

WORDS MATTER

In this issue we look at how the language we use when talking about disability affects the way we see ourselves and each other. Learn how the systemic use of ableist language has cultivated exclusionary policies and how the evolution of language can help us break down barriers to inclusion and foster a sense of dignity for people with disabilities.

We want to hear from you. Please share your ideas for future themes, or your suggestions of how we can increase accessibility, by emailing mail@drcnh.org.

A Discussion on Language

By Nathaniel Livernois



**Identity-First
vs. People-First
Language**



*Nathaniel Livernois
gives his perspective on
disability language.*

When describing my diagnosis, would it be better to say I am autistic or that I have autism? These two options are known as identity-first and person-first language. When using the former, it highlights one's disability and relates it back to oneself. The latter acknowledges the person with disabilities before the disability itself. Both have slightly different approaches, but both are acceptable if whoever you are describing is okay with your choice of language.

Why should it be okay to accept either option? Let's start with identity-first language. In the previously stated phrase "I am autistic," the word "autistic" is a single word defining one personal trait. Calling myself an autistic person doesn't make any assumptions about me as a whole, any more than calling myself a joyful man means that I can never be sad. The language only relates me to the diagnosis of autism. It says nothing about personality, physical traits, beliefs, relationships, or any other qualities that may belong to me. It only provides the basic information that I'm autistic.

(continued on page 2)

A Discussion on Language

(continued from page 1)

When looking at person-first language, there are small differences from identity-first language. Using the phrase “I have autism,” as an example, the tone shifts away from the disability towards the speaker. Rather than defining a disability as a personally-defining quality, person-first language claims that disability is a trait over which one has ownership. By showing ownership, person-first language tries to emphasize the importance of the person over the disability. However, the end result is almost identical to identity-first language. Both approaches describe how disability relates to the individual, but they never reach beyond the disability’s definition.

There is, however, one form of language that does fail to define having a disability without reaching into other aspects of life. This would be the phrase “experiencing disability.” If I were to say that “I experience autism,” there would be a few problems here. The first being that an experience usually has a clear start and endpoint. Neither of those are visible here unless you want to include my birth and death, which most advocates probably aren’t thinking about when they use this phrase. Additionally, describing disability as an experience is not a common occurrence for temporary disabilities. At least anecdotally, I don’t think I’ve ever heard of someone “experiencing a broken leg.” **Because an experience is temporary, it might be more appropriate to say that others experience my disability through me. My disability itself is not an experience. However, it does lead to plenty of life experiences.**

Language is always tough to get right. What may be the right words to use in some company may be inappropriate in others. Although I have outlined both identity-first and person-first language as appropriate here, it is important to note that many people are only comfortable with one or the other. **Respect should always be at the front of every conversation.**

Nathaniel Livernois is a 2022 SARTAC fellow at the Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire.

The prefix dis is often associated with something negative. It turns words like respectful or honest into disrespectful and dishonest. However, dis is also related to the Latin prefixes of bis and duo, both of which are related to the notion of twice or two ways. When considered this way, the term disability sheds its negative connotation for one that is powerful:

Dis = Another Way of Doing and Being

Disabled = an ability to do or be something in another way

Disability = an ability to do or be in another way

“Disability does not need to be a dirty word. It does not need to be something of which to be embarrassed or ashamed. Rather, it holds the potential to a power to see and experience the world in a completely different way.” —Meriah Nicols

Adapted and used with permission from *3 Reasons to Say Disability Instead of Special Needs* by Meriah Nicols available at <https://www.meriahnichols.com/3-reasons-say-disability-instead-special-needs/>



Linguistic Ableism

"Ableism is not a list of bad words. Language is one tool of an oppressive system. Being aware of language—for those of us who have the privilege of being able to change our language—can help us understand how pervasive ableism is. Ableism is systematic, institutional devaluing of bodies and minds deemed deviant, abnormal, defective, subhuman, less than. Ableism is violence." —Lydia X.Z. Brown

Excerpt from: *Violence in Language: Circling Back to Linguistic Ableism*
by Lydia X.Z. Brown*



Linguistic ableism:

- a) is part of an entire system of ableism, and doesn't exist simply by itself,
- b) signifies how deeply ableist our societies and cultures are by how common and accepted ableism is in language,
- c) reinforces and perpetuates ableist social norms that normalize violence and abuse against disabled people,
- d) actively creates less safe spaces by re-traumatizing disabled people, and
- e) uses ableism to perpetuate other forms of oppression.

*Read the entire article at <https://bit.ly/3hCtYvJ> (2014). For more from Lydia X.Z. Brown including a list of generally ableist terms and phrases visit <https://bit.ly/3WqpUh6> (updated 2022).

Four Disability Euphemisms That Need to Bite the Dust

By Emily Ladeau

One of the biggest disparities surrounding disability is the language people use to refer to it. I prefer to be a straight shooter and keep things simple by using the term “disabled person.” Other people choose alternative euphemisms to avoid saying that. While I know some people genuinely embrace words other than “disabled”—even some people who actually have disabilities—I just can’t get on board with that.

Of course, I can’t presume to speak for anyone other than myself, and everyone should have the right to choose how to refer to themselves so long as they don’t impose it upon anyone else. However, when non-disabled people try to dance around the word “disabled” in an effort to be more respectful, I don’t think they realize the hidden ableism behind the euphemisms. It demonstrates an assumption that “disabled”

is a negative quality or derogatory word, when, in fact, disabled is what I am. It is, in my opinion, the plainest, simplest, most straightforward, and least offensive way to refer to what my body can and cannot do.

So, next time you hesitate to say “disabled,” consider why I wish these four alternate terms would kick the bucket:

1. Challenged

Having a disability definitely makes some things more difficult for me, but we all face challenges on a daily basis, regardless of ability. This makes it frustrating when people call me “challenged” because it makes me feel like my existence is a problem. In reality, most of my challenges stem from circumstances I encounter in the world around me. Instances of discrimination and environmental access barriers that disabled people experience are not our fault. We are challenged by



people who perpetuate stigmas about disability; we are challenged by people who cannot be bothered to make locations accessible; we are challenged by inadequate legislation. But to call us challenged when we are neither the cause of our challenges, nor the only humans who deal with challenges, is quite unfair, don't you think?

2. Handicapable

This term drives me up the wall. It's so cutesy and dripping with condescension, almost like a verbal pat on the head. I don't need sugary-sweet reminders that I am capable of things just because I have a disability. I already know that, because every human has capabilities and limitations. Even so, I've encountered the rare disabled person who uses "handicapable" in a completely un-ironic way, and I just don't get it.

I know many non-disabled people who say "handicapable" do so with the intention of showing that they don't "see" disability or that it's not a big deal, but disability is part of a disabled person. My disability doesn't make me feel like less of a person, but calling me "handicapable" does. In fact, the only thing I think of when I hear it is that "the handicapable" would be a good name for a brand of kitchen gadgets at Walmart or Bed, Bath, and Beyond.

3. Differently-abled

Let's think about this one for a moment, because it's actually loaded with prejudiced assumptions. Essentially, "differently-abled" implies that there's such a thing as a standard body that possesses standard abilities. The problem with this? There's

not. No two people are able to do exactly the same things in exactly the same ways. Some people are able to walk on their feet. Some people are able to roll in a wheelchair. Some people can touch their tongue to their nose. Some people can contort like a pretzel. So, to be technically correct, disabled people aren't the only ones who are differently-abled. We all are.

4. Special Needs

Why, oh why is this still such a common term? It makes no sense to me. By much the same logic that explains why "differently-abled" is inaccurate, it's clear that "special needs" is too. If you are a human, you have needs. Everyone has needs. What makes mine so "special" just because I have a disability? Nothing.

My needs are not "special" just because they're not met in ways identical to the needs of non-disabled people. I need a ramp; you need steps. Not special, just facts. I need a wheelchair; you walk. Not special, just facts. Moreover, the needs of non-disabled people certainly aren't all met in the same ways. Just like every other living, breathing human being on this planet, I am a person who has needs that must be fulfilled in ways appropriate to my abilities.

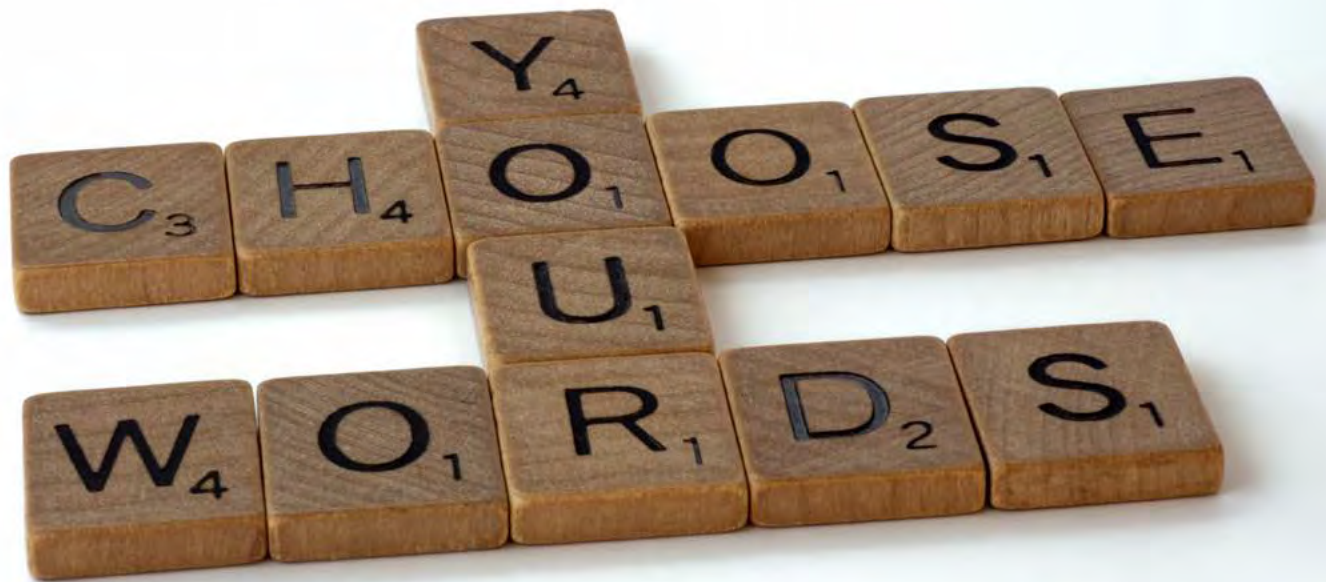
Whether you're disabled or non-disabled, I urge you to realize why euphemisms really aren't a show of respect, no matter how well meaning your intent might be. They can be disempowering, patronizing, and even hurtful. So please, just call me a disabled woman, because that's who I am, and that's who I'm proud to be.

This article was reprinted with permission. Emily Ladau is a writer and disability rights activist whose passion is to harness the powers of language and social media as tools for people to become informed and engaged social justice advocates. She maintains a blog, Words I Wheel By, as a platform to address discrimination and to encourage people to understand the experience of having a disability in more positive, accepting, and supportive ways.

"Everyone has needs. What makes mine so 'special' just because I have a disability? Nothing." —Emily Ladeau

The Power of Language

By DRC-NH Legal Intern, Brianna Hankel



The words *idiot*, *imbecile*, and *moron* are commonly used in everyday slang, but where did they originate? The answer is from the lexicon of Henry Goddard, an early twentieth-century psychologist and eugenicist who tried to prove that intelligence, criminal behavior, and work ethic were all determined by an individual's genetics. Goddard believed that an IQ test could identify “feeble-minded” people who were dangerous and should not be allowed to reproduce.

In 1924, the state of Virginia used Goddard's—and other eugenicists'—theories as justification to legalize the forced sterilization of “feeble-minded” individuals. At that time, Carrie Buck was a patient at Virginia's State Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded. She had recently given birth to a child also deemed “feeble-minded.” The head of the institution wanted her sterilized and the case went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In one of its most infamous decisions, *Buck v. Bell*, the Court decided that the government could force people with disabilities to be sterilized against their will. Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes justified the ruling with his claim that,

“Three generations of imbeciles are enough”—a reference to Carrie Buck's mother, Carrie herself, and Carrie's child. The Court has never reversed the Buck decision, and it remains law today.

Seventy thousand individuals with disabilities have been sterilized in the U.S. since the Buck decision. In 1980, a New Hampshire court case known as *In re Jenny N* involved a 12-year-old with developmental disabilities. Her parents and doctor decided she could not manage menstruation and petitioned for a hysterectomy to sterilize her. The probate court found that Jenny's parents had a good faith belief that the procedure was in her best interest and gave them permission to consent to the sterilization. The New Hampshire Supreme Court upheld the decision, making New Hampshire one of only 17 states that allows the forced sterilization of both children and adults with disabilities. For more on these laws visit <https://bit.ly/3WslBSa>.

As time progresses, so does language and the law—with the law often taking longer to catch up. The term “feeble-minded” was replaced by “mental defect” in medical terminology around

the 1930s. In the 1950s, parents whose children were subjected to inhumane cruelty, abuse, and neglect while institutionalized began to advocate for community-based care and access to education. The change in attitudes forced language and the law to change. “Mental defect” later became mental retardation and then just retarded. During this cultural shift in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, the “r-word” was regarded as a more dignified and respectful alternative to Goddard’s words of the past.

As people with disabilities shifted out of state-run institutions into community-based settings, more accessible educational opportunities and services became available. In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed. It took nearly two decades but, in 1990, the name of this federal civil rights law was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the text of the law shifted to person-first language. Around this same time, the U.S. Department of Education itself shifted to person-first language to further its goals of inclusivity and respect. In 1992, the Association for Retarded Citizens changed its name to The ARC. Today, The ARC is one of the most respected national disability rights organizations.

In 2009, a campaign called “Spread the Word to End the Word” was formed. The goal was to address exclusionary language, specifically to end the use of the “r-word.” With corporate sponsorship from the Special Olympics and Best Buddies, the grassroots campaign reached millions who acknowledged the harmful use of the word.

In 2010, Rosa’s Law removed the “r-word” from some federal education, health, and labor statutes, including the Americans with Disabilities Act. Named after a child with Down syndrome, Rosa’s Law demonstrates the power of language within legislative text. During the lead up to the law’s

***“What you call people
is how you treat them”***

passing, Rosa’s 11-year-old brother stated, “What you call people is how you treat them. What you call my sister is how you will treat her. If you believe she’s retarded, it invites taunting, stigma. It invites bullying and it also invites the slammed doors of being treated with respect and dignity.”

Three years after Rosa’s Law passed, the American Psychiatric Association dropped “mentally retarded” from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-5) and the Social Security Administration voluntarily removed the “r-word” from its policies. This past September, a new bill, the Words Matter Act (H.R. 8863), was introduced. The Words Matter Act is a bipartisan effort to change all remaining references of the “r-word” in federal law to “intellectual disability.” If passed, this Act will remove this outdated and harmful language from twelve additional federal laws including the National Housing Act and the Omnibus Crime Control and the Safe Streets Act of 1968.

People of the past failed to recognize that all people deserve dignity and respect and yet harmful, hurtful, and ableist words like moron, lame, and the “r-word” continue to be used by the media, our law makers, the courts, and even by our family and friends. As our commitment to inclusion evolves, so too must our language—whether it be casual slang or legal text—because the words we use to describe a community of people directly informs the policy and laws that govern them.

Brianna Hankel is a third-year law student at UNH Law where she is pursuing her JD and a certificate in health law and policy.

Disability Language Guide

There are two main ways to write about disability: person-first and identity-first. All three DRAPP organizations use person-first language as a default and that is reflected in this language guide. However, when possible, we ask individuals with whom we are working or writing about which format they prefer.

Example:

- Person-first: “A person with a disability”
- Identity-first: “A disabled person”

The following list depicts phrases and terms that are generally considered appropriate, as well as terms and phrases to avoid. Please keep in mind that language is constantly evolving and not everyone has the same preference, so the best guideline when referring to people is to ASK.

PREFERRED	AVOID
accessible parking/accommodations	handicapped accessible
children/student with disabilities	special children, special needs
education, appropriate education, or the education of students with disabilities	special education, SPED
individual without a disability	able-bodied, normal, whole
individual with a physical disability	crippled, lame, handicapped, deformed, defective, differently abled, handicapable
individual with a spinal cord injury	quadriplegic, paraplegic, incapacitated
individual with (e.g., multiple sclerosis)	suffers from (e.g., multiple sclerosis)
individual who uses a wheelchair	wheelchair-bound/confined to a wheelchair
individual who is blind or has low vision	blind
individual who is deaf or hard of hearing	the deaf, deaf and dumb, deaf-mute, hearing impaired
individual with burns	burn victim, disfigured
individual of short stature	dwarf or midget
individual who had a stroke	stroke victim/suffered from a stroke
individual with a cleft lip/cleft palate	hare lip



PREFERRED	AVOID
individual with a congenital disability	deformed/person with birth defect
individual with epilepsy or a seizure disorder	Epileptic, spastic, person who has “fits” or “attacks”
individual living with HIV or AIDS	HIV or AIDS victim
individual with a learning disability	slow learner, retarded, stupid
individual with an intellectual disability	Slow, retarded, dim-witted
individual with dyslexia	dyslexic
individual with a psychiatric disability or with a mental health diagnosis	Crazy, maniac, lunatic, demented, schizo, psycho, feeble-minded, deranged, spaz, mad, nuts, insane
individual with autism	autistic
assistance animal, service dog	Seeing-eye dog (refers only to a service dog specifically trained to assist an individual who is blind or has low vision)
Down syndrome or Trisomy 21	Down’s syndrome, Downs

The above material is adapted from *Guidelines for Reporting and Writing about People with Disabilities* by the Research and Training Center on Independent Living at The University of Kansas and the National Disability Rights Network’s *Words Matter—Guidelines for Reporting and Writing About People with Disabilities*. For more information visit www.rtcil.org or ndrn.org.

An excerpt from:

How to talk about disability sensitively and avoid ableist tropes

By Shruti Rajkumar

Inspirational narratives of disability are directly tied to a term called "inspiration porn." Coined by activist Stella Young, inspiration porn is defined as "objectifying disabled people for the benefit of nondisabled people."

[Rosemary] McDonnell-Horita [of LaVant Consulting] said an example of inspiration porn is the viral videos that get spread around prom season of a high school football player asking a girl with Down syndrome to prom. Being asked to prom is something that almost everyone wants, she said. But videos of disabled people getting asked to prom get amplified because society perceives disabled people as pitiable and "unlovable." This is just one example of how inspiration porn degrades, exploits and others disabled people.

"It's really dangerous to have that be the trope because then it really limits and continues to infantilize disabled people and their potential," McDonnell-Horita said. "It's very patronizing, and it only continues to other disabled people, as if they don't deserve to have access to regular life milestones that other young people have."

Another example of inspiration porn is videos of disabled people standing up out of their wheelchair at a wedding. This directly ties into the "overcoming disability" narrative. [Cara] Reedy [the director and founder of the Disabled Journalists Association] points out that these tropes come back to disabilities being seen as a deficiency and that they serve to dehumanize disabled people.





"If the stakes are lower and the assumption is that you can't do anything, that you're not that smart and that you aren't supposed to achieve anything, [then] any time you achieve something, it becomes like a party. But what that does is it erases all of the disabled person's effort, all of the barriers they've had to overcome," Reedy said.

These tropes frame disabled people as being held back by their disability and imply that it's something that they have to overcome. McDonnell-Horita said that her disability identity isn't something she has had to overcome. Instead, she has had to overcome the shame she was taught to feel about herself as a disabled person, ignorant questions that people ask her and the systemic ableism that keeps disabled people out of certain spaces.

"If you're still writing stories about inspirational people and disability and not really digging into the barriers, then you're creating—and this is going to sound extreme, but — you're creating violence. You are perpetuating violence among a group of people, which, by the way, is a quarter of the American population," Reedy said.

The infantilization in such language is harmful, as it leads to people not being able to make choices in their lives and the assumption that they shouldn't. For example, 1.3 million disabled adults are in conservatorships in the United States, according to the National Council on Disability. Additionally, 31 states plus Washington, D.C., have laws that allow the forced sterilization of disabled people.

"There's language that infantilizes, but there's also actions. The actions are the insidious part that the language is sort of covering for," said Reedy.

Republished from *How to talk about disability sensitively and avoid ableist tropes* by Shruti Rajkumar. Copyright (c) 2022 by Mark Shruti Rajkumar.
Used by permission of NH Public Radio. All rights reserved.

In Memorium

Remembering Freda Smith

By Deb Genthner

In 2005, on my first day as a New Hampshire Leadership Series trainee, I met Freda Smith. She told her daughter's story and I cried. Her daughter, Janet, was sent to the Laconia State School when Freda became sick and could no longer give her daughter the care she needed. This could have been my son's story.

When Freda was well enough to visit Janet at school, she quickly learned the living arrangements were difficult for all and unlivable for many. She pushed for improvements and when that didn't work, she advocated for the school to be shut down altogether.

Janet was a named plaintiff in the landmark case *Garrity, et al.*, which resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of people housed at the Laconia State School and which directly led to New Hampshire becoming the first state in the nation to close our only institution for people with developmental disabilities. When the case went to trial, Freda never missed a day in the court room.

When I think about tough times and hard-to-win situations, I think about Freda. She rallied and organized people across the state to create policy change and better the lives of her daughter, her family, and others with disabilities. She was a mother who fought for something she believed in—and she won.



Freda promised to live to 200 so she could share her daughter's story and ensure no one would ever forget that there was once a place called the Laconia State School and Training Center. For over 25 years, each entering class of the IOD's NH Leadership Series spent their first session with Freda. She worked for decades as a champion for education, social justice, and civil rights for citizens with disabilities and their families. Freda Smith's work ensured that children with disabilities and their family members would be supported, have good lives, and be welcomed as members of their communities.

***"When I think about tough times
and hard-to-win situations, I think about Freda."***

Deborah Genthner is the coordinator of the NH Leadership Series.



In Memorium

Memorial Statement for Freda Smith *By Dick Cohen*

Freda Smith had a long, robust life with many varied interests at the center of which was her family. I knew her through her advocacy on behalf of her late daughter, Janet, and so many others who were institutionalized at Laconia State School. I worked closely with Freda around the Laconia State School class action lawsuit, *Garrity v. Gallen*, and years later when she served as a Disability Rights Center Board member. As a result of her disability advocacy, she was recognized by the *Concord Monitor* as one of the 100 most influential persons in New Hampshire in the twentieth century.

Up through the 1970s/80s, the predominant way New Hampshire and all other states “served” individuals with developmental disabilities was by institutionalizing them in large, segregated, and isolated institutions where conditions became more inhumane over time. Due primarily to Freda’s leadership and sheer will, along with the contributions of others, New Hampshire ultimately closed Laconia, replacing it with the statewide Area Agency system, becoming the first state in the union to do so.

Freda’s disability advocacy was based on her own personal beliefs but was also grounded on fundamental legal and human rights. Institutions such as Laconia were not only unnecessary to support individuals with disabilities, but they also deprived them of their very rights to be safe and to achieve their potential.

Like so many parents, Freda and Harvey Smith placed Janet at Laconia State School as there were no educational or social services available in the community. Because of the institution’s lack of transparency, it was difficult for parents, or any “outsider,” to know the true depth of the horrific conditions there. When Freda learned what was happening at Laconia, she began unceasing efforts to compel reform not only for her daughter, but for all residents. She became President of the New Hampshire ARC as well as a leader of the

Laconia State School ARC chapter. In 1975, she was instrumental in the enactment of RSA 171-A, the state’s transformative community-based services law.

While there were some improvements after the passage of that law—due primarily to federal funding measures—conditions remained egregious. Freda, as a parent and president of NHARC along with Jim Haddock, its executive director, approached NH Legal Assistance to see if they would file suit. John Macintosh and I were the attorneys selected as co-counsel. The federal class action suit, with Janet as one of the six named plaintiffs, was filed in 1978. After a 10-week trial in 1980, Judge Devine ordered the State to establish the Area Agency system, ultimately leading to the closure of the institution in 1991.

While the trial clearly established that most, if not all, residents at Laconia State School would be far better off in the community, there were some who were skeptical. It was understandably hard for some parents to imagine a comprehensive and coordinated community system. Freda had the vision, imagination, and boldness to understand that the only way her daughter and all children and adults could have the opportunity to be truly safe and secure would be to live in their community close to family, friends, and neighbors. She thus played a key role in advancing the lawsuit not just in the court but amongst many skeptical parents and citizens.

What made Freda such a force for transformative change? Her imagination and boldness, to be sure. She also had a formidable quality which some found intimidating. But in my view, what motivated Freda were high standards and her profoundly loving and caring heart for her Janet and all those with disabilities.

So many lives were changed, and continue to change, because of Freda. As we pay tribute to Freda, let her commitment to disability rights inspire us to work towards inclusive and quality lives for all people.

Dick Cohen is an attorney and disability rights advocate. He served as co-counsel on Garrity v. Gallen and was the Executive Director of Disability Rights Center – NH from 2002-2015.

“Your Request Cannot be Filled” The Shortage of ASL/English Interpreters in the U.S.

By Laurie R. Shaffer, Dan Hoffman, and Karen O'Hicks

Any quick Google search on the topic of American Sign Language (ASL)/English interpreter service pulls up headlines of stories that reveal a scarcity of interpreters. This scarcity is a long-standing and continuing problem across all corners of our country. Why is this? Simply put, the number of interpreters is not commensurate with the need for service.

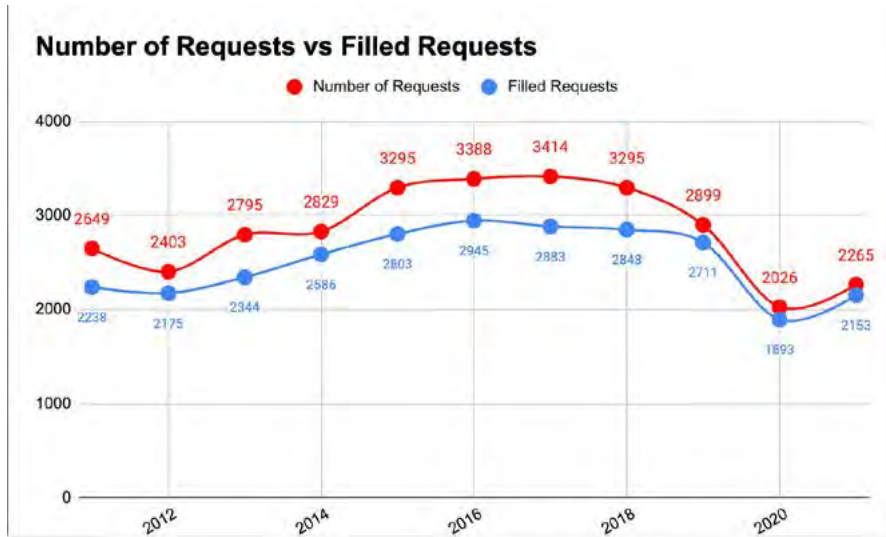
While most statistics are based on hearing loss, not language use, a reasonable estimate is that over six million Deaf people live in the U.S. and use ASL as their primary language. Laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act aim to create a more equivalent lived experience for all members of society. These laws have opened doors, and with every door that opens, the demand for interpreters rises. Many institutions of higher learning, and even high schools, are offering American Sign Language classes. Shouldn't this create more interpreters? Yes and no.

ASL is a complex and rich language that takes years to master, and it may surprise people that it is not simply English vocabulary presented manually. Signs are accompanied by many other linguistic components found elsewhere on the body. For example, raising your eyebrows and tilting your head forward is asking a “yes/no” question. Puffing your cheeks while you sign “slow” adds a modifier to show that something was REALLY slow. As with any second language, most learners can develop basic conversational skills, but few become fully fluent. It is imperative that interpreters have full fluency in both ASL and English.

Another factor to consider is that Deaf people are as varied as the rest of America – they comprise a multitude of races, religions, ethnicities, and sexual orientations. They have different levels of education, employment, and economic status. When people with disparate experiences and ways of viewing the world come together to interact, conversations can be very complex. No one interpreter is suitable for every situation.

The chart on the next page (Figure 1) shows one New Hampshire agency that arranges interpreting services for various assignments. Comparatively speaking, they are quite successful at filling requests for interpreter service. Note that there are 100 to 400 requests unfilled. That means 400 interactions with doctors, teachers, and employers that did not happen. This deficit has a real impact on the daily lives of Deaf people.





Northeast Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services

Figure 1: The number of requests for ASL interpreters versus the number of filled requests.

The bottom line is that demand clearly surpasses supply. As more Deaf people obtain higher degrees and enter all levels of society and employment, the requests for service increase and often require specialized expertise. At the same time, it appears that the number of available interpreters has plateaued.

How can this problem be overcome?

Most solutions involve technology. In the future, we may see the use of holographic communication – three-dimensional projection suitable for ASL. Currently, there is increased use of Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) – an interpreting service provided virtually. This service links interpreters from across the country with those seeking service, maximizing the availability of interpreters. However, there are drawbacks to VRI service such as the impact on authentic human connection that serves a vital role in communication.

One option that is not technology-based is offering high quality ASL instruction across the school curriculum, starting as early as elementary school. Taking ASL classes throughout primary and secondary school would mean students could enter a training program for interpreting with language fluency and be better prepared to enter the field upon graduation.

In a perfect world, everyone in the U.S. would learn ASL, eliminating the need for interpreters. In the meantime, creative solutions are needed to increase the number of interpreters as soon as possible. The shortage of interpreters is real, and the consequences are significant for Deaf people and for the rest of society. Without interpretation, we are hindered from interacting with and learning from this rich linguistic and cultural minority.

Three Reasons to Say “Disability” Instead of “Special Needs”

By Meriah Nichols

1. People with Disabilities Want You to

In and of itself, this is really the only answer anyone should need: *people with disabilities want you to.*

Parents of kids with Down syndrome have been on a campaign to stop the use of the word “retard,” first and foremost, because people with Down syndrome have asked us to stop saying it. Regardless of how it makes sense or not to people, we ask that people “spread the word to end the word”—quit saying the “r-word.”

Adults with disabilities ask that you say “disability” and not “special needs” when you are talking about disability.

“Disabled people should control the conversation about their disabilities, and the language used about them, not their parents.”
—Louisa Shiffer

Your child with autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, deafness, brain injury, dyslexia, spina bifida, blindness, muscular dystrophy—all of it—every one of them counts as a disability, and adults from every one of those communities identify as being disabled.

That doesn’t mean every adult from those communities, just like not every adult with Down syndrome is asking you to quit saying the r-word; but enough of them, the majority of them, identify as having a disability, not a special need.

2. “Special Needs” as an Educational Term is Outdated

I myself hiccupped there. I thought that you could have a special need and not a disability—that is, that one could have an IEP for something not necessarily disability-related.



Wrong! It’s all disability-related if they receive an IEP. Anyone with an IEP has a disability; anyone receiving services or accommodation under section 504 or the IDEA has a disability. Point blank. Call it what it is.

Say the word: **disability**. In the words of Lawrence Carter-Long:

“A need isn’t special if other people get to take the same thing for granted.”

3. All the Other Words Make Us Gag

“Handi-capable,” “People of all abilities,” “Different abilities,” “Differently abled” can be lumped together with “special needs.” They all sound patronizing, condescending.

And they are all inaccurate.

“Handi-capable,” “People of all abilities,” “Different abilities,” “Differently abled” and “special needs” were made up outside of the disabled community, by people without disabilities. Their continued use, and the defense of their use by people without disabilities reeks of able-splaining; that is, people *without* disabilities explaining disability to people *with* disabilities.

Excerpted and used with permission by Meriah Nichols. View her entire piece at <https://www.meriahnichols.com/3-reasons-say-disability-instead-special-needs/>.

Meriah Nicols is a counselor, solo mom to three (one with Down syndrome, one on the spectrum). Deaf and neurodiverse herself, she’s a gardening nerd who loves cats, Star Trek, and takes her coffee hot and black.

Institute on Disability



University of
New Hampshire

The Civic Language Perceptions Project

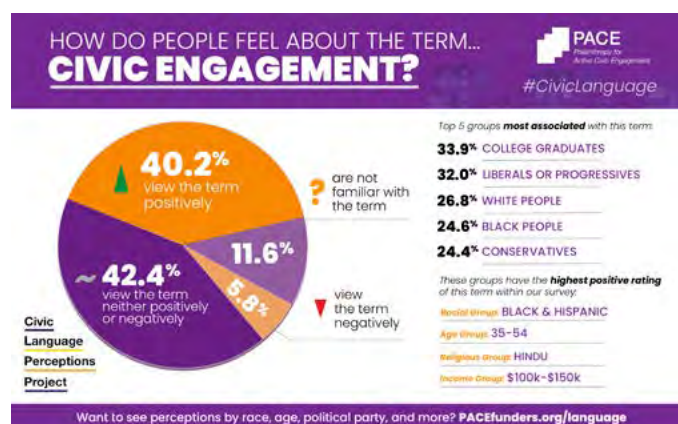
Language matters in the disability rights movement. Words have the power to change the way people think and feel. However, the words we choose may mean different things to different people. Recent survey data from the Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement (PACE) suggests this may be especially true for words related to civic participation.

Civic participation can be a range of things meant to improve your community: volunteering, being involved in a neighborhood association, participating in the census, and more. It can also mean reaching out to lawmakers and voting. People with disabilities are approximately 20% of the voting population. Voter turnout for people with disabilities is growing faster than the general population, despite barriers to voting that organizations like the Disability Rights Center are working to address.

PACE launched the Civic Language Perceptions Project to understand associations with words related to civic engagement. You can view their findings here: <http://www.pacefunders.org/language-register/>. One of the demographic markers that PACE did not ask about was disability status. Let's help bring this important perspective to civic engagement work. Please take a moment to fill out the PACE survey and give your anonymous view of these words. Civil society is stronger when everyone participates!

PACE SURVEY
<https://bit.ly/3BGZUpU>

PACE (Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement) and Citizen Data (2022). Civic Language Perceptions Project, National Survey data collected November 2021. Retrieved via [PACEfunders.org/Language](https://www.pacefunders.org/Language)





Information Access for All

The NHCDD is dedicated to collaborating with NH entities to reduce barriers to accessing information.

Explore our resource library on our website at:



<https://bit.ly/InformationAccess4All>

Plain Language

.....
Easy Read

.....
**E Content/
Social Media**

.....
**Disability
Language**

.....
Trainings

.....
**ASL Interpreter
Services**

If you are interested in contributing to our resource guide, please contact Vanessa.A.Blais@ddc.nh.gov.

Ask about our Accessibility Grants

Up to \$500.00 to support accessibility for community projects or educational programs that help achieve goals and objectives in the Council's Five Year Plan.

www.nhcdd.nh.gov

2½ Beacon St., Suite 10 Concord, NH 03301 • 603-271-3236



NHCDD



NHCDD



NHCDD

Planning for the Future

Recently, Disability Rights Center-NH staff and Board came together to reflect upon and streamline our organizational mission and develop a new vision: simple, yet vital long-term goals for our day-to-day work. We are excited to share these with you below.

MISSION

Disability Rights Center – New Hampshire protects, advances, and strengthens the legal rights and advocacy interests of all people with disabilities.

VISION

We envision an inclusive, accessible, and just society where:

All are treated with dignity and respect,

People with disabilities live the lives that they choose; lives that are free from abuse, neglect, and discrimination,

People with disabilities have equal opportunity to participate fully in their community and enjoy their lives.

Help us put these goals into action

We are currently developing our new 5-year strategic plan and we want to hear from you. There are many ways you can share your thoughts, ideas, and suggestions with us:

1. Take our short [survey](#).
2. Attend one of our on-line Discussion Sessions (Zoom). Visit drcnh.org/uncategorized/planning-for-the-future for event dates and to register.
3. Send feedback to us directly or invite us to attend your meeting: [Email](mailto:stephaniep@drcnh.org) stephaniep@drcnh.org to make a request.

We'll also be planning several in-person events in the spring. [Subscribe](#) to our e-newsletter at drcnh.org for announcements.



SCAN ME



NH Council on Developmental Disabilities

2½ Beacon Street, Suite 10

Concord, NH 03301-4447

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Disability Rights Center - NH

Protection and Advocacy System for New Hampshire

twitter.com/DRCNH

facebook.com/DisabilityRightsCenterNH

Disability Rights Center – New Hampshire protects, advances, and strengthens the legal rights and advocacy interests of all people with disabilities.

WEBSITE: www.drcnh.org **EMAIL:** mail@drcnh.org

64 North Main Street, Suite 2

3rd Floor, Concord, NH 03301-4913

VOICE AND TDD: (603) 228-0432

1-800-834-1721

FAX: (603) 225-2077

TDD access also through NH Relay Service

VOICE AND TDD: 1-800-735-2964

Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire

twitter.com/unhiod **youtube.com/unhiod**

facebook.com/instituteondisability

The IOD promotes full access, equal opportunities, and participation for all persons by strengthening communities and advancing policy and systems change, promising practices, education, and research.

WEBSITE: www.iod.unh.edu

DURHAM OFFICE

10 West Edge Drive, Suite 101

Durham, NH 03824

PHONE: (603) 862-1769

RELAY: 711

FAX: (603) 862.0555

NH Council on Developmental Disabilities

Dignity, full rights of citizenship, cultural diversity, equal opportunity, and full participation for all New Hampshire citizens with developmental disabilities.

WEBSITE: www.nhcdd.org

2½ Beacon Street, Suite 10

Concord, NH 03301-4447

PHONE: (603) 271-3236

TTY/TDD: 1-800-735-2964

This publication was supported solely by federal funding from grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Community Living/Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities; U.S. Department of Education, Department of Rehabilitation Services; Social Security Administration; and a grant from the New Hampshire Bar Foundation.

The contents are solely the responsibility of the grantees and do not necessarily represent the official views of the grantors.