

# DHS Deaf & Hard of Hearing Communication Survey Results March 2005

## Introduction

The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (OVR) took the lead role in designing, launching and monitoring a survey of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Oregonians in order to determine the community members' preferences for electronic and other communication with DHS staff, including OVR staff. The survey was available online from February 22, 2005 through March 2, 2005. For clarity to readers, when used in this report, the term Deaf will describe individuals who, regardless of the level of hearing loss, identify with Deaf culture and use American Sign Language (ASL) as their primary language. Hard of Hearing will be used to describe those respondents who, regardless of level of hearing loss, use English or another spoken language as their primary language and who do not depend on ASL for communication.

## General Information

The survey was comprised of 14 questions, two of which were demographic in nature. OVR, Oregon Advocacy Center's Client Assistance Program, Self Help for Hard of Hearing People of Oregon (SHHH-OR), Western Oregon University's Regional Resource Center on Deafness and the Oregon Association of the Deaf (OAD) were the primary organizations asked to let potential respondents know about the survey. A link to the survey was also placed on the OVR web page on the DHS website.

## *Demographic Information*

The respondents were balanced between the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities. Of the 96 people who answered the question on hearing ability, 53% were Deaf and 42% were Hard of Hearing. The balance, 5%, identified themselves as persons from the Hearing community. Respondents represented all areas of the state as well:

Coast	2%
Portland Metro	40%
Salem/Albany/Corvallis	24%
Eugene/Springfield	25%
Southern Oregon	2%
Central Oregon	1%

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Columbia Gorge	1%
Eastern Oregon	2%
Other	3%

Two of those in the “Other” category identified themselves as being from Vancouver, Washington and from “between Salem and the coast;” the third stated he/she was a child of Deaf adults (CODA) who is late deafened (a term which typically describes someone who developed a significant hearing loss after completing high school) and uses a cochlear implant.

The survey site was visited a total of 167 times, with 108 completed responses. Questions and response ratios are discussed below. A summary of narrative responses is also included, where applicable.

## Survey Results

### ***Instant Messenger Programs***

Of the respondents, 73% stated they use Instant Messenger (IM) programs on a computer, laptop, PDA, Sidekick or cell phone.

Of the 31 people who responded to question 2 (If you do not use IM programs, why not?), 26% stated they did not like the interruptions IM programs can cause to workflow or thought processes. Another 23% stated they did not know how to use IM programs. A preference for email as a communication strategy was indicated by 10% of respondents; an identical number stated that problems with technology prevented them from using IM programs. Language barriers were cited by 6% of those responding. Another 6% stated their hearing was sufficient to use the telephone, so IM programs were not necessary. Lack of use by family members and friends was cited by 3% of the group. The balance of respondents (16%) listed other, unrelated responses:

*I didn't think it was allowed by DHS.*

*Sometimes I do...never know if they are on line especially when buddy list says you are but choose not to respond.*

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*[I'd] rather use Sorenson VP to  
communicate with VRS/deaf people.*

When asked which IM programs were used, respondents were able to select all that applied. America Online's Instant Messenger (AIM) was the most popular program, with 70% of participants selecting it. MSN Messenger (37%) and Yahoo Messenger (35%) were nearly tied for second place in popularity. ICQ was hardly used at all; only 1% of the sample stated they used this program.

Question 4 asked participants to select the one program they used most often for IM communications. AIM was again the most popular, selected by 63% of respondents. MSN was selected by 15% of participants and Yahoo Messenger by 10%. The balance of answers indicated use of text pagers or text messaging on wireless phones.

When asked why they preferred that specific program identified in question 4, the majority (29%) stated it was the program most often used by friends and family. Another 24% reported it came with their computer or Sidekick device, or is a part of the service offered by their ISP. 16% felt their choice was the easiest to learn or to use, while 9% reported that it was the only IM program they had tried. Preferring specific features was motivating for 8% of the group.

While the use of T-Mobile's Sidekick II device (an integrated email/IM/web browser/cell phone/digital camera) was a popular choice with 17% of respondents selecting it as their primary equipment used to IM, the vast majority of participants (67%) indicated a computer or laptop was their primary IM device. The remainder of the sample stated preferences for text pagers, cell phones, Ogo devices (a competitor to Sidekick) and related items. 30% of the "Other" respondents stated they use computers and sidekicks equally.

When asked whether they believed DHS should use IM programs to communicate with clients, 77% of respondents felt it was a good idea. Lack of a third party (interpreter or relay operator); ease of use and cost effectiveness were often cited in supporters' comments. Those opposing IM use cited difficulty with English comprehension and expression, lack of computer equipment or internet service and slow typing speed as their

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main concerns. Many respondents felt it should be one of many options, not the only option, for communication.

## ***Video Remote Interpreting***

The survey also asked participants to provide opinions on the use of other communication modalities. Question 7 explored the communities' interest in Video Remote Interpreting as a communication strategy for DHS. 60% stated they would support the use of this new technology. The majority of the remaining 40% indicated they did not use ASL so would not be interested in this technology, though there were others who were unsure the technology could support the visual clarity demands appropriately and cost effectively. Those who supported its use did so enthusiastically:

*...there are many deaf/hoh people who are also mobility impaired and have difficulty getting transportation. In addition, in the southern, eastern and central areas of Oregon, there is a scarcity of interpreting services. You would be better off using VI services than scheduling appointments 3-4 weeks in advance, when an interpreter is available to travel to that region. This also cuts down on mileage and transportation costs for the interpreter.*

*IT IS MUCH EASIER TO MAKE UNDERSTAND WHAT INTERPRETER SIGN TO ME THAN TTY OR ELSE.*

*I would have more visual and social cues if I could see the person I'm communicating with and there would be less chance for a misunderstanding. Those cues are not available on IM. I also like the thought that my interaction with my worker would be more personal through video remote versus instant messaging.*

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## ***Web Cameras***

The use of webcams for direct communication via the internet was not as resoundingly supported: 61% of respondents felt this was a good idea but 39% disagreed.

*Provided that DHS staff are proficient in ASL, the message gets across.*

*Yes it would be helpful to the client as the conversation may be confidential. I know most VRI trained to be confident by to some may feel secured if DHS staff talk directly to the client.*

*Webcams allow for hackers to attack the State's systems. Also the lag time is terrible if you are on Dial-up—unless the state is willing to pay for High Speed internet for all of its DHS clients...it's just not worth it.*

*Too much hassle.*

## ***Video Relay Service***

Nearly 80% of those participating in the survey felt DHS should provide Video Relay Service (VRS) access in its offices to help citizens make telephone calls and look for work. This would allow Deaf clients to independently make calls in ASL which are interpreted into English (or Spanish), instead of requiring them to use their non-native language to contact potential employers, case managers and VR Counselors, medical providers and others. Video Relay Service access would require a computer with internet access and a webcam. It differs from Video Remote Interpreting in that it is only used to facilitate phone conversation between a Hearing/Hard of Hearing person and a Deaf person. A growing majority of the Deaf community prefers VRS to the traditional TTY relay.

## ***Top Preferences for Communication***

The survey requested feedback on preferred methods of contact by DHS staff, presuming the issue did not require an appointment to resolve.

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Participants were asked to choose their top three preferences. Their responses were:

Email me	92%
Send me an IM	44%
Call me on the phone (TTY)	31%
Send me a letter in the mail	27%
Other	26%
Call me on the phone (Voice)	23%
Ask me to come into the office (with interpreter/assistive listening device if needed)	15%

Responses in the “Other” category included requests for CapTel, VRS, text messaging, and calls to family members to pass along information.

Survey participants were also asked to choose their top three preferences for use in contacting DHS staff themselves. Responses were similar to the previous question:

Email them	85%
Send them an IM	36%
Call them through TTY relay/CapTel	30%
Call them TTY to TTY	26%
Call them on the phone (Voice)	24%
Call them via Video Relay Service	22%
Send them a letter in the mail	14%
Call through online (text) relay service	11%
Other	9%
Wait for an appointment (with interpreter/assistive listening device, if needed)	2%

### Conclusion

The Oregon Department of Human Services appreciates the responses from the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Communities. We will use this information to guide our decisions about and to improve our practices in communicating with our Deaf and Hard of Hearing clients across the state.