day do you put in working with the deaf?

LOIS MARONEY: I put in many hours of the day. A lot of times I don't get to bed until about 11 or 11:30. What's interesting is that I went off the ALDA Board for one year. I started to feel so bored. I felt there was nothing going on in my life. I am one of these people that I am a multitask person and have to have lots of different things going on to keep me interested. But I do take care of myself and that's important to do that and I do have certain days of the week where I cross off my schedule that it is my time.

But I think also what happened to me; I was in depression for so many years that I just kind of withdrew completely from society. I really feel that I slept my life away for about five or six years. I was so depressed, I would get up in the morning, drive my kids to school, come home and go to bed. Then I would wake up for four and five hours later. I think I came out of that like a tiger and I feel I have so much to accomplish right now. If I am not doing a lot of things, I'm bored, really bored. I have to keep going. We are all different. That's me. That's what keeps me going and I enjoy that.

ESTHER KELLY: I average 12 hour a day, my choice partly because the state requires so much paperwork that I could never do the paperwork otherwise. The phones are shut off and everyone goes home. I put in 12-hour days. With the traveling it makes some weekends, too, but I love every minute of it.

AMBER WILHELM: I have a 24 hour hot line and I never know what my days are like.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I was curious that nobody had mentioned family as one of the issues. To me it just seems with people that I had spoken with, I feel I'm lucky and I have a very supportive family. But even though to a certain extent can support me only so much with my transition to the deaf world. I have heard so many stories, people my age, and even young people today.

I attend a college in California and that's in Fremont where there is a large deaf community. I hear stories of the deaf kids who come from hearing families who don't get the support of their parents, don't learn sign language. Many of them are post lingual. You could consider them late-deafened. Even some of the people here at ALDA can tell you stories about their families not learning sign language.

I would think that would be a major challenge that prevents them from becoming whole people when they need to go out into the work force because they haven't been allowed to be who they are and get the resources that they need. Perfect example: My husband would love to support me and wanted to go to deaf events with me but then when we got there and I told him ahead of time we need to stay out there

and social, and then he says, okay, let's go. I said, wait a minute. We need to stay out there. You promised me. So he didn't go. He hasn't come with me since. And he is very supportive. I think that has to be a really big factor into the equation.

**BONNIE O'LEARY:** At NVRC, we have two things going on. Fairfax County has funded a program for the past couple of years called Bright Beginnings for Babies. This is for hearing families who have deaf babies or babies who are very, very hard of hearing. They come to our Center and there is about a 12-week program, and they come twice a week and meet with counselors, experts in the deaf community. They learn about the kind of things they will have to do with and for their children. They have little tiny babies in their arms and the parents get to bond and that is proving to be a very, very good program.

We also have a family support specialist, and this is somebody who does sign, does cued speech, is hearing, her husband is deaf and two of her three children are profoundly hearing impaired and are in special programs. When we get inquiries from parents whose children have lost their hearing, children we steer them to our support specialist.

We also have a Music Together Program for hard of hearing children so they can learn rhythm and vibration and dance. There are quite a few things that go on at our Center. Specifically if you would like specific information about that you can see me afterwards and I can put you in touch with the people who are the experts in that field.

**LOIS MARONEY:** I understand your question. There are times that the late-deafened people; when they start to get help don't have that family support. I think first of all, I do teach sign language to couples and I absolutely love that. The hearing spouse and the late-deafened spouse and I work with them and communicate strategies and also counseling. But what the message I'd like to convey is that that late-deafened person, regardless of the support they get out in the community, the locus of control is internal.

We cannot control other people and I would not like to have a late-deafened person say I can't get through it, I can't accept my deafness. If only my husband would do this or that, we want to keep the focus of control within ourselves. I know when I started to come out of my depression I didn't have family support at that time. I'm sure they would say yes, they did give me support. But they did not go to sign language class with me, didn't do those kind of things. But I decided I would keep the control inside of me and I went and started my own life. It was not with anger, not aggressively but in an assertive way. You're okay and I'm okay and I will have a life, also.

So I had my deaf friends, my late-deafened friends, and then as my life started to evolve and I created an identity for myself, I found that my family was so fascinated and so proud of it and they started to become involved and they all learned sign language. But that's why I think with my counseling, the focus that I do is helping that late-deafened person be empowered, to be self sufficient, to have an internal locus of control and not have it be extended to other people. Like, "If my husband doesn't support me, I will not be a happy person or just can't make it."

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** This is good. You guys offer really excellent services in your state. But as far as I know, my state of Georgia does not have any services for late-deafened adults, even for VR. I've



been to the counselors that had no idea how to communicate with me. I went a couple of years later and said I graduated from grad school and can you help me with finding out how to get a job, how to interview, what do I do now? She said we mainly offer services for vocations and you are out of the system and have a grad degree. "Can't help you. Sorry."

I know in my state we have a Council for the Hearing Impaired but there are differences between that and what people perceive late-deafened and culturally deaf. As far as I know, and I'm looking, there is nothing like a counselor that can help late-deafened people. So what do I do? I came to the ALDA meeting and financed it myself but there is nothing in my state like this.

ESTHER KELLY: I trained hard of hearing counselors in vocational rehab. There is a woman there, her last name is Adams, and she is in charge of all deaf and hard of hearing services in the State of Georgia. She is a wonderful woman who is very in tune to your needs, Tammy Adams, and if you are in Georgia you need to call your state vocational rehab main number and ask for Tammy Adams, and she could steer you right to where you need to go because she is very anxious to tailor her services to hard of hearing, late-deafened and deaf. That's why she came and had me do a two-day workshop on what the counselors in Texas are doing—she is trying to do more in Georgia.

HEIDI ADAMS: I'm a little bit stunned they told you that because you had a graduate degree they couldn't provide you with assistance in job seeking. Vocational rehab?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Along that same line, when I was divorced and needed to get back into the job force, I needed help to get started. I already had a college degree but hadn't really used it in 30 years. So the state vocational rehab was able to help me to the point of finding someone. They couldn't help me financially or anything because I had too much income but they said we found a group for MS patients that will be starting a class in writing résumés, going for job interviews. I went with that group and got myself back into the job force and back to school. But I would think any good vocational rehab counselor would look at your problem and give suggestions.

HEIDI ADAMS: They can do information and referral that has nothing to do with financial needs. But their method is to provide vocational services.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I have a question. What kind of outreach are you doing for veterans with hearing losses? I believe it is the top disability for veterans, returning back from the Mideast. What are you doing for that?

HEIDI ADAMS: In my area, it's actually quite a trip from the Rockford area to Madison, Wisconsin but that's where all the veterans go and really don't have any other options. We have talked briefly and not deeply, but we have talked about what to do so those people don't have to make that trek. I get different feedback. Some people are more than happy with the program up there and others not.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My question is this, what message do you want us as your audience to leave with today? In terms of just being out in the general public on a day-to-day basis, how can we educate, incorporate that in our every day conversations with people? What can we do to raise awareness to be more accommodating within the community? What advice do you have for us?

ESTHER KELLY: Each of us has capability and should try to do more for awareness not just for your friends, neighbors, family, but just like the woman over here that lives in Georgia and couldn't find services, she needs to be more vocal and call state offices and say, okay; I'm looking for this and not finding it. I have a cousin on Long Island, New York, who called me and said I'm going deaf, can't find any help in New York State. It took me about 20 phone calls and I found help in New York State. We have to start searching and then advocating so that more services will help.

There is need for more help, but unless we make that need known there will not be more. That's why Texas started this new program, the Hearing Loss Resource Specialist and has a Deafness Resource Program. I am not a vocational rehab counselor. They have those that have the money to give services. I'm actually the educator, the provider of educating people out there and getting them to the right place and advocating for them and it is under a state program, a unique program, so they have vocational rehab counselors. They have a whole program of 28 of us that are called resource specialists that go around and let people know there is help for them.

BONNIE O'LEARY: I say advocacy is probably the single most important thing that people who struggle with hearing loss can do for themselves, and the people who are hearing who love them. I think that one of the greatest assistive listening devices is a hearing person that knows what to do for a hard of hearing person. That's a way for Cheryl Heppner to keep everybody interested in what's going on especially with advocacy and legal issues. All you have to do is go to our website [www.NVRC.Org](http://www.NVRC.Org) and it is free. That way, when issues that come up like captioning in theaters, all this business going on with digital TV, Cheryl gives the information that advocacy is a big issue for everybody.

LOIS MARONEY: From a hearing perspective and I also agree with you that advocacy, taking down barriers in the community, is the most important thing. Before we became deaf, we used to be able to go to the movies, museums, enjoy the arts, all things. All of a sudden when we go to the museums, we see movies there, documentaries and not captioned. So that sends a message to that late-deafened and hard of hearing person that life has stopped. So you as a hearing person, when out in society, look for the barriers that a hard of hearing, late-deafened person would face.

I think probably the most rewarding thing I for me is that I had the experience of, being on a Cross Disability Board when I got away just from the deaf issue to cross disability and I find myself now when I go to stadiums and I see a protruding object, what about that blind person will walk right into it? I go and tell management about it. I take down the barriers. Can you imagine a blind person being out there and walking right into it? What does that do to their confidence level? I am always thinking of things like that when I am out. I am thinking in cross disabilities and not just from the hearing loss perspective.

HEIDI ADAMS: I absolutely agree with that with the advocacy thing. Also we need to be learning what resources are out there, what's available for people.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: How do you communicate with your clients? Do you slow down your speech or use sign language or do you use a computer or do you have a CART reporter or an interpreter?

AMBER WILHELM: It depends on the situation. If one-on-one with a client, we will read lips with each other. It depends. With a hospital, I use CART for someone who doesn't sign.

ESTHER KELLY: Most of mine are just hard of hearing or late-deafened or sudden deafness. I never write notes. I have a special computer in the living room setting I meet them in and I will type. Most people losing hearing are not proficient lip readers. I encourage family members and they say to me, "Esther, how come she is talking so much to you and not me?" And I ask them do you have a computer at home? Sure. Have your family, grand kids or children type. Most of my clients do not know sign language yet and some of them are scared to death of sign language.

I have to be honest. I was at my second ALDA meeting in 1991 and I was very impressed we are all struggling because I was suddenly late-deafened. I to this day do not sign very much at all because that's my comfort zone. I like that ALDA back then, and hopefully still now, will meet and say, if you are not comfortable with sign language you are still a member of ALDA and still meet where you are at and I have met some people here who do not know sign language trying to figure out what's wrong with me. I pointed out to someone maybe you are not comfortable learning sign language yesterday and she said you got it because she has been lip reading for so long and her whole goal is to do this. When she went to sign language class, and this happened to me, I looked at the teacher and I was reading her lips as they say what the sign was. I missed the sign. I will look at her hands as she signed it and I missed what it was.

All the people in the class are getting it and I feel dumb and I don't know sign language and all hearing people that want to go out and learn it, and I quit three times. Now because I work for Deaf Action Center, I can sign, though I am still not comfortable with it. So the culturally Deaf people in my office are so great and most of my clients are in a place where they say, "please don't sign at me use other things." When you sign or lip reading, it distracts them and cannot follow your lips and are frustrated. All those things go together.

CHRISTINE SEYMOUR: But ALDA's philosophy is still "whatever works." Whatever you need, we will give you, and most of all the people who sign can still talk. One question that didn't get answered, how do you communicate? In my office I have an FM system and use that if that's what they need for communication, too.

One question was how do we find the late-deafened and hard of hearing people to provide services. The same thing is true of how do we find ALDA members. When I think about this, one of the problems is that I believe there is an intellectual barrier to looking for services for those of us who lose our hearing, especially as adults. It is just a hearing loss. I should be smart enough to figure it out myself.

Until we start really feeling an emotional down from it, we don't go looking for help. When we do go looking for help, walking into a deaf services agency is the last place we want to go. So to find the millions of people out there that haven't found ALDA yet, the millions of people out there that we as individual service providers, client service providers could help, we have to go find them. They will not come walking in our doors by hoping that they will find us on a website.

By the way, ALDA will have a brand new website on December first and we are hoping it will make a difference, that people will open the web site and go, wow, that's the place I want to go. That's the idea of the panel today, to let some members that are here today know that there are really friendly people like us who can help. I can give you some tips, clues, ways to make your life better and that hearing loss thing doesn't have to be a miserable way of life but can be a really positive way of life.

That's what today is all about. We need to go out there and help people realize that not knowing what to do with hearing loss has nothing to do with intellect. It has to do with lack of experience. There is nothing dumb about not having the experience. So we have experience and we are willing to share it with you and we just have to find a way to let people know that that experience is out there in a friendly way.

We also need to let the agencies that pay the money to hire the people know that they need to bring people like us in to do it. Right now one barrier to that, a big barrier to that, is that most of those agencies are being run and staffed by people who are fluent in ASL. The only reason I got my job, the reason I'm the first person in the State of Washington to be hired with late-deafened experience is that I am fluent in ASL. My co-workers and supervisors are culturally deaf and if I couldn't sign, I couldn't get hired and that created a barrier to skilled hard of hearing and late-deafened adults. They got me by accident. They had no idea I would come in there and specialize in hard of hearing and late-deafened but I am and they can't tell me I can't because it is the Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

When you talk about what message we should take out to the world, they have to create offices where you don't have to sign in order to provide services to hard of hearing and late-deafened people. Sign language doesn't have to be a requirement of that job. How will you do that, break down that barrier when the bosses are deaf and use sign language? That's a big message that has to be carried out there. We need offices of hard of hearing and late-deafened.

**Moderator:**

*Christine Seymour is a Communication Advocate for hard of hearing and late deafened people at Hearing Speech and Deafness Center Tacoma. She has spent the last 5 years working for Deaf Counseling Advocacy and Referral Agency (DCARA). The first three years as Client Support Specialist for Hard of Hearing and Late Deafened People in the San Jose office. The last two years as Regional Emergency Preparedness Specialist for the Western US and Hawaii for the Community Emergency Preparedness Information Network (CEPIN); a project of Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Inc (TDI) and the Department of Homeland Security, that developed and delivered a course, Emergency Responders and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Communities: Taking the First Steps to Disaster Preparedness. She is currently a certified instructor for that course. She is President-Elect for ALDA, Inc 2007, and managing editor of the ALDA News, has served on the board of ALDA East Bay in San Leandro, California and started ALDA San Jose before returning home to the Pacific Northwest where she is currently group leader of ALDA Puget Sound.*

**Panelists:**

*Heidi Adams - Heidi Adams has had a progressive hearing loss for more than thirty years and has become profoundly deaf due to hereditary factors. Currently she uses both a hearing aid and cochlear implant, which she received in January 2007. She was delighted to discover ALDA in 1987 and has been actively involved ever since, most recently as President of ALDA-Chicago.*

*Heidi received a B.S. and M.A. in Communication, Speech/Language Pathology, from Northwestern University. After twenty years, a career change due to her deteriorating hearing led to a position as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the Illinois Department of Rehabilitation Services, where she had a general case load. In 1995, Heidi accepted a position as Planning Specialist in the Strategic Management section of the agency. Here she set up and facilitated focus groups, worked on a team developing and facilitating community forums across the state, served as co-owner of the Communication System and edited the agency's on-line newsletter.*

*Currently, Heidi is the Community Outreach Specialist for the Center for Sight & Hearing, a community based rehabilitation program in Rockford, Illinois, which provides programs and services for individuals with hearing loss, vision loss or both. She is the Site Coordinator for PEPNet-Midwest, part of a national consortium with the goal of assisting programs to*

*become accessible for individuals with hearing loss. In 2007, she became involved in training first responders in the Winnebago County area on working with individuals with hearing and/or vision loss. Heidi is a member of the Illinois Telecommunications Access Program (ITAP) Advisory Council and the DSH/Division of Rehabilitation Services Hard of Hearing/Late Deaf Committee.*

**Amber Wilhelm** - *Amber Wilhelm is a late deafened adult who serves as an outreach specialist for Deaf Vermonters Advocacy Services (DVAS). She is a victim's advocate for hard of hearing and late deafened individuals in Vermont. Amber is currently developing and implementing a program under DVAS called Hearing Loss Advocacy Network (HLAN). This program focuses solely on hard of hearing and late deafened individuals who need assistance with domestic violence, sexual assault, divorce, child custody, fraud, elder abuse, discrimination, and general accessibility issues. She graduated with a Bachelors Degree in Sociology and Criminology from Gallaudet University after serving an internship with the Superior Court of Washington, D.C. Amber then went on to receive her paralegal certification from George Washington University. She moved to Denver, Colorado where she worked with inner city youth and helped write grants for several non-profit agencies through Americorps. While in Colorado, Amber was a volunteer victims advocate for DOVE-Advocacy Services for Abused Deaf Women and Children. She completed her Masters degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Colorado at Denver after completing an internship with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Liaison Unit with the Metropolitan police in Washington, D.C.*

**Esther Kelly** *is late-deafened and received a very successful cochlear implant 11 years ago. She is Hearing Loss Resource Specialist in Texas. She presents full day workshop on Hearing loss to professionals around the state, meets people with hearing loss in her office/technology center, teaches classes in 2 community colleges, has written and produced several DVD's on hearing loss and received numerous awards.*

**Lois N. Maroney, LMHC** *has a Masters in Education and a Masters in Rehabilitation Counseling. Before becoming deaf, she was a high school Russian and French teacher in up state New York. She is now a licensed mental health counselor and sign language teacher at Deaf and Hearing Connection for Tampa Bay. Lois was President of ALDA in 2004 and is presently secretary of ALDA.*