

AMERICAN LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
2020 MIDWINTER MEETING
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

FRIDAY, JANUARY 24, 2020
11:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M.
DEAF CULTURE FORUM

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National Association of the Deaf

>> MELISSA DRAGANAC-HAWK: Hello, everyone. Good afternoon. I hope everyone is feeling very satisfied at lunch and isn't falling asleep. I know we are getting close to the afternoon hours. I am the National Association for the Deaf president, and I want to tell you a bit about our organization that was established back in 1880.

Really, we promote the preservation of the deaf human language rights. That is our priority. This afternoon I'm so thrilled to have been invited so that I can talk from the perspective of myself as a person, but also the perspective of deaf people across the country of America, and about how we interact with libraries. So, I'm not going to talk too much about NAD, I would rather focus on libraries while we are here. So just three points, very recently there was the librarian who was signing from the Public Library, and I think it's just a critical piece to mention that many parents who have deaf children are looking for, are hungry for the opportunity to meet other people who know sign language.

90 percent of parents of deaf children are hearing and when

their child is born, they don't know sign language. So often, of course, states offer early intervention services, but where is the human interaction? Where is the opportunity for that deaf child to have peers? That's quite a difficult task. Coming to the deaf school or deaf program typically doesn't happen until a child is at least five years old.

Here in Philadelphia, I wear two hats. I work for, of course, as the president of the National Association of the Deaf, but I also work at the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, and the free library of Philadelphia has been in some discussions with us about partnering around some different ideas. Perhaps identifying four Public Libraries where it would be easily accessible for parents and families to get there by public transportation because oftentimes families don't have a car. To arrive once every Saturday for Storytime that would happen through American Sign Language through a storyteller who is either deaf or they might use a sign language interpreter.

That would bring children together and hearing parents who are going through this similar difficult experience, and they have the opportunity to connect with one another. So that's something we are really strongly encouraging.

Additionally, within the prison system, there are many deaf people who have been in the prison system, and not all of them have the ability to necessarily read. Some of them can and they might read magazines. One story that I have heard of as a person who was incarcerated, and they did not have equal access as the hearing prisoners. The hearing prisoners were able to talk with one another and chat during down times, but the deaf person would often times just watch television and the television did have captions ready, sometimes there weren't captions available for that programming and became very lonely for the deaf person.

And the library really saved their life during that time in prison. And being in the library, given the opportunity to talk with friends and family members once they came in for family visits about what they were reading in the library. So, it was an opportunity to really have something to think positively about while in prison and be part of the library. Some of those libraries, the information in there is very old, and so it needs to be updated, but that's something to very much consider in regards to the deaf population.

The National Association for the Deaf has a variety of different committees. One is called the Sections committee. And one area of expertise within the committee was established in 1984 with FOLDA. Alice was previously involved with that and establishing that member section and that focuses specifically on libraries, and wanting to recognize deaf awareness month, and that particular member section has continued on and now has

changed to Library Friends and then once again changed to the Deaf culture and history section. You might be wondering why we've changed that section over time. What we have found is we wanted to look more broadly than just specifically at libraries. We wanted to look at more that there were resources available about Deaf culture and make sure those were accessible to libraries.

Our current chair is Amelia Dall, and she is very energetic and very active and we have been having lots of committee meetings that encourage librarians or folks to get involved. So, I would love to discuss more with people how we can expand that connection and continue to share resources.

So those are my three perspectives from NAD, but my personal experience, I would love to see libraries have a specific section that's designated to Deaf culture or to deaf language. There are so very many deaf authors out there, and many of them are talking about the Deaf experience. There are children's books that are new as well. We also have lots of ASL literature, and ASL English bilingual literature, so it would be wonderful if there was an area designated in the library and that way families that have children that are deaf could come in and take advantage of that in local communities. Oftentimes the resources are spread throughout the library not necessarily in one easily accessible location. One book that I read that was called Boy and it was written by Phil Cummings, an author from Australia, and he talked about the deaf child who is a soldier, who saves a dragon and there is a fight about what's happening in the story and the boy doesn't understand and he is trying to rescue them. It is a sweet story.

The point is that that's a very inspiring book for deaf children to see that they can be brave. and they can be involved in a rescue or saving someone. So, whenever I meet deaf children, I read that book again and again and I think it's a great one. So, thank you for listening today.

(Applause).
