

**YOUR STORY**

Deaf customers disadvantaged and discriminated against

by [GEORGE_HELON](#)

21st Dec 2018 7:06 AM

Contrary to stereotypical community perceptions, not all hearing impaired people are simply deaf as a post and unable to hear anything, and most certainly, they are not stupid or dumb!

Government, big business and private enterprises tend to ignore the fact that deaf and hearing impaired people are clients and customers too who need equal access to services, goods and support, but sadly a majority of service providers have no policies, procedures and practices in place to meet even the basic needs of hearing impaired people.

Deaf people have interests, likes, wants and of course, money to spend too just like everybody else.

Congenital or acquired, there are varying degrees of deafness: mild, moderate, severe, profound, and complete, or total.

Common across the spectrum of deafness is that: many have trouble hearing and discerning sounds; they find it hard and struggle to understand clear speech; they have difficulty engaging in conversations, communicating and interacting with other people, and being understood; they find it very hard and exasperating to engage with people in public places; they will turn the television up and often avoid

talking to people on the telephone.

You probably wouldn't be able to spot a deaf person in a crowd, but there are both subtle and obvious signs that a person is hard of hearing.

Hearing impaired people might ask you to repeatedly say something over and over again; their voice could be considered loud and their speech might sound 'funny' to you; they'll insist on texting you rather than talking on a phone; they might appear to be rude by staring at your face; they might appear to have ignored something that you have said or an instruction that you have given; they might cup their ears or utilise subtitles; you might spot a hearing aid; you might notice them signing, or they will just simply tell you that they can't hear you.

Community, communication, participation and social interaction are paramount social norms which are the mainstay of any society; unfortunately though, government entities, big business, commercial enterprises and service providers, the community, and family and friends are generally oblivious and inconsiderate to the difficulties faced by deaf people.

Deafness is a disability fraught with negative experiences and discrimination associated with erroneous community perceptions where hard of hearing people are denied the same courtesies and equal accessibility to services, goods and support as any ordinary person would expect.

All too often, hard of hearing people become marginalised and isolated; more so because many without hearing difficulties can't empathise, let alone understand the many frustrations faced by those with hearing loss on a daily basis.

Mouths are covered, backs are turned, faces are masked, kettles are turned on, televisions are blaring, fans and air conditioners are on full, background noises mask conversations, car windows are open and shopping centres and restaurants - with all their hustle and bustle, and screaming children - well, they're are a bloody nightmare!

Notwithstanding the fact that people with an unaffected level of hearing are often referred to foreign client and customer service call centres and complain that they can neither hear, nor understand what is being said to them, no thought is given to the plight of the hard of hearing and deaf people who are alienated and discriminated against, occasionally

ridiculed, patronized, and even mocked.

Little thought is given to the reality that a deaf person cannot hear the whisper of one's name being called out in a crowded medical surgery; that they can neither hear, nor understand public announcements at public venues, public transport hubs and at airports where there is significant background noise; that they can neither hear the voice of a customer service officer in a crowded retail hub, nor hear the hello of a passing friend in a crowded street; the voice of a loved one in a noisy public environment, or the ever tender I love you of a lover whispered in the ear.

Some of those difficulties faced by hard of hearing people include getting service at shopping centres where background noise is all around and diversionary; at coffee shops where conversations are loud and many, and where espresso equipment is constantly being used; at railway stations and public transport hubs where ticketing offices are often screened and traffic abounds; at airports where announcements are repeatedly quick and the content lost to a noisy environment, and at take away establishments where crew members talk and serve quickly amidst clanging dishes and cutlery.

Even booking and taking a holiday can be a stressful and traumatic experience for a deaf person who worries about not being able to hear basic announcements (let alone emergency ones), being isolated, all alone, and in trouble in a foreign country.

Most airlines tout that they offer special assistance to deaf and hearing impaired passengers requiring special assistance during their journey, but in practice, hard of hearing passengers are quite neglected at the airport, ignored during the journey and treated more like excess baggage.

Hard of hearing passengers are often told (whether intentionally, or without conscious thought) to "keep your eye on the flight display information board for latest departure information, and to be sure to listen carefully for public announcements and the directions from ground staff."

Telecommunications retailers too show little or no empathy to assist the hard of hearing, choosing instead to hand them a card with the direction to call a customer service call centre which is often staffed by foreign workers who can neither be heard, nor understood by even a person with acute hearing.

Of most concern is that deaf people can find it almost impossible to get help in an emergency situation and are at an increased risk of danger, death, or injury in a natural disaster situation.

Deaf people are commonly disconnected and cut-off from usual forms of communication, they can feel alone, shut-out and ostracised from the all of the positive experiences life has to offer, they often experience isolation, have low self-esteem and are often affected by depression and anxiety.

Although deaf people might be hard of hearing, their other senses are intensely tuned and they can pick-up when someone appears frustrated that they are not being understood and the fact they are irritated by having to repeat themselves.

A hard of hearing person will often become withdrawn when they sense that a person has changed the way in which they are acting towards, and interacting with them.

And contrary to popular thought, hearing aids do not restore one's hearing, just as glasses cannot restore another's eyesight. Hearing aids can improve one's ability to hear and communicate with the world around them and contribute significantly to an improved quality of life.

Never associate a person's deafness with their level of intelligence.

I MIGHT BE DEAF, BUT I AM NOT STUPID OR DUMB!