

THE COMMUNICATOR



WELCOME NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: ARLENE GARCIA GUNDERSON

THE NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING (NCDHH) FULL BOARD HAS HIRED MS. ARLENE GARCIA GUNDERSON AS THE AGENCY'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR. A NATIVE ASL USER, BORN TO PUERTO RICAN DEAF PARENTS AND RAISED IN A SPANISH SPEAKING COMMUNITY IN THE BRONX, ARLENE BRINGS A WEALTH OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ADVOCACY, ASL, DEAF EDUCATION, HUMAN SERVICE, AND INTERPRETING.

ARLENE HAS MORE THAN TEN YEARS OF ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE AS WELL AS BACKGROUNDS IN TEACHING, TRAINING, AND MENTORING IN K-12 AND HIGHER EDUCATION. HER PERSONAL STRENGTH IS IN STRATEGIC PLANNING, SETTING PRIORITIES AND MANAGING BUDGETS BASED ON IDENTIFIED GOALS TO LEAD PROGRAMS AND SERVICES. ARLENE HAS MADE LEADERSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS TO VARIOUS COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS BECAUSE SHE FEELS AUTHENTIC GRASS ROOT NETWORKING, INTER-COMMUNITY RESOURCE BUILDING, AND ADVOCACY ARE THE BEST WAY TO SUPPORT DIVERSE, MULTICULTURAL INDIVIDUALS AND ENABLE EVERYONE'S FULLEST POTENTIAL.

ARLENE WAS THE FIRST PERSON OF COLOR TO SERVE AS THE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION, SERVING TWO TERMS ON TOP OF SEVERAL YEARS OF BEING ON THE BOARD. ARLENE VALUES LIFELONG LEARNING AND IS DEDICATED TO BROADENING UNDERSTANDING AND SENSITIVITY TO THE NEEDS OF DEAF, HARD OF HEARING, DEAF-BLIND, DEAF-PLUS (DISABLED) AND BIPOC POPULATIONS, THEIR FAMILIES AND SERVICE PROVIDERS/PROFESSIONALS WHO WORKS WITH THEM.





Director's Corner

I OFFICIALLY BEGAN MY CAREER AT THE COMMISSION ON MONDAY, MARCH 20TH – AND HAVE HIT THE GROUND RUNNING! IT HAS BEEN A VERY EXCITING TIME TO MOVE TO A NEW STATE AND MEET MANY NEW (AND SOME FAMILIAR) FACES IN THE COMMUNITY.

IN MY FIRST COUPLE WEEKS, I HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN A FEW COMMUNITY DISCUSSIONS AND ENGAGEMENTS, INCLUDING A DEAF MENTOR PROGRAM MEETING WITH THE NEBRASKA ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF AND A DEAF/HARD OF HEARING STAKEHOLDERS MEETING. IT HAS BEEN A BUSY BUT FUN TIME LEARNING ABOUT NEBRASKA AND THE PROGRAMS THAT ARE AVAILABLE. I ATTENDED A PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION ANNUAL SURCHARGE HEARING MEETING AND WAS ABLE TO MEET PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSIONER AND TRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER, TIM SCHRAM, AS WELL AS DIRECTOR OF THE TELECOM/NUSF DIVISION OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION, CULLEN ROBBINS.



I HAVE GOTTEN TO KNOW OUR TEAM AND HOW THEY APPROACH THEIR ADVOCACY BY OBSERVING AND ATTENDING MEETINGS AND PRESENTATIONS WITH TEAMMATES. RECENTLY, I ATTENDED A PRESENTATION WITH BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COORDINATOR, SHARON PRICE AND ADVOCACY SPECIALIST, ASHLEY WULF AS THEY GAVE A PRESENTATION TO PROJECT HARMONY, EDUCATING THE TEAM ON OUR SERVICES AND ACCOMMODATION PROCEDURES IN FOSTER CARE SETTINGS.

ON MARCH 25, I ATTENDED THE FIRST ANNUAL DEAF-CENTRIC HOSPITAL EVENT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA MEDICAL CENTER (UNMC). THE GOAL OF THIS EVENT IS TO ENGAGE THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING COMMUNITY WITH STUDENTS PURSUING HEALTHCARE CAREERS. IT INVOLVED REVERSE ROLE-PLAY OPPORTUNITIES, ALLOWING FUTURE HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS TO GAIN AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE STRUGGLES PATIENTS WHO ARE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING FACE IN COMMUNICATING AND ESTABLISHING A TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP WITH HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS. NCDHH WILL BE WORKING WITH THIS EVENT FOR FUTURE YEARS WITH SUPPORT AND SPONSORSHIP!

I AM EAGER TO CONTINUE ORIENTING MYSELF WITH OUR AGENCY AND VERY EXCITED AT WHAT IS TO COME FOR THE FUTURE OF NEBRASKA!



IT'S LICENSE RENEWAL TIME!

Sharon Sinkler, Interpreter Program Coordinator
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Welcome to Spring 2023! License renewal time is coming up for all Interpreter/Transliterator and Intermediary (Deaf Interpreter) licenses. These licenses all expire on June 30th.

THE NEWS

To renew your license, you will need to provide the following to NCDHH:

- Interpreter/Transliterator or Intermediary license renewal application (found here: <https://ncdhh.nebraska.gov/licensing> under Renewal). All license applications are now fillable pdfs.
- Proof of current RID or accepted BEI certification. Proof of QAST certification or state deaf interpreter certification DOES NOT need to be provided.
- Copy of a current government issued photo identification.
- Copies of required continuing education (clock hours or CEUs). You can submit copies of your certificates of attendance or your RID continuing education transcript, making sure that you have completed 24 clock hours or 2.4 RID CEUs and they are **earned between July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2023**. Remember, you must have at least 3 clock hours or 0.3 CEUs specifically in Ethics. The easiest way to prove this is if the title or workshop description includes the word “ethics.”

•License renewal fee. You can now pay your license renewal fees ONLINE!! On our website’s licensing page (<https://ncdhh.nebraska.gov/licensing>), there is a hyperlink called “PAY ONLINE” which directs you to PayPort where you can pay by credit card, debit card or checking account.

Please feel free to mail your completed application and supporting documentation or scan and email them to me at sharon.sinkler@nebraska.gov anytime between now and June 30th. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

PANHANDLE HAPPENINGS

Susan Whitaker, Education Advocate / Advocacy Specialist
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The Scottsbluff office has a new addition! Her name is Jolene, and she is a mannequin that can let you know "How Loud is Too Loud". Jolene goes with me to my booths and presentations. I will ask a member of the public who uses ear buds for listening to their media (music, podcasts, etc.) to set the volume at where they normally would listen to it. Then I place one of the ear buds into Jolene's ear and show them with the decibel reader where they rate on the decibel scale.



Anything over 70 decibels, with prolonged use, will begin to damage your hearing. When I show someone where their reading places on the decibel scale, many of them are shocked. At that point I can educate them with what level is safe to set their volume in order to protect their hearing.

Jolene is a great asset when educating people, young and old alike, on how to protect their hearing. We are planning trips to the middle schools and high schools across the Panhandle with our "How Loud is Too Loud" program. It is very important to teach the young kids how to protect their hearing. Once it's gone, you can't get it back.



KEARNEY SPOTLIGHT

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My spotlight on the community continues with an interview with Jessica Hoss of Kearney.

My name is Jessica Hoss and I live in Kearney with my husband, Jim, and our four wonderful children: Lydia (18), Nathan (17), Christopher (12), and Bennett (10). Lydia is a freshman at UNK, Nathan is a junior at Kearney High, and I home-school Christopher and Bennett.

What is some of the work you do for the hearing loss community?

I work as a Parent Guide for the Hands and Voices Guide By Your Side program. Guides are experienced parents of a child with a hearing difference and are matched with other parents who are navigating the journey. What I love about being a Parent Guide is that every child and every family is on their own path. Helping parents to find the information and the resources that they need in order to help their children achieve their fullest potential is one of my greatest joys. I am privileged to wear multiple hats within Nebraska Hands and Voices. In addition to being a parent guide, I also fulfill duties as Outreach Coordinator, a H&V board member, and most recently an ASTra (Advocacy Support Training) Advocate. The ASTra program recently launched in Nebraska and its goal is to help parents navigate the educational system and work with their school in order to best meet their child's needs.

What drives you to do the work you do?

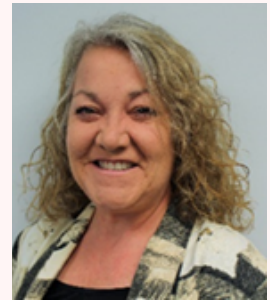
When Nathan was diagnosed with profound hearing loss, we were stunned. We thought that deafness was caused by heredity or by illness, neither of which was the case for him. We were uninformed, unprepared, and had a lot to learn in a short amount of time. I want other families to know that it is going to be okay, that there are supports out there, and that there is a whole community of other parents and D/HH adults who understand and want to help.

What are some things that people don't think about having a child with hearing loss?

So many things! I feel like it's been a surprise a minute with this kid, but I think the most important thing that people don't think about is that hearing aids and cochlear implants are not a miracle cure. Nathan's cochlear implants give him access to sound, but he doesn't hear all of the sound frequencies. There's a lot that he misses and certain environments are impossible for him to hear in at all. There are times when things are too loud for him - which sounds crazy, but it does happen. People also don't realize that listening fatigue is real, the amount of effort involved in focusing on the important sounds and voices and filtering out the rest is exhausting.

FUNDING AVAILABILITY FOR COMMUNICATION ACCESS WITH AN ATTORNEY!

Kim Davis, Advocacy Specialist
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Do you need an attorney to provide you...

- Legal consultations?
- Legal documents for estate plans, last will and testament, living will, power of attorney or living trust?
- Prosecution or defense service involving child support, divorce, custody, or guardianship proceedings?
- Prosecution or defense service in a criminal proceeding?
- Civil rights advocacy for the protection of basic human rights, equality, or social freedoms?



These are just some examples of attorney services that are commonly sought. Do you need an attorney to provide you an interpreter, captioned service provider, or other communication accommodation access? Or have you had an attorney concerned about paying for communication accommodations? Worry no further!

NCDHH received a portion of the federal funds from the American Rescue Plan Act through the Nebraska legislation. This fund established one of the two programs, the Legal Access Communication Fund (LCAF)*. This fund is available for attorneys or law firm entities to be reimbursed for the cost of sign language interpreter services, captioned service providers, or other auxiliary aids that involves providing effective communication accommodation necessities with any Nebraskans who are either Deaf, DeafBlind or Hard of Hearing. Additional reimbursements may include interpreters or captioned service providers' travel time, travel mileage, per diem for meals, or lodging necessities if they are deemed reasonable and standard within this industry.

If you are not sure how to find a private attorney, the Nebraska Bar Association has a Find-a-Lawyer directory that lists attorneys with an active status to practice law in Nebraska, with options to narrow your search by their expertise or practice area and locations they serve.

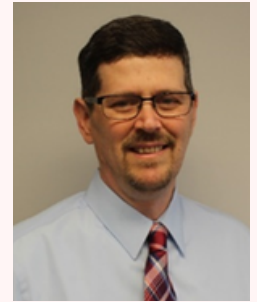
When you are scheduled with a private attorney, or appointed with a public defender through court, all you need to do is request the attorney to provide you the type of communication accommodation that is effective for you and refer the attorney to NCDHH to obtain the necessary LCAF forms (also available on NCDHH's website). If an attorney or its law firm is not sure how to find an interpreter, captioned service provider or a particular auxiliary aid, NCDHH can also provide these resources.

MY WORK WITH OMAHA & NORFOLK FIRST RESPONDERS

Jeremy Daffern, Advocacy Specialist

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After multiple occurrences between law enforcement & emergency responders with deaf communities across the country, the need to collaborate and educate became apparent. It made me think about how we can apply this to communities in Nebraska.

I collaborated with Omaha Police Department and Douglas County emergency responders to plan and develop an event that will educate them and the deaf community. In September 2022 we hosted a Safety Day event in Omaha; over fifty people who attended the event. Omaha Police and Fire provided fire trucks, police cars with a rambler, a demonstration with a K-9 dog looking for banned substances, and a presentation from Douglas County Dispatch. There was an opportunity for deaf and hard of hearing individuals to apply for light strobe fire alarms installation by the fire department during the event. It was a favorable success and I personally received many remarks and compliments from both the attendees and presenters how they learned from both sides and gained perspective. The Omaha Police Department and Douglas County have since requested to have more events to maintain their knowledge of deaf culture, communication methods and to educate the deaf community.



I also worked with the Norfolk Fire/Police Division for a Safety Day in this area as well. My vision and goal is to expose Norfolk police and emergency responders and help them understand how important it is to have effective communication between them and the deaf/hard of hearing persons. It is also important for the deaf community to increase understanding of the functions and duties of law enforcement, first responders and the fire division.

As I work with various emergency responders and law enforcement agencies, my passion and desires are to increase understanding and knowledge within the agencies and ensure deaf and hard of hearing individuals can feel comfortable and safe in situations that should arise with emergency first responder presence. **Emergency first responders are under increasing scrutiny and pressure to address concerns and increase sensitivity towards minority communities. Emergency first responders should strive to be aware of deaf culture, various communication modalities and have empathy.**

HEARING LOOP ON GOOGLE MAPS

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Often the deaf and hard of hearing communities struggles to find public places that already provides hearing loops. GOOD NEWS!!! Hearing Loss American Association (HLAA) was able to work with Google to develop an accessibility feature on their Google Map. Basically, when you are searching for a place to see if they provide hearing loop system, Google Map will state if there is hearing loop accessibility. For example, you wanted to find the address for Benson Theatre and wanted to see if they have hearing loop, in Google Maps, they will have an accessibility tab and that will inform you if they offer hearing loops or not.

This is still a work in progress and HLAA will need your help on this by promoting and advocating for Hearing Loop Systems. If you noticed the google map isn't showing hearing loop system in accessibility, they encourage you to fill out the form and inform them. I've included these below.

INFORMATIONAL LINKS

Fillable Form: How to Add Hearing Loops for Locations:

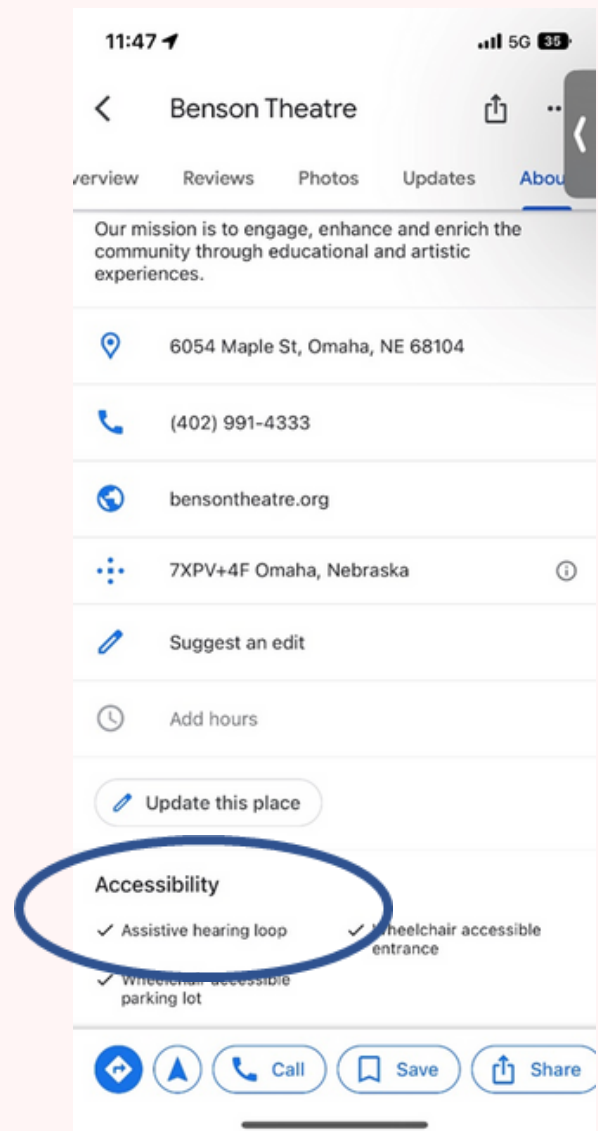
https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=s1ORtJAWrUizTQ0Z8JTjuTjNdShUDK1JIPs-uEa_ofZUQzBBTDIPMldGNDdOWFNQSUHHTIhON0VPUyQIQCN0PWcu

How to Find Hearing Loops in Google Maps

<https://www.hearingloss.org/wp-content/uploads/how-to-find-hearing-loops-in-google-maps.mp4>

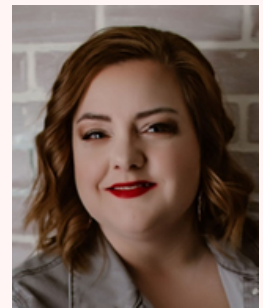
NCDHH Website: Nebraska Locations with Hearing Loops

<https://ncdhh.nebraska.gov/sites/ncdhh.nebraska.gov/files/doc/Hearing%20Loops%20in%20Nebraska%206.17.2022.pdf>



SELF-COMPASSION

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Self-compassion? “What is that?” you may ask yourself. Too often we may focus on taking care of the needs of others. Parents, teachers, social workers, nurses to name a few often find themselves tending to the needs of others. Think of a time when a close friend or family member were feeling bad about themselves, maybe they were facing hardships and struggling. Perhaps, you responded with kind and encouraging words, a hug maybe. Maybe you provided them a shoulder to cry on. Now, think about the times you were in a similar situation. Did you provide yourself with the same encouragement you provided to others? Maybe you had some negative dialogue within yourself and beat yourself up over it. Have you thought “I can’t do this anymore” or “no one cares about me, why me?” You are not alone!

We should be showing ourselves the same kind of support and concern as we do others. This is called self-compassion. Self-compassion is the practice of showing yourself the same compassion you would show someone you care about when they are facing struggles. It allows us to recognize our limitations and flaws while showing ourselves kindness as we accept them.



To maintain self-compassion, it is important to practice self-care. Self-care is the conscious practice of taking the time to be mindful, being aware of our surroundings, our body and what we are thinking about. Taking the time to turn off our work obligations, focus on doing something positive for ourselves. Take the time to focus and do something good for our body, mind and soul. This can take the form of exercise, going for a walk, spending time with our pets, going out to eat ourselves, window shopping, going for a drive and many other positive activities. Create a mental list of what you enjoy doing on your own and how it made you feel and set aside time to do it on a consistent basis.

With Spring now in full force, we should be taking advantage of the warmer weather and the sunny days. Warmer weather and sunshine do wonders for our mental health. Remember, it is important to have healthy relationships with others and provide support, but we should have healthy relationships with ourselves and practice self-compassion.

If you need behavioral health resources, please contact me at video phone 402-682-7129 or email sharon.price@nebraska.gov.

BONE CONDUCTION HEADPHONES:

ARE THEY FOR YOU?

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Bone conduction headphone technology is not new. The earliest reported use of bone-conduction was by a physician, Girolamo Cardano, in the 16th century. However, Ludwig van Beethoven, famous composer and pianist, is credited with the invention. Beethoven lived in the 18th and 19th centuries and lived with hearing loss. To create his music, he bit into a rod attached to a piano, enabling him to hear music through bone conduction. In the early 19th century, the first audio bone conduction devices were developed. Such a discovery was published in March 1935, possibly the first patent. Rather than a normal speaker, it was a telephone with bone conduction. Over the next decades, several devices were developed. In the 1980s, the very first radio and music player launched. It was created specifically for sports so that listeners could hear their surroundings while exercising. Conducting was utilized since the cables from the audio player were hooked to the collarbone. The USA-issued patent for the first bone conduction headphones were patented in 1994 by H. Werner Bottesch. It looks and works the same as advanced bone-conducting headphones of today. In 1994 customers got their first bone conduction, after the patent for the first bone conduction headphones was published. Since the bones don't manage all frequencies equally, the bone conduction headphones also had a bit of custom equalizing to enhance their sound quality. Nowadays, you can find a broad range of bone conduction models.

The basic definition of bone conduction technology is a device that carries vibrations through the bones in your skull, directly to your inner ear. It keeps your ears free as nothing is plugged into your Cochlea (inner ear). The abridged version of bone conduction headphones is that they rest directly on the listener's cheekbones (behind the ears). Unlike traditional headphones and earbuds, the eardrum doesn't vibrate to pass the information along to the cochlea. Instead, the vibrations from the bone conduction transmit directly to the cochlea. Due to lack of eardrum movement, this technology is good for people with hearing loss, as the bone conduction vibration acts in lieu of the eardrum. Insulating your eardrums from outside clamor benefits clarity because a good seal mitigates auditory masking. That means you can hear the outside noise, saving your ears from getting damaged. Bone conduction transmits the sound vibrations right to the Cochlea via skull bones, avoiding the external and middle ear. Once the internal ear gets the vibrations, it generates a brain signal so you can listen to it. This technology uses bone conducting to send sound to the inner ear. Everyone, normal hearing, deaf, and hard of hearing can use this technology efficiently. Bone conduction headphones can't cause hearing loss through eardrum damage, but they can still harm the inner ear (Cochlea) if they are listened to, too loud for too long.

In terms of structural quality, comfort, and fit, the bone conducting headphones are equal to regular headphones. But when it comes to sound quality, bone conduction is slightly lagging behind. Everyone has different experiences and different tastes. Some people vow by bone conduction headphones, and others like to use the more conventional options available. No matter which style you choose, securing your hearing is essential. Keep in mind you only have one pair of ears, and being careful with your hearing should always be something you have foremost in your mind.

There are many styles of bone conducting headphones and ear buds. They range in price from \$30 to \$200. Several of the websites listed at the end of my article will give reviews of different makes and models. Some of the reviews list their top preferences. In the end, each of us has to make the choice for ourselves to decide what is best for our hearing and listening choices.

If you would like to discuss my article, 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.