

Brian Determan's Personal Story

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Access Specialist

Communication Access Ability Group – Austin, Texas

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Brian Determan, 54 years old, was born profoundly deaf. What caused it is unknown, according to the doctor as per my mother. I don't mind sharing my personal background as a profoundly deaf person.

I grew up with my hearing family. As a little child, I did receive private speech therapy at home for several years. Even though the school provided these services through the end of my school years, speaking clearly is still difficult for me.

I first attended school when I was 2 years old. Except mathematics, I struggled to learn with language and other subjects including English. The communication method selected by the school (oral method) was ineffective for me, although it actually was effective for some of my deaf classmates.

My parents and I struggled to communicate with each other. At age of nine, I attended a different school and learned sign language where a sign language method was primarily used. My education immediately skyrocketed. My parents realized that the oral method was not effective for me, so they eventually learned sign language in order to better communicate with me.

During my senior high school year at a public school in Dallas, where I grew up, I was a top student in Deaf Education. Most of the classes I took were mainstreamed with hearing students along with a sign language interpreter. Two teachers, who used to teach me as a little child, using the oral method, later transferred to my high school during my high school years. They both were very surprised about my educational improvements. I heard that these teachers told my other teachers that I was not smart as a little child.

I attended, and graduated from, Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) in Rochester, NY, with an associate's degree in computer information system. In the 1980's, many students who were deaf or hard of hearing, from across the nation, attended RIT. I then transferred to University of Houston to receive a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration. At this university, the interpreting services were provided for all the classes that I took.

I have met people, who are profoundly deaf, and they can speak clearly. In fact, my childhood best friend is profoundly deaf and can speak clearly. Apparently, for some reason, speaking clearly is difficult for me and other individuals, who are profoundly deaf. It seems as if my brain and my mouth won't get along at all. Ha ha.

Even today, I do practice speaking although it is still unclear. Oh I have something to share with you. Two weeks ago, I tried to speak to my mother without using sign language. My mother was puzzled and said, "I heard you say, "Do I smell beer?" Actually, I said, "Do I speak better?" That's funny! But that's close enough to show some improvement.

I have been working as Deaf and Hard of Hearing Access Specialist for more than 11 years. I work with people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or late-deafened in the areas of advocacy, effective communication, equal access, equal opportunity, reasonable accommodations, self-advocacy and soft skills. In many instances, I work as liaison between consumers, (who are deaf, hard of hearing, or late-deafened) and service providers regarding appropriate service provisions and accommodations.

I do provide other hearing loss related resources including STAP. I am authorized by HHSC-Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services to be a STAP certifier. I also provide sensitivity training to service providers, employers, and law enforcement officers on how to interact with a patient/clients, employees, or drivers who are deaf, hard of hearing, or late-deafened. I provide the interpreters when I give a presentation. I also provide a self-advocacy training to deaf and hard of hearing individuals including high school students and senior citizens. My region covers 30 counties from Hays County up to Hill County, from San Saba County to Madison County. There are nine other Deaf and Hard of Hearing Access Specialists across the state.

Here is an example - a senior citizen, with hearing loss, was summoned for a civil court. She contacted the court clerk to request an auxiliary service, i.e., a captioning service in advance. The court clerk told her that they don't provide these services and told her to bring her own. The customer contacted me to request my assistance on getting the court clerk educated about their obligation to provide an auxiliary service to an individual with disability to ensure effective communication. She gave me a permission to contact the court clerk. I contacted the clerk, and professionally introduced myself and my program. I then said the reason I contacted you is because my customer feels that the court clerk might need some helpful information about providing an accommodation to an individual with

disability. I asked if they are aware that, generally, a court is obligated to provide an auxiliary service, i.e., a FM system or captioning service, to an individual with hearing loss to ensure effective communication.

The clerk said, “No”, I then stated that, according to the Americans with Disabilities Act, courts are obligated to provide an auxiliary service to an individual with hearing loss, or other disability, to ensure effective access. I asked if they would like to have a copy of this law and sent it to them for their review. About one day later, they called back, and said they realized they actually are obligated to do so, and they asked me where they can find a captioning service. I provided the list of captioning service agencies to them. That’s one of my primary tasks.

Yes, my ability to communicate via phone is amazing, with a video relay service? I use it to communicate with a non-signer or hearing user just like you and I communicated over phone. An operator, who functions as a sign language interpreter, is a part of the video relay service. Like a captioning relay service, the video relay service is funded by FCC.

Brian’s brief bio. 5/10/18

Brian Determan, deaf since birth, is the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Access Specialist in Central Texas, employed by CAAG and funded by HHSC/Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services to provide services to persons who are Deaf or hard of hearing, such as information and referral, training and advocacy. He attempts to build bridges that connect the divide between the hearing, hard of hearing, and deaf worlds. Mr. Determan has over 25 years of experience in providing a support service to individuals, who are deaf and hard of hearing. He holds a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration from the University of Houston and has been a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Access Specialist since 2007.