

Student's outreach to deaf crosses borders

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Miguel Aguayo, senior social work student from Chicago who became deaf at age 14, serves as a regional director for the Association of Late Deafened Adults. His role is to answer questions and inquiries from the members in his region, which includes the eastern corridor of the United States, the Canadian provinces of Quebec, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, the United Kingdom, Finland, Norway, the Netherlands, Europe and the Middle East.

"This is outreach in every sense of the word," says Aguayo, now 41. "My objective is to give these people the feeling that the ALDA board is composed of flesh and blood instead of black and white names on the letterhead. I provide information and referrals to deafened people seeking help or just simply meet other deafened individuals, their families, friends and service providers (doctors, audiologists, etc).

"For people outside of Rochester, being deafened after progressing through childhood can be very isolating because the social networks of the deafened people normally doesn't include other deafened, hard-of-hearing, or deaf people."

Aguayo joined ALDA in 1987 shortly after its conception. "What attracted me to this organization is that I met other 'late'-deafened individuals whom I knew understood my deafness," he explains. "It gave me validation and a feeling that my experiences were normal. All of my work in ALDA is aimed to give other newly deafened people this feeling."