

Communication development

- Oral education and the consequences of learning sign language/ hands-on-signing

In general there are many deafblind people, who had oral education. They've been educated in lip-reading, speech and writing. Their first language is Dutch.

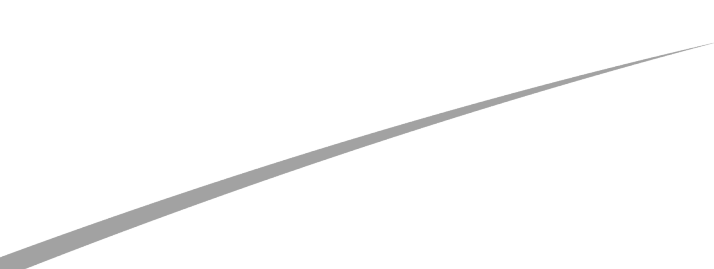
With deafblind people who have a faulty language development, you see more difficulties in teaching them hands-on signing or sign language.

These deafblind clients have little vocabulary and aren't able to use the Dutch language appropriately in their daily life.

In sign language or hands-on-signing we have to introduce a lot of new words, also abstract words. With every new sign that they learn, it is like a 'negotiation' of the sense of that word. We try to search for situations that are known for the client, which help them to give meaning to the sign. We verify if the meaning of that word is understood, so they are able to reproduce the sign.

- Perspectives of hearing- and vision loss

As we told, many deafblind people had oral education. Their knowledge of the Dutch language isn't fully developed. To learn



a new language (e.g. Sign language), the knowledge of your first language needs to be fully developed.

So if a deaf person loses his vision, he also loses his ability to read lips. Therefore he needs to learn hands-on-signing. This isn't an easy process due to their poor vocabulary.

If a person with hearing loss loses his vision, he also loses his ability to read lips. If he also loses his hearing, he needs to learn signs to support his language.

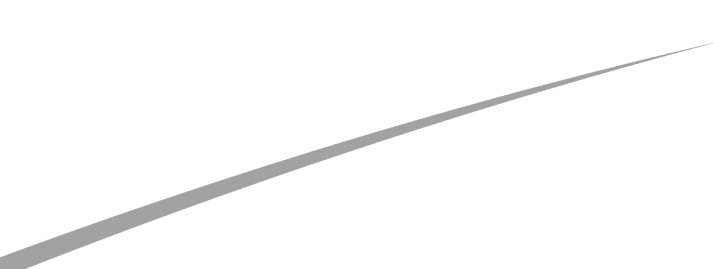
All deafblind people tend to compensate as long as possible.

Information

- Access to information

How do deafblind people receive information? For a 'normal' person the newspaper and television are large sources of information. This doesn't count for deafblind persons. They take in information that is told by partners, relatives, friends etc. The information is often told in comprehensive language and adjusted to their level. Therefore the information is often selective.

The clients are able to cope with limited information and therefore they remember what is important for them. So we have to deal with personal limitations. True study we know that these people have problems with the communication and taking in information.



If new signs or information is handed to the client, we need to know about the vocabulary and experiences of life of this particular client.

- Expand information possibilities

How can we expand the information possibilities for our clients? We can teach them to handle a computer, teach them Braille so they can read information themselves, teach them sign language so they can communicate with others and teach them orientation and mobility to visit others.

So to expand their opportunities, we have to expand their possibilities for information including communication and mobility.

Mobility

- Consequences of limited mobility

A limited mobility can cause isolation. Mobility is necessary to gain information and to maintain contacts. Limited mobility means little knowledge of the world and the environment. Therefore deafblind persons often depend on others. Fully mobility isn't possible for a deafblind person. For instance: traffic isn't heard or seen if a client wants to cross over.

- Possible aids and adaptation

To expand their mobility they can learn to use a cane or use a seeing-eye-dog. These possibilities are limited to their own environment. If they want to swim, shop or go to a club, they can ask for a volunteer that receives a financial compensation. We need to be aware that a lot of things aren't accessible for deafblind persons, because you need or vision or hearing. For instance the use of the ticket machine of the Dutch rail company. You need to have a good vision to read the screen.

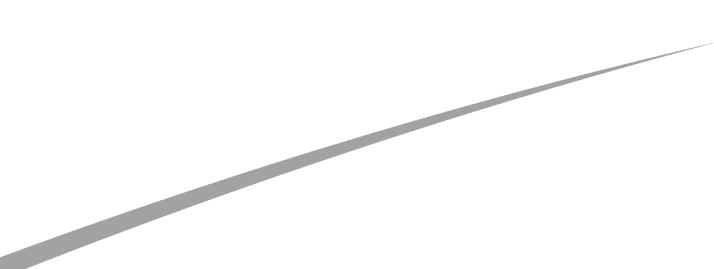
Severity of the two sensory impairments

- The two different impairments

People with the 2 different impairments, are often approached from 1 point of view: the hearing impairment or the visual impairment. Trainers of deafblind people often forget the enormous influence of the two impairments at each other. For instance: If a deafblind person has an interpreter, the interpreter not only signs the message but also needs to inform the client about the environment.

- The influence of the impairments at each other

Why do the impairments influence each other?



Deaf people have a higher developed visual function because of their hearing impairment in the neurophysiologic system. This compensation is no longer available when the visual conditions are getting worse. The result is a big communication problem. They are forced to use hands-on-signing, tactile finger spelling, Lorm-alphabet or other forms of communication.

The communication problems are for instance:

Miscommunication due to the lack of alternative communication forms, lip-reading is getting worse, the need for much repetition, tiredness of the client. Surrounding problems like lighting conditions and visual acuity are also examples for problems in communication.

For people with visual impairment and hearing deterioration the consequence is more relaying on visual compensation. These people experience problems with surrounding noise and therefore they depend more on lip-reading. They need to communicate in a 1 on 1 situation.

So if the hearing is getting worse, the deafblind try to compensate this with their rest vision, e.g lip-reading. And if the vision is getting worse, the deafblind try to compensate this with their hearing, e.g. talk slowly and clearly in a quiet environment, use adapted hearing devises as digital hearing aids or cochlear implants.