Maine Relay System Training

June 16, 1995
Re: Americans with Disabilities Act Requirements - Effective Communication

The ADA mandates an equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities to participate in or benefit from the goods and services offered by a place of public accommodation (your agency). In order to provide this equal access, a public accommodation is required to make available appropriate auxiliary aids and services for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing or speech impaired are TTY's (telecommunications device for the deaf) and TTY relay systems.

Maine Relay Services, also known as "Dual Party Relay", is a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week service, which provides a communication link between those who use a Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TTY) and those who use a standard voice telephone. TTY's are special typewriter-style devices used by people who are hard of hearing, speech impaired or deaf to communicate over telephone.

Maine Relay Service communicates simultaneously with each party. When the hearing person speaks, the relay operator voices the typed information to the hearing person.

It is important that you educate your staff regarding the use of the TTY telephone relay system. It is not necessary to dial "1" before the relay numbers in the Augusta area. To access this service just dial: 995-3777 for voice originated calls; or 955-3323 for TTY originated calls.

Because the Maine Relay System eliminates many telephone system barriers to TTY users, ADA requirements relating to TTY's are limited in nature. Agencies with employees who are deaf or hard of hearing, may be required to provide TTY as a reasonable accommodation, particularly if that person's work involves communicating with the public. Also, TTY's must be provided when clients are permitted to make calls on "more than an incidental convenience basis".

If you have any question regarding the Maine Relay System or this requirement, do not hesitate to contact me at 287-4289.

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A LITTLE TTY HISTORY

"In the history of deaf people, few events have had such significance as the development of a special type of acoustic coupler by Robert Weitbrecht, a deaf scientist, in 1964. This device, used with a teletypewriter (TTY), enabled deaf people to communicate by telephone. The telephone had been a formidable--and ironic--social and cultural obstacle for the deaf since its invention by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876. Ironic, because Bell was a teacher of the deaf by vocation. His invention forever changed the way most people communicate with each other, but it thrust deaf people into a communications limbo worse than any they had known previously. Weitbrecht's device made it possible to send and receive printed messages on paper over existing phone lines simply by typing on TTY's. Thus, deaf people finally had a way of making use of Bell's creation, and this seemed no less than a miracle."
The first TTYs equipped for use by deaf people had little effect on deaf life, however. The machines were extremely large and heavy and limited in supply. In 1968, the entire network of TTYs in use consisted of just 25 machines. During the next few years, this number steadily increased as Western Union, American Telephone and Telegraph, and other businesses donated second-hand teletypewriters to the deaf community for conversion to phone use. But only a handful of private firms and public agencies obtained the TTYs, and so their practical value remained largely limited to personal calls between the few deaf people who owned them.

During the early 1970's, technological advancements led to the development of a new generation of phone machines for the deaf. The massive, dishwasher-sized TTYs gave way to smaller, lighter machines that produced messages on an electronic display screen. The first of these new machines were expensive and many people could not afford to buy them. In 1974, only about 7,000 TTYs were in use worldwide. And only a small percentage were found in places other than deaf homes."

Excerpt from *WE'VE COME A LONG WAY*

**WHAT IS A TTY?**

TTY stands for teletypewriter and it is the term preferred by the Deaf Community. You may also see the terms TT (Text Telephone) or TDD (Telecommunication Device for the Deaf); they all refer to the same equipment.

Many people are uncomfortable using a TTY at first. Find a buddy in the office or at a different location to practice with so you will be ready when the calls come.

**THE TWO BASIC TYPES OF TTYs**

1. Direct-connect TTYs come equipped with a built-in phone jack and are directly connected to the wall phone jack via a phone wire. You do not need a separate telephone to use this type of TTY. You will dial and hang up directly from the keyboard. Follow the step-by-step directions in the owner's manual. Most direct-connect TTYs only have a small flashing light built into them to signal when it is ringing. This is difficult to see unless you are looking directly at it. You may want to add an inexpensive visual and/or audible signaling device so you know when a call comes in. An old telephone can also be used for this purpose.

   Note: Never connect a direct-connect TTY to a digital phone line. They must have an analogue line (which is the same as a residential phone line or a fax line) or the inner workings of the TTY will gradually be destroyed and the TTY will need to be replaced.

2. Non direct-connect TTYs with acoustic couplers are used with a standard telephone. All dialing and hanging up is done from the telephone and the phone handset is placed in the couplers on the TTY during typing. The TTY’s power cord is simply plugged into any electrical outlet.

**OTHER THINGS YOU MAY WANT TO KNOW**

- The first language of most Deaf people is American Sign Language (ASL). There is no written form of ASL. Most Deaf people are bilingual, with English as their second language. The grammar and structure of ASL is very different from English. Don’t make assumptions about a person’s language capacity until you have considered your own ability to communicate in a second language.
- Reading typed words on a TTY does not convey emotion, as tone of voice does, nor does it indicate how a comment was intended or received. Deaf people will often add words like "SMILE", "GRIN", "LAUGHING", or "HAHA" to show emotion.
- Misunderstandings can occur due to the inability to hear tone of voice. Think of all the different ways you could say the word "FINE" when asked how you are doing. Depending on the inflection in your voice, it could mean anything from "doing very, very well" to "life stinks". Just keep this in mind if confusion arises.
• Match your language to the Deaf person's. Don't use professional jargon or idioms. KEEP IT SIMPLE.
• Some TTYs have a paper printout; others do not. All TTYs with printers have the ability to turn them on and off. Have extra rolls of TTY paper available and handy.
• TTY calls take much longer than voice calls. AT&T gives a 70% discount on long distance calls for TTY users because of this. Please be patient.
• Some of the newer TTYs do have an interrupt key on them. When activated, it will make the TTY on the other end flash …INTERRUPT… on the screen. This only works if both TTYs have interrupt capability and it is turned on. If you are on the receiving end of an … INTERRUPT… type in “GA” immediately. Don't wait to finish your sentence.
• Be sure to publish your TTY number on everything: correspondence, letterhead, business cards, pamphlets, brochures, giveaway pens and mugs, etc.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE RELAY SERVICE

You will, on occasion, get a relay call, or need to call a deaf person when you do not have access to a TTY. The relay system is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days of the year.

Receiving Relay Calls:

Basically, a deaf person calls the 1-800 number and types in the number of the person they want to call. The Call Assistant (CA) then calls that number and says, “This is Call Assistant number ___ with the Maine Relay Service. Are you familiar with the Relay Service?” If not, the CA explains how the process works. If you are familiar with the Relay Service the CA then says, “Okay, just a minute”, and connects the call.

You speak to the CA (using GA at the end of your turn) and the CA types to the deaf person. Speak slowly so the CA has time to type what you say. The CA will read to you what is being received on their TTY.

Making Relay Calls:

When making a relay call, a hearing person dials the 1-800 number. The recording says:

“Maine Relay Service; to place a call, press “1”.
For general relay instructions, press “2”.
For collect calls, credit card calls, or special call requirements, press “0” (zero) for the next available CA.”

The voice phone number (for hearing people) for the Maine Relay Service (MERS) is: 1-800-457-1220

After October 1, 2000, the Maine Relay Service phone number for hearing AND deaf callers will simply be: 711

This ‘711’ system will eventually be used by relay services nationally. It is presently being implemented one state at a time. The ‘1-800’ number will also remain in effect.

Sometimes you will receive a TTY call and not be able to help the caller. If you know who can, and they don't have a TTY in their office or building, call them on your voice line, give them the Relay and TTY number of the deaf person, and have them return the call.

Two other types of Relay calls you may receive are Voice Carry Over (VCO) and Hearing Carry Over (HCO). Some people who speak, but cannot hear, use VCO. You will hear the voice of the caller and the CA will type your responses so the caller can read them on their TTY or VCO phone. People who can hear, but not speak, often use HCO. The caller types their message onto the TTY, which is read to you by the CA. When you speak, the caller will hear your voice (not the CA). These types of calls can only be made with the assistance of the Relay Service.