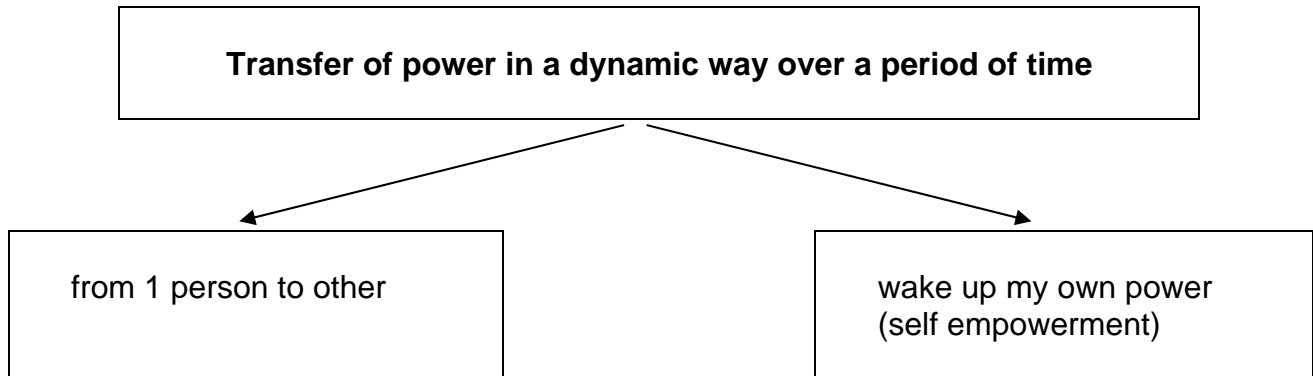




DEAF EMPOWERMENT



Everyday definition:

Helping people to help themselves
Leading people to learn to lead themselves

Why is Deaf Empowerment important?

Empowerment in the Deaf community is very important. As a small community (a minority group), we depend on a small number of people to be the leaders and to guide the development of the community. If we want the Deaf Community to develop better and to become more equal to other people, we need good leaders for the future of our children. It is best to have the Deaf leading the Deaf and to facilitate our own development and success. This can be done through empowerment. We need to educate the community about how to change things for the better and how to become independent from other groups (including hearing people).

Give a man fish to eat and he will be hungry tomorrow.

Teach him how to fish and he will never go hungry.



We need to empower our children (our future generation) because deaf leaders are:

role models

We are models of how we behave as Deaf persons in the majority and how we contribute to the development of Deaf Community. We show the expectations we have for ourselves, Deaf people and the Deaf Community, and actions to achieve our goals.

language models

Using Sign Language, we show that the language is justified as a true language and that we have the privilege to use the language most native to us. Sign Language is very important for access in life and in dealing with the majority. We also contribute to the language development of Deaf youth by using sign language as language models.

culture models

As culture models, we show others how to participate in the Deaf Community through art, film, festivals and participation in Deaf Associations and clubs. We show how Deaf people behave, how we think and feel about our culture.

facilitators of learning

As facilitators of learning, we aid in the general learning of Deaf people, in forming education for our Deaf Community and ensuring that our future generation is able to succeed in society.

facilitators of service

We provide a variety services that benefit Deaf people such as interpreting services, equipment distribution, health services, access to government services, etc. Without these services, Deaf people are unable to participate in the general community.

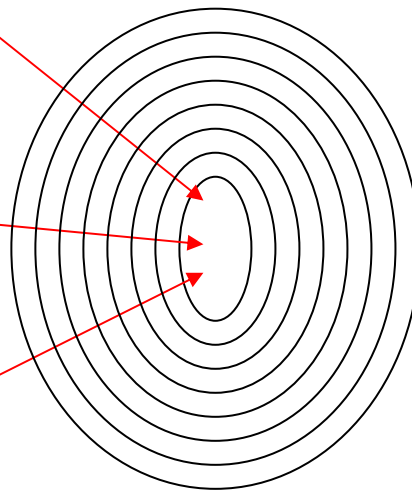


THE CORE OF A DEAF IDENTITY

Sign Language

“The Deaf Way”

Social Experiences



Each person has different layers that make who they are- their identity and personality. The outside layer is what everybody can see, their appearance and poise. Inside, it gets more complicated as you go deeper. Each person has a core that is the very essence of that person’s personality and identity. As you can see in the diagram, there are three components to the core of a Deaf identity.

Sign Language: Sign Language is extremely important to the Deaf person and their identity. It is the only language that allows a Deaf person to express themselves completely and to fully understand everything that is happening. This language is the native language of a Deaf person and is expressed fluently. As part of the Deaf identity, sign language is extremely valued and considered sacred to the community.

“The Deaf Way”: The Deaf Way is the culture of the Deaf Community. It shows how Deaf people behave and includes the norms, tradition, history and different aspects of the



community. With a Deaf identity, the person cherishes the culture of the Deaf people and is involved in the community.

Social Experiences: The Deaf identity includes different experiences that have happened throughout life within the Deaf community and in dealing with the majority. The experience of oppression and discrimination is one of the unifying factors of the Deaf community and is a large part of the Deaf identity.

Peter Niemelä – Highway to the Deaf Community

Frontrunners was delighted to invite Mr. Peter Niemelä, an amateur historian specializing in Deaf history. One of his biggest hobbies is to collect various classic and modern objects from all over the world having to do with Deaf culture, community, and Deafhood. During the presentation, Mr. Niemelä constantly emphasized on the importance of remembering the milestones of the Deaf history. Why? We are being perpetually faced with the promising threats leading to even permanent extinction of Deafhood – for instance, the boom of cochlear implants, the coming back of oral methods, and possible removal of the Deaf gene.

All the texts on Peter's presentation were written only in Danish, so we tried our best to put down the notes of his presentation. The Deaf archives are not well-preserved and have especially been long forgotten. It is about time to dig them up once again and re-evaluate historical events that are significant to the continuing existence of the Deaf community worldwide. Mr. Niemelä also mentioned that the best places to rediscover the documentations of the Deaf history are: Deaf schools, libraries that have deaf-based archives, and Deaf organisations (which includes nationwide associations of the Deaf). Not to mention, the stories and legends passed down to further generations from Deaf ancestors – grandparents and great grandparents who are deaf by example. In the present society, more and more Deaf symbols are being recognised and published.

Peter proudly exhibited some of his collections – postal stamps. There are so many stamps from certain countries as such as Yugoslavia, Poland, Malaysia, Thailand, Japan, Canada, Denmark, and South Africa who printed stamps related with Deafness into circulation. Furthermore, Mr. Niemelä showed several pictures of the Deaflympics in the past. We were intrigued seeing the black and white pictures of medal winners on the platforms. The worldwide events as such as WFD congress, Deaflympics, and Arts festivals originated in Europe. It finally got more global during the past 20 years.

We have also agreed to the fact that culture and language work together in order to thrive to the fullest. Peter has a DVD – on some of the very oldest sign language videos. George Veditz, a hearing man, who contributed a lot to the Deaf Community in the United States during the late 18th century. We saw a really cool footage of him signing pretty fast with his lips completely shut. It is essential to maintain the pride of preserving the history of Deafhood. By gathering the historical documents and objects, we are yet able to argue that the Deaf community most definitely includes a very remarkable history of language and culture developments.