

How to Turn Challenges Like Deafness Into Gifts

[nytimes.com /2017/06/23/jobs/how-to-turn-challenges-like-deafness-into-gifts.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/23/jobs/how-to-turn-challenges-like-deafness-into-gifts.html)

PATRICIA R.
OLSEN

6/23/2017



Lauren Mackiewicz Bryan Anselm for The New York Times

Lauren Mackiewicz, 32, is a job coach at [Easterseals](#) in East Brunswick, N.J.

Q. What does Easterseals provide and what is your role there?

A. We offer children and adults with challenges like deafness and autism a variety of services including educational enrichment programs, residential group homes, recreational activities and employment assistance. I help clients find jobs and become successful in their positions. I'm also manager of our deaf and hard-of-hearing employment services.

You have a personal connection to the organization.

I'm what's known as hard of hearing, or partially deaf, and I wear hearing aids. I speak well enough that many people can't tell but I can't hear high-pitched sounds. I started in public school but moved to a school for the deaf. I attended a public high school that had deaf and hearing students. I didn't want to attend a college solely for the deaf, so I enrolled in [New Jersey City University](#) and studied graphic design. An interpreter for the deaf attended classes with me.



Ms. Mackiewicz, who is partially deaf, working with Enrico Robinson. She is the manager of the deaf and hard-of-hearing employment services at Easterseals. Bryan Anselm for The New York Times

How have you communicated with clients?

By whatever method each client prefers. I lip read, I use American Sign Language and speak like hearing people do. As far as tools, we mostly use email; texting; [Glide](#), a visual messaging app popular with the deaf community; and a video phone service for communicating visually.

Do you work only with clients with hearing loss?

I've added people with other challenges, including Down syndrome, autism and schizophrenia.

What have you told clients about job hunting?

That it once took me three years to find a job. I've reassured them that I'll be with them every step of the way.

Where does your inspiration come from?

From believing that nothing is given to you that you can't handle. I don't like the word disability, I never say anyone is disabled. I say they have challenges. I look at my deafness as a gift and try to apply it to my clients' experiences. It's not always easy, but I try to take those challenges and turn them around into a positive experience.