

# Access to community Centres

## Introduction

In this document, you will find many suggestions as to how to make your services more accessible to people with a hearing loss. Happily, thanks to modern technology, there are many and varied ways of supporting those that use your services. While one system may not work for everyone, there are lots of good ideas that may work together to support people in different situations. This is by no means a comprehensive list, more of a suggestion.

If you would like to know more about any equipment, apps or ideas, please do get in touch with our knowledgeable and friendly staff. The contact details are at the bottom of the page.

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## **Examples of situations where access requirements are to be met**

### **Group gathering – guests seated theatre style - needing to hear the presenters**

In this situation, we have a presenter talking to a group of people. Everyone in the group needs to hear the presenter clearly regardless of where they are in the room.

Things to consider:

- 1) Good acoustics and no background noise.
- 2) Possible questions from the audience, how will the audience hear?
- 3) Not all audience members will have hearing aids but the majority may have a hearing loss.

### **Group meeting – around a table - needing to hear each other**

Things to consider:

1. Good acoustics and no background noise.
2. People will talk over each other, so there will need to be some method of reducing this.
3. How will all people round the table hear each other clearly?
4. How will the people with hearing loss know who is talking?

## **Legalities**

All community spaces, care homes and other public service providers are required under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments for people with disabilities. You'll need to consider how to make a service or activity as accessible as possible, but balance this with encouraging people to come forward with their own access needs.

### **Ask your congregants what help they need**

Where possible, do ask if people have access needs. While some people may not come forward, by looking at your demographic, you may be able to work out the likelihood of people having hearing loss. 60% of people aged 60+ are likely to have a hearing loss – whether or not they wear hearing aids.

People with hearing loss can be reluctant to admit it. There are various ways to ask people discreetly about their access needs. In an application form, you could have a section asking what they would like in order to access a service. By keeping it general, you may find some interesting requests that may be very simple to meet.

You can also run discussion workshops and invite people to take part for the good of the community. By inviting people to help others, it can increase the response rate.

### **Good acoustics are just as important as equipment**

As our hearing deteriorates, we find it more difficult to be in noisy places. Spaces with high ceilings, no carpets or curtains, hard floors and surfaces can be really noisy, as they reflect the sound, creating extra challenges for people with hearing loss.

When choosing a room or place for your gathering, think about the acoustics. Does sound echo? Is there lots of reverberation? Ask someone with hearing loss to help you with this. Soft surfaces absorb sound reverberations - curtains (covering walls as well as windows), carpets, rugs, tablecloths are all helpful.

Installing acoustic ceiling and/or wall panels can reduce the way sound bounces around a room and make it easier for everyone to hear more clearly.

Acoustic treatment can:

- reduce excessive noise levels, which in turn reduces stress for people with hearing aids.
- reduce echo and reverberation, which can increase sound quality and clarity.
- ensure that what is being said stays inside the room – important for confidentiality.
- One company that JDA has worked with to improve the sound quality in schools is [www.hushtacoustics.co.uk](http://www.hushtacoustics.co.uk)

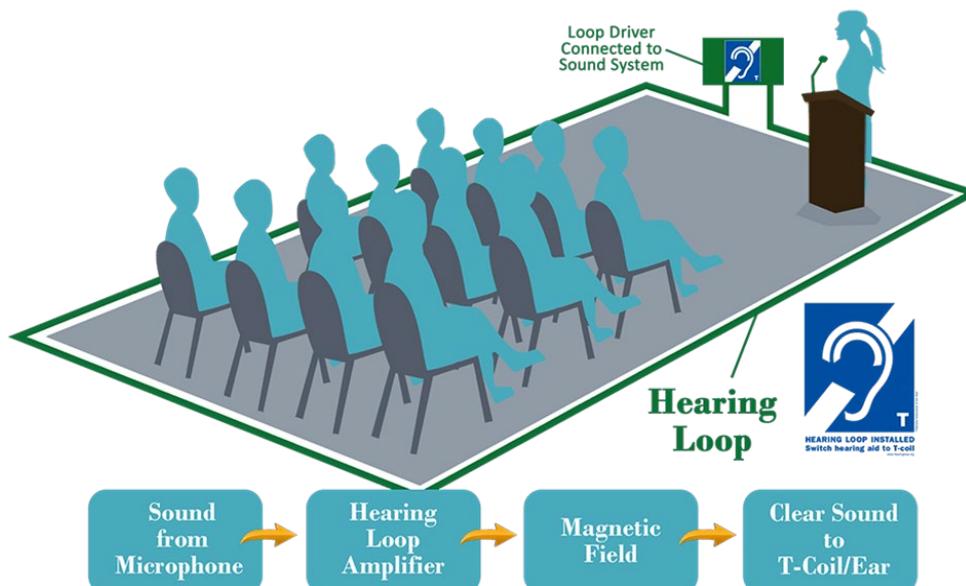


## Hearing Loop systems – for installation in synagogues, meeting rooms and reception areas

Some people's hearing aids have a loop setting (sometimes called a T setting) which enables them to enjoy clear sound directly from a microphone to their hearing aids, via the use of a hearing loop.

This is a magnetic sound system with a microphone that streams sound directly and discreetly into the hearing aids, cutting out background noise without the need for a receiver or headset. It works via a fixed cable around the room - ideal for a large group of people with one presenter, or can be portable - ideal for a one-to-one situation such as at a reception area, or private meeting.

The fixed loop is also ideal for use in synagogues, as hearing aids can be adjusted to the loop setting before the start of the Sabbath or holy days.



## **Bluetooth Technology**

Hearing loops are no longer the only option to stream sound directly and we are seeing a big change in what technology is available to use with hearing aids both from the NHS and private sector.

Newer Bluetooth technology can connect hearing aids to a sound source wirelessly and produces very clear, digital sound. Increasing numbers of people are being issued with Bluetooth enabled hearing aids as the NHS is beginning to offer them as standard.

Depending on how their hearing aids are programmed, not everyone will be able to access a hearing loop or a Bluetooth signal so when deciding what to purchase, you may need to get equipment that can help users of both technologies.

**Before investing in either system, please seek professional guidance or email [andrew@jdeaf.org.uk](mailto:andrew@jdeaf.org.uk).**

## **Equipment for individuals**

One way that people with a hearing loss can take part in a one-to-one conversation or hear in a group more easily, even when there is a lot of background noise, is with the simple to use **Bellman Mino digital personal amplifier**.

It works both without hearing aids, using headphones, or with hearing aids, using a neck loop. As it has a short lead, it cannot be placed more than 3 feet from the wearer so the presenter will ideally be between 1 and 3 feet away.

If the voice of the presenter can be picked up, the Mino produces very clear sound and reduces background noise, which helps the wearer to focus on one voice at a time. If the presenter is further away, then more background noise will leak in and the pickup of the voice will not be so efficient.

The Mino has a T setting that allows people who don't wear hearing aids to connect to a room loop if it exists. This is especially useful when attending services in a large room. To combat any concerns about infection control, we suggest that people bring their own headphones or earphones to the synagogue - as long as they have a 3.5mm jack, they will be compatible. We like this particular device as it presents high sound quality and is good value for money.

There are other systems such as the Roger Pen that offer unrivalled sound quality but are much more expensive.

**For more information on the Mino or any other equipment, please contact Gabrielle or Judith in JDA's Technology and Information Centre on 020 8446 0214 / [info@hearingconnect.org.uk](mailto:info@hearingconnect.org.uk)**

## PA systems (public address system)

A PA system increases the volume of sound for everyone, which is really useful for large gatherings. It works by transmitting sounds from a hand-held microphone to one or more speakers around a room.

### IRR-40P-with-SwiftTX-microphone-kit and 4-WALL-SPEAKERS

The presenter wears an infra-red transmitter microphone that sends the signal to a transmitter box. The system uses 4 small speakers set around the room, giving a more balanced volume level to the whole audience. It can also have a function installed, which will allow those with the loop setting in their hearing aids to pick up the signal directly.



## Apps on phones that either make sounds clearer or provide live subtitles

There are several Apps on mobile phones that can produce text from speech, effectively producing live subtitles. The phone can be paired with a smart tv to have subtitles up for a whole audience to see. While the free apps are pretty good, Dragon Anywhere is currently the most accurate.

To improve the quality of any speech to text software, the use of a microphone enhances the accuracy up to 97%, making it very useful for groups of all sizes at minimal cost. You can pair a phone with an omnidirectional microphone such as the **Shure MV5** available on [Amazon](#). This microphone clips onto a lapel and has the advantage of being small and easy to carry.



Omnidirectional means that it will pick up sound in all directions, so is an advantage if the microphone is being used in meetings. When used by a single presenter, however, it may be more useful to use a directional microphone to reduce background noise. Many good quality microphones are able to switch between directional and omnidirectional, depending on how they are being used.

An example of a good quality microphone that you would have on a desk in a meeting is the **Shure MV5C** available on [Amazon](#). This type of microphone can also be suitable for use with computers, laptops and tablets.

When buying a microphone, consider how it will be used - for example, will it be sitting on a desk, or will you use it while mobile? Does it connect using a 3.5-millimetre jack, USB or Bluetooth?

## Apple iOS

**Voice to text pro:** [apps.apple.com](#) is an app that enables you to dictate to your phone and save the result across several programs. There are both free and paid versions available.

**Transcribe Live:** [apps.apple.com](#)

This app is free for the first 15 minutes then is chargeable. It uses machine learning to transcribe into 7 different languages in real time.

## Android

**Live Transcribe:** [Play store](#) is Google's own software and has access to the largest database of different accents in the world. While not the current leader in terms of accuracy, it is certainly a flexible and free option.

## Any system (iOS, Android, Windows, Linux etc)



**Dragon Anywhere:** <https://shop.nuance.co.uk> This version supports Apple, Android and Windows mobile phones. There is a charge per year but it allows for great mobility.



**Chatable Apps** <https://chatableapps.com/> helps you focus on in-person conversation by providing clear voice without noise, using pioneering Artificial Intelligence based on auditory neuroscience. It is available via an annual subscription or one-off payment.

## Programs used on a laptop/desktop



**Dragon Naturally speaking:** <https://shop.nuance.co.uk> is the version for laptops and computers, and may be easier to connect to a smart TV. Nuance, the company behind this software, is currently the market leader in AI-driven dictation software. There is a one-off payment.

Having subtitles can be very useful, not only to those with hearing loss, but to those for whom English is a second language.

## PowerPoint presentations

If your service or speech is pre-prepared, you can consider using a laptop connected to a TV or projector with the text on a PowerPoint presentation. This can be set to change pages automatically once running. This is especially useful if there are different languages side by side on a page.

The benefit of this over a book being held by the audience member is that the slide will show exactly where you are in the text. It helps to ensure everyone in an audience is on the same page.

## Communication Support Workers

We have mentioned a lot of equipment and devices that can provide ways of accessing speech. There are a range of communication support workers (CSW) that can also be very useful for one-off events.

**Speech to text reporters** use one of two systems to provide verbatim speech on a screen. Palantype and Stenography refers to the equipment used. They both work in the same way, using a phonetic keyboard. They can type verbatim at 250 words per minute at 97% accuracy. The advantage is that they can add special words or phrases into the conversation and can ensure that any slang or abbreviated words are added. Unlike AI driven automatic captions, if a mistake is made, a STTR can correct that mistake on the fly, leading to a vastly superior service.

They can either dial into a meeting and listen over the phone or be present in the room. The latter option is more expensive as you'll need to cover travel costs. However, by being in the room, the STTR is able to ensure that there is good sound for them to listen to and is able to interrupt presenters for clarification if needed.

Some STTRs are able to switch between pre-prepared text and live text. This is very useful for when a speech is given using technical words or switching between English and a different language, such as Hebrew.

There are other CSWs available, such as **lipspeakers**. They repeat what is said using a very clear lip pattern with their voices "switched off" and can be useful for small groups. They are not suitable for larger groups, however, as people will need to be seated close to the lipspeaker in order to see the lips.

**BSL interpreters** also fall into this category. They translate what is spoken into British Sign Language (BSL) so that those who use this language will follow. BSL is a visual language with its own syntax and grammatical structure. Those who use BSL may not be able to follow spoken English and so will need an interpreter in order to take a full and active part in any activity.

**For information on how to book a CSW or interpreter, please call us on 020 8446 0502 or email [mail@jdeaf.org.uk](mailto:mail@jdeaf.org.uk).**

## Talks

At JDA, we have some wonderful volunteers with a wealth of experience around hearing loss and how to be accessible. They are experienced in giving entertaining and informative talks to groups of any size. They can talk about clear communication, lipreading, technology and the experience of being hard of hearing.

If you would like to book a talk by one of our volunteers, do get in touch using the contact details above.

## Other equipment

At the JDA we have a room full of other equipment available to try out that might be useful for staff or volunteers. This service is called Hearing Connect. Do contact either Gabrielle or Judith to find out more about trying equipment, advice on hearing aids and their use.

Alerting devices:

- Fire alarms
- Doorbells
- Paging systems
- Phone ringers
- Amplified phones

TV listeners can also be useful for online meetings via Zoom/Teams.

## Hearing Connect contact details:

Telephone: 020 8446 0214

Email: [info@hearingconnect.org.uk](mailto:info@hearingconnect.org.uk)

Web: [www.jdeaf.org.uk](http://www.jdeaf.org.uk)