

Maine celebrates the 10th anniversary of American Sign Language Tax Day

Saturday, February 24, 2018, marked the 10th anniversary of American Sign Language (ASL) Tax Day in Portland, Maine. Stakeholder Partnerships, Education & Communication (SPEC) partners provided free tax preparation services to 44 taxpayers who are deaf or hard of hearing. These partners included CA\$H Greater Portland, Disability Rights Maine, Maine Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, and the University of Southern Maine.

“ASL Tax Day started in Maine 10 years ago,” said SPEC Director **Frank Nolden**. “We later adopted their model and encouraged participation throughout SPEC and our partner network. With the support of the National Disability Institute and other partners, we continue to expand ASL tax services that are currently offered in 16 states.”

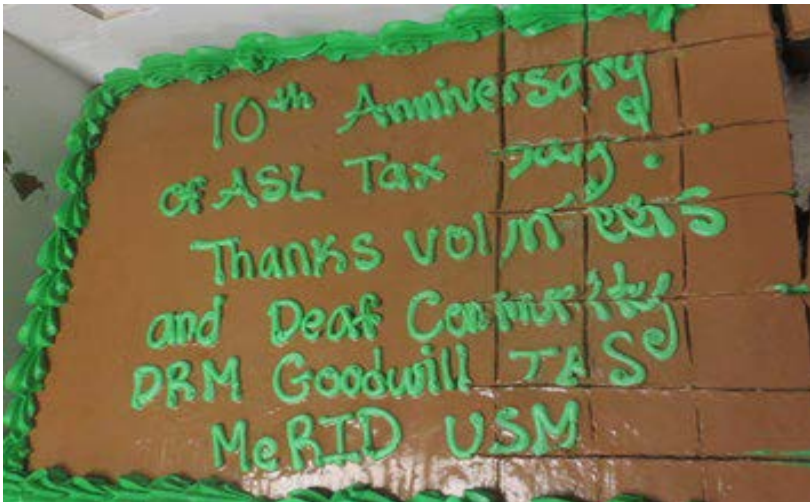
The ASL Tax Day events vary from city to city; some places just have a one-day event while others offer this service continuously during the filing season. Some sites have paid ASL interpreters to assist while others have volunteer ASL interpreters or a combination of both.

Disability Rights Maine, a protection and advocacy agency, enlisted a volunteer who is deaf and an ASL interpreter who worked with CA\$H Greater Portland to become IRS-certified to prepare tax returns in ASL. There were also 25 volunteer ASL interpreters (and ASL student interns) who participated in the day’s events. They worked with CA\$H opportunity guides to complete the intake process (where asset-building opportunities are offered), and then with volunteer tax preparers to complete the returns.



American Sign Language volunteers and interpreters sign the number 10 to signify the 10-year anniversary of ASL Tax Day in Maine. SPEC partners provided free tax preparation for taxpayers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The Goodwill Industries Northern New England site that was used for the ASL Tax Day in Maine is an ideal site since it has numerous private offices that were used for tax preparation. Privacy is of the utmost concern in this close-knit community that uses a visual language to communicate.



Buttons were distributed to volunteers that reflected their years of service, and cake was shared with both volunteers and taxpayers.

“It was a jovial atmosphere,” said **Tess Armstrong**, SPEC’s senior relationship manager who leads many of the ASL efforts in Maine and has volunteered at ASL Tax Days for the past ten years. “This has become an annual social event as well as an opportunity to provide free tax preparation and consultation on financial empowerment. For me, it was heart-warming to see many familiar faces and the joy that the gathering inspired,” said Tess.

About five years ago, Tess met a young woman who is deaf and appeared to be terrified during her tax preparation appointment. When she arrived at the site on ASL Tax Day, she was beaming with confidence and excitement at the prospect of seeing her friends and having her taxes prepared.

“It’s efforts like ASL Tax Day, EITC Awareness Day and so many others that validate the importance of what we do, not just within our Maine Deaf Community but in so many communities throughout the nation,” said Frank.

The IRS also produced a series of ASL videos designed to help ASL interpreters clarify tax terms for taxpayers who communicate in ASL.

- **Understanding “Claim” and “Dependent”**
- **Understanding “Deduct” and “Refund”**
- **Understanding “Permanently and Totally Disabled”**

