

Being Nudged By The Importance of Self-Advocacy

Once again, I have been nudged about the importance of self-advocacy. In the August 11 and 12 CCAC Digest for ccaxic@googlegroups.com, there was a discussion about the need for captioning, especially at airports. One woman dutifully told the agent at the desk that she had a hearing problem and could not understand the announcements. She pointed to where she was seated and ask for help with the announcements. Later, she went up to the desk to ask about the flight only to discover that the flight had been moved to a different gate. She got there just before the door closing!

I had a similar experience in the Dallas airport. The stewardess did not have any information on connecting flights and our current flight was late. I got off the plane as quickly as possible and ran to the skybridge/train to get to my flight only to discover a gate change. Understand that the postings still had the original gates listed. I ran to the new gate just in time to see my plane taxi away. I spent the night in Dallas. No one was responsible. Weather caused the delay. The city controls the message boards and the Airline had no responsibility. Had I been able to understand the announcements, I would have been home a day earlier.

Both incidents relied on the HOH person to be alert, to ask, and to assertively seek information from multiple sources. Until we can get accurate captions of the announcements, it is up to us to protect ourselves. It is up to us to contact airport officials and file complaints, express our needs and advocate not only for ourselves but also for others.

"...many with hearing loss/deafness don't want to "ask" if they feel they can 'get by" without - without whatever. Don't want to appear different. Probably due to stigma of hearing loss which remains so strong unfortunately. The long history of stigma feels heavy (some of it so irrational for those with hearing loss/deafness who have disproved the history of "mute" and "dumb" and "pity" etc.). The more we advocates speak up and often and clearly, the better of course." (L Storck)

When we consider advocating, it must be understood that rarely is it just for ourselves. Wearing a headset at the theater or using the theaters caption device becomes an advertisement that there are aids/help for the asking. It lets the management know the

devices are needed and the money is well spent. At the same time, it is important to express gratitude even if the assistance was provided because it is the law.

In this same edition, it was noted that some airports provide special TSA lines for people with disabilities. Although the symbol used is a wheelchair, hearing loss does qualify because special attention to oral instructions are needed.

“At last year's SayWhatClub Convention I was part of a panel on travel. One of my points was to tell people about the Special Services/Disability lines when going through security. Not all airports have them, but if you ask if they do many times you will be taken to the front of the line. We all know many with hearing loss who travel are anxious that they won't hear something and long lines tend to add to that....” (Michele Linder)

Using the lines help reduce travel anxiety, inform TSA and airline staff to needs and serves as leadership to other HOH/Deaf people.

Ed Schickel (Editor)