

THE COMMUNICATOR

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



NCDHH Testifies for LB 15



It was a packed house on Monday, March 4, 2019 at the State Capitol at the hearing for LB15: The Children of Nebraska Hearing Aids Act. LB15 would provide coverage for hearing aids for Nebraska families and children. A top priority for NCDHH Full Board, LB15 was introduced by Sen. Carol Blood, the bill gained momentum in weeks leading up to the hearing, with 16 co-sponsors. This comes as a necessary second-step to a bill passed in 2000 that would require early screening and hearing loss detection for newborn children in Nebraska.

Sen. Blood hosted a press conference with stakeholders, co-sponsors and supporters (see above) of the bill prior to the hearing. She emphasized the importance of this bill for the current and future education and developmental opportunities for Nebraska children.

Over ten supporters and families testified in favor at the legislative hearing in front of the Banking, Commerce and Insurance committee. Proponents urged the necessity of this bill for a wide variety of factors including financial, educational, professional, medical and more.



NCDHH Board Chairperson Jeremy Fitzpatrick testifies alongside son Quin at the LB15 hearing

Nebraska Testifies at LB248

Legislative Bill 248 was filed under Sen. Sara Howard, for an act to change terminology 'hearing-impaired' persons to 'deaf and hard of hearing' in Revised Statutes of Nebraska. This piece of legislation has been led by the Nebraska Association of the Deaf (NeAD) and is fully supported by the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) Full Board.

Initiated by the NeAD, this bill follows other states who have passed similar laws with the view maintaining the term 'hearing-impaired' has a negative connotation that focuses on what people can't do. Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing find the labeling of 'hearing-impaired' to be offensive.



"We applaud the work of Senator Howard and the Nebraska Association of the Deaf in their work with this bill," NCDHH Executive Director John Wyvill said. "This is an important step in establishing equality for all Nebraskans who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing."

The status of this bill can be found at the Nebraska Legislature website at:
https://nebraskalegislature.gov/bills/view_bill.php?DocumentID=36991

NCDHH Hires Business Manager

Stephanie Degroot



Hello! My name is Stephanie DeGroot and I am the new Business Manager for NCDHH. I am excited to be a part of this wonderful team and I look forward to working with you all! I come to NCDHH with 20+ years of accounting experience. I have a strong work ethic and I am highly organized. My goal is to bring a positive outlook with team support and unity as well as sound financial decisions to NCDHH. I am a Nebraska native however I spent a number of years in Colorado. I moved back to Nebraska in 2012

to take over our family farm located just 45 minutes east of Lincoln. I am also an Assistant Fire Chief and an EMT for my local community. I love NASCAR and my favorite food is pizza. You may contact me if you have any questions at 402-471-3068 or stephanie.degroot@nebraska.gov.

NCDHH Hires Interpreter Program Coordinator

Sharon Sinkler

Hello! My name is Sharon Sinkler and I am the new Interpreter Program Coordinator at the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH). I came on board at the end of November of 2018 and have been busy learning the many nuances of my new position. I would like to take this opportunity to tell you a little about myself. I was born and raised here in the wonderful city of Lincoln, Nebraska. Both of my parents are deaf, and I have other deaf relatives on my mom's side of the family. People often ask me what it was like growing up with deaf parents. I always struggle to answer that question because I don't have anything to compare that to. To me, it was a wonderful upbringing and I always loved being around deaf people. My parents always took my brother and I with them to Deaf clubs and social events. We and all the other children who were brought by their deaf parents would play well into the night. Generally, our parents would outlast us, and you could then find all of us fast asleep somewhere waiting to finally go home. I have so many great memories that I cherish and wouldn't trade for the world! I don't know what children with hearing parents did, but it couldn't have compared to what I had growing up. ASL was my first language and I took to it quickly and naturally. Much to my delight, people oftentimes thought I was deaf!



I began interpreting professionally in 1996. I became QAST certified in 1997 and was an educational interpreter in the K-12 setting for 14 years. During the summers and at other times when I wasn't working at school, I did community interpreting. After leaving the educational setting, I worked full-time doing community and VRS interpreting. I am thankful to have worked with such wonderful, experienced, supportive and nurturing interpreters throughout my career. Without them, I wouldn't be where I am today. Thank you to each and every one of you that have been a part of my journey.

I am married to my wonderful husband of 32 years, Dave, and we have one daughter, a son-in-law and a beautiful granddaughter, Lillyana. We also have a houseful of cats that we adore and that are spoiled rotten.

During this new chapter of my work life, I am hoping to reunite the interpreting community by again calling upon all the wonderful, experienced, supportive and nurturing interpreters that we have here in Nebraska. It is crucial that we all work together for the good of our profession and the people that we serve. I am excited to work with you on issues that we face as professional sign language interpreters.

"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." By Helen Keller

Please feel free to reach out to me by email at sharon.sinkler@nebraska.gov or you can reach me by phone at (402) 471-3065.

Don't forget to check out NCDHH on Facebook at:

www.facebook.com/nebraskacommissionforthedeafandhardofhearing/

We're also on Twitter! @NebCDHH

You can also find information on our website at www.ncdhh.nebraska.gov



Fresh Faces in the Omaha Office

Teresa Hevner, Lead Advocacy Specialist



As many of you may have seen on NCDHH's many social media platforms, the Omaha Office has recently welcomed two new members to the team! Jessica Larrison is the new Education Advocate, and Cody McEvoy is our newest Advocacy Specialist. Both Cody and Jessica have hit the ground running, and the three of us have been very busy during the training process.

One of the first events they had taken part in was the Nebraska Power and Farming Show in Lincoln. We got the chance to work alongside other NCDHH team members, converse with clients and our two new members gained hands-on experience. After their initial training in Lincoln, both Cody and Jessica settled into their offices and began to attend meetings in the Omaha area. We have gone to a variety of meetings, getting the chance to meet and discuss our roles at NCDHH as well as allowing Jessica and Cody to collaborate with other agencies NCDHH works with regularly. Since their start, they have been very engaged within the office, as well as around the community.

The three of us got the chance to tour Iowa School for the Deaf (ISD), learning some of the wonderful programs ISD has to offer students. We have also been traveling quite a bit, promoting our new team members to various stakeholders throughout Nebraska. Both Cody and Jessica have begun to establish clientele in their respective areas. If you are interested in contacting either Cody or Jessica with questions about services, please feel free to call 402-471-3593. Check out 'Meet The Team' page on our website for more information at www.ncdhh.nebraska.gov.

Accessibility Apps to Download on Your Mobile Device

Cody McEvoy, Advocacy Specialist



You know what they say: there's an app for everything!

I would like to share with you a great website with apps for adults and kids with hearing loss. This was compiled by a woman named Tina Childress who is an educational audiologist and is late deafened who decided to research through app stores and found as many apps relating to individuals with hearing loss.

The link is provided below and lists numerous apps that include captioning, lyrics to songs playing on the radio, video messaging apps that can be recorded and sent using ASL, quick phrases that show up on the screen when ordering food or coffee, and that's only a few of the apps that I mentioned. So check out this website and see all the apps that can be downloaded on your phone that can help improve accessibility and make your day go smoother!

This is a great resource to use with the ever changing improvement of technology and use of phones so check this out! <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1jBcMgGGKgUY2myJz8749IIZIWFwjlxBUjcy35SnahPo/edit?pli=1&pli=1#gid=2>

My role as NCDHH Education Advocate

Jessica Larrison, Education Advocate

As the NCDHH Education Advocate I am here to assist you and your child in their education needs. Individualized Education Plans (IEP) can be very overwhelming and at times scary, especially if it is your first time going through one. You aren't sure how the process will happen, what you can and can't do, what the schools can and can't do, and are you allowed to be involved or not? The process and questions can be very nerve-wracking, and you tend to work yourself up before the meeting has even begun. This is where I come into play. One of the biggest and best decisions I made while going through my own son's IEP was to have an advocate there with me. This was a person who stood by me and my child. Most importantly, the advocate empowered me. She gave me the strength to voice my concerns when I did not agree with choices made, because I knew it wouldn't work for my son.



As a parent, you are your child's biggest support and we KNOW what works for them because we are with them every day. But to stand up and voice your opinion in a process like this can seem daunting or frightening. Having the advocate there with me gave me the power to say no and ask for alternatives. This is what I want to do for you: I want to empower you to be your child's voice through this process and if you need, I can help. I can also help with rules, regulations and policies that are attached to IEPs, what are the laws that protect your child in school, and what can and can't be provided through an IEP. If you or someone you know is needing help or assistance in an educational setting, please do not hesitate to reach out. You can contact me via phone, videophone or e-mail: VP: 402-325-1068, phone: 402-595-2052, or email: jessica.larrison@nebraska.gov.

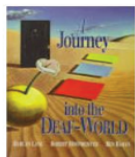
NCDHH Media Center Recommendations

Kim Davis, Advocacy Specialist

NCDHH offers anyone living in Nebraska library materials such as DVDs or books pertaining to deafness, hearing loss and interpreting. Two (2) DVDs and/or two (2) books may be loan from the Media Center at a time for a five (5) week period. Material may be mailed to anyone living in the State of Nebraska; the borrower is responsible for the return postage or onsite deliverance of the material to NCDHH's Lincoln office at the end of the five weeks. For additional information, or to see what DVDs or books are available, visit our website at www.ncdhh.nebraska.gov/services/media-center, or contact Cindy Woldt by email at Cindy.Woldt@nebraska.gov or by telephone at (800) 545-6244 V/TTY or (402) 506-7956 VP. To name a few popular books and DVDs related to heritage and language of the Deaf community, check out some of these listed below:



Books on Deaf Culture



A Journey into the Deaf-World
By Harlan Lane, Robert Hoffmeister, and Ben Bahan



Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood
By Paddy Ladd



Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture
By Carol Padden and Tom Humphries



Audism Unveiled
By Ben Bahan, H-Dirksen Bauman, and Facundo Montenegro

DVDs on Deaf Culture



Through Deaf Eyes
PBS Home Video



Unheard Journey of Deaf Nebraskans
NET Connects

How to Fight the Winter Blues

Brittney Isom, Advocacy Specialist



The holidays are over, but the cold winter weather is still among us. During the winter, the days are much shorter; which means less sunlight and time outdoors. Because of this, you may find yourself feeling less happy or not as motivated. The medical term is called, Seasonal Affective Disorder or, ironically, S.A.D. Like many people, I thrive when the sun is out, birds are chirping and flowers are growing. Here are a few ways to help fight the winter blues and hopefully make the winter months more enjoyable:

Vitamin D

Since we get most of our Vitamin D from the sun, how do you include it in your diet naturally? Making or maintaining a healthy lifestyle by lowering your cholesterol and exercising is a good way to increase your vitamin D levels. There are also certain foods that are good sources of vitamin D, like salmon, tuna, milk, yogurt, eggs and cereals with vitamin D.

Make a reading list or start a project

Winter is a great time to catch up on that reading list you keep adding to, but never get around to doing. There are so many benefits to reading, including mental stimulation, stress reduction, vocabulary expansion, memory improvement, stronger analytical thinking skills and improved focus and concentration.

If reading isn't your thing, winter is a great time to start a home project. For example, de-cluttering the house or purging all the old clothes in your kids' closets. Maybe you want to paint a few rooms in your house or all the rooms; during those cold months keeping busy will distract you from what is going on outside. This will also give you a sense of accomplishment when you are feeling "stir crazy" being cooped up in the house most days.

Socialize

This last tip is one of the more important ones. As humans, we are naturally social animals. When the winter months creep up, it can be a very isolating time for many. Find something to do with a group of friends, whether that be going for coffee or lunch; maybe taking a sewing or scrapbooking class. Whatever you decide to do, make sure it is with a group of people you feel good being around. In one study conducted by Nicholas Christakis, MD, PhD, of Harvard Medical School and James Fowler, PhD, of the University of California in San Diego, individuals who associated themselves with happy people were more likely to be happy themselves.

Source

<https://www.everydayhealth.com/columns/therese-borchard-sanity-break/ways-fight-off-winter-blues/>

Age Related Hearing Loss

Kathy Scusa, Advocacy Specialist

As you age, you experience a number of changes in the way your body functions. Hearing loss might be one of these changes. Hearing loss due to aging is a common condition that impacts as many as 50 percent of adults over 65 years. Age-related hearing loss is also known as presbycusis. Although age-related hearing loss is not a life-threatening condition, it can have a significant impact on your quality of life if left untreated. Age-related hearing loss occurs gradually over time. Changes in the inner ear can cause the condition. These changes include: changes in the structures of the inner ear, changes in blood flow to the ear, impairment in the nerves responsible for hearing, changes in the way that the brain processes speech and sound, damage to the tiny hairs in the ear that are responsible for transmitting sound to the brain. Age-related hearing loss can also be caused by other issues, including: diabetes, poor circulation, exposure to loud noises, use of certain medications, family history of hearing loss, and smoking.



Symptoms of age-related hearing loss typically begin with an inability to hear high-pitched sounds. You may notice that you have difficulty hearing the voices of females or children. You may also have difficulty hearing background noises or difficulty hearing others speak clearly. Other symptoms that may occur include: certain sounds seeming overly loud, difficulty hearing in areas that are noisy, difficulty hearing the difference between “f”, “s” and “th” sounds, ringing in the ears (tinnitus), turning up the volume on the television or radio louder than normal, asking people to repeat themselves, and being unable to understand conversations over the telephone. Always notify your doctor if you have any of these symptoms. They could be signs of other medical conditions and should be checked out by a doctor.

If you have symptoms of age-related hearing loss, see your doctor to diagnose your condition. He’ll complete a full physical exam to rule out other causes of hearing loss. Your doctor may also look inside your ears using an otoscope. If your doctor can’t find another cause of your symptoms, they may diagnose you with age-related hearing loss. They may refer you to a hearing specialist called an audiologist. The audiologist can perform a hearing test to help determine how much hearing loss has occurred.

There is no cure for age-related hearing loss. If you’re diagnosed with this condition, your doctor will work with you to improve your hearing and quality of life. Your doctor may recommend: hearing aids to help you hear better, assistive devices, such as telephone amplifiers, lessons in sign language or lip reading (for severe hearing loss). In some cases, your doctor may recommend a cochlear implant. This is a small electronic device that’s surgically implanted into your ear. Cochlear implants can make sounds somewhat louder, but they don’t restore normal hearing. This option is only used for people who are severely hard of hearing.

Age-related hearing loss is a progressive condition. This means it gets worse over time as you age. If you lose your hearing, it will be permanent. Even though hearing loss gets worse over time, using assistive devices such as hearing aids can improve your quality of life. Talk with your doctor about your treatment options. Ask what you can do to minimize the impact of hearing loss on your everyday life. You may also want to consider treatment to prevent the depression, anxiety, and social isolation that often occur with this condition.

You may not be able prevent age-related hearing loss. However, you can take steps to keep it from getting worse. If you experience age-related hearing loss, try these tips: avoid repetitive exposure to loud sounds, wear ear protection in places where there are loud sounds, and control your blood sugar if you have diabetes. Seek prompt help from your doctor if you develop symptoms of age-related hearing loss. As your hearing loss increases, you’re more likely to lose your ability to understand speech. However, you may keep this ability, or minimize the loss, if you seek early treatment.

“What Did He Say?”

Aaron Rothenberger, Advocacy Specialist



“Why is it so hard to hear voices on the television?” I was asked this question during one of my recent senior center presentations, and it made me wonder if there is something more to this than just hearing loss.

Whether it is keeping up with the news, watching your favorite sitcom, enjoying the big events like the Superbowl and Academy Awards, or just idly watching whatever is on to put off your chores for as long as possible, we all can enjoy some television viewing.

However, many people have difficulty hearing programs on TV. An assortment of factors attributes to this issue including, television design and sound mixing.

Let’s start with the televisions themselves. As manufacturers make flat-screen televisions lighter and thinner, their focus has been primarily on the picture as the most critical feature of a TV. Because of this, the speakers have become less of a priority and have been made smaller and moved toward the bottom and back of the television. That design choice can cause a distinct drop in sound quality depending on where the TV is in your home.

A lot of today’s media is also created with more sound channels in mind than just a standard television has installed. Most TVs come with two audio channels, i.e., left and right speakers. Home theater systems can add more speakers such as center speakers or soundbars, surround speakers and subwoofers. Extra speakers give sound more channels which allow more customization. DVD’s and Blue Ray discs come mixed for 5.1 channels of audio. Trying to push 5.1 channels of audio into just the two channels can make voices that much harder to pick out.

Another factor is sound mixing. To make movies and shows more immersive, audio producers utilize something called dynamic range. This method sets up intense moments to seem much louder to get a reaction out of audiences. The big explosions in action films or the loud shrieks in horror films are made much more intense by careful sound mixing. This sound mixing is less apparent in shows that do not need dynamic range, such as sitcoms and news programs. Most televisions have sound modes that either enhance this feature or reduce it.

What about those actors that always mumble? We are noticing a transition in the way that actors speak their lines in our current television shows. Actors are moving towards a more natural style of dialog and away from the older method of theatrical voice projection that worked to boom toward the audiences inside of a theatre. The actors want their characters to be as believable as possible and see the natural style as a better way to play their parts. Unfortunately for some viewers, this means less intelligibility and harder to understand lines.

Familiarity is another big factor. Speakers that we have listened to more often are easier to understand. If we watch the same news station with the same reporter each night, our brain develops a familiarity that makes it easier to comprehend what they say. We become used to the sound of their voice and can recognize the words they say.

Predictability of what the speaker says will also play a significant role in how well we can understand them.

“What Did He Say?” cont.

Aaron Rothenberger, Advocacy Specialist

It is much easier to understand the words if you are watching your favorite movie for the fifth time or watching a sport that you know by heart. While we are on the subject, another person at my presentation asked why commercials are so much louder than the programs we watch. Interestingly, advertisements are not louder than the programming per se. The FCC back in 2012 limited ads to match the average volume of the programs that they advertise alongside.

The difference being, programs we watch ebb and flow between louder and softer volumes. Commercials maintain that same volume throughout the ad, and the transition between a quiet ending of our show into a somewhat louder advertisement can make the sound change that much more jarring and appear to be much louder.

Commercials are also mixed and designed to grab your attention as quickly as possible and to best sell their product. You might notice this with different commercial types. A commercial about beds will be much softer than an advertisement about a monster truck show.

Now that we have had a quick course in why hearing the television can be difficult let's go through some options to make understanding our favorite show a bit easier.

The first thing you should look for is a Dynamic Range Compression option on your television. This feature can go by a lot of different names, such as Night Mode, DRC, Dialogue Enhancement, Volume Amplification and so on, so you might have to look around to identify it. By using this option, you reduce some of the bass sounds and increase the treble, which helps bring the voices up.

Next look for a sound mode on your television. Options might include, news, clear voice, movie/cinema, and so forth. This feature should adjust the settings to something more suited to your desired listening experience. You might also want to try moving the television around the room to find the best position for the sound of the speakers to bounce off the walls. It is helpful if you can have someone else move the TV while you close your eyes and listen to get the best location fit. Finally, if you have not already, consider putting closed captioning on. Having the words at the bottom of the screen can make all the difference when you have trouble hearing.

All of these free adjustments should increase your ability to understand the voices on the television, but there are more options if they do not work, albeit they may cost a little more as well. By adding a center speaker or soundbar, you can send the voices through the front of the television instead of trying to bounce the sound off the walls. A center speaker will reduce the muddling of voices from poor TV speakers, and some soundbars are specially made to enhance the frequency of spoken words and lower the bass noises.

There are also television streamers that connect to wireless headphones or hearing aids. These streamers connect directly to the hearing device and allow you to cut out all the other excess noise that might be going on around you. They also allow you to adjust the volume as loud as you want without disturbing others. There are many options out there to help alleviate hearing issues when it comes to watching your favorite television program. I hope that this little lesson on the reason that voices can be hard to hear and the ways that you can fix that helps you understand your next program better, even if the only reason you are watching is to put off dusting the bookcase a little longer.

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