



## **VR: Faces of Deaf Consumers**

### **In Search of the Right Words**

As you approach your learning about the diversity of the Deaf community and the implications for work as an interpreter in vocational rehabilitation settings, it is important to first acknowledge the limits of language. In this unit, you will be introduced to some terms that have negative connotations, such as "low functioning deaf" and "minimal language skills." These labels attempt to identify particular challenges that people may have in communicating.

Other people, such as [Roger Williams at the National Symposium on Healthcare Interpreting in July 2012](#), use terms such as "dysfluency" to describe these concepts. Others suggest using the phrase, "working with people who have multiple barriers." Other terms that you may encounter include alingual to describe someone who has never been exposed to a natural language or semi-lingual for those who may have some signs but expression remains limited.

Throughout this module, we refer often to the Report on Serving Individuals who are Low-Functioning Deaf-the 25<sup>th</sup> Institute on Rehabilitation Issues as it provides depth and breadth on the topic of serving Deaf individuals with unique needs. We seek to use the terms dysfluent, alingual, semi-lingual rather than "low-functioning deaf". Yet our reliance on this source text means that the term will appear regularly as well.

This module will not solve this issue, but wants to begin by acknowledging that it is still an open question of what language is most respectful for talking about this topic. And so in beginning, we quote from the Report on Serving Individuals who are Low-Functioning Deaf- the 25th Institute on Rehabilitation Issues. Published in 1999, this report addressed this issue then. While years have gone by and new terms have been introduced, it is important to know this concern still needs to be addressed.

### **Note on Terminology**

The term "low-functioning deaf" has been used since the late 1970s to describe the group of individuals to be discussed in this report. This term was used by the Commission on Education of the Deaf (COED), by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), by Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), and in legislation passed by the United States Congress. This term is used in this report to achieve consistency in terminology and is not intended to perpetuate a negative "label" for persons with a disability. When this term is used, the authors are referring to persons

who are diagnosed as deaf or having a hearing loss through clinical assessment and who require adapted communication in their everyday lives. The authors of this report acknowledge that the field must develop more person-centered language to describe this group of deaf and hard-of hearing persons. This challenge, however, is beyond the scope and purpose of this document. The authors, therefore, agreed to use the terms “persons who are identified as LFD” or “individuals who are LFD” as the preferred references in this publication (Report on Serving Individuals Who are Low-Functioning Deaf).

So, as you begin your journey exploring the diversity of the Deaf community, know that as a profession we still are looking for the right words to describe the joys and challenges that are to be found.

Copyright © 2013 by the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers (NCIEC).

This NCIEC product was developed by the National Interpreter Education Center (NIEC) at Northeastern University. Permission is granted to copy and disseminate these materials, in whole or in part, for educational, non-commercial purposes, provided that NCIEC is credited as the source and referenced appropriately on any such copies.