

# How to enable deaf and hard of hearing people to access your community events and services



## Introduction

Here are some suggestions as to how to make your services more accessible to people with a hearing loss. Happily, thanks to modern technology, there are lots of different ways to do this. While one system may not work for everyone, there are a variety of good ideas that may work together to support people in different situations. This is by no means a comprehensive list – it is an overview to get you started.

If you would like to know more about any equipment, apps or ideas, please do reach out to our knowledgeable and friendly staff. Their contact details are at the bottom of the document.

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## 1) Examples of situations where access requirements need to be met

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

When a presenter is talking to a group of people, everyone in the group needs to hear them clearly, regardless of where they are in the room.

Things to consider:

- 1) Make sure you have good acoustics and lighting - and no background noise.
- 2) If there are questions from the audience, how will the audience hear what's being said?
- 3) Not all audience members will have hearing aids but some may have a hearing loss.

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

Things to consider:

1. Make sure you have good acoustics and lighting - and no background noise.
2. People will talk over each other, so there will need to be some method of encouraging them to speak one at a time.
3. How will all people round the table hear each other clearly?
4. How will the people with hearing loss know who is talking?

## 2) 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, whilst also encouraging people to let you know their own access needs.

## 3) 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.

A Deaf person is likely to tell you they need an interpreter. But 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.

## 4) 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, thus reducing 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



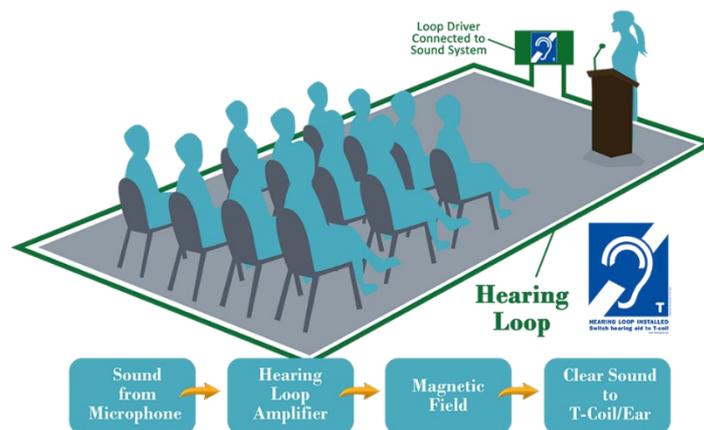
[www.hushtacoustics.co.uk](http://www.hushtacoustics.co.uk)

## 5) 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. It works via a fixed cable around the room - ideal for a large group of people with one presenter. There is a portable version - 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.



## 6) Bluetooth Technology

Hearing loops are no longer the only option to stream sound directly and we are seeing a big change in the technology available for 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. More 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, some people will be able to benefit from a hearing loop, whilst others will be able to access a Bluetooth signal. So when deciding what to purchase, you may need to get equipment that can help users of both technologies.

Below is a list of different types of equipment available. Some can be bought, rented or offered by your local council's sensory services department.

**Before investing in any system, please seek professional guidance or contact us at Hearing Connect on 020 8446 0214 / [info@hearingconnect.org.uk](mailto:info@hearingconnect.org.uk)**

## 7) Equipment for individuals



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

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 it will be harder for the wearer to pick up the presenter's voice.

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.

For infection control and good hygiene, we suggest that people bring their own headphones or earphones - 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 at JDA's Technology and Information Centre on 020 8446 0214 / [info@hearingconnect.org.uk](mailto:info@hearingconnect.org.uk)**

## 8) PA system (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.

One example is the **[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.

## 9) Microphones



Most devices listed here will benefit from having a microphone connected. This will enable the best quality sound to be picked up and relayed to a phone/laptop or other device.

You can pair a phone with an omnidirectional microphone such as the [Shure MV5](#) available on [Amazon](#). This microphone clips onto a lapel, is 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, do 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 to the device you are using with a 3.5-millimetre jack, USB or Bluetooth?

## 10) Apps on phones that provide live subtitles

Having subtitles is extremely helpful, not only to those with hearing loss, but to those for whom English is a second language.

There are several apps for mobile phones that can produce text from speech, effectively creating live subtitles. The phone can be paired with a smart TV to display captioning for a whole audience to see. While the free apps are pretty good, they're not perfect. Dragon Anywhere is currently the most accurate.

### 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 such as Note and Word. 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 speech to text 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 a flexible and free option.



**Speechnotes:** <https://play.google.com/> One of the best features of Speechnotes is its punctuation keyboard. Many people find it awkward to dictate punctuation marks (for example, you typically have to say "Hi Mum comma please pick up the kids").

The punctuation keyboard adds on-screen buttons for the most commonly used marks, thus allowing you to dictate faster and more naturally. It also offers emojis and symbols. Currently as both free and paid options.

## 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 because it is on a mobile phone, it can be used while out and about, for example in a shop or in a restaurant, not just in a meeting-based situation.



**AVA** <https://www.ava.me/> This US based company has developed an app that uses both AI and Speech-to-Text Reporters to provide live subtitles with reportedly 97% accuracy. This is available on mobile phones with either IOs, Android or Windows systems, as well as laptops and computers. It is aimed at companies to provide support for D/deaf staff and customers. In addition, because this is using highly skilled professionals as well as AI, the charge is higher than for other apps.



**Otter AI** <https://otter.ai/> Fast becoming one of the largest transcription services in the US, this app can be used on all makes of mobile phones as well as computers. **The app can be integrated with other software, for example Zoom calls**, to provide captions to online meetings as well as live conversations. Currently they offer 600 minutes for free every month with paid options available.

## Programs used on a laptop/desktop



**Dragon Naturally speaking:** <https://shop.nuance.co.uk> is the version for laptops and computers and therefore 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.

## 10) Apps on phones that make sounds clearer



**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. There are two sliders to use, one to make sounds louder and the other to reduce background noise. It is easy to adjust the sliders to your personal preferences.

As the app is compatible only with certain phones, please check the website before downloading. It is available via an annual subscription or one-off payment.

## 11) PowerPoint presentations as a visual aid

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 (e.g. Hebrew and English in a synagogue service).**

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.

## 12) Communication Support Workers (CSWs)

There are a range of professional people - communication support workers (CSWs) - who can also help to make events accessible to people with hearing loss.

### Speech to Text Reporters

**If you are holding a big event, we highly recommend employing a Speech to Text Reporter to display almost 100% accurate live captioning on a big screen for all to see.**

Speech to Text Reporters use one of two systems to display 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. If a mistake is made, a Speech to Text Reporter can correct that mistake on the fly, giving a vastly superior service to any AI automatic captioning.

A great advantage is that you can send them your speech or presentation in advance and let them know any specific or unusual words, names and terms that are likely to come up. They can then add all these special words or phrases (including Hebrew, abbreviations, slang and jargon) into their dictionary when they are preparing for your event, ensuring these words will all be displayed accurately. (We can't recommend this highly enough!)

Some Speech to Text Reporters 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.

Ideally, a Speech to Text Reporter will be present in the room. If this is not possible, they can dial into a meeting and listen over the phone, which is cheaper but not as efficient. Being in the room ensures that there is good sound for them to listen to and enables them to interrupt presenters for clarification if needed.

**Lipspeakers** can be useful for an individual or in small groups. They sit facing the person with hearing loss, repeating what is said using a very clear lip pattern with their voices "switched off".

They are not suitable for larger groups, as people will need to be seated close to the lipspeaker in order to see the lips.

**British Sign Language Interpreters** translate what is spoken into British Sign Language (BSL) so that people who are culturally Deaf and use sign language will follow what is being

said – and be able to respond and communicate effectively. British Sign Language is a visual language with its own syntax and grammatical structure.

Do not assume that those who use BSL can follow written or spoken English. They will need you to book a BSL interpreter so they can play a full and active part in any activity or service – and of course be able to ask questions and take part in conversation. A BSL interpreter must be professionally trained, suitably qualified and appropriate for the assignment.

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

### **13) 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, please call us on 020 8446 0502 or email [mail@jdeaf.org.uk](mailto:mail@jdeaf.org.uk)**

### **14) Other services at JDA**

#### **Equipment demonstrations**

At the JDA we have a room full of 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.

#### **Lipreading classes**

Every Monday, we offer two lipreading classes. Each one is two hours long and is designed to be as accessible and informative as possible. One class is in person in our office in North Finchley, the other is on Zoom. Run by Gabrielle, a highly qualified lipreading tutor, the classes are suitable for people wanting to learn a new skill as well as gain advice on how to cope in a wide variety of situations. There are three terms per year. Please contact us for more information.

#### **Tinnitus Retraining Therapy**

Tinnitus retraining therapy is a form of habituation therapy designed to help people who experience tinnitus, a ringing, buzzing, hissing, or other sound in the ears when no external sound is present. Gabrielle is a qualified therapist, enabling clients to manage their reaction to the tinnitus and thereby reduce the impact it has on everyday life.

## Book Club

We offer a social opportunity for people with hearing loss to meet and discuss books and other matters important in life. Meeting every month, the group leader is trained to ensure that everyone in the group has the opportunity to take part and enjoy the experience of being in a social environment. Suitable for those wishing to improve their coping mechanisms around hearing loss in a social environment. This group is currently suspended during the pandemic.

## Gabrielle & Judith at Hearing Connect

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