



Promoting excellence in elderly care for Deaf signers

Our contacts with elderly Deaf people in Norrland, Sweden, have resulted in the following action list. If municipal councils implement these recommendations, they will contribute greatly to improving elderly care for Deaf people who use Sign Language.

Better routines for needs analysis

Needs analyses should only be done in the presence of a Sign Language interpreter or a relative who can sign.

Competence development

Those who work at and administer elderly care centres must have more knowledge about the care-related needs of Deaf people.

Sign Language training

Staff who work with Deaf people must be able to communicate with them. Invest in continuous Sign Language training.

Evaluation

Those responsible for elderly care centres that cater to Deaf people should be required to conduct continuous evaluations of their quality.

Group homes for elderly

Municipalities should have the objective of bringing signing Deaf people together in group homes, together with staff who can sign.

Co-operation among municipalities

Deaf people are a minority. It is therefore important for municipalities to co-operate with

each other to create elderly care with signing personnel.

Co-operation with Deaf associations

Deaf associations have specialised knowledge regarding needs and preferences. Use them as a resource.

Counties & municipalities

Social workers attached to county hearing clinics can be helpful to the Deaf. Cooperation between these units and municipalities can be improved. The social worker should initiate contact with Deaf associations and explain what services are available. Trust must be established before Deaf people want – or dare – to make contact on their own. County hospitals and municipalities must also improve their co-operation when it comes to Deaf patients, so that they can feel safe and secure.

Security alarms

The response to an ordinary security alarm is that someone calls on the telephone to find out what the problem is. Elderly Deaf people who can't manage a text telephone have no means of explaining the situation. An alarm system that incorporates a videophone coupled to an interpreting relay service allows Deaf people to explain to caregivers what they need help with. This type of system has begun to be installed in Skåne, in the south of Sweden.

Friendship services

Many Deaf people feel isolated. They need someone to chat with over a cup of coffee and



hear a little gossip, and sometimes take a walk or a trip to the shops. Sundsvall municipality and Dalecarlia county have started “Friendship Services”, with good results. The Red Cross offers training for participants in the programme. Deaf associations need the support of municipalities to initiate such services in their districts.

Signing recreational assistants

The municipalities of Linköping and Norrköping have started a project for recreational assistants for the elderly, after interpreter service centres picked up signals that many elderly Deaf people were showing signs of illness. A signing recreational assistant was employed, and the programme is now very much appreciated. Pensioners now have something to look forward to and they have become happier as well as developed their communication skills. Municipalities can pool their resources and employ recreational assistants to increase the quality of life of Deaf pensioners.

Special elderly taxi services

The new law on elderly taxi services has not had completely positive results. According to preliminary

figures from The Swedish National Road Administration, half of all municipalities have tightened their eligibility rules. This has made it harder both to obtain basic taxi service and for the blind to have an accompanying guide. The new law excludes large groups of people from participating in a variety of community activities. For Deaf people, it means less access to the important social interaction that Deaf associations offer. For Deaf people in Norrland this is especially serious, since there are large distances between towns and far to the nearest Deaf association. The government must change the rules regarding special elderly taxi services if they are serious about their goal that “the elderly shall be able to live active lives and play an active role in society”.

Summarised from an SDR project report

This summary is based on an SDR report by Gertrud Högström, “Signing Elderly Deaf People in Norrland”, March 2003. The report in Swedish can be ordered from SDR.



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