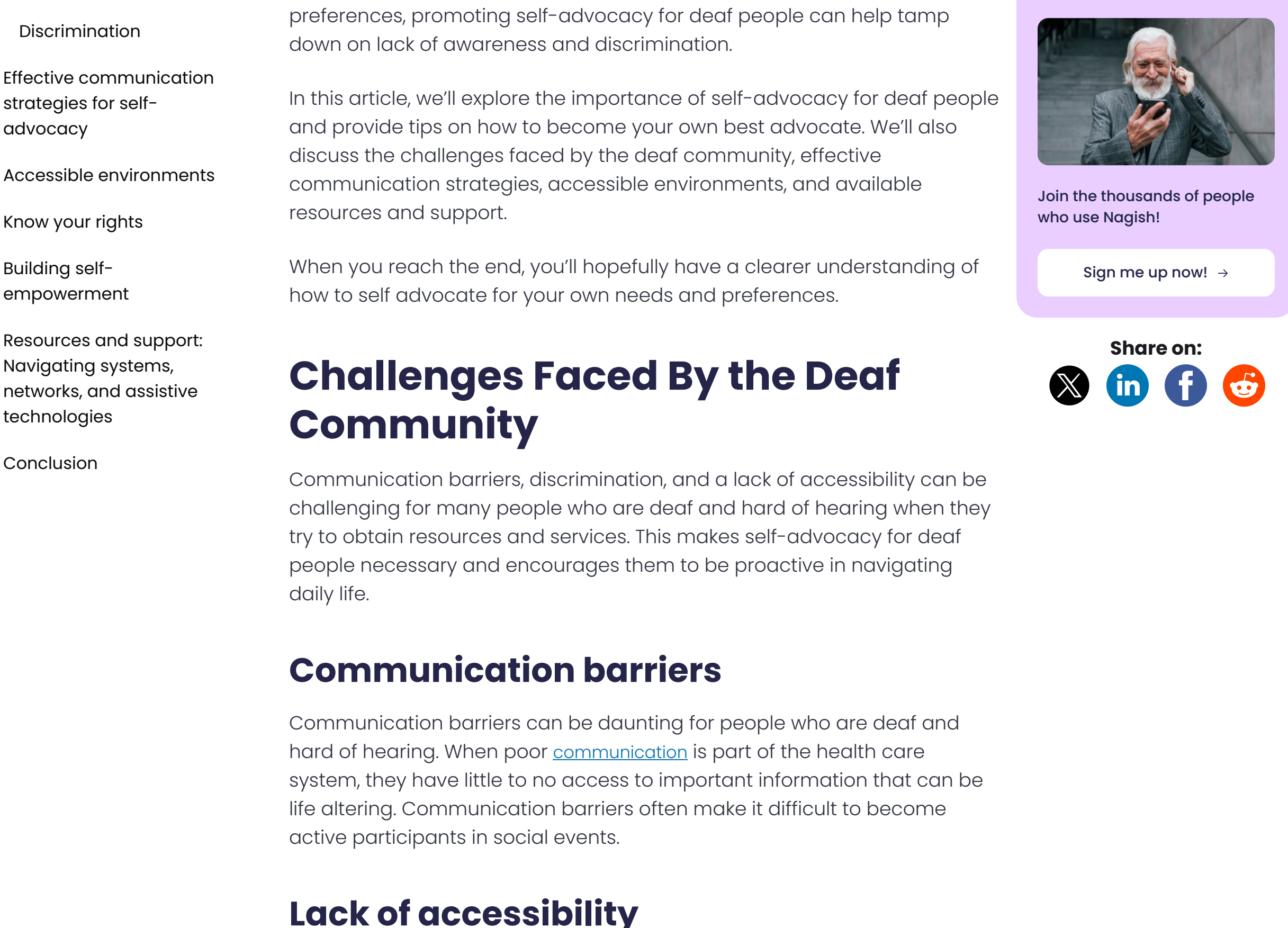


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The Power of Self-Advocacy for Deaf People: Breaking Down Barriers

Learn about self-advocacy for people who are deaf and hard of hearing and why it has to become more important in society!

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Introduction

People who are deaf and hard of hearing face unique challenges in their daily lives because of communication barriers, discrimination, and lack of awareness.

By being vocal and educating others about specific needs and preferences, promoting self-advocacy for deaf people can help tamp down on lack of awareness and discrimination.

In this article, we'll explore the importance of self-advocacy for deaf people and provide tips on how to become your own best advocate. We'll also discuss the challenges faced by the deaf community, effective communication strategies, accessible environments, and available resources and support.

When you reach the end, you'll hopefully have a clearer understanding of how to self-advocate for your own needs and preferences.

Challenges Faced By the Deaf Community

Communication barriers, discrimination, and a lack of accessibility can be challenging for many people who are deaf and hard of hearing when they try to obtain resources and services. This makes self-advocacy for deaf people necessary and encourages them to be proactive in navigating daily life.

Communication barriers

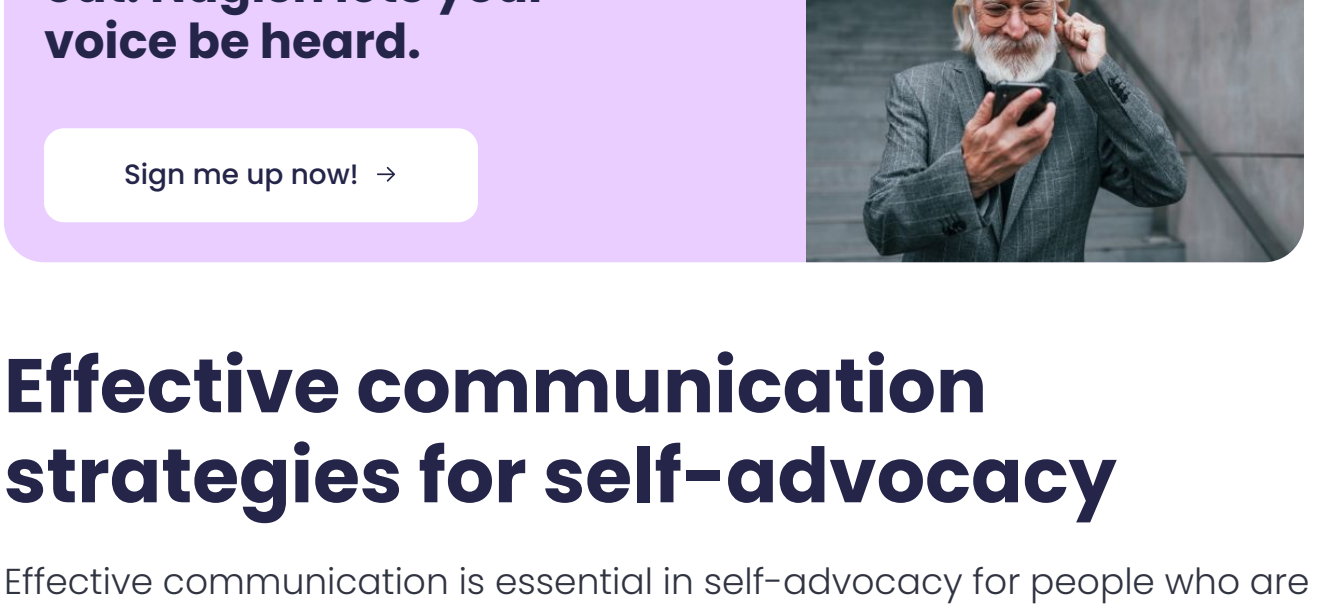
Communication barriers can be daunting for people who are deaf and hard of hearing. When poor communication is part of the health care system, they have little to no access to important information that can be life altering. Communication barriers often make it difficult to become active participants in social events.

Lack of accessibility

Digital spaces, such as websites and apps, can be inaccessible to people who are deaf and hard of hearing, who require closed captioning and transcripts for multimedia content, as well as sign language interpreting.

A less-talked-about topic is how buildings and transportation can be inaccessible. One example is fire alarms, which are loud and blaring. Another example is communication systems on buses and trains, which can be easily remedied by including assistive technologies and sensitivity or cultural training for professionals.

Discrimination

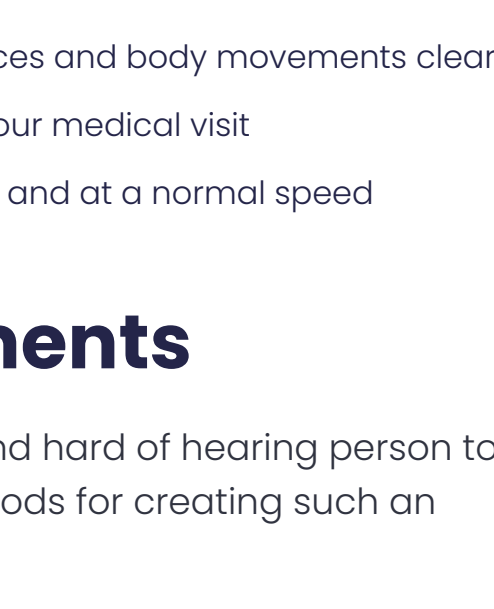


Small black cubes spell out the word "Discrimination" in different colors.

Discrimination continues to be a challenge for the deaf community. People who are deaf and hard of hearing can face discrimination in important aspects of life due to lack of education, non-inclusive laws and policies, and lack of training of public-facing professionals.

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Effective communication strategies for self-advocacy

Effective communication is essential in self-advocacy for people who are deaf and hard of hearing. You may need to try different communication strategies to accommodate certain situations. Some effective strategies can include:

- Sign language interpreters or Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) services
- Assistive technologies such as hearing aids, cochlear implants, and automated captioning
- Using written communication such as notes or emails
- Educating others about deaf culture and unique communication needs
- Make sure health care professionals are trained in deaf awareness and communication methods
- Make sure the room is well lit so you can see faces and body movements clearly
- Request brochures and pamphlets related to your medical visit
- Encourage your doctor to speak in plain English and at a normal speed

Accessible environments

An accessible environment helps the deaf and hard of hearing person to be a full participant in society. Here are methods for creating such an environment:

- Buildings and transportation systems should have fire alarm systems that have visual as well as audible alarms.
- Websites and applications should have captions or transcripts for video, and audio should have visual cues to help people who are deaf and hard of hearing understand the content.
- Many modern health care facilities are now designed with accommodations in mind. Health care professionals should be trained in deaf awareness, and sign language interpreters and CART services should be present to facilitate communication.
- Public events should have sign language interpreters or CART services available, and visual aids should be provided.
- Employers are supposed to provide closed captioning, sign language interpreters, and easy access to email. For impromptu meetings, a simple solution is assigning a notetaker.
- Teachers should be trained in deaf awareness and learn how to communicate based on the deaf person's unique needs. This is a good way to "practice" a sign language interpreter and notetaker are usually present.
- Public information should be readily available. For example, brochures or pamphlets should be provided in written form, and videos should have captions or transcripts.

Know your rights



Profile of female employee wearing a hearing aid. She is smiling and appears to be gesturing and talking with someone.

Becoming educated about your rights as person who is deaf or hard of hearing can guide you to become a better self-advocate.

These resources will boost knowledge of your rights:

- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- The Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Beyond getting familiar with these laws, you can also participate in social activities and family outings. This can strengthen your self-advocacy skills. Being able to speak up about your accommodation needs without your family's help is crucial.

Additionally, you can seek out deaf and hard of hearing role models. Meeting others like yourself can help you feel empowered and more capable of self-advocacy. They can also serve as mentors.

Building self-empowerment

As a deaf or hard of hearing person, communication barriers come with the territory. We live with it every day, which means learning how to self-advocate for your needs. Here are some ways that you can empower yourself:

- Familiarize yourself with your legal rights: This will help you advocate for yourself and ensure that your needs are being met.
- Gain knowledge: Deeply understanding your own needs and preferences will make it easier for you to share this with others. This can give you the confidence to advocate for yourself.
- Identify your strengths: This can involve reflecting on your past successes and failures. Understand where you need improvement.
- Grow a support network: A network of friends, family, and professionals can help you stay motivated and provide guidance and feedback.
- Get involved in self-advocacy groups: These groups are run by and for people with disabilities.
- Participate in social activities and family outings: These can be an overlooked opportunity to develop self-advocacy skills. This is a good way to "practice" asking for what you need among people that you know.
- Be part of a team effort: Learning self-advocacy can involve a collaborative effort with you, parents, teachers, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and other disability service providers. Working as a team gives you different opportunities to learn and practice essential self-advocacy skills.
- Participate in training programs: Training programs can help people who are deaf and hard of hearing develop the skills and knowledge they need to advocate for themselves effectively.
- Use assistive technologies: Hearing aids, cochlear implants, automated captioning, and other hearing devices can help for smoother communication.
- Practice self-care: When you take breaks, you feel more capable. Do the things you enjoy, stick to a sleep schedule, and follow a healthy diet.

Resources and support: Navigating systems, networks, and assistive technologies



Young female wearing eyeglasses and business attire. She is reading and taking notes.

Making sense of systems, networks, and assistive technologies can be challenging but there are plenty of resources available.

Here's a list to get you started:

- Vocational Rehabilitation Services. VR offers different services but the main service is helping you get and retain full-time employment.
- Disability Rights Organizations. The ADA National Network consists of 10 regional centers throughout the U.S.
- Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Centers. Find your local deaf and hard of hearing services by doing a web search.
- Assistive Technology Centers. Conduct a search for your local area. All U.S. states provide assistive technology for people with disabilities.

Conclusion

Valuable self-advocacy for people who are deaf and hard of hearing is essential to access needed services.

To combat barriers and the general public's continuing lack of awareness of disabilities, remember that there are resources and support services available to you, including disability rights organizations, self-advocacy groups, assistive technology services, legal assistance, and support networks.

By using these resources, people who are deaf and hard of hearing can become empowered to create more equal lives for themselves.

Juana Poareo

The founder of Being Access-able, an accessibility resource hub for brands and entrepreneurs. She also writes about accessibility and advocacy.

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