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This is a Captioned transcript provided by CIDI to facilitate communication accessibility and is not a verbatim record of the session.

>> Johan Rempel: Good afternoon everyone. This is Johan Rempel from CIDI. We'll get started in a minute or so. People are still trickling in.

>> Johan Rempel: Good afternoon, everyone. This is Johan Rempel from center for inclusive design and innovation. Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules for attending this training called overview of communication tips and etiquette.

This is the third training that we have offered to the BLH and NLM team. I have the privilege of co‑presenting today with Liz Persaud and Dr. Ballenger who will introduce themselves in a moment.

This is being recorded and archived. And it's going to be shared with Allie who will distribute it as well.

We also are distributing the entire PowerPoint as an accessible PDF file, as well as the transcripts from today.

Next slide.

So, big thank you to Heather today from the CIDI team, our captionist. We try to practice what we preach and this is being live captioned. There are two options available here to access the live captions.

Heather has placed the StreamText link in the chat. That's one way of accessing the live captions.

And the second one is the closed captioning option. There's a red arrow pointed to the CC symbol on the bottom toolbar. You can select it and access the captions that way.

Next slide.

So very briefly here with Zoom it offers some additional accessibility features that are worth mentioning briefly. Spotlighting and pinning. Spotlighting is a feature that works across a platform for anyone who is attending. The host and co‑host can spotlight someone. This is especially beneficial if you have, for example, an ASL interpreter and you want that person on the screen permanently. And whoever is spotlighted will appear in the speaker view.

Pinning is more of an individual choice.

Any participant can pin any other participant's video at any time and it only impacts that participant's display. Spotlighting and pinning are basic. You hover over the individual participant that you want pinned or spotlighted and you select the ellipsis, the dot, dot, dot and then you can spotlight for everyone or pin.

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So, with that I will go ahead and pass it on to Liz Persaud who introduce herself and you will pass it on to Dr. Sheryl Ballenger.

>> Liz Persaud: Thank you, Johan. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm thrilled to be with you this afternoon presenting an important topic that means a lot to me. As Johan said, my name is Liz Persaud. I currently serve as the program and outreach manager for Tools for Life which is the ‑‑ Georgia's assistive technology program. We are at CIDI here at Georgia Tech.

Sheryl?

>> Sheryl Ballenger: Hello, everyone. I appreciate you joining us today. This is fun for us and I hope informational for you. My name is Sheryl Ballenger. At CIDI I'm the manager of our deaf and hard of hearing services. And with that we serve students and people with hearing loss through either captioning, captioning on videos or even audio description on videos for those with vision impairments. Johan?

>> Johan Rempel: Excellent. Thank you.

And probably most of you already know me. I oversee the digital accessibility initiatives at CIDI. That includes web accessibility evaluations, technical assistance, and training such as this.

Next slide.

So the session description today: This training will focus on being able to better understand present day disability awareness obstacles, along with resources that are in place to overcome these barriers. Presenters will share information about disability culture and define the differences between medical model of disability and social model of disability.

The learning objectives: Participants will be able to identify and explain specific communication tips for physical, sensory, hearing and vision, cognitive and communication disabilities.

Communication and language culture within the deaf community and ‑‑ [mic interference].

I will ask for those with an open mic to please mute yourselves.

And the last objective here is the three best practices for communication etiquette for people living with a variety of disabilities.

Next slide.

Brief over view of CIDI: Some of you have been introduced to us and know a little about us. We are housed at Georgia Tech under the College of Design. So research is a large part of what we do. It's very often disability related and we also provide accessibility consulting in the area of ICT, Information and Communications Technology and user experience.

Braille services, we have a braille unit that provides services across the country. Captioning and described audio services. You're going to be learning a little bit about what's offered there through Sheryl Ballenger. She's described a little bit of that already. We have an entire department that specifically focuses on accessibility documents. The remediation of text books, PDF's, PowerPoints, syllabus for example. And then we have our Tools for Life team which has a number of highly specialized individuals specific to assistive technology and disability awareness.

And I will pass it on to Liz to talk more about that.

>> Liz Persaud: Thank you so much, Johan. Absolutely as Johan said and when I introduced myself, I'm the program and outreach manager at Tools for Life. We are the assistive technology act program for the state of Georgia. Every state in the country, as well as the territories has an assistive technology program like us. We fit well at Georgia Tech. Basically at Tools for Life we're here to help any Georgian of any age, any disability access assistive technology so they can be more independent. And we do that through demonstrations of equipment, training, we even have a lending library where folks can borrow equipment before they purchase it as well and we always have a conversation about funding resources and how people can acquire the tools available out there. If you have questions about that, feel free to reach out to me or anyone else at CIDI and we can get you connected with some AT, assistive technology resources. So, I'm going to jump in and provide the introduction and talk about more about the overview of communication tips. Especially when it comes to interacting with people with disabilities.

First and foremost, those who have been online before, we often start these out by talking about attitudinal barriers because when it comes to some of the obstacles whether physical, systemic that folks encounter every day the biggest challenge that a lot of folks with disabilities ‑‑ I will say "us" because I identify with a physical disability ‑‑ but it's often the attitudinal barriers that comes along. So attitudinal barriers are ways of thinking or feeling resulting in limiting the potential of people with disabilities to be independent individuals. Think about attitudes and the barriers they can create for people with disabilities it is all about diversifying our circle of friends, our colleagues, our professional connections, our networks, getting to know folks with disabilities and understanding more about disability culture. We're going to be talking about language and communication today.

So when we're able to become more familiar, educate ourselves, we debunk those myths that are out there and we remove the fear of the unknown and help remove the attitudinal barriers and we're all of a sudden in the mode of tolerance and acceptance and moving forward.

So, there's lots of impacts when it comes to attitudinal barriers. So many negative and so many positive as well. On the left‑hand side are points I want to bring to your attention. Some of the impacts are learned helplessness. Basically if you are living in this world and people are constantly putting up barrier, there's constant societal obstacles, you're constantly hearing negative language, you constantly hear "I can't work" or "I can't have friends" when you're constantly being put down and the barriers are focused on, often times we as people with disabilities or anybody who faces negative stigma, we put ourselves down. It's learned helplessness. I can't tell you how many people have called me through Tools for Life and say well you don't know what it's like to have a disability. I can't work full‑time and that's kind of the magic me answering the phone and talking to them anonymously because I can say actually, I do know. I have had a disability since I was 9 months old and yes, it's tiring and fatiguing and there are obstacles out there but there are so much that people with disabilities can do. So I appreciate having the opportunity to help move people away from this idea of learned helplessness.

Isolation, absolutely it goes hand in hand. If you're being pushed down and up against those barriers, isolation is something that's very much in the forefront of people with disabilities. That's happened during the pan dem and we're still moving towards pulling people away from social isolation and getting them more socially connected. When you are being pushed down when you hear about the negatives so much isolation can definitely happen to folks with disabilities. Hand in hand with that lack of self‑worth. Even the empowerment that folks can feel tends to go away.

When you move over to the right‑hand side and think about the attitudinal barriers, what would it look like if people embraced that. We're talking about inclusion, comfort, respect, friendship. When we can change our attitudes of mind, we can change so much of the world out there.

So there's the idea of tolerance to acceptance.

Really what does this look like? Thank you to Sheryl for making this beautiful word cloud. I like the way it looks and the way it stands out to drive home the idea of what tolerance to acceptance looks like.

There are words in here in this word cloud like initiating, interrupting, toward, preventing, education, encouraging, educating‑self, supporting, acceptance, responding, recognizing. You can think of this as a domino effect or timeline.

When we say initiating and we're out in the community and hear language that may be is offensive ‑‑ maybe they are telling a joke but what if that joke is offensive to somebody with a disabilities.

Often times we talk about how individuals with mental health disabilities ‑‑ non‑visible disabilities ‑‑ are often the largest group within the community of people with disabilities.

We hear jokes like that's crazy or don't be so whacko. Common things and common language that we've heard but think about what that means. Think about saying that. Think about our friends that deal with mental health issues what it would feel like to hear that. People saying hurtful things. I've had people refer to me as lazy because they didn't fully understand my physical disability.

So when we're talking about tolerance to acceptance, when we hear people say things like that it's initiating a response. We have to do better collectively as our society. Disability or not. We have to interrupt that. Then we encourage people. We talk about it. We have to talk about it. We have to say it wasn't cool when you said that. I understand that might be something that is normal to you or something you have heard throughout your life but let's talk about what that really means. So we're encouraging and moving to educate. Then we educate ourself even more to help support people out there and hopefully that's moving people towards acceptance response. So when people respond it will have more of that accepting tone to it. At the end of the day we want people to recognize it's okay to make a mistake but we move forward and try not to do it again and communicate as effectively and as respectfully as possible as we can.

So hopefully that makes sense to think about that transition of tolerance all the way down to acceptance.

Symbols to communicate.

I absolutely love this. I'm going to start on the right‑hand side. You can see symbols there that represent accessibility or disability. This has been in our society for many, many years. If you look on the left‑hand side there's a transition of that symbol to something more modern. If you really take a look at it, what I love about it is that accessibility symbol that often can represent something negative ‑‑ people can say words like cripple or handicapped. We want to communicate more positive active roles. I love the symbol on the left because it's showing someone in a wheelchair being active. Again, it's not just those stationary. It's not helpless. It's saying I'm taking control. It's a simple thought to take the symbols and change it slightly but look at what that really does for understanding disability and for moving through this world.

I love when I'm out with my husband and we're driving around, we park and I see new symbols like this. To me, people are getting it and understanding it. I can't wait until it's commonplace and 100%.

It's just the way those symbols communicate and the way it can help us communicate our language and the way that we interact with people in general.

So, I encourage you to pay attention when you're out and about in the community and see if you see more of the awesome symbols on the left as opposed to the older ones on the right‑hand side.

Hidden disabilities are something that we often talk about as being a large group of folks with disabilities. What we're talking about communication, again, that is so important because you don't often know what people are dealing with. Just like the individual who called me and said, "you have no idea," they didn't know I was sitting in my power wheelchair and I have my AT. Just like we don't know who is giving us a call. It's important that we think about disabilities more holistically. Not just people using wheel chairs or using communication devices or walking around with canes or crunches.

So this could include learning disabilities, psychiatric disabilities, individuals with epilepsy, individuals that are dealing with cancer, arthritis and heart conditions. I'm so glad all of those are now covered with the Americans with Disabilities Act. There was a time many years ago where it wasn't. So I'm glad to see our friends and family members that are dealing with hidden disabilities are covered by the law. They're covered by the law and now it's our job to help with communication and understanding.

If you look on the right‑hand side we have a couple points to think about when you are referencing or talking to people with hidden disabilities. There's so many communication challenges that folks that don't have visible disabilities deal with. Do they disclose their disability? Whether in conversation or applying for a job, acquiring a service or resource out there. When is it appropriate to disclose disability? How do you request acceptability or other accommodations. Something that might be easier for people with disabilities that are not hidden.

Again, it's important for all of us to know that individuals exist out there with hidden disabilities and we have to be aware of how to embrace and communicate and help them navigate through some of these complicated challenges. I'm going to move on briefly and toss it over to Sheryl.

We're going to talk about general communication tips specifically when dealing with people with disabilities.

Over all generally I want to mention don't be afraid to make a mistake. We all encounter situations where we just don't know how to interact with somebody and we do the best we can and at the end of the day it's about being respectful and communicating effectively. I would also like to mention it's important to not make assumptions about what a person can or cannot do. None of us on the line wouldn't like it if somebody assumed so much about your life, assumed something that you can or can't do. You would want you to ask you about your life. So it's important that before ‑‑ this happens often. This happens to me when I'm out and about. People often jump in and say let me do that for you, you don't need to do that, don't worry about it. Even though it might take me longer to do something, I'm still doing it myself and it's a strive for independence. So we encourage folks to ask before giving assistance. There's no harm in somebody saying no I got it. Just asking is a respectful way of communicating that you want to help out but finding out if that's okay.

The other point that's really important if someone with a disability is accompanied by another individual whether it be a personal care assistant, a friend, a colleague. I'm often in the community with my husband. It's important to address and speak to the person with a disability. I can't tell you how many times people come up to my husband and they will say ‑‑ even now in this day and age with awesome strides of inclusion ‑‑ people will ask my husband what would she like to eat or what would see like to drink? And he says I have no idea. You need to ask her yourself. Or I'll be out and someone will say how is she doing or does she need this? So it's that assumption that I can't communicate for myself and can't be independent. So they're immediately going to that person and speaking to them rather than to me. It's a very hurtful situation because my brain works fine. It's just a physical disability. It's just my legs. So I want people to communicate with me and so that takes us down to the next bullet which is treat adults as adults. If you're uncomfortable, move forward talking. It's important to do that because you will encounter a diversity of preferences and opinions and that's what makes our world more cohesive and inclusive. Don't be afraid to make a mistake and don't make assumptions. Some basic general communication tips that will go a long way. So communication tips for folks with physical disabilities. It's important to respect the individual's personal space. I consider my wheelchair personal space. I think in general the rule for people whether you have a disability or not is 3 feet of personal space that often doesn't happen. If a person with a disability has some type of assistive technology or durable medical equipment that is helping them, keep in mind that's their personal space. I can't tell you how many people have leaned on my chair. I had a stranger rest their bag on my chair while we were in line. So again, be mindful that that is someone's personal space and is an extension of their body. It's important to never move someone's assistive technology or their durable medical equipment. You wouldn't want to touch or move someone's crutches or walker or cane or other mobility device.

I remember many years ago I was at a restaurant and somebody walked in using crutches and they sat down at the table and the server moved their crutches to the opposite end of the restaurant and I remember that person just talking to them and being very nervous about it. It would make me nervous. If there's an emergency that person would need those crutches to get up to move and it wasn't there. So it's important to never touch somebody's devices.

Along with that don't push a person's wheelchair or grab the arm of someone walking. I've had many people try to push my wheelchair without asking me. That's a very scary feeling. I have had friends that have difficulty walking and have fallen down when someone grabbed their arm. You want to ask before you offer and jump in.

The last point is important and I appreciate this. When speaking for more than a few minutes to a person using a wheelchair to try and find a seat so you can be seated so we're both at eye level. If it's talking to someone for an extended period of time, I appreciate the fact that they maybe sit down and have a conversation with me because I'm able to look them in the eye. It can be exhausting stretching your neck up and talking to someone in that position. So just little things that can go a long way and often if we think about putting ourselves in another person's position all of this really makes sense for communication and being respectful. So some communication tips when it comes to interacting with individuals with cognitive or intellectual disabilities.

Again, when speaking to someone who has a cognitive disability, try to be alert to their responses. You may need to speak slower. It may be that language needs to be more concrete than abstract. So instead of saying you're going to go down to the end of the road and make a right. Maybe giving road names and landmarks. Being more concrete than abstract.

It's important to know individuals with brain injuries may have short‑‑term memory issues. They may need you to repeat information. So be relaxed and adjust your method of communication. As I mentioned a moment ago and if you have to be repetitive, that's okay. If you still have difficulty interacting, communicate that respectfully and effectively and say something like I'm so sorry I'm having trouble interacting. Maybe can we pull somebody in to help us with this conversation? That's a respectful way of going about communicating as well.

A little bit more when it comes to cognitive disabilities. People with auditory perceptional problems may need more help. You may have to help take notes for them. It's important to know that people with perceptional or sensory overload issues may become disoriented or confused. It's important to stay calm and give information in a sequential manner and not be too inundate with too much. That can help with sensory overload.

The next point I talked about this with you. Don't pretend to understand. You never know what you could be agreeing to or just saying happy to do that. Always ask the person to repeat. If you have difficulty, it's okay to interact that with the individual.

People with cognitive disabilities may respond slowly. Patient is important when interacting with persons who may be a little slower than your responses.

Communication tips specifically for individuals with communication disabilities. This could be somebody who maybe doesn't speak on their own or using a communication device to speak. So if you're having trouble understanding what's beings said, you can ask the person to repeat. That's definitely more preferred than pretending you understand. Again, that former part is respectful and leads to accurate communication. If you're nodding your head and saying yeah, yeah, yeah. That can be embarrassing for that person. They think they're having an awesome conversation with you and you may not understand what's going on. So be respectful as possible. Again, the conversation people may respond slowly so patience. The last point is really important. If somebody is typing into their communication device or having trouble getting out a thought for a second, don't try to finish sentences or guess what the person is saying. That can be very challenging for the individual. It can confuse them. It could make them forget what they're trying to say to you. So patience is a virtue. Be mindful of not jumping in and making sure we ask and not presume.

The last point I want to share with you all is specifically AAC. This is another way that individuals with communication difficulties may communicate. AAC stands for augmentative alternative communication. Over on the bottom right-hand side is an image of what an AAC board could look like. You've got conversation starters, quick messages, there's an alarm there's a keyboard. Often with communication devices some of those common every day phrases that are familiar are already preprogrammed in there. So it's important to acknowledge values, multiple modes of communication.

Again, always ask the individuals preference when communicating. They may say let me get my communication device out. They may say give me time and we can talk about it. They may say can you write that down on a piece of paper. So there's different ways out there. Another example could be that some people prefer you read along as you type or read the completed message.

>> Sheryl Ballenger: Thank you, Liz. So helpful to be reminded that communication is not just about the give and take that we have in conversation, but there's so much to symbols and how we communicate through that and communicate in different environments and different people.

Thank you.

So we're going to look at communication tips that deal with deaf and hard of hearing individuals. That's a very specific type of disability that can affect a person's ability to hear, understand and even speak.

So, first off if you're dealing with someone who's deaf or hard of hearing ‑‑ and this could even be someone who's aging into being deaf or hard of hearing, ask them how they prefer to communicate. Not all deaf people use sign language.

Before you speak, make sure you get a person's attention. Lately we've been wearing masks in different places and I don't have a hearing loss but I find I don't hear as well if I don't see a person's mouth. So looking at the person and getting their attention even helps hearing people when we communicate.

So make sure you're doing that especially with deaf or hard of hearing people.

Always speak clearly and expressively as possible. Always speak in a normal tone. Even a person who is hard of hearing if you make your words louder than a normal speaking tone, it doesn't help. It actually distorts the sound and the way your mouth moves and that can create a barrier to someone speech reading.

Always speak directly to the person who is deaf or hard of hearing. Like Liz mentioned, she needs people to speak directly to her. Don't say "tell her" or "tell him" but speak directly to that deaf or hard of hearing person. If you're speaking through an interpreter, that interpreter may lag a few words behind. So pausing a moment would be very helpful so that that communication event can get all the way through and then the deaf or hard of hearing person has the opportunity to respond.

Reading lips most of us have heard that phrase at one time or another. It's now referred to as speech reading because we don't just stare at someone's lips. We look at their facial expressions and the way they move their hands and the way they shift and their lips all combined. So the phrase now is speech reading. It's very difficult. If you want to test yourself, you can certainly on any TV program or YouTube that you may watch online, turn your volume down and see what you can understand without hearing the audio. There's a production company called little moving pictures whose produced a cute video called can you read my lips. It's a clip about lip reading based on the essay seeing at the speed of sound by Rachel Kolb. So tonight or tomorrow or whenever you get time, go to YouTube and search for can you read my lips. The company little moving pictures gives a very showing of how it is when you have to read lips all the time, and how difficult that can really be. It's not simple. It's very difficult and unfortunately people who are hard of hearing or deaf have to depend on this quite often. So everything we can do as a hearing and speaking person to make that a smoother action is so appreciated.

Next slide.

Looking at deaf people and communication.

There's several options. There's not just one way of how this happens. So for deaf people in the Deaf community they may use American Sign Language, also known as ASL. They could use a pidgin signed or signed English where it's more based on English grammar but uses the ASL signs.

Some people use home signs. That's more of a pantomime version. Certified Deaf Interpreters have interpreters that are certified and have skills with the different various forms of sign language in the deaf community. Some people, even deaf who use sign language use speech reading in combination with sign language. Writing back and forth would be a last re‑sort but it does happen. In some business settings deaf people are forced because there's nothing on the other end to aid in communication. So they are forced to have to write their message back and forth. And writing can be very time consuming and difficult when you're in a business setting like that.

Most deaf people are not totally deaf. They have some residual hearing. So they may have some ability to speak. It's individualized. People who are hard of hearing may participate in listening and speaking to some degree. They may need assistive technology such as hearing aids or assistive listening devices. They do heavily depend on speech reading. They may use writing. They may also use sign English or American Sign Language but listening and speaking would be the top way people who are hard of hearing or small d deaf would communicate verses those in the Deaf communicate who use American Sign Language.

The percentage of communication ‑‑ this is from our Atlanta metro area, at one point in a survey it was learned that about 146 different languages are spoken at home and 17% speak a language other than English at home. There's not a nation‑wide survey that determine the number of speakers and ASL is not included on the census. We don't have data on how many people use American Sign Language. Estimates are ranging between 500,000 and 2 million. That may include those who are interpreters who use sign language for work along with those who are deaf and use American Sign Language as their main mode of communication. So 15% of American adults, 37.5 million of us, age 18 and over report some trouble hearing. So 45‑60 have a loss of hearing that is come on from different reasons like health or injury or just age. Disability is an equal opportunity for all of us to participate in at some point in our lives.

It's important to realize that American Sign Language is not English. It does not match word for word. What makes your organization feel more deaf friendly and accessible? You could think about it. What services could you have that could improve for a deaf audience or deaf community to participate with you.

Have you ever had any issues surrounding with confidentiality in dealing with your agencies? A problem with staff who may be available, this is something written in ASL that was written by a deaf person who wrote "before problem with staff, not keep confidential about your personal."

So in English that would be difficult for us to figure out.

The next comment they said was did they blah blah your personal with others. You can figure that out if you give it a try. If you let go of some of your English back ground and do you best to think about what is this person trying to say? They're trying to mention that they've had problems with your staff and keeping things confidential. That's a problem that they want addressed within your organization if this was an employee situation.

Another sentence might be in English what kind of training or information do you think agencies need to better serve deaf people? This may come across in ASL as teach, train, make a list, improve deaf friendly agency what? Well that's saying the same thing in English but in ASL. The message is the same but it's not word for word. So if you're dealing with an interpreter and you think I finished talking, why is the interpreter still signing, it's because they're getting the message across. They're making sure it's understood and vice versa. Maybe the deaf person signs a short sentence to the interpreter but the interpreter is voicing a paragraph to you. It's fine. It's the message that's being relayed and translated into the language either way which is needed.

Next slide.

>> Johan Rempel: Sheryl, I know we are rushing through because of limited time but I think it's important to make time for this. There's a question in the chat: Are there guidelines to interpret for deaf people from Spanish speaking communities in the U.S.A.?

>> Sheryl Ballenger: If you're dealing with a deaf person who uses Spanish sign language because American Sign Language is only for English speaking in America. Even in England where they speak English, they have British sign language. For a person who speaks Spanish their sign language will be more on Spanish sign language. So it would make sense that you might have to hire two interpreters. One who could interpret Spanish sign language and then another who can understand the Spanish and voice it in English if you needed that next move. If you understand Spanish you could probably deal with a Spanish interpreter that can voice in Spanish. It may require two interpreters for that kind of situation. I hope that answers your question.

So looking at ASL, it's more how translation happens. It's not just about your hands. It uses so much of the face and the body even. So a person's face indicates emotional state. The body is used to indicate action. Eyes are conversation regulators. They can start and stop the conversation. People can look right in your eyes and that's starting the conversation. And they can look away and that's stopping the conversation. Eye brows are grammatical markers. When a deaf person raises their eyebrows, they're asking a question. Just like we do in English but more pronounced. Mouth morphemes show lexical markers. This person is signing in a public communication event. They are doing the sign for "how" and you can see that whatever question was voiced this interpreter is now portraying in ASL because it's a big "how"? Maybe the person said, "how in the world did this happen?" This is coming across on the face of the interpreter. They don't even have to say how in the world. They just sign how.

You may hear individuals on a phone conversation if you deal with a deaf person calling through a relay operator. They may use the term go ahead and they may need you to also use the term go ahead because in communication over phone particularly or through a communication assistant with a relay service, it's one person at a time. It's kind of like Morris code if you want to think of it that way. So the deaf individual may be typing their message and don't know what you're saying back to them. The relay operator is voicing it to you. Your turn will happen to talk back to the relay operator when you hear "go ahead." So you get your turn to say everything you want to say that communication assistant is typing it back to the deaf viewer and when they read go ahead, they'll know it's their turn to respond back to you. In Georgia we have a Georgia relay service. Every state has one. Largely some part of community fees go to pay for a relay service in your state. These are some of the different symbols that you may see come across like TTY for text telephone or VCO, voice carry‑over may be for a person who uses their voice but cannot hear. Hearing carry‑over is the reverse of voice carry over. And speech to speech which is what we do and then video relay service it's done with actual signing on like a video camera to a relay assistant who voices it to you and when you voice as a hearing person the communication relay operator will sign back to the deaf person on the other end.

So there's multiple ways of how communication can happen electronically and this is one example. But learning "go ahead" as a feature is very important.

And now, Johan.

>> Johan Rempel: Thank you so much, Sheryl. What a wealth of information. So visual impairments and blindness. I'm going to be talking about this. This is more of a continuum than sort of boxing a person into one category or another. Next slide.

So how do you know if a person is blind or visually impaired? I've been accused of faking. I'm legally blind. I have a 22-inch monitor inches from my face. That's why I'm not fond of having the camera on because you would just see my forehead. You can say anyone who has the extended focal point to read a smart phone or menu at some point or another many of these aspects that Sheryl and Liz were talking about we're going to experience that to one degree or another. There's an adjustment to this. This isn't ‑‑ we are all somewhere on that continuum at some point in our lives.

These are ways you can determine a person's visual impairment.

Eye report. Rarely will you see that. Observation. Although even with this it may be misleading. A person like myself who was born being legally blind I adapt really well and I know how to adapt to my environment.

Word of mouth can be highly inaccurate. If you hear from someone else that the person is visually impaired or blind you don't know if that's total blindness. Again, going back to that communication that both Sheryl and Liz are emphasizing is just ask. If you're not sure, ask. Sometimes it's more of a reflection of a person's own discomfort about a disability than the person with a disabilities themselves.

So I encourage you to get comfortable with disabilities. It's not a curse. Individuals with disabilities have pushed up against this part all of their life. Discomfort comes with lack of communication.

Self‑disclosure is really one of the best ways to determine if a person is visually impaired or blind.

Even eye reports after 6 months to a year can change considerably.

Next slide.

So communicating with a person who is blind or low vision. Identify yourself by name when approaching. There's a misconception that someone who is blind or visually impaired recognizes voices right away. There's too many people in this world for us to always recognize individual voices. I'd say that 60‑70% of the time I get it right but often when I'm in an unfamiliar environment and someone calls out the majority of times, I have no idea who it is. Do not shout unless they say they have hearing loss. This is common. This is something Liz has talked about as well.

Just because a person has a specific disability does not mean they have hearing loss.

It's condescending and really inappropriate to raise your voice at someone with a disability unless you know they have a hearing loss. It's okay to use words like "see" and "look." What you don't want to do is point at something and say look at this, see what I mean? You want to avoid that. Gestures. Indicate that assistance is available but do not assume it's always needed. Again, like Liz was talking about. People taking hold of her wheelchair. Don't assume that the person needs help unless they indicate that.

Next slide.

Guiding a person who is blind. There's an image to the right of a woman ‑‑ they used to call an individual guiding someone who is blind as a sighted guide. That has shifted in recent years to human guide.

Just because the person that's guiding may be very familiar with the area and they may happen to be blind themselves.

So the woman is about half a step ahead of the man. The man has his folding cane next to him. He's holding her arm above the elbow. That frees her hand up to open a door or carry something in that hand. It is ‑‑ I can't emphasize enough how much feedback is provided just by holding on to that position just above the elbow. If she steps down because she's a half afoot ahead of him she will feel that immediately.

Him hanging on to her shoulder doesn't give as much feedback. Him holding on to her hand. Unless they're husband and wife or dating that might be inappropriate as well.

So do not grab the person you are guiding by the hand, arm or shoulder and try to steer them. Move your guiding arm behind your back when approaching a narrow space so the person can follow single file. That might be a little more difficult to conceptualize. But with her left arm she would move that behind her toward the center of her back and that would allow them to go through narrow passages like door ways for instance.

Hesitate briefly at a curb or flight of stairs and verbally indicate what's ahead. Don't give information over load. Make sure that the information you're providing is critical information.

Verbally indicate necessary landmarks when guiding a person who is blind.

Next slide.

So, a little bit of a situation where a friend of mine has put me in touch with a friend of hers and this person recently lost a considerable amount of vision. They use a cane. Sadly she refers to her cane as the pity stick. It's comic relief. Apparently, she's trying to make light of it but the cane is really ‑‑ provides literally the difference in many cases between life and death. If a person who is blind is traveling, this protects them in so many ways. The cane allows sound to emit in the air so the person can tell if it's concrete or asphalt. The cane is always in front of the person to contact obstacles. The cane is also the universal symbol of blindness. All of us recognize when you see someone with a white cane that indicates blindness or visual impairment.

And it quite literally is the extension of a person's finger. There's so much tactile information that can be provided through the cane. Acceptance of the white cane is very difficult for many people. Especially if they have vision loss later in life. My experience working in the field this is one of the biggest hurdles is having them accept the cane and be seen in public because it basically tells the world I'm blind and I function in a different way than a sighted person.

So when you see someone with a cane just realize that for some people that takes a lot of courage and the training involved it can be anywhere from 3 months to a year to be highly proficient with a cane. Photography next slide.

>> Liz Persaud: I want to let you know we're at 4:05.

>> Johan Rempel: Thank you. Additional communication tips. Inform people who are blind or have low vision to changes in the environment such as posting on bulletin boards or changes in the physical environment. Often that visual content is just not readily available, especially in the physical environment.

Do not use hand signals or gestures. Inform them of others who may be in their presence with you.

And keep in mind too when you're on a zoom call or teams meeting, someone who is blind or low vision might not know you're on the call so it's good practice to let them know ‑‑ let the room know that you're in the room if you're presenting or participating in any way.

Always speak directly to the person, not through another person. Liz touched on that as well.

Next slide.

These are just some software solutions and overview of the importance of keyboard skills for someone who's blind. They do not have the luxury of using the mouse to point and click. So keyboard familiarity is essential.

Next slide.

So for those who have some functional vision and may not be interested in learning the keyboard there's a number of individuals I have worked with that a lot of seniors who may not have good keyboard skills. These are some solutions. The stick ons, the high contrast keyboard that really may assist them to still use a computer.

Next slide.

And then in another presentation we're going to be going into more detail regarding screen reader technology. There's several screen readers on the market. NVDA stands for non‑visual desktop access. Narrator which is built into windows. JAWS which is the most popular and powerful. And then VoiceOver for Mac. One reason screen readers are so important for accessibility testing is it's a bit of a gold standard. If it can pass a screen reader test and someone who is blind can access it, generally it will be accessible across the board. Obviously for visual content such as captions for instance, a blind individual would not be able to read those. Although the transcript would be accessible to them. With some exceptions access to screen readers goes a long way to make sure a site is accessible.

And then refreshable braille displays. Converts what a screen reader speaks into braille. If you look at the picture to the right those pins shoot up and emulate what braille would actually feel like when it's printed or embossed.

Next slide.

Speaking of braille I will mention this briefly. Both Liz and Sheryl were heavily involved with a project we oversaw with the Centers for Disease Control. One of those deliverables was providing materials in an accessible format to people with disabilities and that included braille. We carried out some extensive usability testing and it turned out that a very high percentage of people who could read braille preferred COVID‑19 materials in braille format whether that's digital or embossed physical braille. So our braille department has mailed out thousands of packets of embossed braille COVID‑19 related materials. So this is definitely not obsolete. Braille has a very important role in the blindness community.

Next slide.

And then iOS and Android. Everything is going towards mobile. In fact, the majority of what's designed these days seems to be mobile first and there's a number of accessibility features within iOS and Android that specifically benefit individuals who are low vision or blind, but also benefits many other people with disabilities.

Next slide.

Okay. And additional resources here. Some curtsy rules of blindness that I thought would be of benefit through the national federation of the blind. And then the MaxiAIDS is a distributor of assistive technology solutions. A lot of solutions for individuals who are blind or low vision, but also communication devices across the board for individuals with a variety of different disabilities and needs.

And then the other two are local resources, center for the visually impaired. The majority of cities in the U.S. have agencies serving individuals who are blind or low vision. And then the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation agency provide assistance with funding and training as well regarding employment and education.

Next slide.

Okay. So wrapping up with communication rights.

Three points that I would like to cover: Be spoken to with respect and curtsy is a basic right that should be provided to anyone with a disability across the board. We should be doing that for anybody.

Be spoken to directly and not spoken for or talked about in a third person while present.

And have clear, meaningful and cultural appropriate communications. I would throw the word honesty in there as well. The level of honesty to be truthful like Liz said earlier. If you don't know something, don't pretend. The person on the receiving end will pick up on that immediately.

And next slide.

Time for questions.

Any comments or questions? Either unmute yourselves and feel free to speak it or post it in the chat. We'll give people a moment here.

While we're waiting, Liz and Sheryl, did you have any additional comments or feedback before we wrap up here?

>> Liz Persaud: Thank you, Johan for thinking of us to present this with you. When we started, these topics are the most favorite for me to talk about. I hope this was helpful and that you learned something new. We have our contact information up. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out.

>> Johan Rempel: Thank you.

>> Sheryl Ballenger: I second what Liz said. That's absolutely true. If anybody has questions after this please do e‑mail us. We're happy to respond.

>> Johan Rempel: We are a passionate bunch. Okay. I will give people another minute or two for any ‑‑ maybe a minute for any questions or comments that you may have. If you want to be confidential about it, you're welcome to e‑mail us separately and we're happy to follow up one on one with you.

Again, this is going to be archived and I will be sharing this with Allie McDougal. We'll provide the entire PowerPoint as an accessible PDF, as well as the transcript. We'll be sending that out.

I'm not seeing any questions or comments. I thank you all for your time. I know you're all extremely busy. Especially after a Thanksgiving break. I'm sure you all have plenty to get back to and your inboxes are full. Unless there are other questions or comments, we will go ahead and close it out.

We're getting a lot of thank yous. We appreciate you attending.

A big thank you to Sheryl and Liz. I learn from them every time I present with them.

All right. With that I will stop the recording and hope you all have a good rest of the day. Thank you so much.