

Improving health care delivery for deaf people through networking and referrals

Introduction

This document shows how health services for Deaf people can be improved using the disability network as a starting point.

Background

The deaf community struggles with significant health disparities and they are often excluded from health Services, outreach program and mass media health care messages. Many organizations in Masaka of different mandate joined together to use their strength to support each other. For example, while one organization provides school fees another will provide beddings, clothes, and scholastic materials to support deaf pupils access education. In providing this support, the network realized that the deaf were not accessing health services. Reports from the District Health Officer (DHO 2013 quarterly report), indicate that 80% of health service providers are not providing health care services to the deaf people. Our hope is that interventions based on this approach will contribute to greater health-care access for deaf people.

How can health providers effectively provide health care services?

Health care providers often lack appropriate communication skills and thus do not provide effective health services to deaf people. The network contacted our development partner Sign Health Uganda to provide a sign language training to health workers and 4 main centers were created (Mulogo centre, probation office, FOHO office) plus 4 others clusters were created for services providers at a lower level (Kyazanza, Buwunga, Bukulula and Kingo respectively). Through interventions by the Network 30 people including health workers, teachers and parents in Masaka were equipped with sign language skills to improve their communication with deaf people and hence increase their access to health services. The training started with crucial service providers and now the training takes places annually to ensure that all workers in every sector of the district benefit as deaf and other people with disability benefit.

Three months after the intervention by the Network, reports from the District health department indicate that there is an increase in the deaf people's access to health services in government health units and private health centers that trained in sign language.

The sign language training also sparked off other areas of joint implementation which are now going on, such as medical camps, school outreaches, establishment of parent support group on early intervention, community awareness on disability, community dialogues with health workers and leaders at different levels, these are all aimed at improving deaf peoples' health care.

Conclusion

Partnerships between health services providers and specialist services for deaf and hard of hearing people offer the most appropriate mechanisms to ensure that deaf people freely access and receive appropriate health services. Civil society organisations and local government structures should know that networking creates education opportunity for Deaf and health service providers.

Networks of services for the deaf provide an opportunity for members to share good practice and facilitate quality improvement in service provision for the deaf, including health care. The support system has greatly improved the lives of Deaf people that might otherwise have been diminished by their experience of seeking health services.

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