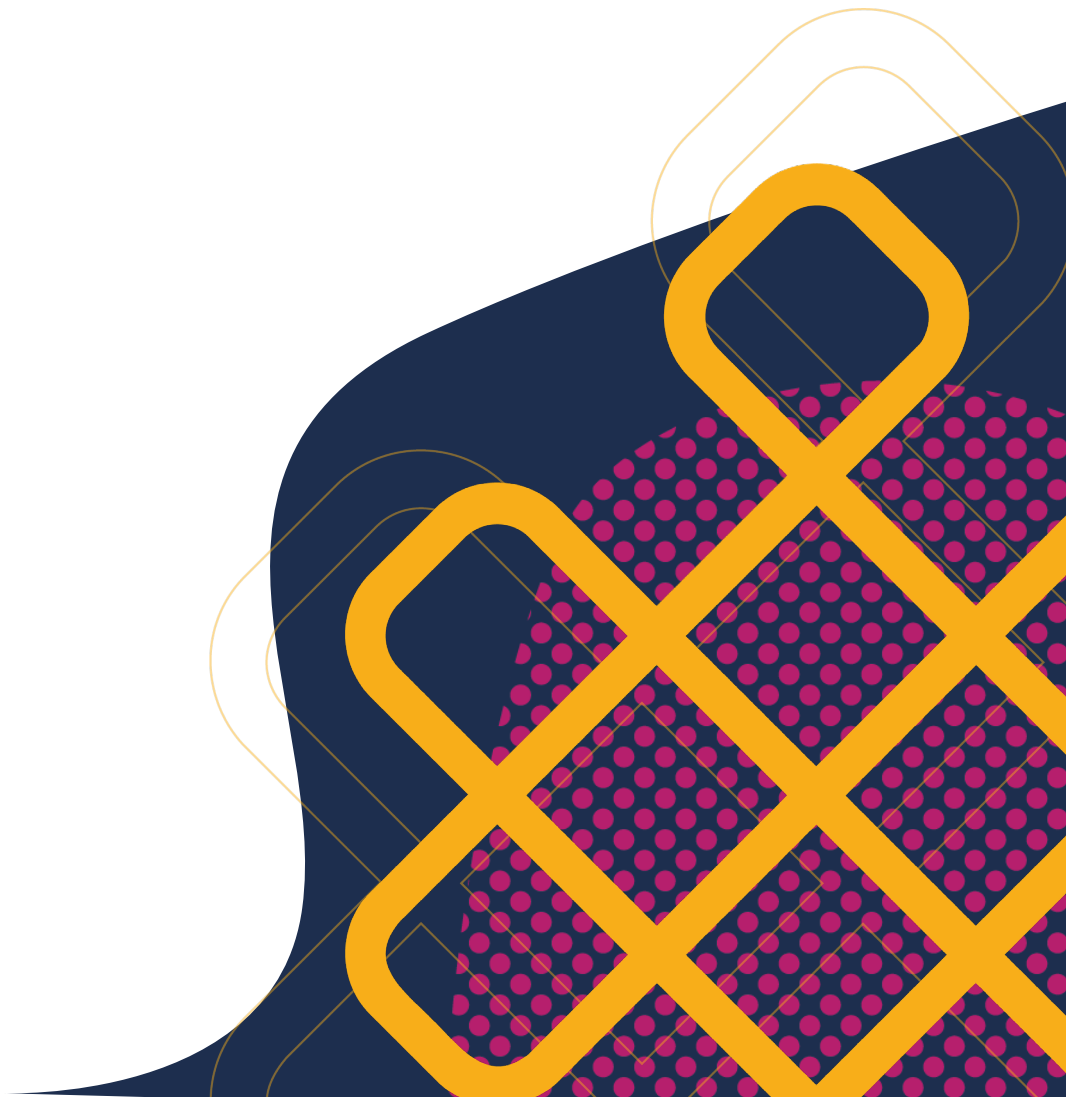




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How to make your refuge accessible for D/deaf and hard of hearing people



Within this resource we use the term D/deaf and hard of hearing. If a person identifies as Deaf with an upper-case D this means that they are culturally Deaf, are a part of the Deaf community and are likely to use British Sign language as their first or preferred language. If a person identifies as being deaf with a lowercase d this means that they have a significant hearing loss and are likely to use spoken English as their first or preferred language. When we use the term D/deaf we are simply referring to both groups of people. The term hard of hearing is often used by people who have a mild to moderate hearing loss and are hearing aid users.

With 1 in 6 of the UK population experiencing hearing loss and D/deaf women being twice as likely to experience domestic abuse, it's essential that refuges are accessible for people who are D/deaf.

Planning and awareness are required. It's important to be proactive rather than reactive. Leaving it until you have someone in need who is D/deaf or hard of hearing to consider access will mean that they are likely to have a negative experience with you, at a time in their lives when they especially require support. Consider the following:

Accessible Information

Do you have any multimedia on your website or in any induction/welcoming materials? If so, double check that subtitles and transcripts are available.

Did you know that many people who use British Sign Language (BSL) as their first language struggle to understand written English?

This is because grammatically BSL is so different from English. Consider having some information available in BSL. BSL Translations are not expensive and make information about the services you offer much more accessible to people who are Deaf.

Contact Methods

Consider how D/deaf and hard of hearing people can contact you. Offering a choice of ways in which people can make contact increases accessibility. There are lots of options, including:

- Providing a mobile number so people can text you
- Provide a monitored email address
- Ensuring staff are aware of the Relay UK service – a free service which allows deaf or hard of hearing people to communicate with you via an operator who types what is said for the deaf person and speaks, if needed, what they type. All they need is a free downloadable app and access to the internet.
- Signing up as an organisation to Video Relay services which allows a Deaf person to contact you with an interpreter on the call, free of charge.

The Physical Environment

Intercoms can often cause anxiety for people with hearing loss. If you have one, consider what you can do to navigate this barrier. Providing a text number for example, or simply reassuring someone that when they press the intercom if they do not respond a member of staff will go to the door and check who is there, can alleviate any concerns.

It stands to reason that many people accessing your services are already in a heightened sense of anxiety. In this case, it's especially important that we know what's happening in our environment to help us feel safe.

Consider all the sounds we hear to alert us to things. D/deaf people need access to these sounds such as the doorbell ringing, people knocking on their door and baby alarms. Assistive technology that makes use of vibrations or flashing lights is necessary. Simple portable solutions can be purchased at a reasonable cost or reach out to your nearest sensory impairment social care team and see if you

could have equipment on loan, should this be required. Portable hearing loops can be beneficial for some hearing aid users. They enable hearing aids to pick up sound directly from the loop system microphone, improving clarity of sound and reducing background noise. These can be used to amplify the television (so it doesn't have to be super loud and disturb everyone else) and also important conversations, as they can be placed on a table between participants.

How echoey are your rooms? Rooms with poor acoustics can make life much harder for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Just a few minor changes such as adding rugs, curtains, some soft furnishing and plants can make a big difference to the acoustics.

Safe Evacuation

Many local fire services will install specialist smoke alarms for people who are D/deaf or hard of hearing or there are alternative products such as a Deafgard; portable and wire free smoke alarm monitors. As part of your fire risk assessment, Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) will be necessary for anyone who is disabled. The evacuation plan will need to be completed personally with the individual considering their hearing loss, related requirements and their location within the building. It's important that staff are fully aware of the need for PEEPs and have had adequate training.

Questionnaires and Assessment Tools

Any assessment tools or questionnaires should consider the needs of D/deaf people. Consider what information you will require to ensure that you make your service fully accessible. Remember not all D/deaf people have the same communication needs and it's important that you do not make assumptions and you ask appropriate questions about how you can best meet their needs.

As a minimum, you will need to know the following:

- What is their preferred method of communication?

- What (if any) communication support do they require?
- How can staff best communicate with them?
- What (if any) assistive technology do they need?
- Do they use any listening aids such as hearing aids or cochlear implants, and if so do they have everything they need to use/maintain them?

Often, when asked about access requirements people can overlook factors which can later be problematic. It's very difficult to know what support you will need in a situation until you experience the situation. It's important that access is an ongoing conversation and people feel comfortable speaking about their needs.

Referrals

D/deaf people may need specialist support such as counselling and mentoring services which can be accessed in British Sign Language, for example. Ensure that you have a list of services where you can refer D/deaf people to. This can help to avoid delays and makes any referral process much easier.

Wi-Fi

D/deaf people often require stable high speed Wi-Fi to be able to access services such as remote interpreters. They may also rely on the internet more than others as they may be unable to use a telephone and require Text Relay, or video call software/apps. Is your Wi-Fi good enough to allow this?

Training

It's important that staff have had good quality deaf awareness training. This training should, as a minimum, include:

- The language commonly used to describe deafness
- The ways in which people who are D/deaf and hard of hearing communicate and factors which can affect successful communication
- The barriers that D/deaf and hard of hearing people face accessing services and ways these can be removed
- The cultural model of deafness
- The range of technological aids and assistive technology available

Negatives into Positives

Do you have an accessible complaints procedure and how do you encourage feedback? Everyone needs to feel their experience and feedback is valued and respected. Have you considered all the ways that you can encourage D/deaf people to give feedback to allow you to evaluate your services? Take any negatives and turn them into positives by learning as an organisation and constantly strive to be more inclusive.

Communication Tips

Whilst bearing in mind that everyone who is D/deaf or hard of hearing have different communication needs and preferences, the following tips can be helpful:

- Before you speak, ensure you have their attention. Establishing eye contact or a gentle touch on the arm can help.
- Face the person you are speaking to and give them your undivided attention. Avoid trying to communicate with them whilst doing something else such as using your phone or looking elsewhere.
- Speak clearly – avoid speaking too fast but equally don't speak excessively slowly. Never shout!

- If someone doesn't understand what you have said, avoid continuously repeating yourself and rephrase it.
- Consider the environment. A quiet place with no background noise, and limited visual distractions can really aid communication.
- Ensure the light is on your face. Many people lip-read and if the light is behind you, your face will be in shadow, making this impossible.
- Make sure your mouth can be clearly seen. Don't cover your mouth with your hands and if you are wearing a mask pull it down (you can always step back to avoid close contact).
- Gesturing and facial expressions can be helpful.
- Get to the point. Key someone into what you are talking about, by letting them know the topic straight away. This will make it easier for someone to understand you as they are better able to infer what is being said.
- Avoid acronyms and jargon and if unavoidable make sure you explain what these terms mean.
- You can always write it down – but remember to use plain English.

These are just a few tips to start you on your journey to becoming more inclusive to D/deaf and hard of hearing people.

Remember, the more contacts/ partnerships you can establish with D/deaf organisations and the more you create an ethos where people feel comfortable to discuss their access requirements, the more accessible you will be.



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