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The Communicator

Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing



A newsletter surveying health, government and issues affecting Nebraskans.

NCDHH to Close Western Office Due to Budget Cuts Required by the Nebraska Legislature.

Due to State budgetary cuts, the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing has decided to close the Scottsbluff office, effective June 30, 2010. Along with the closure of the office, the Field Representative position will be assigned to the main office in Lincoln. Dr. Donita Mains from North Platte will be the main field representative for the Panhandle area. However, other field representatives maybe assigned depending on the specific issues and services needed.



This is the second in a series of fiscal impacts that have hit NCDHH, affecting the Lincoln and Omaha offices as well. The Lincoln office has eliminated one vacant position and will not fill another position. The Omaha office will reduce one full time position to part-time.

This does not alleviate the responsibilities that the Full Board of the Commission is requiring of its staff. All established goals and plans are still required to be carried out and met throughout the State. The Full Commission Board expects the NCDHH staff to meet the needs of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing people in Nebraska in accordance with the recently approved three year strategic plan. To that end, the NCDHH staff is currently researching new service delivery models to meet the increased workload efficiently.

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One way to provide services and advocacy is through the use of video conferencing. Using modern technology and the Internet, NCDHH is able to contact more people more efficiently than ever before. Combining technology with better planning helps to reduce the cost of providing services overall without sacrificing quality. Improved planning includes setting up meetings, presentations, and activities in remote areas so that actual travel time is reduced to a minimum.

NCDHH will continue to provide face-to-face service as much as possible throughout Nebraska. NCDHH believes that nothing can fully replace the special instruction and training that NCDHH Field Representatives and Mental Health Specialist can provide regarding issues related to Deafness and Hearing Loss. Representatives have been asked to increase contact with Nebraskans, providing information and referral services to more and more citizens.

NCDHH Calendar of Upcoming Events

Additional information on the listed events can be found online at www.ncdhh.ne.gov/calendar.html.

June

17, 1:15pm-2:15pm, **Hearing Loss Support Group-Gothenburg**, Hearing Aid Funding Options, Stone Hearth Estates, Donita Mains, Field Representative for NCDHH

17-20, **Hearing Loss Association of America's 2010 Convention**, Milwaukee

22, 1:30pm-2:30pm, **Hearing Loss Support Group-North Platte**, Hearing Aid Funding Options, First Lutheran Church, Donita Mains, Field Representative for NCDHH

26, 1:00pm-3:00pm, **'Vicarious Trauma and Interpreter Self-Care'**, Karen West Elementary School, Omaha, Dr. Ron Lybarger

July

9-10, 9:00am-5:00pm, **'Incorporating Visual Features Into Your Interpreting'**, Staybridge Suites Hotel, Lincoln, Dennis Davino

13, 10:00am-12:00pm, **Hearing Loss Support Group-Omaha**, Dora Bingel Senior Center, Beth Ellsworth, Field Representative for NCDHH

15, 1:15pm-2:15pm, **Hearing Loss Support Group-Gothenburg**, Hearing and Health, Stone Hearth Estates, Donita Mains, Field Representative for NCDHH

18-22, **DeafNation World Conference & Expo**, Las Vegas

20, 1:30pm-2:30pm, **Hearing Loss Support Group-North Platte**, Hearing and Health, First Lutheran Church, Donita Mains, Field Representative for NCDHH

30, 1:00pm-3:00pm, **Interpreter Review Board Meeting**, Lincoln Medical Education Partnership, 4600 Valley Rd / Classroom 4A, Lincoln

August

5-8, **Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Region IV Conference**, Embassy Suites--Downtown, Old Market 555 South 10th Street, Omaha

6, 6:00pm-8:00pm, **Sign & Dine-Lincoln**, Spikes Bar & Grill, Vicki Steinauer-Campbell

10, 10:00am-12:00pm, **Hearing Loss Support Group-Omaha**, Dora Bingel Senior Center, Beth Ellsworth, Field Representative for NCDHH

17, 2:00pm-4:00pm, **Mental Health Board Meeting**, 1313 Farnam, Omaha

19, 1:15pm-2:15pm, **Hearing Loss Support Group-Gothenburg**, Hearing Aid Technology, Stone Hearth Estates, Donita Mains, Field Representative for NCDHH

24, 1:30pm-2:30pm, **Hearing Loss Support Group-North Platte**, Hearing Aid Technology, First Lutheran Church, Donita Mains, Field Representative for NCDHH

September

10, 8:30 am, **NCDHH Full Commission Board Meeting**, Lincoln Medical Education Partnership, 4600 Valley Rd / Classroom 4A, Lincoln

16, 7:00pm – 9:00pm, **Emergency Care during a disaster for Deaf and Hard of Hearing**, American Red Cross, 2912 S 80th Ave, Omaha, Beth Ellsworth, Field Representative for NCDHH

NCDHH Staff

Dr. Peter Seiler, Executive Director

Lori Burrage, Business Manager II

Traci Cooney, Staff Assistant II

Beth Ellsworth, Field Representative II

Janet Killam, Field Representative II

Donita Mains, Field Representative III

Nancy Marsh, Field Representative II

Ben Sparks, Public Information Officer

Norman Weverka, Field Representative III

Peggy Williams, Mental Health Specialist

Cindy Woldt, Staff Assistant II



A Brief Overview Covering the 5 Titles of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Ben Sparks



What does the ADA do? The ADA is a law that prohibits discrimination against disabled people in employment, State and local government, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation, and telecommunications. It also applies to the United States Congress. There are several agencies that work together to enforce this law.

Does the ADA explain exactly what disabilities are covered? No. It explains that anyone “who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities” is protected by the ADA. The law is written to protect those who have a disability, has a record or history of having a disability, and those who have a relationship or association with an individual with a disability.

Title I relates to Employment. It protects employees from discrimination in every aspect of employment including the hiring process, pay, and promotions. Title I requires employers to make reasonable accommodations to the limitations of a qualified person with disabilities unless it results in undue hardship. Some of these accommodations would include restructuring jobs, altering the workstation, and providing or modifying equipment. All employers who have 15 or more employees are required to follow the ADA.

Title II relates to State and Local Government. This Title requires that State and Local governments give to people with disabilities an equal opportunity to benefit from their programs, services, and activities. Some of the programs listed include post secondary education, transportation, and the court system. Some states take the idea of accessibility even farther by ensuring the quality of the programs and services. Most states require a “qualified” interpreter in legal situations, when interacting with the courts or law enforcement, to meet the requirements of Title II. Here in Nebraska, State agencies are required to hire licensed sign language interpreters. In Illinois, a sign language interpreter must be licensed, with some exemptions, or face a \$2,000 maximum fine.

Title III relates to public accommodations. This Title protects the disabled from discrimination by businesses and non-profit services providers that are public accommodations. Some examples of public accommodations are restaurants, private schools, doctor’s offices, and movie theaters. Under Title III, these public accommodations are obligated to provide for “effective communication with people with hearing, vision, or speech disabilities.”

Effective communication, for some, involves the use of interpreters. Interpreters, TTYs, and captioning services (CART) would be considered an “auxiliary aid.” Public accommodations are not permitted to charge for the use of auxiliary aids and services. These aids help ensure equal access to services.

Some of the misunderstandings about when an auxiliary aid is necessary stems from not knowing what “effective communication” is and when it is needed. Some service providers assume that writing in English may be the most effective way of communicating with a person with hearing loss without the understanding that English may not be the native language of their client.

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What is a...

Hearing Aid?

By Donita K. Mains, PhD, CSW



Sure, you may have seen people wearing a hearing aid or you may even have a pair yourself. But what are they exactly and how do they work?

A hearing aid is a small electronic device that is either worn in the ear or behind the ear. It makes sounds louder so that someone with a hearing loss can listen, communicate and participate more fully in daily life. A hearing aid can be beneficial in both quiet and noisy situations. However, only about one in five of those that would benefit from a hearing aid actually wears one.

A hearing aid has three basic parts: a microphone, an amplifier, and a speaker. Sound waves are picked up by the microphone, which converts them to electrical signals and then send them to an amplifier. The amplifier increases the power of the signals and sends them to the ear through a speaker. Hearing aids are used to improve hearing and speech comprehension in those with a hearing loss from damage to the small sensory cells (hair cells with nerve endings) in the inner ear. This type of hearing loss is called sensorineural hearing loss. The damage can occur as a result of disease, aging, excessive exposure to noise or from certain medications.

A hearing aid magnifies sound waves (vibrations) entering the ear. Hair cells detect the vibrations and convert them to neural signals that are passed along to the brain. The greater the damage to the hair cells, the more severe is the hearing loss. The greater the hearing loss, the more powerful the amplification needs to be. However, there are limits in how much amplification a hearing aid can provide. If the inner ear has too much damage, a hearing aid may be ineffective.

If you think you or someone you know has a hearing loss and could benefit from hearing aids, the first step is to get a hearing test.

“What is...a hearing test?” will be discussed in article 2 in this series.



Statistics released by the Gallaudet Research Center

two to four out of every **1,000** Americans are functionally deaf

one out of every **1,000** Americans become deaf before the age of 18

nine to 22 out of every **1,000** Americans have severe hearing impairment

more than half of Americans incur hearing loss after they reach the age of 64

Many Don't Understand Realities of Hearing Loss

By Carol Agate, J.D.

"I got a new hearing aid. It cost \$3,000."

"What kind is it?"

"4:32 p.m."

Yes, no matter how expensive hearing aids are, they don't provide clarity. This leads to a lot of misunderstandings about them. We have probably all heard from people who don't think they need hearing aids: "I can hear perfectly well. You mumble." Or from friends of people with hearing loss: "He can hear me when he wants to."

The loss of clarity is why some people think they don't need hearing aids -- they can still hear. And they think you mumble because they don't realize their hearing loss affects clarity. The biggest disappointment after buying new hearing aids is that people still mumble; the mumbling is just louder.

The lack of clarity also explains why you think he can hear you when he wants to. Some sounds are more difficult for some people, depending on the range of their loss. High-pitched or accented voices are the hardest to understand. It's important to note that an inability to understand an accented voice isn't a criticism of the speaker.

So what do you do when a person who is hard of hearing says, "What?" Your instinct is to simply say the same thing again and in the same tone of voice. But if it wasn't understood the first time, it probably won't be understood the second time. Try conveying the same idea in different words.

And don't get annoyed. We don't get annoyed at people who are blind or have limited mobility. Maybe people get annoyed at those with hearing loss because of the belief, "He can hear me when he wants to." And there is the mistaken assumption that just as glasses can provide perfect vision, hearing aids can provide perfect hearing.

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Hiding your Hearing Loss?

Beth Ellsworth
Field Representative II
Omaha Office



Thank you for the responses I received following my newsletter article "Hiding your Hearing Loss." Of all the responses one message rang loud and clear "hearing aids are expensive and we need to get insurance companies to help pay for them."

I was recently at a meeting where the subject of the cost of hearing aids came up and much discussion followed. It was suggested that those of us who wear hearing aids along with our family and friends contact our senators and elected officials about this important issue! We could send letters and emails telling of the expense and get this issue out front and center. Many people I speak with have no idea that hearing aids are not covered by insurance! They just assume that they are covered the same as eye glasses.

**Report from
Southeast Nebraska
Norman Weverka,
Field Representative III**



Everyone is busy at this time of the year with spring activities. I have done some more training with 15 new police officers in Lincoln. The Lincoln/Lancaster county corrections completed training for new correctional officers. During the summer I will be traveling to Grand Island and Seward to do training with their Police and Sheriff departments. May 12, I will be doing training for the Highway Patrol at Grand Island.

One of my goals is to continue to expand services in cities outside Lincoln in southeast Nebraska to do more training for the law enforcement.

I am working with Lincoln Fire and Rescue (LFR) on providing free smoke and fire alarms. Lincoln Fire and Rescue was awarded \$125,000 dollars through a grant to provide free smoke/fire alarms to the general public. One part of this grant offers free smoke/fire alarms to deaf and hard of hearing people in the city of Lincoln. If you should have any questions, contact me at my office. The goal of LFR is to make sure that the needs are met for deaf and hard of hearing completely. NCDHH will be actively involved in training the fire department staff on how to work with people with hearing loss. This training is expected to expand into other areas including First Aid providers and how to communicate in emergency situations.

**Report from
Central Nebraska
Donita Mains
Field Representative III**



What a winter! I am sure ready for spring and all the activities that follow. Everyone I talk to is anxious to get outside and begin their spring projects.

However, being outdoors increases our risk of noise exposure. I think International Noise Awareness Day on April 28 is great timing. This day reminds us all about the dangers of noise and being around it.

Lawnmowers, chain saws, power tools, weed trimmers, construction, street traffic and more all start humming loudly. Being outside (or even having the windows open) is being closer to the noise.

Noise is the #1 cause of hearing loss. All of us should be wearing hearing protection (just like sun screen and sun glasses). Even if you already have a hearing loss, you need to protect what hearing remains.

NCDHH has more information on noise exposure and hearing protection. A Field Representative would be happy to provide you with more information or give you a pair of ear plugs.

I will be wearing mine...

**Report from
Northeast Nebraska
Beth Ellsworth,
Field Representative II**



Traveling to different areas was sure a challenge this winter and often times had to be cancelled. We sure had a long winter!! Now that spring has arrived travel is no longer a problem and I have been able to visit various communities. There has been an increase in activity in Norfolk and the surrounding towns.

The Nebraska Specialized Telecommunication Program continues to be very popular. For those people who need amplified phones it is imperative that you try the phones to see what works for you. One size does not fit all! As I have traveled to different communities, I have met with people to

whom hearing loss is a new experience for them and they have stopped taking part in activities. I've also seen this with people who have had their hearing loss for a while.

It has become apparent that the issues inherent in having a hearing loss sorely need attention. Too often we are hesitant to ask for what we need to participate and just "get by". I did this for a while myself and it was a lonely experience!

Does any of this resonate with you? I'd love to meet with you and hear about your experiences. We all deserve and have a right to accessible communication.

NCDHH can help bridge the gap by providing sensitivity awareness, workshops on assertiveness, working with you and your families and interceding on your behalf to start the process of full assimilation.

Knowledge is power.

SPRING WELLNESS IN WESTERN NEBRASKA

-Nancy Marsh, Field Representative II

Attending the 14th annual Spring Wellness Health Fair at Western Nebraska Community College on March 19th were many seniors from the Panhandle.

The day was cold and windy with snow in the air but seniors from Dawes, to Keith County and all the counties in between made the trek to Scottsbluff for a great day of health information from area professionals. Approximately 325 attendees were present for the day's activities.

Meeting the challenge of growing older is never easy. A helpful tool in that process is the annual "Spring into Wellness" health fair with seniors in mind. Topics from health concerns like asthma, heart disease, and diabetes were presented in sessions giving seniors time to listen and ask questions.

Field Representative Nancy Marsh, from the Scottsbluff Office offered information on hearing loss for the third year. With an attendance of 48 it was a lively and interested group of seniors with questions and many examples of the hardship faced by those with hearing loss.

Amplified telephones and assistive listening devices were demonstrated and tried out by participants. Information was given on the loan and NSTEP programs to assist all deaf and hard of hearing persons regardless of age. Financial assistance was discussed in regards to hearing aids.

Treasures & Memories Do Come Home!

Peggy Williams, Mental Health Specialist

Have you ever wondered if something you valued and treasured that was lost many years ago would ever be found and returned?

Virgil Cole, a 1941 graduate of the Missouri School for the Deaf, moved to Nebraska in 1944 to marry his sweetheart, Fern Sallinger of Grand Island where he became an active member of the Deaf community. Together, they raised their two daughters, Shirley and Dorothy, and made Grand Island their home. Virgil worked at the Fairmont Creamery and later at the Overhead Door Company where he retired. He died in 1995.

On March 3, 2010, in the Letter to the Editor in the Grand Island Independent newspaper was a letter looking for the decedents of Virgil Cole. The article was written by a woman in Charleston, Missouri wanting to return an item to Virgil Cole's family. A phone number was listed.

On a cold winter day, she and her husband were in a field in Charleston using a metal detector to search for metal and Indian artifacts when they found an old medallion. Arriving home, she cleaned the medallion the best she could and discovered the name, "Virgil Cole – MSD" written on the medallion. Not knowing what MSD meant, she did a Google search for "Virgil Cole". To her surprise, a genealogy of Virgil and Fern Cole written by a family member came up which helped her gather the information she needed to locate the family of Virgil Cole in Grand Island.



Dorothy Cole Santos, Virgil's daughter who lives in Lincoln, received a call from her cousin in Shelton, NE on March 3rd and the letter in the Grand Island Independent was read to her. Dorothy called the woman in Charleston, Missouri explaining that she was Virgil Cole's daughter and thanked her for taking the time to find them. Dorothy explained that the field was where her Father used to hunt when he was young as he grew up in that area. He had probably lost his medallion on one of his hunting trips in the field.



Thanks to the good samaritan in Missouri, the medallion was mailed to Dorothy. Knowing that MSD meant the "Missouri School for the Deaf", she called MSD to find out if anyone could tell her what the medallion represented. The medallion had a circle in the middle with a star in the center of the circle. Knowing that her father was very involved in sports at MSD, Dorothy assumed it had something to do with a sports award but was not sure. Unsure of what this medallion was, the staff member at MSD told Dorothy she would talk to the MSD Historian and call her back. To date, Dorothy has not heard back from them.

Never give up hope on finding something you treasure that has been lost, things have a way of coming home!

If any of the readers of this article has any information what this medallion represents, please call Peggy Williams at NCDHH, 402-471-3593. That way, the meaning of this medallion can be handed down to other members of the Cole family in the years to come.

Report on Mental Health in Nebraska

Peggy Williams,
NCDHH Mental Health
Specialist



It looks like we survived the long and cold snowy winter and I hope by now all of you are having an opportunity to go outside, plant flowers if you can and enjoy the beautiful weather Mother Nature is now sending our way!

My goals and objectives have been established and approved by the Executive Director and the NCDHH Board for this next year. I am currently in the process of working on two of the objectives which include establishing training programs to educate staff at all Nebraska behavioral health programs on deafness, communication strategies and culture. The second objective is coordinating the 2010 Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault programs and services workshop with funds provided by the Omaha Enrichment Foundation.

The purpose of the Omaha Enrichment Foundation grant revolves around two training components. One is to provide training to staff at domestic violence/sexual assault agencies and shelters on working with victims of domestic violence /sexual assault who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The second training will focus on training professional sign language interpreters on issues and ethics in interpreting for Deaf victims of domestic violence/sexual assault in Douglas and Sarpy Counties.

The interpreter workshop, “Vicarious Trauma and Interpreter Self-Care will be presented by Dr. Ron Lybarger and will be held on Saturday, June 26, 2010 from 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM at the Karen Western Elementary School in Omaha. The workshop is free to attend and CEUs and lunch will be provided.

NCDHH would like to thank Diane Meyers with the Metro Regional Program Suburban Schools Program for providing us classroom space for the workshop. Please contact me via email at peggy.williams@nebraska.gov or call 402-471-3593 to register if you interpret in Douglas and Sarpy Counties and would like to attend this workshop.

The training offered to staff of domestic violence/sexual assault agencies and shelters will be provided in August by Mary Hughes. Ms. Hughes is a counselor for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at the Kansas Rehabilitation Services. A date and location for the August workshop has not been decided at this time. Please check the NCDHH website within the next month for a flier announcing this workshop.

My personal goal this year is to achieve all of the goals and objectives that have been set in place. I want to ensure that Deaf and Hard of Hearing people living in the State of Nebraska receive quality and accessible mental health services.



The Nebraska Chapter of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf has done it again! They have arranged for training from some of the Nation's most acclaimed presenters, bringing them to the Heartland. neRID will be hosting the Region IV Conference August 5-8, 2010 in Omaha Nebraska. This conference will draw interpreters from 14 different States and 3 Canadian provinces.

Nearly 24 separate workshops will be provided covering a wide variety of topics and skill levels. Some of the training is especially designed for Deaf interpreters, interpreters working with the Deaf-Blind, and interpreters working in educational settings. Workshops for interpreters working in educational settings will be a special focus of this year's conference given the rural nature of the states in Region IV. Also on tap is instruction in interpreting in medical settings, self-improvement, and general linguistic studies, providing a well-rounded experience for any interpreter.

It will all start off with a banquet and Alive Aid, a benefit music concert with several bands that have ties to the field of interpreting! On Saturday, all afternoon workshops will be held at the Henry Doorly Zoo. This allows interpreters' families to enjoy a unique attraction of Omaha.

For more information or to register, please visit
www.regioniv-aliveandrockn.com.



Lincoln Fire and Rescue and the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) have joined forces to improve fire prevention by distributing free specialized smoke alarms! Several types of alerting systems have been selected to meet various needs. Installation will be completed by Lincoln Fire and Rescue at no cost in tandem with the Smoke Alarm Rallies on August 21st and October 2nd. To reserve your equipment, please contact Colleen Malotky at the Lincoln Fire and Rescue Department at (402) 441-8361 if you or a member of your family is Deaf or Hard of Hearing. For more information, you may also contact Norman Weverka at (402) 261-2657 (VP) or the main NCDHH office at (402) 471-3593.

If you live outside of Lincoln, we encourage you to contact your local fire department to discuss any questions or concerns that you may have regarding fire safety and your home.



Interpreter News

QAST
Quality Assurance Screening Test

The Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing interpreter referral system will be hosting their annual release meetings. There are several changes that have been made in the Referral Policy. This year attendance is required for those wishing to be on the referral list. The NCDHH referral list is the sole resource that staff uses to locate, inform, and refer freelance interpreters throughout Nebraska. If you are a current interpreter or would like to join the profession, this is the meeting to be at.

The release meeting is also a time for Nebraska's interpreters to provide feedback to NCDHH staff on everything from the referral system itself to licensure and current events in state government. Without feedback from the interpreters we refer, improvements to the system become difficult, impacting the lives of those we both serve, the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Hearing communities.

Omaha

July 23, 2010

9:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m.
Omaha NCDHH Office
State Office Building, Omaha
1313 Farnam-on-the-Mall
Second Floor, room 218

* July 23, 2010 *

1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Omaha NCDHH Office
State Office Building, Omaha
1313 Farnam-on-the-Mall
Second Floor, room 218

August 5, 2010

9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
Omaha NCDHH Office
State Office Building, Omaha
1313 Farnam-on-the-Mall
Second Floor, room 218

Lincoln

August 13, 2010

9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
Lincoln NCDHH Office
Lincoln Medical Education Partnership
Building
4600 Valley Road
Fourth Floor, Room 4A

August 13, 2010

1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m.
Lincoln NCDHH Office
Lincoln Medical Education Partnership
Building
4600 Valley Road
Fourth Floor, Room 4A

*The July 23 afternoon meeting will be interpreted

Going Green?

Receive
The Communicator in
your Inbox by sending
us an email at

ncdhh@nebraska.gov

INTERPRETER TOOLBOX

Websites

Licensed Interpreters, have you considered your Continuing Education Unit requirements for licensure renewal next year? www.ceusonthe.org and www.leadershipinstitute.biz are webinar providers and RID Sponsor wrapped into one site! These sites provide Professional and General Studies CEU credit at reasonable costs. Keep in mind, you will need 2.0 CEUs or 20 hours of accepted Continuing Education instruction. Of those 2.0 CEUs, you may earn up to .5 CEUs in General Studies to apply towards interpreter/transliterators licensure renewal.



Helen Keller

with Anne Sullivan Macy

-Photograph Courtesy of the American
Foundation for the Blind

Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Awareness Week June 27-July 3, 2010

- Cheryl Poff

June 27, 2010 marks the 130th anniversary of Helen Keller's Birthday. We at the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired are working with the Governor's office on proclaiming June 27-July 3, 2010 as National Helen Keller Deaf-Blind Awareness week in Nebraska.

Did Helen Keller ever come to Nebraska? Yes, on May 12, 1947 Helen Keller gave a speech to the citizens of the state of Nebraska (In Lincoln) urging them to support services for the Blind/ Deaf-Blind of Nebraska. On that same day she spoke to the Nebraska Legislature demanding funding for services for the Blind/ Deaf-Blind of Nebraska.

Shortly before her death in 1968, someone asked Helen Keller if she could change anything in her life, what would it be? Her response was that she envied today's individuals who are Deaf-Blind because they live more independent lifestyles whereby they have jobs, live independently in their own homes, marry and raise families.

This year, 2010, the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired is celebrating a decade as an affiliate of the Helen Keller National Center. We provide services to individuals who experience a dual hearing and vision loss, empowering them to build belief in themselves and promoting opportunities to remain independent in the Nebraska community of their choice.

I feel that part of the success we have had these past ten years in serving individuals who are Deaf-Blind is the excellent team work between Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired in ensuring quality



CAN THE BRAIN BE HARD OF HEARING?



Donita K. Mains, PhD,
CSW
Field Representative III
North Platte Office

As one grows older and has difficulty hearing—it may not be the ears. Researchers are discovering problems in the way the brain processes information as we age. In addition to a “timing” problem that limits our hearing, the brain may also have a “feedback” problem that diminishes the ability to hear as we get older.

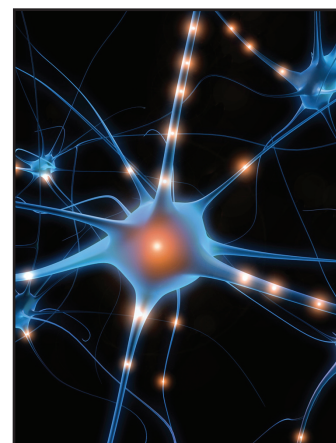
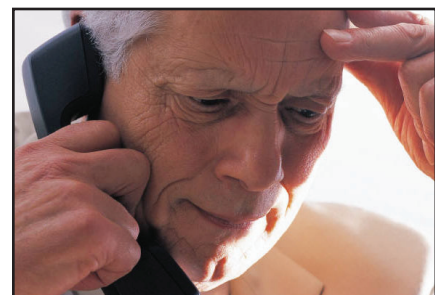
According to Dr. Robert D. Frisina, professor at the University of Rochester Medical Center, there are older adults who have normal ears but still have trouble understanding a conversation. That is because the brain is aging.

Normally the brain does a great job of filtering, sorting and processing the information that flows through the senses every day...the colors and shapes we see, the textures we feel, the foods we taste and smell, and the sounds we hear. Sometimes it is this ability that diminishes, often beginning to decline in our 40s or 50s.

Without this filter, Dr. Frisina reports that a person is quickly overwhelmed by a barrage of information. He compares this to a spam filter on a computer that fails and suddenly all sorts of bogus messages start pouring into the “important documents” folder. This overload in the brain actually hurts a person’s ability to hear well.

The number one complaint among older adults is that they have trouble hearing speech because of background noise. They often say that they do well in quiet places or one on one but it is like chaos in a restaurant or meeting. This is partly due to the feedback system of the brain failing.

Many people gradually lose the ability to hear high frequencies as they age, but it is often the brain’s timing and feedback problems that account for many complaints about hearing, says Dr. Frisina. Having problems with an aging brain on top of problems with the ears is a double whammy.



An Interview by Norm Weverka

For this newsletter I had an opportunity to interview a Deaf couple, Joyce and Albert Sparks. My intention is to provide readers different perspectives of those with hearing loss.



Joyce, where did you grow up?

Joyce: I was born in Henderson Nebraska and lived there until I was 7, then we moved to Lincoln. I went to Prescott school until 6th grade. There wasn't any other schools that could educate the Deaf so I went to the Nebraska School for the Deaf. My cousin drew me into NSD and I really enjoyed my time there.

Albert, where were you born?

Albert: I was born in Omaha. I went to NSD all the way through my schooling years. My parents were Deaf and they graduated from NSD as well. I started school there at the age 5.

Joyce, your parents were hearing is that right?

Was communication difficult with your family?

J: Yes. Communication was hard because I didn't know what they were talking to each other about. I just walked around. Sometimes mother would make me wear headphones to see if I could hear different sounds. I think that she was following a more Oral philosophy.

Albert, what was communication like in your family?

A: My parents were Deaf so we signed growing up... there wasn't any problem there.

So there were differences between your families and how you grew up. Albert had Deaf parents and Joyce, you had hearing parents. Joyce, can you explain a little about what it was like going to Prescott school? Was an Oral program difficult?

J: No, not really. Everyone could speak. Sign was not used at all.

Then you switched over to a Deaf school and they taught you how to sign?

J: They MADE me learn how to sign. That was how we communicated. I learned a LOT there and I really enjoyed it. My parents realized how much happiness that I could get from communicating in Sign.

Albert, your whole family communicated through sign. How do you feel about the Deaf schools?

A: They taught trades. They taught carpentry and printing. With those skills I was able to get a decent job and get promoted.

Joyce, where were you employed?

J: At first I worked in a factory making boxer shorts at a company down in the Haymarket area of Lincoln. People really wanted me to stay at that job but I wanted something with more pay. I started looking for a better job and I started working for the government with DAS, the Department of Administration for a few years. I then transferred to the Department of Motor Vehicles and worked there for 13 years.

At one point, there was approximately eleven people who were Deaf that worked at the State Office Building. I believe that number has dwindled to three. Why do you think that is?

J: The Deaf are able to work at the Department of Motor Vehicles. It's possible they just don't want to do that type of work. It's not easy to find a new kind of employment because of the communication barriers.

Albert, you received your High School Diploma also and worked at Quebecor? Do you feel that it was company that was "friendly" to the Deaf community? Were you able to "move up" in the company?

A: Of course. The foreman was able to sign a little so we could communicate. That was really nice. I started by learning how to load bundles. I then became an apprentice for 4 years. I became a journeyman after my apprentice work was done and moved into the bindery department with inkjets. I learned a lot while working there. We were able to print about 12 to 15 thousand magazines in an hour. I received 3 awards for spotting errors during the printing process that saved the company an unknown amount of money.



So you feel that the Deaf may have a better understanding of machinery, maybe better than the hearing?

A: That's possible. For example, my foreman asked me to train an apprentice. I taught and trained that apprentice for several months. My foreman noticed that my apprentice really picked it up fast despite the communication barrier. He asked my apprentice how my training style was different from other journeymen. He said that I took the time to show him, physically, what I was doing. I didn't just point and instruct. I showed him every step of what I was doing, using gesture to communicate. I trained many successful journeymen that way.

You have had many different forms of education, through formal schooling and hands-on employment experience. Do you find it frustrating communicating with the hearing community?

J: Yes. I can lipread a little, but it's not always effective. It doesn't work with someone who has a mustache, for example. Sometimes they speak too fast. If lipreading isn't successful then we depend on writing. There are people who don't want to take the time to write. If a person doesn't have the patience to communicate through writing with me, then I leave them alone. That's their problem. Sometimes people just don't want to take the time to write.

A: There were a few people that didn't know how to write where I worked. It was difficult communicating with them.

In both of your work experiences do you think there were times when they should have hired interpreters? Were there times when it was difficult to convince them to hire interpreters?

J: There were times when they would tell us that they were not going to hire interpreters. We explained that we would not be able to participate in meetings. They would end up writing notes for us.

A: They were willing to hire interpreters to give us updates and things like that. For daily information regarding machinery, I was able to communicate with my foreman enough through fingerspelling.

**You have two hearing children. What was that experience like for you?**

J: I was familiar with the hearing world. I was able to teach them Sign at 10 months. Things like doorbells were foreign to our house. We raised them in a Deaf world, becoming visually dependent.

Sign was their first language? Were you concerned that the hearing world would want you to teach them to speak first?

J: Yes, sign was their first language. I was able to speak and use sign. I used both. I still kept signing because of Albert. Albert doesn't lipread, he's Deaf and uses sign. We're different in that way.

A: One thing that I learned from Joyce's family was that my parents and I had the same culture. Joyce's parents had a different culture from hers. Raising our children, I had to realize that I needed to actively involve the kids in Hearing culture. After they both graduated, I didn't have to worry so much.

One time, my father asked my son, "Why do you like to Sign?" My son replied, "I have twice as many friends." With the influence of Joyce's parents, it was easier for us to raise hearing kids.

Let's talk a little about your social lives. Do you stay at home? How do you satisfy your social life? Do you participate in the hearing community? If so, is communication a problem?

J: I can socialize with the hearing using lipreading and my voice. I don't go out much with people. In school we had a lot busier social lives. At the school for the deaf, there was a lot of socialization. We had a lot of friends.

A: I'm the treasurer for several organizations.

What would be your advice to hearing parents of deaf children?

A: I would encourage the parents to learn Sign. That's basic. You need to be able to communicate with your child. We were able to teach our grandson how to sign. At 6 months he was able to tell us that his teeth were hurting. He wasn't able to speak it, yet he was still able to communicate to us why he was in pain.

J: Have the children socialize with Deaf adults so they become familiar with the language, how to communicate with their community.

You believe that, regardless of whether or not they can hear, children should be taught sign?

A: Yes.

J: Some hearing think that the Deaf need to be raised Orally. What if the child isn't able to lipread? I believe in a bilingual environment.

You've seen it firsthand! You've already experienced that.

There's a lot of new technology these days, new hearing aids, cochlear implants... Joyce, you previously wore a hearing aid, right?

J: When my children were young, they would take them out of my ears. I can use them, but I just choose not to.

Does having a hearing aid make you a hearing person?

J: No... not at all. With infants, I'm nervous about cochlear implants. I would rather they started out with a hearing aid so they could be more involved with sports. Maybe after they graduated, let them choose for themselves if they wanted an implant or wear hearing aids. My cousin asked me if I was interested in the cochlear implant. I think that there would be too many problems for me. I'm certainly happy without one.

A: I couldn't hear words. I could only sense a vibration in my ears.

Do you feel you have a problem that needs to be fixed?

J: No. I'm normal. I don't have anything that needs to be fixed. I'm not a robot. I'm a normal person and that's that.

A: I actually prefer to be Deaf, myself.

Any advice for Deaf parents raising hearing children?

J: Yes, you'll need to teach them sign. They'll realize that they have Deaf parents. I think that speech therapy is also important so that they can participate in the Hearing community as well. Sign needs to be a part of their education. We took our son to speech therapy at age 4 and he was able to develop just fine.

Do you think that the Deaf community is still experiencing problems in today's society?

A: I think that many businesses are still reluctant to hire Deaf employees. When I went to Haiti, the Deaf were only hired as dishwashers. The Deaf have skills and can work as well as any hearing person.

J: I was able to succeed in an office environment very well and make a good income.

Do you think that today's laws have helped the Deaf community to access the workplace? Do you think that there is room for improvement?

A: I think there is room for improvement. Employers need to hire more Deaf employees.

J: Captioning has really been helpful but can still be improved. Emergency situations during television broadcasts are not captioned, tornado warnings for example. That could be improved.

Have you heard about the Smoke Alarm Rally that Lincoln Fire and Rescue has put together including specialized equipment for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing? What do you think of that?

J: I think that's just wonderful!

A: When we bought our home in 1975, they didn't have strobe systems for the Deaf. We had to depend on our children to wake us up in an emergency. Today we depend on our dog. I'll be so happy to get one for our home. When our church was being designed, I encouraged them to use strobe systems with the fire alarm systems. Now each room has one! They received an award for installing the system. Money does seem to play a big part of decision making process, but cheaper does not always mean better.

Albert, you have done a lot of volunteer and missionary work. Can you tell us a little about that?

A: I went to Tanzania with a group of people from our church with the goal of getting in contact with the Deaf school there. I brought supplies and books to the Mwanga school for the Deaf. I visited with the very polite and well behaved children. They don't use American Sign Language but we were able to overcome that barrier by sharing signs with each other. The teachers lived at the school itself. We presented the superintendent with a book of ASL signs which he graciously accepted. We were also able to support the school by purchasing items that they had made during their education.

Do you have any thoughts that you would like to share with our readers?

A: The Deaf have the ability to succeed. I think that the hearing community might not understand that. I experienced that firsthand when I worked as a foreman with hearing people under my lead. There were several people that I worked with that were resentful of the fact that they had to follow the instructions of a "handicap". I never felt accepted as a foreman and never understood why.

J: I hope that Deaf children today are given a chance to grow in the Deaf community and find work in the Hearing community.



I would like to thank Albert and Joyce Sparks for spending time with us and sharing their wonderful experiences.

What is the difference between a cell phone and pager?

Janet Killam



Pagers and Cellular Telephones are very different pieces of equipment that can enhance the lives of anyone who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing. A pager, sometimes called a page or beeper, is a small device used to send short visual messages. There are two different kinds of pagers, alphanumeric and two-way. The alphanumeric is used to send very brief messages. Ideal uses for a alphanumeric pager are to send messages that contain less than five words or a phone number at which the person wants to be called at. The two-way pager can be used for sending and receiving email, numeric pages, and Short Message Service (SMS) messages. SMS messages typically contain up to 160 characters.

Cellular telephones are wireless electronic telecommunications devices that connect to a communications network for voice communication, SMS, or MMS, Multi-Media Messaging System, which allows for transmission of video and photographs. Additional services might include voicemail, internet access and the use of the Global Positioning System, GPS. Many of these methods of communication are used regularly by the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities.

Continued from Page 3

The problem arises when there is a need for a detailed explanation or in depth discussion regarding a topic. A person could see the same physician for years without needing an interpreter. If a situation with that person drastically changed or needed to be discussed in depth, an interpreter might be the best option for that physician to achieve effective communication. Often a public accommodation will look at the history of what has been deemed effective and apply it to current situations without looking at what needs to be communicated. There is a big difference, for example, between explaining to someone that their physical evaluation is normal and explaining to someone that they have a terminal illness.

Title IV enforces the establishment of a Telecommunications Relay Service, TRS. This Relay system allows people who use Teletypewriters, TTYs, and other similar devices to place calls through a third party. Relay Services must be operational 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Federal Communication Commission sets the minimum standards for these services.

Title V protects the disabled and those who assist the disabled in asserting their rights from retaliation. For example, a person that assists a coworker in filing a complaint against their employer is protected, regardless of whether or not they are disabled.

If you feel that you or someone you know has been discriminated against and would like to take action, there are agencies that can help you! Please feel comfortable in calling any of the NCDHH offices. We can help!

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H.R. 3101 Twenty-first Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2009



Your Congressperson's office is expecting to hear from the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities in support of a Bill that will require increased accessibility to the internet and phone systems. HR 3101 will require improvements in several areas including:

- Extending closed captioning obligations to television-type video programming distributed over the internet (not user-generated content).
- Requiring easy access to closed captions via remote control and on-screen menus and requires easy access by people who are blind to television controls and program selection menus.
- Restoring video description rules and requires access to televised emergency programming for people who are blind or have low vision.

Contact your Representative TODAY! Ask him or her to work with Congressman Lee Terry to help this Bill while it is in Committee. This Bill is at one of its most challenging hurdles. Let him know that this is what you expect. Now is the time to act if you support captioning of online media.

Do you have difficulty hearing a one-on-one conversation?



Do you have your television volume up too high?



Do you avoid conversation at the dinner table because of the background noise?

If so, you may benefit from the use of an Assistive Listening Device (ALD). These wonderful new devices have been designed with you in mind! Equipment has been designed to not only increase the *volume* of the sounds in your vicinity, but you can adjust the *pitch*, higher or lower, depending on what frequency you hear better. Contact a Field Representative at one of our offices. They can prepare a 90-day loan to ensure the device meets your needs.



Continued from page 5

Now that you know that communicating with a person with hearing aids might need some effort from you, what can you do to help? The most important thing is to face the person and not cover your mouth. We all can hear better when we see the speaker's mouth. For a person with hearing loss, seeing a mouth is often more critical than wearing hearing aids.

Don't chew or put your hand in front of your mouth. Also, get her or his attention first.

Use your normal speech, but more slowly than usual if you tend to talk fast. Hearing loss means it takes longer for the brain to decipher the words, even when they are clear.

Don't shout; that just distorts the words.

Don't speak from another room.

The hardest situation for understanding speech is with background noise. Restaurants or parties make it harder for everyone to converse, but for a person with hearing loss, it can be impossible. Give that person the seat facing the room so there is less noise from behind. If you invite a person with hearing loss to your home, don't play background music.

For those with a hearing loss, trying to understand speech can be exhausting. It demands constant concentration. It is often much easier to fake it. Despite what a bad idea that is, most people with hearing loss do it occasionally, thus reinforcing the myth that they can "hear when they want to."

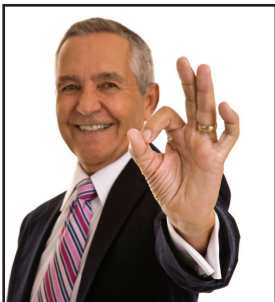
Hearing loss can be isolating. Ending the isolation takes effort from the person with the loss and from those communicating with that person. Please make the effort as graciously as you do as when you open a door for another. Don't be annoyed when you can't be understood on the first try. This is an invisible and poorly understood disability, but with your help it can be less disabling.

Carol Agate is an administrative law judge with the California Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board.

DID YOU KNOW?

NCDHH has a process where consumers can fill out a form online if they have a negative experience with a facility. Perhaps you experienced a situation where you requested accommodations but were ignored or incomplete.

www.ncdhh.ne.gov/complaint_submit_form.html



To register a complaint or comment click on the website and click on "services" then find the "complaint/comment" at the bottom of the page. Complete the online form and click Send Form. It's that simple!

The form will be assigned to a Field Representative who will communicate with you and follow up to find resolution. Please feel free to contact any of our three offices if you have any questions.





**Nebraska
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for the Deaf and
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Lincoln, NE 68510-4844**

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