

Nguyen, M. N. (2013). Facilitators and barriers as a hard of hearing translator. Council of Canadians with Disabilities: Getting and keeping a job: What makes a difference. Winnipeg, Manitoba. Retrieved from <http://www.ccdonline.ca/en/socialpolicy/employment/Getting#Contents>

## **Facilitators and barriers as a hard of hearing translator**

Mai Nhu Nguyen

Finding and keeping a job is important, not just for recent graduates, but also for those making a career change. It can feel like going through whole new motions with whole new challenges in a whole new field – again.

I completed a Bachelors degree in psychology in 2005, and after realizing I didn't like any of the short-term counselling-related jobs I held, it took a while before finding my new calling. I've been a research associate at the Adaptech Research Network on and off for the past 10 years. I write, edit and translate texts, collect data for our studies, develop, administer and validate questionnaires, analyze the results, prepare presentations for conferences and publish our findings in various media.

It turns out that the task I enjoy most is French translation: it fits both with my interests and skills, not to mention it partly removes some of the barriers I face as a hard of hearing person. My work is done on computer and I like to

communicate through e-mails. School has obviously been challenging, and I wasn't aware that accommodations existed until my last year of high school. These accommodations have improved my quality of life, and since then, I've been requesting them whenever possible. One thing that helped me at work is Quebec's Employment Integration Program which provides financial assistance to the employer to cover a portion of your wage and the cost of needed accommodations (that's how I met my new best friend, the FM system). This has truly facilitated my entry into the labour market and has also positively impacted my everyday life. It also helps that the Adaptech Research Network, where I am employed, conducts research involving college and university students with a variety of disabilities in Canada. So, the availability of accommodations, understanding and support in the workplace? Checked, checked and checked.

While searching for translation contracts or jobs, I realized the biggest barrier was the general ignorance about what I can do: a few people think hearing has something to do with writing. Interpretation and translation are two different things! And let's not forget the fear of disclosing my disability but having to reluctantly do it during an interview, at a job fair or a cocktail party, where conditions aren't ideal for people with hearing impairments. I've sometimes lost potential clients or employers after telling them that I am hard of hearing, but I try to convince them to give me a chance and to let me send them a sample of my work. First impressions are hard to change, but it is worth it.

In the end, what really makes a positive difference is to be given that one opportunity to prove yourself to an employer and to fellow employees. If you have the opportunity to find that first job in your field of interest, act as if it's the most important thing in your life. I've acquired precious experience and I now know people who will vouch for me as a worker and as a translator, and this has expanded my network. Employers and clients just need to be open in hiring people with disabilities based on what we can do, rather than based on their perceptions of what we can't do.