- Hi, my name is Lee Ann Russo, I work for Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services. IVRS is a state agency in the Department of Education. We work for and with individuals who have a disability, and help them achieve their employment goals. One of the populations we work with are individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. I'm going to talk a little bit about that population today and share resources that are available through IVRS to help you serve them too.

The goal of IVRS is to be a responsive agency. There are a lot of different disabling conditions, and we want to ensure that we meet the needs of each unique job candidate who seeks help from IVRS. So that goes with individuals who are deaf. Not all rely on an interpreter. Not all read lips or take notes. So it's important to really learn about that individual and what their specific and unique needs are. IVRS is certainly working to improve services to the deaf and hard of hearing populations. We are doing so because we want to, and also in accordance with the mandate that's been given to us by our state rehabilitation council members. We also have infused improving services to individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing as part of our state and strategic planning efforts.

How does IVRS work with individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing? Well, the first thing we've had to do is to prepare staff how to be responsive. Staff don't know how to communicate with individuals who are deaf, if they use an interpreter, if they don't, and what it takes to be able to accurately convey English information into whatever means that individual requires. So we've provided several unique strategies, all to help individual staff members really feel comfortable conveying information to individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. So we've provided information to our staff about the deaf culture. We've utilized the expertise or our two assistive technology specialist who serve the state to go around to each area office and acquaint them with the different tools and resources that they've made available. We also are doing outreach to the deaf community and asking them to help us learn how to improve services based on what their needs are, and if there are any gaps in our services. So we also try and provide information and share with our staff as a whole about resources that are available throughout the state, or those that need to be developed further. We have to continually review what resources may be developing because AT needs change every day.

Likewise, individuals who are deaf know themselves best and know what their needs are so it's important to be able to develop a relationship with them first and foremost. People who are deaf are people who are proud. Just because you're deaf doesn't mean you have a disability in many individuals who are deaf's eyes. As a matter of fact, they consider themselves able, not disabled. And it's up to us as fellow human beings to learn how to interact and communicate and develop relationships with them. They want to make sure that we know that the deaf culture and their community is very important. So we respect that. People who are deaf say they can do anything that a hearing person can, except for hear. Some of the beliefs that are held by the deaf culture is that they're normal, as I mentioned, and not disabled. They're just experiencing life in a different way.

There are a variety of languages that are employed by individuals who are deaf. This might include signed English, American Sign Language or ASL, cued speech, finger spelling, speech reading or lip reading, or pigeon signed English, also known as PSE. In doing outreach to individuals who are deaf we need to make sure that they are feeling like they are important to us, and that we have a lot to learn from them. So it's important that our staff can at least converse in at least some basic interactions, such as good morning, or please sit here, or how are you feeling, or hi. We've also tried to get the schedules of deaf clubs that operate throughout the state to make sure that we perhaps consider attending and introducing ourselves or marketing VR services at that time.

We want to encourage job candidates who are deaf to come and learn about our services and how our services can benefit them in terms of employment. So we want to make sure that our offices are culturally supported, there's not glaring, blaring lights, or loud noises within our offices when we're meeting with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing so we have to be cognizant of individuals who are deaf's needs. We also want to make sure that their access if equal to that of everyone else. So we want to make sure to ask the person who is deaf what their preference is in terms of communication. They're the ones who know how they relate and understand language best.

We also note that our agency is responsible for providing interpreter services if an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing asks for an interpreter. So an interpreter is utilized by IVRS, free of cost, to ensure that individual has equal access. Voc Rehab, or IVRS, has also tried to reach out and in our hiring practices target individuals who are deaf to help us meet the needs of individuals in the state who are deaf. We'd like to hire more people who are deaf so if there's anyone who's out there who may be listening to this and knows someone who is deaf please give consideration to IVRS as an employer.

We'd also like to point out the different items to consider that are under the assistive technology umbrella. It's important before going into depth that we keep it simple, that we utilize inexpensive materials or devices because those are usually the easiest. It's faster for us to learn. And it becomes second nature. Plus, it doesn't call a lot of attention to ourselves to have some wildly extravagant laptop or information that we're carting around from place to place and trying to convince an employer to hire, saying you have to have this. So again every device or piece of equipment is based on the needs of that individual. And some may or may not be necessary. We want to make sure that whatever AT we utilize is safe, and it doesn't impact significantly others within the environment, and that the user is compatible with that type of equipment and capable of using it, and the software is capable of being utilized in the manner in which it was developed. So there are a lot of considerations to think about before assistive technology can or should be utilized. There's several built on apps that are available to individuals. If you're interested, you've probably got quite a few of these already. So this is not specific to individuals who are deaf. These are things that help us as a hearing population too. So just be alert that these are things that have been made available, and are still being developed in some capacity, specifically to individuals who are deaf. The other assistive technologies could be a note taker. And these are links that would be made available should that be the preferred method of communication for your individual who is deaf that you're working with. There are also audio notes or smart pens or things like that to allow a person who's deaf to take notes or be part of a conversation with others.

There are a variety of tips for communication. The first of which is to meet in a quiet setting where there's not a lot of extra activities going on, or things that would distract. An enclosed office, where there's little traffic. Remember that sunlight can impact how a person sees. And individuals who are deaf don't rely on their ears. They rely on visual cues. So it's important that you face the person, and make eye contact when you're speaking to them. Use pictures and visuals whenever possible. Yelling and mumbling doesn't help. If a person prefers lip reading, don't overemphasize words or facial expressions. And because you both have a communication problem, while it's difficult, try and be relaxed and take time that may be needed. I want to just say that it's important to remember that lip reading is a very inexact art. Not everyone who's deaf can lip read. And English is a very guttural language so it's very difficult to discern the English that a person is attempting to convey. Just think about saying the colors red, white, green. They're all formed the same way on the lips. So a person who is deaf cannot distinguish what color you're, you may be saying without hearing that color.

Okay, I'd like to talk about how to get attention to people who are deaf. And we want to of course do so in a respectful manner and not gesture wildly. But tactfully more into the person's visual field. Also, you can gently tap them on the shoulder. You can flick the lights. If it's an emergency, pound on the desk or stomp on the floor. But ask the individual how they would prefer that you alert them to things within their environment.

There are some tips for group settings too that you can read about. Before an individual is attending a meeting it would help to allow them to have an agenda or any notes that you might be able to provide to them so they understand the gist of it. Similarly, if you're using an interpreter to help you convey what's going on at the meeting, the interpreters like to have a handout too. Just to make sure that they know all the words or terms or maybe can develop some abbreviated gestures for what might be conveyed. Try and ensure that you have the proper communication access. Again, not everybody who's deaf wants an interpreter. Although I would have to say, most do. The CART is the real time captioning, or like the captions that you see on the TV, being displayed on the screen that an individual might follow along. A note taker or visual aids to help follow up with correspondence. Or make sure that your seating is correct so that individuals who are deaf have a clear visual field in order to see what's happening. Other things to remember is, when you're speaking, make sure you raise your hand. Because a deaf person can't hear a sound to know where to turn to watch the speaker. Only one person should talk at a time. You want to avoid loud environments. And allow more time to communicate. Because again, that interpreter is translating what they're hearing in English into American Sign Language. So that translation takes a bit more time. And remember to ask the person if the site that they're in is going to work for them. Some communication options are listed here.

Again the primary option that people who are deaf use are interpreter services. And they can be found by going to the Human Rights website, and looking under interpreter services. Deaf Services Communication of Iowa is also listed. And that can show the names and licensure information on interpreters that have that certification requirement for Iowa. It's important to get a certified interpreter and not use a person's relative or family member or friend because they may not be a licensed interpreter. It is up to the host agency to provide the cost reimbursement for that interpreter. If you're having an open meeting and asking anyone in the public to attend, you as a host need to ensure that the communication access is equal and thereby pay or fund for interpreters to be present if an individual who requires those services asks to attend. Real time captioning is CART. We've talked about that. And then the technical devices that are available.

Assistance listening devices, such as hearing aids, phone devices, the amplifiers or adapters. TTYs are teletypes for the deaf and they're an older model of phone that work on electronic pulses once a phone receiver is placed on a TTY device that a deaf person has. So, probably most people who are deaf now use individual devices as opposed to TTYs. But, across the state, if you dial 711, you could get a relay operator to utilize voice carry over services and convey information by voice to an individual's phone number if you'd like.

Signaling devices are the flashing lights or red twirling emergency alarm systems that alert individuals who are deaf to get up in the morning. Their bedside lamp table flashes. Or the doorbell rings and there's a light that flashes. Or there's an emergency and they have to flee the office or building, the sirens may come on, but also electrical or signal lights should also help alert the individuals who cannot hear a siren to the fact that there is an emergency.

Closed Captions TV is available for any newer TV these days and has been in place for a long time. Again reading and writing notes is okay if the individual who is deaf says it's okay. It wouldn't be a practice to rely on in the long run if a lot of communication needs to occur.

There are online resources available at these different websites. So you'll have access to this webinar and you can utilize them as appropriate.

Also, Voc Rehab staff would like to make you aware of who can help. Vienna Hoang is an individual who serves the western side of Iowa and can be reached at that number or contact information. Bob Hendrickson's contact information is there. And this is Lee Ann Russo, from Voc Rehab signing off. I hope you enjoyed today's webinar. Thank you.