



## Hill Country Intergroup Deaf Access Committee:

### Questions and Answers about us!!

The HCIA Deaf Access Committee exists to help Deaf people who want to get sober or stay sober be able to do that. We believe that it is AA's responsibility to help any alcoholic who suffers from our disease have access to the message. A Deaf person cannot have access to the message without interpreters, and most cannot afford an interpreter on a regular basis. DAC exists to provide both spiritual and financial support, for Deaf people to participate in AA, get a sponsor, and be part of our fellowship on a regular and on-going basis. Because an individual, especially a newly sober individual, cannot carry the financial burden of interpreters, and because a single group also cannot, we believe that the responsibility should be shared by all AA groups, to pool contributions ear-marked for this purpose, as has been done successfully in other parts of the United States.

Below are some questions that are frequently asked about DAC:

#### **1. How much should a group contribute?**

It doesn't matter how much or how little. Any amount helps, and contributes to the whole.

#### **2. How much do interpreters cost?**

A lot. However, we have a number of dedicated professionals willing to accept a lower rate. That lower rate is about \$100.00 per AA meeting per interpreter. Most professionals, through an agency, charge more, but those who are willing, compassionate, and dedicated, help us for less.

### **3. Why not use volunteers or state provided interpreters??**

Due to the complexity of interpreting, it is not guaranteed that the volunteer is fluent in interpreting, or follows the code of ethics, which includes *anonymity*. Experience has shown that relying on volunteers doesn't work. We don't ask doctors or janitors to volunteer their services; neither do we ask professional interpreters to volunteer their services.

Also, Volunteer interpreters, while appreciated in a pinch, because they are not being paid, have the option not to show up. This is very disappointing for a Deaf person looking forward to the only meeting they may get, and not be able to comprehend anything being share in an meeting or be able to interact with others, contributing to the isolation they already feel due to their alcoholism.

### **4. Why is it so expensive?**

Interpreters go to school to learn this skill of interpreting, after having studied ASL for a number of years. Interpreters are certified by accreditation organizations after demonstration of skill as well as professionalism in the code of ethics. The interpreters who "free lance" must factor in overhead costs such as certification fees, mileage, and time used traveling between jobs, and so forth. Also, many times, two interpreters are required, due to the physical and mental stamina required to translate well over the given period of time.

### **5. Haven't we had interpreters before at AA meetings?**

Yes, but having an interpreter is only part of what AA can provide to hear the message. Many AA members do not interact with Deaf people due to their own awkwardness of speaking through an interpreter therefore Deaf people don't build relationships, and Deaf people don't get sponsored. Some of the Deaf newcomers feel they are treated differently then hearing newcomers. The hearing members seemed more willing to offer help to hearing newcomers than Deaf. And when the

newcomer does show up instead of being welcomed back (like a hearing newcomer or someone that relapsed) some Deaf newcomers are greeted with resentment. “We paid an interpreter and you didn’t show up”. And, sadly, sometimes the actions of a few are carried over to any Deaf newcomer that attends. DAC is trying hard to bridge the gap between hearing and Deaf AA members, so that there can Deaf people can have access to the message AND have relationships within the fellowship. There ‘s more to AA than just the meetings.

#### **6. Why aren’t more Deaf people showing up at interpreted meetings?**

It depends on many factors, most related to having enough AA members with long-term sobriety willing to do 12-step work. We also need to improve on getting the interpreted meeting list out to the Deaf community resources. We need more volunteers willing to sponsor, give rides, and do basic newcomer service work with the Deaf alcoholics. There have also been problems with having correct information about meetings that are interpreted, and consistent information provided, and having professionals in place who will show up to do the job required.

#### **7. Can a Deaf person just read the written materials provided if they cannot attend the meetings?**

Clearly understanding the written English materials will depend on the Deaf person’s educational background. ASL is most often the first language of the Deaf person, whereas English is their second language. American Sign Language (ASL) is a visual language, and *not* a written language. ASL has its own linguistic rules, and includes visual cues for tone of voice and emotional content. It is not a coded form of English. ASL is a conceptual, visually spatial language with no direct word-for-word translation to English. Thus, knowledge about Alcoholics Anonymous is not communicated very well to the Deaf community, especially through written English. Presently the only AA literature available in ASL from the General Service Office is the first 164 pages of the Big Book (VS-1) and the Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions (VS-3). GSO is currently working on an even more accurate translation of the 4th Edition. For many AAs the key to their sobriety is having the opportunity to hear other AA members share their experience, strength, and hope in sobriety and service. Alcoholics who are Deaf have no access to AA stories and find very limited access to AA meetings, and service events, thus

makes it difficult for them to learn how others members of AA stay sober and how do service work.

### **8.Is DAC really part of AA??**

We used to be a standing committee, formed by AA members, for AA members. After a year and a half of showing growing results with our efforts to help AA, we joined Intergroup as a standing committee. You can read more about or history and purpose on our webpage.

### **9.Is DAC accountable financially we the money contributed?**

Yes. We send a report to Intergroup, and our treasure's report is published on the DAC website. [www.austindac.org](http://www.austindac.org)

### **10.s it breaking anonymity for an interpreter to be at an AA meeting?**

No. We asked GSO about this, and here is their response:

“Our experience is that many group consciences of both open and closed meetings have agreed to allow professional non-A.A. ASL interpreters to translate for an A.A. member in their meetings. In order to help both newcomers and longtime A.A. members, some groups announce at the beginning of the meeting that the professional translator is bound by a code of ethics and that all interpreted communications are confidential. Some A.A. members have pointed out that an interpreter, like a wheelchair, is just a method or apparatus to help an A.A. member with special needs.”

### **11.Why don't Deaf people get together and have their own meeting?**

This had been tried before.It doesn't work, because there is a lack of experience,strength, and hope.GSO has more to share on this:

“GSO experience indicates that limiting an A.A. meeting to a narrow category of A.A. members may not allow the full, rich message of A.A. to be available. An example is a group that meets in a school where only young people with limited sobriety attend. They are not able to take advantage of longer time sobriety, experience, strength and hope. Our experience is that Deaf members report that attending regular ASL interpreted meetings of A.A. helps them with their spiritual condition and often helps them avoid the temptation to feel isolated and relapse. There have been attempts in the past to start up AA meetings conducted in ASL, but often these groups do not get input or feedback from old timers as to how to use the Traditions to keep it an AA meeting. The majority of the participants are new to sobriety and have had very limited exposure to AA meetings, service, and the AA traditions. These groups often do not have the experience, strength, and hope offered from AA meetings that have participants with long-term sobriety and experience in service.”

## **12. What about state provided interpreters??**

In Austin, where there are a lot of Deaf people because of the Deaf school here, is a very closed community. Anonymity among the Deaf community is very important, in early sobriety especially. Interpreters hired by the State may even be co-workers of some Deaf people, and may not be AA members and have an understanding of the steps, “hitting bottom,” or other AA terms they cannot translate accurately due to the interpreters’ own lack of experience. They are not AA members and cannot identify, therefore may translate the message inaccurately.

Aside from this, we do not believe it is the state’s job to help Deaf alcoholics, , but our duty. Our responsibility statement “Anytime, Anywhere, when anyone reaches out for help, I want the hand of AA be there!! And for that: I am responsible! “ was written for the 1965 A.A. International Convention in Toronto. by identifies former AA trustee, Al S. He wrote an article in our International Newsletter Box 459 this: *We must remember that AA will continue strong only so long as each of us freely and happily gives it away to another person, only as each of us takes our fair share of responsibility for sponsorship of those who still suffer, for the growth and integrity of our Group, for our Intergroup activities, and for AA as a whole. It is in taking responsibility that real freedom and the enduring satisfactions of life are found. AA has given us the power to choose – to drink or not to drink – and in doing so has given us the freedom to be responsible for ourselves. As we become*

*responsible for ourselves, we are free to be responsible for our share in AA, and unless we happily accept this responsibility we lose AA.*

So we are a truly a fellowship of equals, how do we level the playing field for the Deaf Alcoholic? We believe that the DAC provides the answer to this, as well as other committees around the United States that now has a strong Deaf sober community that have merged with the hearing community in AA.

The bi-lingual community here in Texas went through a similar history, 10 years ago, and are now strong and thriving in their Spanish Districts, because the hand of AA was there, and paid for the translator equipment we continue to use at our Area meetings. But it started with one alcoholic talking to another. One day, perhaps we will have a Deaf District here in Austin. That will be up to us all, and whether we can live up to the spiritual principles set by our predecessors.

### **13. We already have an interpreter at our AA meeting.**

An AA group may choose to hire an interpreter to serve the needs of a regular member of their home group, however, this does not serve the needs of AA as a whole, in regards to Deaf AA members. It helps one Deaf individual, but not every Deaf individual who needs help. It's the difference between buying a Big Book for one newcomer in your home group, as opposed to sending contributions to GSO or District or Area so they can get Big Books to AA in remote areas or poor groups or treatment centers and jails for those that cannot afford books. Contributing 7th tradition funds to DAC insures that every Deaf alcoholic gets access to our AA message, and it allows more choice for where a member might choose to go, for instance if they move or decide to change groups.

### **14. Can you help??**

Yes, by telling others in your home group or District about DAC, sharing the information we provide, be part of the group conscience of our DAC committee, and letting people who sign or interpret in ASL that we can use their skills if they would like to help. If an interpreter shows up at the meeting you attend, it's important they are seating in a place that has good lighting and that the Deaf person has a clear view of the interpreter. The interpreter also needs to be able to hear well to translate. Sitting in the corner of the back of the room doesn't work well.

We also need people available to sponsor Deaf AA members. Signing is not required for any of this, just willingness. There is ample technology available to help people get past language barriers, such as:

**TTY (also known as a TDD – Telecommunication Device for the Deaf):**

Equipped with a keyboard and small visual display, this device enables users to type their messages and send them over the phone lines.

**Relay Service:** If the person on one end of a phone call uses a TTY and the person on the other end uses a regular (speaking) telephone, the services of a relay operator are needed. All telephone companies now provide this service free of charge.

**Internet & Video Relay** is a free service for Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals to place and receive text-based relay calls using a computer or mobile device. It enables Deaf or hard of hearing persons who sign to communicate with hearing persons through video conference equipment like web cameras or video phones features.

Different people use different devices, so it is an individual preference as to which way is most comfortable for the Deaf newcomer.. Face to face interaction is a must, though, to feel part of the fellowship. In that case, use of a computer or handwritten notes will sometimes suffice. There are plenty of opportunities for individuals who would like to pick up basic sign language if they wish, thorough the local universities or on-line. Again, willingness, is the key!!



---

For literature, more information, and updated interpreted meetings, visit the Austin Deaf Access WEbsite at [www.austindac.org](http://www.austindac.org)

Norma A., DAC Chairperson