

THE COMMUNICATOR

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



Deaf and Hard of Hearing Awareness Day at Henry Doorly Zoo: Success!

NCDHH and NeAD hosted the fourth annual Deaf and Hard of Hearing Awareness Day at the Omaha Zoo in September. This event continues to grow each year in excitement for this fun community event. Every year over 300 Nebraska residents come out to enjoy the different activities we plan. This year we invited other organizations to be involved in this event including Nebraska VR, Nebraska Regional Program, Nebraska Hands and Voices and Nebraska Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf.



Carly Weyers during Deaf Connect Reading

Activities include a Deaf Connect reading and an ASL Storytelling, done by NCDHH Behavioral Health and Deaf Services Coordinator Carly Weyers, and Jonathan Scherling. There was also a coloring contest and a lizard brought out by Henry Doorly Zoo staff as an animal ambassador. A very successful part of the day was animal signs taught by Jonathan Scherling. Community interpreters volunteered their time to be throughout the zoo at various animal encounters to ensure that everyone attending the zoo could have the full zoo experience.



A great turnout crowd for activities!



Jonathan Scherling teaching Animal Signs

Onward!

John Wyvill, Executive Director



Onward! Is the favorite slogan of our former NCDHH Board Chair, Margie Propp. It sums up our goals and objectives every day as NCDHH fights for all Nebraskans to be equal before the law. Our work is never done collaborating with our stakeholders. Ms. Propp has been instrumental in advancing efforts to raise the standards for educational interpreters, fight for better communication access in hospitals and businesses and interactions with law enforcement.

One example of what the NCDHH Full Board is working on is a solution to ensure that children who need hearing aids are provided them. This is why we need hearing aid insurance legislation and financial support for HearU Nebraska. Did you know that 2-3 of every 1,000 children born in Nebraska are born deaf or hard of hearing, with more children acquiring hearing loss later due to disease, heredity, or trauma? Not providing hearing aids to those in need can negatively impact a child's language acquisition, cognition psychosocial well-being, and overall educational success. Research indicates that untreated hearing loss can cost our society over \$1 million over the course of the child's lifetime (special education, extended school, loss of work productivity, etc.). Did you know that the average retail cost of a pair of hearing aids is \$4,400 and they need to be replaced, on average, every 5 years?

Did you know that most insurance plans, with the exception of Medicaid, DO NOT cover hearing aids or related services? HearU Nebraska assists families by providing hearing aids, batteries, dispensing fees, ear molds, and care kits to hard of hearing children to lessen the educational and social impact hearing loss can have on our children, and to lessen the financial burden on our families. HearU Nebraska has provided hearing aids to hundreds of Nebraska children in over 90 different communities across Nebraska. However, this program is in need of assistance in order to continue serving Nebraska youth. HearU Nebraska runs solely on private donations from citizens and on grants/awards. No state money is used to fund this critical program. A small financial investment in HearU Nebraska would produce a large return on this investment for our families, and a huge cost saving to our state.

Onward!

Check us out on Social Media!



NCDHH has various social media accounts you can follow with to see what we're up to, what we've done, and what we have coming up! We have our agency Facebook page "Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing", we have a Behavioral Health Facebook page, dedicated toward information and updates relating to behavioral health, and we also have a Twitter page: @NebCDHH. You can also find various updates and information on our website: www.ncdhh.nebraska.gov.

Social media is a very important link with us and our stakeholders, community and public. People from near or far can reach us, see what we are up to, find information and resources through information that we may post. Check us out!

Zoo Day out West

Brittney Isom, Advocacy Specialist

On Saturday, September 8th NCDHH, with the help of Nebraska Regional Programs and Hands and Voices of Nebraska, hosted a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Awareness day at the Riverside Discovery Center in Scottsbluff, Nebraska. We had a great turnout with over 60 people in attendance.



We started off the day by meeting up at The Stage for a story read by Advocacy Specialist, Kim Davis. The book was called, “Wild about Us” by Karen Beaumont, and it was about animals embracing their differences and loving themselves as they are.

After that, we had informational tables set up by NCDHH, NE Regional Programs, Hands and Voices of Nebraska and Agate Fossil Beds National Monument. We also had a few activities that everyone could enjoy; bingo, which allowed people to explore the Zoo and informational booths and digging for bones at the Fossil Beds table while the Ranger signed to them. It was a beautiful day with an awesome turnout. The feedback was a positive one and we hope to do this again next year!

Interpreter Review Board Seeks to Fill Vacancy

Please Pass On!

The Nebraska Interpreter Review Board (IRB) has one vacancy in the representative for a deaf individual.

The IRB is tasked to develop guidelines and regulations for the licensing of sign language interpreters that work for any state entity which receives appropriations from the Legislature. This includes Legislature, legislative committees, executive agencies, courts, and probation officials. The Board consists of eight individuals: a director of Health and Human Services or his/her designee, a Director of the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) or his/her designee, two Deaf or Hard of Hearing individuals, two licensed, qualified interpreters within one year of their appointment, and two individuals representing local government. Members are appointed by the NCDHH Full Board of Commissioners. The IRB meets quarterly, generally with the meeting occurring on a Friday. Normally, meeting times are 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., alternating between Lincoln and Omaha work sites. Members are reimbursed for their travel expenses.

Anyone interested in becoming a member on the Nebraska IRB, please download the application here: https://ncdhh.nebraska.gov/sites/ncdhh.nebraska.gov/files/doc/IRB_application1.14.14.pdf

Holiday Feels: The After Effects

Teresa Hevner, Lead Advocacy Specialist



The holiday season is rolling around again, and that means a number of different things. From social gatherings to planning trips and wrapping presents. Many of us spend a lot of time and planning around this special time of year. What happens when all of the glitter and gifts have disappeared? This can leave some of us to end up feeling a bit down, a common reaction had by a number of people during the holiday/winters months.

As I mentioned previously, for some of us, planning for the holiday season takes up a substantial amount of time. From planning gifts and decorations to attending meals and gatherings. These events seem to fill our schedules and conversations. Once those events are finished, our personal calendars appear much more open, or empty. For some, this can be daunting. Socializing is very important to some individuals, especially during the holidays. Interacting with family, friends and new acquaintances may help some achieve a feeling of validation. After the holiday season ends, the sudden “lacking” in events can be a struggle. Especially for those who prefer the highly social aspects of the season. Isolation and loneliness are common feelings expressed by many during this time of year. For those who miss the interactions had during the holidays, try to carry a portion of that over into the New Year. Make plans to have a game night, or meet for coffee periodically. It may give you something to look forward to, and allows you and your loved ones to stay connected. If in-person meetings are difficult to schedule, planning phone calls, FaceTime or writing letters may be effective as well.

However, the increased interactions may be the cause of others uneasy feelings. For example, many Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals may not feel they are able to engage with some friends and family due to communication barriers. This can leave both parties feeling disappointed or upset. If you have a family member who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing, make an effort to include them in the conversation, or let them know what you are discussing. Get their attention prior to the conversation. When gathering around the table, ask them where they would prefer to sit. This may allow the person to choose a seat, which may allow them easier access to the conversations at the table. Utilize technology and resources around you as well. For instance, you are watching “the big game” make sure you turn on the captioning in advance. This helps to provide access to all your guests. If you have a smartphone (as most of us do) use the notepad, or texting feature as a tool to converse. Showing an effort to communicate may be a small way to let your loved ones know you care.

In general, the winter months bring on changes in our external environment as well. The days become shorter and in many areas much colder. This can cause us to spend much more time indoors “hibernating” until spring. These factors can also cause some to feel “gloomy.” Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is something that affects some individuals during the fall/winter months. It can cause feelings of fatigue, social withdrawal, and other symptoms. If you feel you may have SAD, you can speak with a medical professional. They may recommend a number of different resources to you.

Some common forms of treatment are phototherapy (also known as light therapy), cognitive behavioral therapy or medications. Light therapy gives an individual exposure to artificial light, which is supposed to be similar to natural light. Another type of treatment is cognitive behavioral therapy, also known as talk therapy. This method focuses on a variety of tools. They include problem solving, acceptance and commitment therapy, motivational interviewing and positive psychology. Most of us enjoy the holiday season, even if we particularly enjoy the winter months. So, while you are feasting on holiday treats, remember some of these tips to help adjust to the end of the glitz and glam of the holidays.

Managing Stress During the Holiday Season

Carly Weyers, Behavioral Health/Deaf Services Coordinator

You've made your list. There are parties to plan and attend, shopping, baking, cleaning and many more. Your to-do list at the holidays might be as long as Santa's nice and naughty list! This is why statistics show that people are in more risk of stress and depression during the holiday season. We often forget that a stressed mind and body are in more risk to get sick!



Please make sure you make some time for yourself and plan ahead to reduce the stress and chances to become sick during the season. Learn to recognize your triggers and knowing your financial and personal demands are few examples of how you can manage your stress better. Remember, you are in control of the holidays, so don't let the season become something you dread! You will be able to find peace and joy if you take steps to prevent the stress and depression! Please feel free to contact me if you want more information on how you can reduce the stress during holidays!

A Lil' Bit 'O Nebraska Deaf Heritage

Kim Davis, Advocacy Specialist

Recently in September there were promotions everywhere recognizing Deaf Awareness Month. This brings me to reflect a lil' bit 'o history about Deaf Culture in Nebraska.

Shortly after Nebraska became a state in 1867, a Deaf man named William M French of Indiana was one of the advocates to support the proposal for the establishment of a state residential school for the Deaf. Thus, Nebraska School for the Deaf (NSD) was established in North Omaha in 1869, and William M. French was hired as the first Deaf principal and teacher to oversee the education program with his younger sister, Jeanie (French) Wilson, as the Matron. The 1870 US Federal Census showed 11 pupils enrolled at NSD between the ages of 7 to 39 years old. However, other publications indicated 13 pupils enrolled. Perhaps the other two joined later after the census enumeration, or they were day students who resided in Omaha. William M French moved on elsewhere sometime around 1871 or 1872 and later changed his name to DeCoursey French. NSD continued as a residential school until, sadly, the state's legislative budget cuts closed its doors in 1998. It is fascinating to learn about members of our Nebraska Deaf Community who are a part of this rich cultural heritage that attended NSD, and even those who passes on its hereditary of multi-generational deaf families. Some historical stories of interest about our heritage can be explored through various genealogical records and publications, visiting Nebraska School for the Deaf's museum, and viewing "The Unheard Journey of Deaf Nebraskans" on the Nebraska Educational Telecommunications (NET) Television program's website or by borrowing the digital video through our NCDHH Media Loan Center. Here are some resources for further exploration. Caution, it may be addictive!



North Omaha History
<https://northomahahistory.com/2015/11/23/a-short-history-of-north-omahas-nebraska-school-for-the-deaf/>

NCDHH Media Loan Center
<https://ncdhh.nebraska.gov/services/media-center>

NET Program
<http://netnebraska.org/interactive-multimedia/television/unheard-journey-deaf-nebraskans>

Newspaper Archives
www.newspaperarchives.com

Husker Harvest Days 2018

Aaron Rothenberger, Advocacy Specialist



It is our biggest booth event of the year, notching almost 5000 visitors this September. It is filled with farmers and Ag businesses from all over the country. And the best part, this year it had paved streets! I have been at Husker Harvest Days both years that I have worked for the Commission. It is an event that I look forward to, even though it can be very dusty. There is just something different about Husker Harvest Days compared to everything else I have been to, State Fair included.

The best way I can describe it would be akin to a small village popping up in the middle of a cornfield. Large combines, tractors and other farming equipment are set up for sale on either side of the main street. Pivot systems are rocking back and forth dropping water into a large basin a few streets to the right. There are some tall grain silos and metal sheds set up for viewing a few streets to the left. And everything farm related is stashed in-between. There is even a spot where they test harvest on actual cornfields right next to the cattle dog demonstrations. Large groups of people walk around with 5-gallon buckets instead of bags to carry all the free stuff they pick up along the way. Husker Harvest Days really has everything Ag related you can think of.

My favorite part of the event is the people we, my fellow Advocacy Specialist Teresa and I, got to chat with during the three days we were there. We talked to a lot of farmers, but we also chatted with some Ag businesses and a fair amount of 4H kids from high schools across the state. We even spoke with a man from New Zealand that was working on irrigation systems here in the United States.

A consistent motif that we heard throughout the event was hearing loss due to the tractors and other loud farm equipment that they used. The older cabless tractors are significantly loud pieces of equipment. Some of them ran upwards of 100 decibels of noise, which can cause permanent hearing damage after fifteen minutes of exposure.

We got to hear a lot of farmers talk about the strange, yet not so strange, phenomenon of left ear deafness. The left ear of some farmers is much worse than the right ear due to how they sat on the tractor. Many farmers would look over their right shoulder while running the tractor and this would expose their left ear to the engine noise while also slightly reducing the noise that the right ear was exposed to. I found this tidbit of info to be very interesting, but it made a lot of sense when you thought about it.

Another motif that we experienced was the number of parents that grabbed some earplugs from us for their kids. It was heartening to see so many parents take hearing loss seriously. I heard several of the parents mention that their kids go shooting guns, out to races and other loud noise situations. We even had several high school kids grab some earplugs as well. They mentioned shop class as the most prevalent reason they were getting hearing protection.

All in all, it is a unique experience that I think everybody should do at least once. And I am happy that the Commission has allowed me to work it twice. It gives us a first-hand experience of hearing loss on the farm and the effect that it has on people. And although we have to listen to lots of huhs, whats, and other joking statements to get to the meat of the conversation, it is well worth it to hear about where these unique people come from and how they live.



Governor Pete Ricketts stopped by the NCDHH booth

Noise Induced Hearing Loss

Kathy Scusa, Advocacy Specialist

Greetings from central Nebraska! Fall is a busy time for our residents who work in agriculture. In November I was able to have a booth at the McCook Farm & Ranch Expo. I had the opportunity to talk with lots of farmers and ranchers. Most understand the dangers of noise induced hearing loss. Few do anything to protect themselves. So much hearing loss could be prevented if only people would take some simple precautions. I did some research. I am presenting a bit of what I read.



Farmers are at risk for hearing loss. According to an American study, 78 percent of farmers believe they have hearing loss, a significantly higher prevalence than those found in other comparable groups. Lengthy exposure to typical noises on farms can result in noise induced hearing loss to farmers of all ages, including teenagers. Production agriculture can generate high noise levels. Tractors, forage harvesters, silage blowers, chain saws, skid-steer loaders, grain dryers, squealing pigs and guns are some of the most typical sources of noise on the farm. Studies suggest that lengthy exposure to these high sound levels have resulted in noise induced hearing loss to farmers of all ages, including teenagers. A serious hearing loss injury is not as dramatic nor as sudden as a tractor overturn or machine entanglement injury, but it is permanent.

Some hearing loss is normal as we get older, it can be difficult to separate naturally occurring hearing loss (presbycusis) and lifestyle hearing loss (loud music, hunting) from noise induced hearing loss. If your ears ring after exposure to workplace noise, you can't hear a co-worker standing an arms-length away, or you can't hear normal conversation, TV or radio at the end of a workday, then your hearing loss is more likely to be noise induced. Regular monitoring of workplace noise and annual hearing testing helps establish connections between workplace noise and hearing loss.

Occupational safety and health standards are used to set "safe" levels of noise in the workplace, even though professionals acknowledge that some people may suffer from noise induced hearing loss at levels below the standard. The accepted levels in the United States come from OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health). Become aware of the hearing conservation program required when permissible noise exposure levels are exceeded. Find the information on OSHA standard 1910.95 (Occupational Noise Exposure) (www.osha.gov, click on Standards) or by contacting local safety professionals or industrial hygienists.

90 dB is the level of noise permissible for an 8 hour workday, 85 dB is the level at which action for hearing protection is recommended for everyone. Exposure to impulsive or impact noise, such as firing a gun, should not exceed 140 dB. Know how loud your machinery level is and protect yourself.

OSHA Permissible Noise Exposures	
Hrs/Day	Sound level dB
8	90 dB
6	92 dB
4	95 dB
3	97 dB
2	100 dB
1 1/2	102 dB
1	105 dB
1/2	110 dB
1/4	115 dB

General Agriculture: Typical noise levels on the farm	
74-112 dB	Tractor
77-120 dB	Chainsaw
79-89 dB	Riding mower
80-105 dB	Combine
81-102 dB	Grain dryer
83-116 dB	Crop dusting aircraft
85-106 dB	Orchard sprayer
85-115 dB	Pig squeals
85-120 dB	Center Pivot Central Power Motor
88-94 dB	Garden tractor
93-97 dB	Grain grinding
110 dB	Leaf blower

Noise Induced Hearing Loss cont.

Kathy Scusa, Advocacy Specialist

Protect Your Hearing

Daily life on the farm is characterized by high noise levels from squealing pigs, tractors, ventilation systems and other machinery. Consequently, farmers are particularly vulnerable to loss of hearing. This is reflected in a prevalence of hearing impairment far above the average found in other groups in the labor market, according to an American study. Similar results were found in earlier Swedish studies. In a US study, 5,000 farmers were questioned about their hearing over a period of 10 years. The study found that 92 percent of the farmers were exposed to extreme noise levels while involved in farming activities. As a result, 78 percent suffered from hearing problems, yet only four percent used hearing aids.

Using hearing protection in noisy work conditions should be routine. Yet, only 44 percent of the males in the study said they used hearing protective devices on a daily basis. Female farmers were much more likely to protect their hearing, with 78 percent of females reporting that they used hearing protection. The studies showed significantly less hearing loss occurred among farmers who used hearing protection routinely. Noise may adversely affect farm workers' concentration and contribute to physical exhaustion. The farmers often have to exert more energy in order to perform their tasks in a noisy environment. This can result in other work related injuries.

Protecting your hearing begins with recognizing how much sound is too much and then effectively limiting exposure to hazardous levels. Sound level can vary significantly among similar items, depending on age, maintenance, and specific features. For example, 30-year old tractors without cabs are going to be louder than a new tractor with an enclosed cab. An old air compressor without a muffler will be louder than a new air compressor with a muffler.

Protecting your hearing is a smart move for a number of reasons. While hearing aids are a very useful tool, they do not correct hearing as eyeglasses can correct one's vision. They only aid the hearing process if hearing is not too far gone. Hearing loss also carries consequences beyond not being able to hear. A key element of how we connect with others is affected and relationships suffer. Work and social situations can be uncomfortable and stressful. Work can even become dangerous. Exposure to noise affects more than one's hearing: it increases blood pressure, narrows blood vessels (both which affect the heart) and causes abnormal hormone secretions. It can contribute to sleeplessness, which then can affect work.

Noise reduction with farm equipment can be accomplished in several ways, often related to maintenance of the equipment. Worn, loose, or unbalanced machine parts can increase decibel levels during operation. Regular lubrication and parts replacement (bearings, mufflers, silencers, etc.,) reduce friction and lower noise levels. Larger engines that can be operated at lower speeds reduce noise levels, and may even conserve fuel. When new machinery is purchased, make sure that it is quieter than old machinery (Figure 2). Vibration isolation pads may be installed under the legs of noisy equipment to reduce noise generated by the equipment vibrating on a cement floor. Newer chain saws and leaf blowers have flexible mountings to reduce vibration-induced noise as well.

Do I need hearing protection today? Answer these questions:

1. Will I be exposed to a noise level greater than 85 dB today?
2. Will I be exposed to that noise level for more than eight hours?
3. Will I be exposed to a noise level greater than 100 dB for more than two hours today?

If you answered yes to any one of these questions, use hearing protection!

If you would like to discuss anything hearing related or NCDHH's programs and services, please contact me at my North Platte office phone number (308) 535-6600 or you can email me at kathy.scusa@nebraska.gov. I look forward to serving you.

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