

Deaf Refugee Advocacy - Diana Pryntz

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Organization Profile

Organization Name	Mail Address
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Mission/Vision Mission:

We recognize that deaf refugees, asylum-seekers, immigrants, and those from US territories have unique needs that are best served and assisted by the members of the general Deaf community. Our mission is to

1. provide direct services (education and case management services),
2. promote advocacy and full language access for this population, and
3. outreach services (collaboration, consultation, and education) to existing community service organizations and agencies.

We aim to support them as they strive to be self sustaining neighbors while still retaining their own cultural heritage, identity, language, and religion. Furthermore, we wish to ensure their inclusion into our Deaf community and into general society.

Receive County Funds? no

Div. of Corp. N/A? no

Proposal Information

Project Name Deaf Refugee Advocacy Community Connections

Summary Monroe County's (MC's) Deaf, DeafBlind, and hard of hearing ("deaf") population, as well the County's population of refugees, immigrants, and asylees (RIAs), both face systemic and population-specific barriers toward equitable participation, knowledge, and benefits of the services, resources, and opportunities of the County. As made even more apparent by the COVID-19 pandemic, RIAs who are deaf and may have other intersectional identities, including but not limited to gender identity, gender expression, race, ethnicity, class (past and present), religious beliefs, sexual identity and sexual expression, are significantly underserved and face unique challenges that require targeted interventions. These barriers include systemic language, cultural, and accessibility issues. Deaf Refugee Advocacy Community Connections (DRACC) will provide this marginalized subset of the deaf population, unable to get appropriate support elsewhere in MC, opportunities to improve their language, technical, and cultural competencies, economic standing, and health. By providing an interconnected, person-centered system of education on critical subjects, behavioral health supports, and human services, an estimated 200 deaf RIAs and their families will achieve equitable opportunities to benefit from MC's vast resources to enter the workforce and improve their economic and behavioral health well-being. This addresses two of three Bring Monroe Back goals (Workforce Development & Economic Recovery and Public Health & Public Safety), including creating jobs for individuals who will operate the DRACC. Increasing the skills, confidence, and sense of belonging among deaf RIAs and their families will ultimately result in greater equity and participation of deaf RIAs as citizens who contribute to a thriving MC.

Workforce/Economic?	Health/Safety?	Infrastructure/Sustainability?
yes	yes	no

Description There are an estimated 3,480 deaf RIAs in MC, and the population continues to grow. This indicates a significant impact on MC's resources; deaf RIAs are at greater risk for homelessness, becoming victims of violence who then become perpetrators, drug use, illnesses, legal issues, and dependency on welfare programs. Many of the deaf RIAs have family members, neighbors, and other community members who are seriously affected by their well-being.

Deaf Refugee Advocacy (DRA) will advance Bring Monroe Back goals of Workforce Development & Economic Recovery and Public Health & Public Safety as detailed below. All numbers are program totals.

1) LANGUAGE, TECHNICAL, & CULTURAL COMPETENCIES

ISSUE 1A) Language Foundation: Deaf RIAs lack knowledge of American Sign Language (ASL) upon their arrival to the US. An estimated 75% never had opportunities to learn their home country's spoken language or sign language, resulting in severe language deprivation. This impacts not only their ability to learn new language skills but also impacts their cognitive decision-making skills.

ACTIVITY 1A) DRACC will provide ASL and English workshops to 100 deaf RIAs, advancing their language foundation. 75% of participants will demonstrate greater language fluency.

ISSUE 1B) Education & Soft Skills: Deaf RIAs are typically uneducated or did not attend school beyond elementary age and may also lack “soft skills” needed for successful day-to-day interactions.

ACTIVITY 1B) DRACC will provide workshops on financial literacy, independent living skills, computer literacy, and citizenship to an estimated 100 participants. This activity will build RIAs’ overall resilience and capacity. 75% of participants will demonstrate a better understanding of these topics.

2) WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & ECONOMIC RECOVERY

ISSUE 2A) Economic Stability: Most deaf RIAs are unemployed; many who had jobs became unemployed due to COVID. This population continues to struggle to find suitable employment.

ACTIVITY 2A.1) DRACC will reduce barriers to economic stability by offering workshops on job readiness, resume building, and job seeking to an estimated 20-25 participants. 75% of participants will report a better understanding of these topics. Ultimately, this will advance the numerical metric of increasing median household per capita income of MC residents.

ACTIVITY 2A.2) We will partner with County organizations that provide job skill training and/or job placement and will provide foundational training to an estimated 25 deaf RIAs so they can meet the entry requirements to benefit from these partners. 50% will obtain employment.

ISSUE 2B) The majority of service providers do not know how to engage with or meet the needs of deaf RIAs. Deaf RIAs greatly benefit from 1:1 support from trained individuals who can explain cultural concepts, terminology, and/or specific requirements needed to successfully access workforce and economic resources.

ACTIVITY 2B) DRACC will provide individual advocacy support to 100 deaf RIAs who need assistance in accessing workforce/economic resource service providers. 75% of service providers will report that DRACC’s involvement was beneficial.

3) PUBLIC HEALTH & PUBLIC SAFETY

ISSUE 3A) Health Care Access & Quality: Many Deaf RIAs are not fluent in ASL or in any other language. During the pandemic, accessing the health care system virtually became the norm; however, telemedicine was inaccessible to this population and their health needs were ignored and/or delayed.

ACTIVITY 3A.1) The majority of service providers do not know how to engage with or meet the needs of deaf RIAs. Many deaf RIAs benefit significantly from 1:1 support from trained third-party advocates. DRACC will provide advocacy support to 100 deaf RIAs who need assistance in accessing health care service providers. 75% of service providers will report that DRACC’s involvement was beneficial.

ISSUE 3B) Deaf RIAs have limited understanding of allopathic medicine and differing cultural views of health care. Due to lack of education, access to language, and cultural differences, they misuse the medical system and are at-risk for misusing their medications and not following their doctor’s instructions.

ACTIVITY 3B) DRACC will improve deaf RIAs’ access to quality education and training by offering workshops and field trips on computer literacy, health education topics addressing US medical care, healthy relationships, food insecurity (nutrition and diet), self-care and physical health, and healthy relationships to 100 participants. 75% of participants will report a better understanding of these topics.

ISSUE 3C) Community & Well-being: Deaf RIAs are isolated due to their lack of fluency in language, including within their own families. The lack of mental health awareness and socialization is serious: some have experienced severe depression and considered suicide. Additionally, the sign language interpreting pool decreased significantly due to COVID, resulting in less accessibility to events overall.

ACTIVITY 3C.1) DRACC will offer workshops on mental health topics to 100 participants. 75% of participants will report a better understanding of these topics.

ACTIVITY 3C.2) DRACC will offer ASL and deaf culture classes to 10 families to improve the communication dynamics within the family resulting in less isolation and improved well-being for the entire family. 60% will report higher rapport with the deaf family member.

ACTIVITY 3C.3) DRACC will offer a Children of Deaf Adults (CODA) support group deaf RIA’s children to assist this target’s population grappling with the cultural differences of growing up within the American deaf/hearing cultures and their home country culture. CODA support groups have a known track record of being crucial to CODA’s mental health and well-being. 10 CODAs will participate in this group with 75% reporting an increased understanding of their identity.

DRA is the only entity in MC capable of meeting the unique intersectional needs of the deaf RIA population. A deaf-led and operated organization, however, we face many of the same systemic barriers that deaf RIAs do, making it a challenge to find funding and resources. We aim to become sustainable beyond 2026 by: 1) contracting with Innovative Resources Group, a philanthropy and communications firm, 2) establishing fee-for-service and vendor agreements, and 3) establishing job pathways by using available resources and exploring entrepreneurial opportunities that could create additional revenue. DRACC needs the ARPA funding to continue its transformative programming and create lasting impact beyond 2026.

Company Strengths DRA, a nationally recognized organization that has consulted for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), was founded in 2017 because the refugee support organizations in MC were ill-equipped to accommodate and support the unique challenges that deaf refugees face. DRA became a 501(c)(3) organization in 2020.

DRA continues to receive positive reports from the various human services providers; they have expressed deep gratitude for DRA's support after seeing first-hand the benefits of using a sign language centric model organization when working with deaf RIAs and their families.

Within MC, DRA developed working relationships with organizations such as (but not limited to): Center for Refugee Health, URMIC medical team and social workers, East House, Catholic Family Charities, World Relief Western NY, Refugees Helping Refugees, Rochester Refugee Resettlement Services, Ignite (Willow), Lake Ave Baptist Church, National Technical Institute for the Deaf, and Deaf Access Services (People Inc.)

As part of our work to have a positive impact on the MC community, the Executive Director and Board President are advisors and active participants on various coalitions and task forces such as (but not limited to) Rochester Committee on Refugee Resettlement, Monroe County Community Engagement Task Force, New American Advisory Council, TogetherNow's Equity Review Board, Monroe County Language Access Coalition, and Empire Justice Center (subcontract to assist with Police Accountability Board's language access policies). One outcome of our increased community presence is the increased awareness of the at-risk Deaf RIAs' existence and needs.

DRA has a state and national presence due to its outreach work. DRA's expertise is sought by immigration lawyers, USCIS, and human services providers around the country. DRA recently formed a coalition of organizations providing support to deaf refugees around the country to further collaboration with policy makers, national resettlement organizations, and human services providers regarding Deaf refugees' needs.

Community Resources Since 2018, NTID faculty has invited the Executive Director to present to their college students about deaf RIAs, work with deaf international students, be part of the community volunteer fair, present at a student-run conference. NTID also donated the space and interpreting services when DRA hosted the first ever international conference for human services providers in 2019. For the DRACC project, DRACC staff will serve as the Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) on the needed materials to be developed when working closely with the National Technical Institute for the Deaf's (NTID's) Master of Science in Secondary Education faculty and their graduates to develop a marketable curriculum that is designed specifically for deaf RIAs and their families.

To provide people-centered and Sign Language centric human services, we will work closely with WorkingTogether to enable our staff and deaf RIAs to use and benefit from WorkingTogether's MyWayFinder, enabling deaf RIAs to have full access to the County's human services providers.

Since its inception, DRA has been providing individual advocacy support to approximately 17 deaf RIAs and their families that were under the care of Catholic Family Charities (CFC) resettlement services. When new deaf RIAs arrive, DRACC will be working together with World Relief Western NY (WR) and Catholic Family Charities (CFC) to ensure the newly deaf refugee arrivals and their families obtain resettlement services promptly in a manner equitable to their hearing counterparts.

The Executive Director of Deaf Access Services (DAS) in Buffalo is an advisor to the DRA Board and has been instrumental in providing organizational development support especially during DRA's formative period. DRA has provided expertise in cultural competencies of deaf RIAs. DAS and DRA have an on-going partnership through our shared concern for the well-being of deaf RIAs. One future project is to collaborate on a program designed to help deaf RIAs obtain citizenship.

DRACC's role with all organizations that provide services to the deaf RIA population involves sharing caseworker responsibilities. DRA helps the deaf RIA with the necessary prep for obtaining appointments, filling out needed paperwork, transportation, advocating for appropriate language access, support during the meeting, assisting with any required follow up, and any clarifications needed by either the deaf RIA and family members and/or human service provider. DRA also provides the often-needed information on the background of deaf RIAs and best practices for the human service provider's knowledge. This results in a win-win scenario, a highly successful outcome for the deaf RIA and human service provider.

In the third year and beyond, as part of the proposed project, DRACC will provide workforce development training for deaf RIAs ultimately setting them on a path where they could eventually become MWBE certified, which would be a milestone given that we are not aware of any MWBE certified enterprises owned by deaf individuals in the county area. Potential working relationships are but not limited to: Rochester Education Opportunities Center, Vocational Rehabilitation, and NTID when DRACC develops job pathways for deaf RIAs.

Audience There are an estimated 3,400 deaf refugees, immigrants, and asylees in MC, who have long faced systemic barriers that were made more evident, exacerbated, and impacted in new ways by the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the pandemic, deaf RIAs were unable to obtain critical information regarding the health crisis that was triggered by the onset of COVID-19 due to language, health literacy, and technology access barriers, as well as differing cultural approaches to health. Now that we are nearly three years into the pandemic, deaf RIAs continue to lag behind the general population in terms of employment, education, and training; health and wellness; overall access to information, communication, and equitable quality of life.

This community relies much on face-to-face contact. Medical and human service social workers reach out to introduce deaf RIAs to our program. Resettlement organizations also reach out to us, especially when they meet newly arrived deaf RIAs. Members of the NTID community have provided us contact with the immigrant student population and some have utilized our services. We plan to hire deaf RIA ambassadors to further reach out to the target population. DRA has a social media presence as well. It is the plan to offer DRACC's services at no cost to deaf RIAs and their families.

MC is known for having the highest per capita ASL users in the country and Rochester is internationally known as a "deaf-friendly" city. However, this is not necessarily the case for deaf RIAs. By addressing the inequities existing for this population and continuing to strengthen new and existing partnerships, this program will strengthen RIAs' skills, support networks, and sense of belonging so that they thrive as members of the MC community and will be a model to other communities.

Cost 1st Year	Cost All Years	Residents 1st Year	Residents All Years	FT Employees	PT Employees
\$879,008.00	\$3,697,315.00	150	300	5	0
Volunteers					

Staffing Full time employee staffing needed for this project: Executive Director, Senior Instructor Coordinator, Social Work Manager, Case worker, and Admin Assistant.

Executive Director: Masters with 5 years of experience or bachelor's with 10 years of experience working in the nonprofit sector. The candidate must demonstrate native-like fluency in American Sign Language, be deaf culturally competent, and demonstrate international cultural sensitivity awareness.

Senior Instructor Coordinator: MS in education with 2 years of coordinator experience and 5 years of teaching experience. The candidate must demonstrate native-like fluency in American Sign Language, be deaf culturally competent, and demonstrate international cultural sensitivity awareness.

Social Worker Manager: MSW with 2 years of management experience or BSW with 5 years of experience in the field. The candidate must demonstrate native-like fluency in American Sign Language, be deaf culturally competent, and demonstrate international cultural sensitivity awareness.

Case worker: BS with 3 years of experience in the field. The candidate must demonstrate native-like fluency in American Sign Language, be deaf culturally competent, and demonstrate international cultural sensitivity awareness.

Admin Assistant: BS with 2 years of experience in office administration.

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