

Effective Communication and the ADA

The Davenport Civil Rights Commission is working to serve you! The *City News* is a good place to talk about communication. Often we take our common methods of communication for granted until we are presented with a need to communicate utilizing less common methods. Persons with vision, hearing, or speech disabilities use different methods to communicate. Government entities, businesses and nonprofit organizations are required to communicate effectively with persons with communication disabilities. What is “effective”



communication? Effective communication ensures that communicating with persons with disabilities is equally effective as communication with persons without disabilities. It ensures that the person with a disability can receive and convey information to the entity. For example, people who are blind may give and receive information audibly; persons who are deaf may receive information in writing or through sign language. Businesses and other entities subject to the ADA are required to provide auxiliary aids and services such as large print menus, Braille, electronic information for use with screen-readers, a qualified reader, sign language interpreter, printed script, real-time captioning, or other options when needed.

The key to communicating effectively is to consider the nature, length, complexity, context of the communication and the person’s normal means of communication. It is not a “one size fits all” solution, but an individualized assessment of the needs of the interaction. In a straightforward situation such in a lunch room or restaurant, reading the menu to the visually impaired person or writing notes to the hearing impaired customer may suffice, but if the communication is more extensive, then it may be necessary to provide a qualified interpreter. A qualified interpreter or reader is one who is able to interpret effectively, accurately, and impartially -- both understanding what the person with the disability is saying and being able to convey the information to that person using any specialized vocabulary. In addition to interpreter services, aids and services include a wide variety of technologies. Most important in the selection of the aid or service is that it is effective: that it successfully communicates the information from one party to the other and vice versa. When choosing an aid or service, government entities are required to give primary consideration to the selection of the aid or service made by the customer unless there is an



alternative that is equally effective, and a business is encouraged to consult with the person with a disability to discuss what aid or service is appropriate. Walk-in requests must be honored to the extent possible; however, a business or government entity may require reasonable advance notice from people requesting aids and services. Additionally, the cost of the aid or service is a consideration. A business or government entity must provide the aid or service that

does not result in significant difficulty or expense. The definition of significant difficulty or expense varies from entity to entity and depends on the resources of the particular business. *Effective* communication is the responsibility of both the business and the customer! It is everyone’s privilege!

**Call the Davenport Civil Rights Commission at
(563) 326-7888 or TTY (563) 326-7959 for more information
or to file a complaint.**

