

## **MORE THAN PROVIDERS**

- by John Ford, hearing impaired advocate

For a few moments, I would like you to look at the role of reporters in CART and real timing, primarily, but not exclusively, in the field of religious services. How do people see the reporters and how do they see themselves? Just what are you doing, anyway?

You will be sitting in front of one of those funny little keyboards, listening intently; tickling the keys to produce strange chicken scratch marks on the paper and watching a computer miraculously convert it all into readable text. However, you are not just sound in/text out data converters! You are not plug-in, bionic modules of your machines. In a purely legal environment, you know that the reporter is an anonymous fixture of the court. In a meeting, you are there to provide a service to people who need it.

We often refer to it as access provision. You are, however, far more than wheelchair ramps and grab bars in toilet stalls! By providing access to deaf and hard-of-hearing people, you are enabling them to be a part of that meeting. That enablement may go much farther than just helping them fit into the meeting. You may very well be making a life changing difference to them and others with whom they interact. You could be saving a life, even an entire family.

Today, access leads to empowerment. Deaf and hard-of-hearing people no longer need to shrug and retreat from life. Having a reporter putting the words onto a screen can mean a level playing field for people otherwise left to go home. We did not play the game. We did not even stay to watch. We went home because we did not even know which game they were playing. With access, we can play too. That is empowerment! That is living the way life is supposed to be lived.

A while ago, I met a young African American man who had just graduated from law school. He was deaf and had access provided by a real time reporter in his lectures. Without that access, he would never have been able to finish his first semester. When the reporters provided access, they also facilitated life change for him. He is now a successful professional with a good income and raising a family in a healthy, secure environment. Without access, there is a frightening possibility that he might have become another tragic statistic among the number of young men who never make it to middle age. With the support of access not only has his life been changed, but also his kids and likely their kids too.

In a church environment, there are obvious situations where we can see how access will bring life change. If you have a real time reporter providing CART/captioning at a huge evangelistic rally, it is not hard to see how someone can have a life-changing experience. Without access, they would not have "heard" the message and responded to an altar call. When captioning is provided week after week at a church

service, one sees changes in the lives of those who depend on it. They may have wandered in the first time not sure what to expect. When they enthusiastically return, and grow because of the ministry, they will start to help others. The blessing multiplies! The entire body becomes a better place because of the ministry to a few.

Sometimes it is not the huge meetings or the weekly grind. Sometimes a relatively simple situation can have a massive impact on someone who needs that access. Such a time came in early July of this year.

Joanne Anderson, a very accomplished reporter in Burlington, Ontario, Canada, jumped to clear her busy schedule with just a day's notice. She drove to New Life church in Milton to caption a funeral. A deaf man and his hard-of-hearing wife were mourning the sudden loss of their 24-year-old daughter. Joanne said, I just could not let him sit there, not knowing what was happening at his own daughter's funeral!

Other deaf and hard-of-hearing people were going to be there. With the captioning, everyone in attendance knew every kind word, every song, and every comforting remark. And the man that was deaf was able to follow the pastor's cues to come up onto the platform at the front of the sanctuary and to say a few words to the congregation. He had full access to all that happened.

Every year, thousands of deaf and hard-of-hearing people in the U. S. and Canada do not have the luxury of such access. Circumstances force them to sit there. They cannot go home from this one. It becomes another nightmare adding to their grief.

Closure does not come easily if you do not know what is happening at a funeral. You become like a rudderless ship, engulfed in a fog bank at the midnight hour. With access, the man that was deaf faced a level playing field in the worst "life game" a father could ever face.

How can I be so sure about this situation? Well, it was my 24-year-old daughter that was buried on July 12, 2006.

Reporter, access provider, enabler, empowerer, an angel sent by God! Thank you, Joanne. I will remember that day for the rest of my life.

*For more information on church CART/captioning go to [www.captioningtheword.com](http://www.captioningtheword.com)*