



PRESENTATION

ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PROGRAM

FOR DEAF ADULTS

LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

November 8, 1996

by

Fern J. Khan

PRESENTATION
ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PROGRAMS
FOR DEAF ADULTS
November 8, 1996

I am so very happy to be here with you, my friends and colleagues, this evening and so very honored to be asked to share my recollections of the program's early beginnings. I do hope that you have had a chance to look at some of the photographs which are on display in the lobby. We all looked very different fifteen to twenty years ago. The photographs also helped me to recall many events with ease and so were invaluable as I reflected on those early days.

I can still vividly recall the day in the early 1970's when Ann Marcus, my supervisor and LaGuardia's first Dean of the Division of Continuing Education invited me into her office for a meeting. Some days or weeks earlier, Dean Marcus had talked with Oscar Cohen from the Lexington School for the Deaf. Oscar had suggested that LaGuardia should think about making continuing education accessible to the deaf population. At that time, no colleges in NYC provided continuing education courses or programs for the deaf population. It so happened that the DCE was also looking to expand in new program areas. So Dean Marcus asked me, "Fern, do you know anything about deafness?" My response was, "No, do you?" She said "No, but let's go find out from the experts".

Within a few weeks following that conversation, we flew down to Washington and spent a day with Tom Mayes, the Dean of Continuing

Education at Gallaudet College at that time. Dean Mayes described his model for making adult and continuing education classes accessible for the deaf communities in his geographical area. Through ongoing needs assessments, he was able to identify the interests and needs of the deaf populations in D.C., in nearby Virginia and Maryland. He then collaborated with existing adult education programs and obtained their permission to place ASL interpreters in a rich array of courses enrolling two or more deaf adults.

We learned an enormous amount about deafness and developing programs for deaf adults in that one visit. This was also our first experience in using an interpreter and we had no idea about how one related to an interpreter. So, in addition to constantly looking from the interpreter to Tom Mayes especially when she was voicing for Tom, we sometimes addressed our questions for Tom Mayes to her. We didn't know the protocol and felt somewhat confused without understanding why. It was only months later in describing our meeting with some colleagues and mentioning how exhausted we felt on the return trip to New York that we learned about the interpreter's role and how to use the interpreter. Because of that experience, I now first orient anyone who is meeting a deaf person for the first time to focus on the deaf person and not the interpreter!

Ann and I returned to NY with a strong sense that we should and could design a program to meet the needs of the deaf community. Accordingly, with Oscar Cohen's help, we invited representatives of the deaf community to LAG to begin the process of community

involvement in developing a meaningful program. The group included Al Hlibok, Phil Bravin, George Johnson, Oscar Cohen, Mary Cheese, Irene Leigh, Berger Erikson, Dorothy Pakula. This group became our Advisory Committee which met over several months. Following their suggestions we offered courses such as tennis, yoga, auto repair and improving communication skills. Later, Driver education was added.

The Advisory Committee recommended instructors who were deaf to teach and now we were ready to launch our program. Then questions about outreach and how to inform and attract the deaf community arose. LaGuardia Community College was not known within the deaf community. The Advisory Committee again came up with the answer. Have a big event with entertainment that's highly visual and then, have the instructors talk about their courses. The first event held at the Graduate Center featured George Johnston, a comedian who was well known in the deaf community. We had a great turnout, almost 200 people, and George was terrific. We enrolled many deaf adults in courses that night. Our next big event was at the Lexington School. Over 150 deaf individuals attended and close to 90 people signed up for courses. The first phase of the PDA was underway.

During these early years, Ann and I talked with many individuals in the deaf community to learn as much as we could. We also hired almost all of the deaf professionals who then worked at New York University's Deafness and Rehabilitation Center to teach or consult at one time or the other.

As the months passed, there was concern that we were only serving a small fraction of the deaf population in NYC, a well educated group, and that we needed to reach out to those underserved and undereducated deaf people who had no access to higher education. As the program grew, the need for a Coordinator became a reality. The Advisory Committee recommended that the coordinator be a deaf person and the recruitment process began. With approval from the President, the Advisory committee became the Search Committee staffed by one college representative. This was a most unusual situation but it underscored the level of commitment from the college and from the Advisory Committee in the early development of the PDA. Glenn Anderson was selected as the first coordinator of the PDA.

With Glenn's arrival, we began to focus more energy on reaching out to inform the deaf population about LaGuardia's program. As you all know, Glenn has a great love for basketball and often while on the courts, he would publicize PDA, frequently recruiting young people into the program. Other outreach strategies to the N.Y.C. deaf community included placing program ads in the "Silent News," preparing flyers and brochures for circulation, visiting the social clubs to describe our programs and establishing relationships with counselors for the deaf in the NYS Office of Vocational rehabilitation. The OVR counselors for the deaf were extremely helpful and supportive.

PDA staff also visited the schools for the deaf to talk about collaborations and to inform students of real career and higher

education options. We wanted to build a bridge to post secondary education for deaf students through the PDA and we also wanted to have a sizable enrollment of deaf students each quarter.

Outreach was also made to federal, state and local government officials and the state legislature to seek funds for the program. Prior to 1985, President Joseph Shenker, Dean Augusta Kappner and Dean Judy McGaughey were all closely involved in visiting and talking to legislators about identifying more permanent funding for the program. In the interim, Grants from NYS Education Dept. for vocational training including American Sign Language training; from the JTPA, their first ever to train deaf students in word processing, food services and office skills, and the US Dept. of Education in 1981 enabled us to expand the program's capacity to:

- increase staff
- explore and develop some additional program options
- provide comprehensive educational and support services to deaf students.

The college's continued support of the PDA and its own outreach efforts culminated in the well publicized visit of Governor Cuomo to the PDA in 1985. In his remarks, Gov. Cuomo stated that LaGuardia Community College reflected government at its best. He said that La Guardia "is government doing the job of removing impediments and doing it marvelously well." This visit brought a commitment of substantial and much needed funding for the program allowing the college to continue serving 500 deaf students enrolling each year in credit, non credit and

vocational training programs. LaGuardia's PDA now had a critical mass of deaf students on campus and was also the program serving the largest numbers of deaf adults and youth in NYC. LaGuardia was also then the institution which hired the most significant numbers of deaf staff members.

The college also initiated a collaboration with Lehman College in 1987 where graduates of LaGuardia's degree programs could transfer to Lehman to pursue Bachelors degrees. Collaborations also developed with Lexington School for the Deaf, CUNY colleges, the Queensboro Public Library and many other agencies and institutions.

We also followed up on one of the recommendations which came from our Gallaudet visit which was to conduct needs assessment or surveys of the educational needs of NYC's deaf community. As a result, two surveys were conducted as planning for phase 2 began. The first survey of program participants indicated that they were very satisfied with the courses offered. However, these participants also indicated a real need for career counseling and assistance.

Another more extensive survey was then undertaken to determine whether these needs were representative of the larger deaf population or specific to the individuals then enrolled in the PDA. This survey conducted by Dr. Frank Bowe, found that there were no specialized career related counseling for deaf students in any two year college program in NYC and that these services were vital to meet the education and career related needs of deaf individuals, especially the

prevocationally deaf population. The results and recommendations from the assessments led to a redesign of the PDA to provide academic and vocational counseling and other support services as well as Adult Basic Education, High School Equivalency preparation, college preparation, study skills, English as a Second Language and ASL all of which form the core of the PDA today.

Finally, a major influence on the success of programs must be attributed to the staff who serve or work with the student population. In her book **Within Our Reach**, Elizabeth Shorr talks about the lessons of successful programs. She says that "successful programs describe their staffs as skilled and highly committed..... Professionals in these programs are perceived by those they serve as people who care about them and respect them, people they can trust". In PDA, staff has always been concerned with full accessibility for **all** deaf students. They worked hard to advocate for their students and also prepared deaf students to be advocates for themselves.

However, there were numerous challenges as the PDA took shape, grew and expanded. In the early 1980's, we noticed that deaf students enrolled in credit programs were repeating their English courses, were becoming frustrated and were dropping out. We talked with students and decided that a different and more supportive approach to teaching English was needed. Dr. Sue Livingston joined our staff and worked with the Basic Skills Department to develop a series of courses using ASL to teach English while she provided professional development for teachers and tutors in the non credit basic skills program. It was in Sue's classes that

many deaf students experienced the satisfaction of reading an entire novel for the first time.

Another challenge related to the program's success in recruiting deaf students. The federal grant received in 1981 enabled us to provide comprehensive academic and support services. Over the next three years, enrollment in both credit and non-credit programs increased significantly.

Simultaneously, this growth presented us with a major fiscal dilemma. There were no identifiable funds to replace the federal grant when it ended in 1984. How were we going to provide ongoing ASL and oral interpreter services in the degree programs where over 55 deaf students were enrolled? I believe that my first gray hairs appeared during this period.

The college rallied to our support and launched a massive campaign to bring our work to Governor Cuomo's attention. This approach was a major success. The Governor came to visit, was really impressed and provided the necessary funding to continue the program's capacity to provide post secondary education for the deaf population.

A third challenge related to the hiring of interpreters. Prior to 1986 there was no CUNY "line" for hiring interpreters. The college successfully negotiated with the Central Office for a civil service title. Within CUNY, the position of Sign Language Interpreter became a non-

competitive civil service title with four assignment levels each with the required qualifications effective July 1, 1986.

Prior to my leaving LaGuardia in 1989, I worked with three directors in the PDA. Glenn Anderson, Carole Lazorisak, Paul Menkis were all very special people from whom I learned an enormous amount. Although I read many books and articles about deafness, my real education came from the staff with whom I worked and who were always so willing to keep me informed.

Glenn taught me a lot about the sociology of the deaf community, the variations within the deaf community and the politics of deafness. He also introduced me to many key figures in the field and always patiently answered my questions or kept me current about individuals, the field or the deaf community. Carol taught me to distinguish among the range of language abilities and the communication modes among deaf students. Carole also shared many rich vignettes about her experiences and the experiences of her family in a hearing world which I still use. Paul had a keen intellect, was an avid reader and shared many articles or books which he had read with me.

Among the staff, I watched Dorothy Pakula become LaGuardia's first deaf graduate, receive her B.A. degree from Empire State College and serve deaf students in a variety of ways as a valued staff member. She taught me the importance of teaching idioms to deaf students. I also watched Thomas Samuels as he moved from student to staff over the

years. Thomas' versatility was remarkable and he always seemed to know **everything** that was happening!

SUMMARY

The success of the Program for Deaf Adults at LaGuardia Community College comes from the unique and wonderful collaboration which has always existed among the college leadership, the staff, the deaf community and supporters.

This collaboration has resulted in a comprehensive and truly accessible program attracting deaf students at various levels of learning into a rich and resourceful academic environment. It has also helped to form a community of learners where everyone who has contact with the program comes away feeling that he/she learned something new. By continuing to develop and adapt flexible and responsive systems or approaches, the goal of an enriched educational, personal and vocational experience for deaf students will continue to be achieved.

I encourage you to continue to inform legislators about the PDA and your student outcomes. You also need to do the same for the foundation world who have not yet made the deaf population a priority. Your strategies have worked well to date so you have a base from which to work. Congratulations and thank you, President Bowen and Dean McGaughey, for continuing to support a bold vision and congratulations to Desiree Duda and the staff of PDA for successfully implementing that vision and for doing an outstanding job. Thank you.

Fern J. Khan