

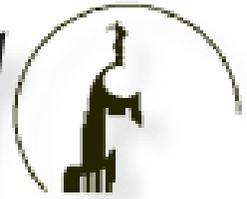
Pete Ricketts  
Governor

Dr. Frank Turk  
Chairperson

John C. Wyvill  
Executive Director

# The Communicator

Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing



Winter 2016

A newsletter surveying health, government and issues affecting Nebraskans.

## NDE Votes To Raise Educational Interpreter Standards in Public Schools

NDE Board Meeting: December 2015 NDE Board Meeting



Live stream start time: Friday, December 4 at 9:00am (CT)

At the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) Board Meeting on Friday, Dec. 4th, NDE voted unanimously (8-0) to pass the proposed revisions to Rule 51, including regulations and raised standards for educational interpreters. The photo above is a screen shot of Board member Lillie Larsen (left) and President Rachel Wise during the call for votes. The Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) has met with various stakeholders and members in the educational and Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities to work and advocate for a better learning environment for students in Nebraska.

These changes, which you will hear more about later in this newsletter, will ensure Nebraska Public Schools can provide appropriate education for students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. These Rule 51 changes reflect a pragmatic, common sense approach to raising standards for educational interpreters in Nebraska.

### Director's Corner

by: John Wyvill, NCDHH Executive Director



**“You must be the change you wish to see in the world”  
Mahatma Gandhi**

The NCDHH Board takes the above words very seriously. At the December 11, 2015 meeting, the Board set the legislative agenda for 2016 for the changes it would like to see in the upcoming year.

On the federal level, the NCDHH Board outlined three priority areas: first, the Board expressed support for the Alice Cogswell and Anne Sullivan Act (HR 3535). This proposed Congressional bill will amend the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to improve the educational results for deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired and deaf-blind children. Second, the Board called for our Congressional Delegation to pass the Help Extend Auditory Relief Act (HR 2748). If passed this bill would improve access to hearing aids and related examinations by removing part of the Social Security Act that prevents Medicare from covering hearing aids. The proposed legislation would also direct the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a study on insurance programs that provide services to help with hearing loss. Lastly, the Board expressed its concern with pending legislation (HR 353/S 564) that would allow for the appointment of a hearing aid specialist to the Veterans Administration (VA). The Board urges our congressional delegation to have the VA focus on the delivery of better hearing health in a more timely fashion.

The NCDHH Board also outlined three priority areas on the state level: First, the Board has joined the call by Disability Rights Nebraska (DRN) to have an ADA coordinator position (as required by law). This position will coordinate the statewide implementation of disability rights laws to ensure people have access to jobs and services within the executive branch of government. At one time, the state had such a position but never filled the position after that person left. Next, the Board over the years has received numerous complaints about the lack of captioning availability in movie theaters, which means people with hearing loss cannot enjoy movies side by side with hearing spouses, children, grandchildren, friends and coworkers. We will ask for an interim study introduced to see how such legislation, similar to Hawaii, can work in Nebraska. After the interim study is completed, the Board will then see if we can introduce such legislation in 2017. Lastly, the Board will continue to explore ways to provide complete hearing aid coverage for children in Nebraska. Unfortunately, the complexities of health care coverage laws create some uncertainties. As a result we will ask for an interim study introduced to study the best course of action moving forward with the intent to have this addressed further in the 2017 legislative session.

As you can see, the NCDHH Board is working hard to change the world one day at a time. 2016 promises to be an exciting year and will be built on the successes made in the last year. I leave you with this:

“May your troubles be less and your blessings more and nothing but happiness comes through your door” in 2016.

# Interpreter Licensure Laws- What Does This Mean for Me?

by: Crystal Pierce, NCDHH Interpreter Program Assistant



As stated earlier in this article, a law was recently passed requiring all sign language interpreters practicing in Nebraska, who are receiving compensation, to obtain a license (with exceptions that I will discuss later in this article). This affects not just sign language interpreters.

I have never considered myself politically or state legislation-savvy, but in the last six months I have become consumed with the interpreter licensure regulations. In turn, this has left my mind brimming with information that affects not only myself and my fellow interpreters on a daily basis, but Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) service providers and the consumers that use interpreters. Consumers include Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals, but also the individuals and businesses that hire them.

For consumers the new regulations give them rights, responsibilities and privileges. Businesses and/or individuals that hire interpreters have the responsibility to hire licensed interpreters. Also, both hiring bodies and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals have the right to request to see proof of the interpreter's qualification and licensure. Interpreters should carry these documents with them whenever working; the hiring entity can also make copies of these documents for their own records. The Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) also provides a list of licensed interpreters on our website at [ncdhh.ne.gov](http://ncdhh.ne.gov) under Finding Interpreters. Knowing the interpreters are licensed can provide consumers with a peace of mind about the quality of interpreting they should be receiving.

There are a few exemptions to the new licensure requirements: In an educational setting, the K-12 interpreters are exempt. Also, interpreters can volunteer anywhere or work in the religious setting without a license. A person is authorized to interpret during emergency situations, only while waiting for a licensed interpreter to arrive. Students studying to become interpreters can also interpret as long as they are under the supervision of a licensed interpreter. Finally, interpreters working for a VRI service provider do not have to have an individual interpreting license, unless the interpreter resides in Nebraska.

If anyone has a concern with an interpreter or questions pertaining to interpreter licensure please do not hesitate to call us. You may contact NCDHH at [ncdhh@nebraska.gov](mailto:ncdhh@nebraska.gov), 800-545-6244 or video phone 402-325-1068.

# Rules and Regulations Update

by: John Wyvill

**Rule 51:** A diverse group of stakeholders including parents, nationally recognized deaf educational experts, and advocates came together to call for raised interpreter standards. Leaders in the Deaf community including Jonathan Scherling, Nebraska Association of the Deaf (NeAD) President, Dr. Pete Seiler, NeAD educational advocate and Linsay Darnall, Jr. went before the Nebraska State Board of Education to formally request the Board to consider raising the standards.

On Friday, December 4, 2015 the Nebraska State Board of Education voted unanimously to approve the proposed revisions to Rule 51, including regulations and raised standards for educational interpreters. This now has to be approved by the Attorney General's Office, Governor and Secretary of State. Under this new rule, new educational interpreters hired by the school districts must now have a 4.0 Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) score. Previously, the EIPA standard was 3.5. In addition, the Department of Education will prepare a Technical Assistance Guide (TAG) to assist and support the local school districts to meet the new standards.

Based on the information provided by the Nebraska Department of Education there are 122 students that are provided communication access of an interpreter in the Nebraska School setting. As of late 2015, there are 101 interpreters in those settings throughout the state. 23% of those interpreters have a 4.0 or better EIPA score, 64% have a 3.5-3.9 EIPA score and 14% have a 3.0-3.4% EIPA score. It is anticipated over time that these EIPA scores will improve. With the higher standards there will be enhanced educational and employment outcomes and opportunities for our students.

**LB 287:** The Nebraska Legislature recently passed a bill expanding licensure requirements for sign language interpreters. The standard of interpreters is being raised to ensure that people who are deaf or hard of hearing are receiving effective communication. This new law, which went into effect January 1, 2016, mandates sign language interpreters who receive compensation for their services and Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) Service Providers to hold licensure in the state of Nebraska. Nebraska is the first state to require a business license for VRI providers.

Sign language interpreters including interpreters within the K-12 educational setting, volunteers, emergency situations (while waiting for a licensed interpreter to arrive on scene), interpreting students (under the supervision of a licensed interpreter), religious interpreters, and interpreters under VRI business license (unless the interpreter is located in Nebraska) are all exempt from this licensure requirement.

For more information regarding the requirements for the new licensing laws visit our website, [www.ncdhh.nebraska.gov](http://www.ncdhh.nebraska.gov) under the 'SL Interpreters' tab and click on Title 96 Rules and Regulations. If you have any questions please call NCDHH Interpreter Program Assistant, Crystal Pierce, at 402-471-3581, Video Phone at 402-325-1068 or by email at [crystal.pierce@nebraska.gov](mailto:crystal.pierce@nebraska.gov).

# Providing Adequate Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Population

by: Dr. Bobbie Beth Scoggins, Ed.D.

\*Article submitted on behalf of NCDHH Board Chairm Dr. Frank Turk



In my former capacity as its Director of the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH) between 1994 – 2007, it was our goal with the help of the KCDHH Commissioners and stakeholders to help each deaf and hard of hearing individual achieve maximum participation and productivity in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Through direct and indirect services, a model for integration, collaboration, partnership and reciprocity was developed with all appropriate state agencies, local education agencies, parent groups and higher education institutions. Based on a year-long campaign building awareness among the General Assembly members of the 1994 Kentucky Legislature, legislators recognized the need for expanded and improved services for the deaf and hard of hearing ... [and] that the array of services now provided may be fragmented, inefficient and inaccessible.

In keeping with this mandate, the KCDHH with six other sister state agencies charged with providing deaf and hard of hearing services presented a report on a strategic and long-range plan on providing adequate services was formulated to provide adequate services to deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, and deaf at risk individuals. This in-depth report called, "Providing Adequate Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Population in the Commonwealth", a Strategic and Long-Range Plan, a Task Force Report to the Governor and the Legislative Research Commission by KCDHH. This was done with input from 40 state agencies, 25 consumer organizations and 135 deaf and hard of hearing individuals resulted in benchmarks of areas in education, employment, mental health, interpreting and advocacy.

This group was charged with identifying gaps and barriers in services, determining where and to what extent duplication does or does not occur, and recommending action which served to close gaps and remove barriers, while utilizing partnerships and collaboration among both public and private agencies which provide services. After eighteen months of sheer determination and hard work, 15 (fifteen) recommendations were formulated with a matrix, which gives an overview on biennial budget requests for additional funds and resources. For nine more years, we did our due diligence on data collected and relationships we built to ask for additional funds. In 2004, another follow-up report showed which 15 recommendations on deaf and hard of hearing services were fully or partially implemented, we were able to rely on relevant data information and relationships we built on trust. This did not happen overnight. To this day, this Task Force Report was the most singular political high impact incident for deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. The results were so astounding, for example at the time of this report being released, we only had 30 nationally certified interpreters and now with the Kentucky Licensure Law on Sign Language Interpreters, we are able to get at least 340 certified interpreters. The interpreter training programs at universities were able to get adequate funding.

You may read this and think, "What is the point of this story?" Well, my fellow advocates. Collecting data, data, and data to support your position and building relationships, relationships, and relationships with individuals are the most two important factors to execute ANY political influence you may want for your Deaf and Hard of Hearing Communities. Leaders start by gathering relevant information listening to all points of view. Legacy stories are so important to carry on the work of past leaders. Your state legislature is a political machine. The majority/minority relationship affects the political dynamics. The minority group, in our case, is the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Communities. The executive and legislative branches are more political than the general population. The ownership on pushing deaf and hard of hearing service benchmarks remains with you. You have to build relationships with politicians capitalizing on their clout to help you get what you need for your community.

As memorably demonstrated during the Civil War by Abraham Lincoln, during the Great Depression by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and during the Civil Rights upheavals by Dr. Martin Luther Kings, great leaders respond to crisis situations by acting decisively ... building a clear roadmap that is both understandable and visionary. You can then show the way out of apathy, crisis and inertia by starting a roadmap for your community.

# Hearing Aid Banks

by: Peggy Williams, Mental Health Specialist



Many people with hearing loss struggle with anxiety, social isolation, depression and other mental health concerns. Because hearing loss affects your life on a daily basis, it can have a serious impact on your well-being. Don't isolate yourself or feel anxious because of your hearing loss, services are available to assist you or your hard of hearing family member in obtaining a used-reconditioned hearing aid.

### **SERTOMA HEARING AID BANK HISTORY**

In 1981, the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing collaborated with the Nebraska Sertoma Clubs, the Sertoma Speech and Hearing Association and the University of Nebraska Speech and Hearing Clinic/Barkley Memorial Center in establishing the Sertoma Hearing Aid Bank (SHAB) for Nebraskans who demonstrated a financial need in getting a hearing aid. The first reconditioned hearing aid was issued in August, 1981. Since that time, the Sertoma Hearing Aid Bank has issued hundreds of hearing aids to Nebraskans who otherwise would not have been able to obtain an aid.

The Sertoma Hearing Aid Bank provides used hearing aids to adult Nebraska residents (ages 65 and older) who demonstrate financial need. Sertoma seeks donations of aids and funds and promotes the Hearing Aid Bank and its services to the public, the University of Nebraska Speech and Hearing Clinic receives donated hearing aids, analyzes them to ensure that they function correctly, catalogues the aids, determines the appropriate aid for the applicant and sends the aid to the provider that tests the persons hearing and NCDHH receives, processes applications and determines eligibility in receiving a hearing aid.

The Lions Hearing Aid Bank is sponsored by the Lions Foundation and provides to Nebraska residents only. Originally, the Lions Hearing Aid Bank was housed at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha until the decision was made to house the Lions Hearing Aid Bank (LHAB) at the Barkley Memorial Center and operate both banks under one program. The LHAB provides refurbished monaural or binaural BTE hearing aids to individuals 19-64 years of age. The bank provides used hearing aids to adult Nebraska residents who demonstrate financial need. The Lions Hearing Aid Bank is operated jointly by three organizations: the Nebraska Lions Foundation (NLF), University of Nebraska Speech and Hearing Clinic/Barkley Memorial Center of the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, and the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH). The Lions seek donations of aids and funds, and promotes the Hearing Aid Bank and its services to the public, Barkley Memorial Center receives donated hearing aids, analyzes them to ensure they function correctly, catalogues the aids, determines the appropriate aid for the applicant and sends the aid to the provider that tests the persons hearing and NCDHH receives, processes applications and determines eligibility in receiving a hearing aid.

## Hearing Aid Banks cont.

### HOW TO OBTAIN AN APPLICATION

If you are interested in applying for either the LHAB or SHAB, please contact the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at 402-471-3593 to request an application. You may also go to the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing web site to obtain an application: [http://www.ncdhh.ne.gov/Sertoma/sertoma\\_hab.html](http://www.ncdhh.ne.gov/Sertoma/sertoma_hab.html) to download a Sertoma application and attestation form and for a Lions application and attestation form please go to [http://www.ncdhh.ne.gov/Lions/lions\\_hab.html](http://www.ncdhh.ne.gov/Lions/lions_hab.html).

### DONATIONS

Donations of used hearing aids are very much appreciated and needed. If you have a used hearing aid you would like to donate, please send the aid to, Sertoma Hearing Aid Bank/UNL Audiology Department, 253 Barkley Memorial Center, PO Box 830731, Lincoln, NE 68583. Donation of used hearing aids are tax deductible.

For further information about either the Sertoma Hearing Aid Bank or the Lions Hearing Aid Bank please contact the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at 402-471-3593.

## NCDHH Office Arrives in Kearney!

by: April Emeigh, Field Representative



I am pleased to report that the long-awaited NCDHH Kearney office location of NCDHH opened in the beginning of January. The office is located at 620 East 25th Street in Suite 1. This office space will be shared between the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired (NCBVI) and me, the Kearney Field Representative.

Opening this office presents a tremendous opportunity for NCDHH and the Kearney area. I will continue to work part-time, but the office presents clients with the opportunity to stop by to inquire about services and to demonstrate equipment. I will have a demonstration center set up so that individuals can view the various equipment selections and also try some things out. Having this space ensures that I will be accessible to individuals who need services and information without having to make a one-on-one appointment. Additionally, the location of the office presents ease of access for referring clients between several agencies including NCBVI and the Area Agency on Aging, which will all be located in the same office building.

We will be having an open house in the future, the date of which is to be announced. Come visit me at 620 East 25th Street, Suite 1. My regular working hours will continue to be Wednesdays 8-5, Thursdays 8-5, and Fridays 8-12. You can also call (308) 627-4509 or e-mail me at [april.emeigh@nebraska.gov](mailto:april.emeigh@nebraska.gov) to set up an appointment.

# NCDHH Hires NSTEP & Hearing Aid Bank Coordinator



Hello, my name is Susanna Fuehrer and I would like to introduce myself as the NCDHH Hearing Aid Bank & NSTEP Coordinator. NSTEP is a program through the state of Nebraska (Nebraska Specialized Telecommunications Equipment Program). The goal of this program is to provide monetary assistance to persons with disabilities who may require assistive technology, such as an amplified phone. I joined the NCDHH team in December of 2015 in the Lincoln office. I have been in training to monitor the Hearing Aid Bank & NSTEP programs, which has included approval and denial of applications, communicating with clients regarding application status and what these programs have to offer.

It has been very rewarding to speak to a new inquiring client and explain to them that there is help out here for them and that these programs are to offer assistance. Many of the responses have ranged from excited disbelief to joyful tears after explaining that THERE IS HELP OUT THERE FOR THEM! I am looking forward to the continued training here and to continue to learn more about this agency and advocating for Nebraskans who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. I feel very blessed to be part of a team who feel so passionate and committed to making a difference in legislation and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

I have received phone calls saying "I never knew there were programs out here like this" and it has been my pleasure to assure them there is and we are here to help them facilitate the process! If you would like more information about our hearing aid bank or NSTEP applications, please call us at 402-471-3593, video phone 402-506-7956 or email us at [ncdhh@nebraska.gov](mailto:ncdhh@nebraska.gov).

# NCDHH Mental Health Specialist Peggy Williams Awarded Employee of the Year

October 29th will forever be known as "Peggy Williams Day" at the Commission. It was on October 29th that we celebrated Peggy's nearly 35 years of service and dedication to NCDHH and the entire Deaf, Deaf-Blind and Hard of Hearing community. Peggy was awarded Employee of the Year at the State Capitol with Gov. Pete Ricketts (seen in photo). No amount of words or signs can adequately express our gratitude for having Peggy as a part of the Commission for so many years.

"Peg is known for her work ethic, being a 'straight shooter' and bringing out the best in everyone that she works with. Working with external stakeholders, Peg represents what we all aspire to be in representing the Commission. We are so fortunate to have had the privilege of working with her and having her on our team," John Wyvill said of Williams.



# Assistive Technology Partnership

by: Tobias Orr, ATP Director



Hello, my name is Tobias Orr and I have been the Director of the Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP) since September. Before joining the ATP staff, I worked at Nebraska VR assisting individuals with disabilities to find, obtain, and maintain employment.

ATP has numerous programs that help Nebraskans with all types of disabilities. We work closely with Nebraska VR to identify and provide technology that make it possible for people with disabilities be successful at work. Through funding coordination and the work we do with DHHS (Department of Health and Human Services) we help individuals live more independently by accessing vehicle and home modifications. ATP Education staff is working with schools throughout Nebraska to help identify appropriate technology for school age children.

AT4ALL ([www.at4all.com](http://www.at4all.com)), and the ReUse Network connect individuals with assistive technology. Opportunities to demonstrate and borrow equipment before purchase are available along with listings and resources for used items.

Two programs are especially beneficial for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. The iCan Connect program is part of the National Deaf Blind Equipment Distribution Program, which helps low income people with a combined hearing and vision loss acquire equipment that gives them access to telephone, advanced communications, and information services. Nebraska ChildFind helps parents and providers with resources, referrals, and rights information when there is concern about a child's development or ability to learn. Often times speech and behavior concerns can be a reason for a parent or provider to call. Hearing loss could be the reason for these symptoms, especially in very young children, and must be identified or ruled out as soon as possible. Another hearing test is often warranted. Through a nationwide hotline, website, public media, and event outreach, Nebraska ChildFind strives to locate all children that could benefit from early intervention, and special education services.

Since 1989, ATP's mission has been to help all Nebraskans be more independent using assistive technology at home, school, and work. Please contact ATP to learn more at (888) 806-6287 and [www.atp.ne.gov](http://www.atp.ne.gov)

## Client Assistance Program: What is CAP?

by: Victoria Rasmussen



The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is a federally mandated program designed to assist individuals who encounter conflicts with Nebraska VR, Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired and Centers for Independent Living. CAP helps individuals with disabilities receive quality services by advocating for their interests and helping them identify resources, understand procedures, resolve problems, and protect their rights in the rehabilitation process. An individual can contact CAP when they find anything dissatisfying or concerning with these programs. If an individual has a negative experience, a concern about funding for services, a complaint about staff, or a concern about the timeliness of services, CAP will contact the agency and assist in resolving any issues. Contact Vicki Rasmussen at 402.471.3656 or 800.742.7594 or email: [victoria.rasmussen@nebraska.gov](mailto:victoria.rasmussen@nebraska.gov)

## Mobile Apps Provide Tinnitus Relief

by: Beth Ellsworth, Field Representative



In the Nov.-Dec. issue of the Hearing Loss Magazine there is a wonderful article titled "Mobile Device Apps for People with Hearing Loss" (Nov./Dec. 2015). In this article Dr. Medwetsky discusses many different apps; in this article I will address Tinnitus. Watch for future newsletter articles where I will highlight other apps in this article. If you would like to get a head start you may find HLAA Magazines at [www.hearingloss.org](http://www.hearingloss.org)

Do you have tinnitus? Wikipedia defines tinnitus as "the hearing of sound when no external sound is present. While often described as a ringing, it may also sound like a clicking, hiss or roaring. Rarely, unclear voices or music are heard. The sound may be soft or loud, low pitched or high pitched and appear to be coming from one ear or both. Most of the time, it comes on gradually. In some people, the sound causes depression, anxiety or interferes with concentration."

If you haven't heard of tinnitus you may be surprised to know that tinnitus affects about 10 percent of the population. This number may be higher because Kochkin, Tyler & Born reported this figure in 2011. The goal of tinnitus management is to reduce the symptoms. Up until recently, only education, counseling and some amplification has been the norm. In his article Dr. Medwetsky wrote about several different kinds of apps to treat tinnitus that are currently available:

**Phase Out:** Using this mobile app the individual can set/adjust the frequency and the intensity of sounds. This helps reduce the tinnitus symptoms.

**Phonak Tinnitus Balance (PTB):** This is a personalized sound program that requires a health care professional that understands how to manage tinnitus. In this app the person selects music or sounds from their personal smart phone. They may also use the sounds that are within the app itself. Once the sounds are selected they can determine if the sound is effective or not and rate the sounds they have chosen. Then the health care professional reviews the sounds to find the most effective sound plan. If they have a Phonak hearing aid, the sounds can be streamed over the Bluetooth using the Phonak ComPilot.

Tinnitus Masker by Explosive Apps are designed to "drown out" the sounds produced by tinnitus. While the sounds are often sharp high frequency sounds this is not always the case. This app provides soothing sounds that focus on the frequency most associated with tinnitus. A sample of sounds provided are rain drizzle, waves on the beach or white noise.

Whist With this app the tinnitus sufferer can arrange, locate or create & save in their mobile device personal sounds that fit & relieve their symptoms. The sounds may be played in the background and is easily accessible because the sounds are saved in the mobile device.

For more information on tinnitus check out the websites below.

<http://hearingloss.org/content/nih-funded-studies-tinnitus>

<http://hearingloss.org/content/tinnitus-today-silence-tomorrow>

[http://hearingloss.org/sites/default/files/5-20-2010\\_Tinnitus\\_DrSeidman.pdf](http://hearingloss.org/sites/default/files/5-20-2010_Tinnitus_DrSeidman.pdf)

<http://hearingloss.org/content/tinnitus>

If you have any questions please contact me at 402-471-3593, Video Phone 402-682-7129 or [beth.ellsworth@nebraska.gov](mailto:beth.ellsworth@nebraska.gov)

# Enhancing Face-to-Face Communication

by: Kim Davis, Field Representative



Changes in technology is amazing and can often blow one's mind away, or is it just me? My penmanship is pathetic as I type more than I write. Personally, I find communicating with pen and paper can often be time consuming with those I may have challenge understanding through verbal means during one-on-one conversations. I'm always looking for something that makes communication more effective, quicker and, at the most, pleasant for myself and others through the use of portable technologies, such as android and iOS (Apple) wireless smartphones and tablets. Below are some Text-to-Speech and Speech-to-Text Apps of interest that are currently available to download for free through the Apple or Google Play Stores, depending on the type of smartphone or tablet you use. Some of the apps listed here may offer in-app purchases. Also, there are other available apps not listed below that are may be available for free or for a fee. I encourage you to explore further using the keywords that are underlined under each type of introduced apps. Please note that these below apps are meant for face-to-face conversations. They are not recommended for lengthy or complex discussions or group settings. They also should not replace interpreting or captioning service providers when one is requested.

## **Text-to-Speech Apps**

Converts texts to spoken words

Google Text-to-Speech  
(For Android Users)

iSpeech  
(For iOS Users)

IVONA  
For Android Users

NaturalReader

For iOS Users

Speak It!

For iOS Users

Text to Speech

For iOS users

## **Speech-to-Text Apps**

Converts spoken words into texts

DejaVoice – Voice Caption App  
(For Android Users)

Dragon Dictation  
For iOS Users

Speech To Text Notepad  
(For Android Users)

## **Text/Speech Apps**

Does both alternative features

The Deaf and Hearing Impaired  
(For Android Users)

Let Me Hear Again  
(For Android Users)

Speak2See  
(For iOS Users)

Statement  
(For iOS Users)

Virtual Voice  
(For Android Users)

Not all of the above apps have been tried or tested by me or anyone at NCDHH. They have been explored for Information & Resources purpose, and the options are left to those interested in downloading and experiencing what may discretely work best. I hope you are pumped as I am. Moreover, no more suffering with writer's cramps! Mind blowing indeed! If you have fabulous App that isn't listed, I'd love to hear from you!

If you have any questions about any of the above information please let me know at Kim.Davis@nebraska.gov, or by video phone at 402-261-2657.

## Voter Registration in Nebraska

by: Secretary of State John A. Gale



As secretary of state and chief elections officer, the coming year will be a very busy one for my office. The election season is already in full swing, with candidates filing their applications to run for state and local offices. My job is to ensure that all of our statewide elections are conducted in a fair, transparent, accurate and reliable manner. I also want as many voters to participate in the process as possible.

Currently, there are 1,145,441 registered voters across the state. That number has been on a steady rise over the past several months. I'm hopeful that trend will continue as we approach the primary and general elections.

There are several methods by which citizens can register to vote in Nebraska. One of the easiest and most accessible methods is online at NEReg2Vote. This web-based voter registration system was launched in September of 2015, and already around 4,500 people have used it to either register for the first time or update their voter registration.

The system is accessible by computer and on all mobile devices, making voter registration accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Information submitted is transmitted in a secure way to county election offices for final verification and processing. It is available to anyone with a driver's license or state-issued identification who meet the age and citizenship requirements for Nebraska.

Additionally, there are other methods of registering to vote in Nebraska. Those who log onto the Secretary of State's website ([www.sos.ne.gov](http://www.sos.ne.gov)) will find the appropriate forms in English and Spanish under the "Elections" tab. Completed forms can be printed out, signed and mailed to the appropriate county election office.

State agencies that offer public assistance also will provide forms for updating or registering to vote for the first time. This year, the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) has implemented a web-based system that provides users with the ability to register to vote when they renew or replace their driver's license.

As accessible as voter registrations is, getting people to the polls remains a challenge. Registration is only one part of process. Elections are crucial, because they are the heart of our democracy. The troubling fact of low turnouts is this – a small majority of people are ultimately deciding the leadership and policies that will govern the majority. The U.S. system of representative democracy works best when we have good turnout at all elections – statewide and local.

## **Assistance for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired** by: Secretary of State John A. Gale

In 2002, the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA) passed with the purpose of upgrading election procedures, voting machines, registration processes and establishing guidelines for poll worker training. Included among those broader mandates was a charge to states to improve the accessibility and participation of voters with disabilities.

In an effort to meet those requirements as well as others outlined in HAVA, I created the State Plan Commission in 2003. The commission, which continues to meet annually, is made up of approximately 12 members consisting of county election officials, advocates for the disabled community and other citizens.

Also in compliance with HAVA, my office purchased new election equipment in 2005, including machines designed to help those with disabilities be able to cast an unassisted and private ballot. That equipment continues to be utilized by election officials in all 93 counties.

In addition to equipment and ensuring that polling places are ADA compliant, my office provides a number of resources to county officials both in print and online about addressing the special needs of disabled voters. Those materials include a sheet that teaches poll workers simple sign language so that they can greet and communicate with deaf and hard of hearing voters. Those same sheets are also included in the materials that poll workers take with them when they staff their precincts on Election Day.

There is also a booklet available that walks users through the appropriate steps for dealing with voters who are blind, have Cerebral Palsy, speech and hearing impairments as well as other disabilities. All of those resources are available through the Election Division upon request.

Recently, John Wyvill, executive director of the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, gave a presentation to county election clerks during a training session in Kearney. Poll workers also undergo training by election officials during which time they are advised on how to handle voters who have special needs. By the time Election Day arrives, poll workers are well versed in how to handle any situation with courtesy and respect.

## **What's Happening Way Out West** by: Brittney Graham, Field Representative



As 2015 has come to an end, I was able to reach out to many people in the Panhandle. Traveling up to Gordon, NE all the way down to Sidney, NE and many towns in between. One of many great things that happened was being able to go to the Regional West Medical Center in Scottsbluff to collaborate with the Language Access Coordinator about different assistive devices the hospital could use for patients who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. Currently, Regional West Medical Center is experimenting with a UbiDuo 2. A UbiDuo 2 is a communication device that allows for face-to-face interaction for anyone who has a communication barrier. There are two sides with a screen and keyboard for each party involved. This allows each person to type back and forth to have an affective conversation. What a great tool for the Doctor's office! For any questions, comments or concerns, please contact Brittney Graham at (308) 633-3751 or [brittney.graham@nebraska.gov](mailto:brittney.graham@nebraska.gov)

# Nebraska's Enable Savings Plan to be Up and Running by Summer

by: Don Stenberg, Nebraska State Treasurer

Beginning in the summer of 2016, eligible Nebraskans with certain disabilities, including those who are deaf and hard of hearing, will be able to open tax-advantaged savings accounts through the new Enable Savings Plan offered by the Nebraska State Treasurer's Office.

Nebraska's Enable Savings Plan is expected to be one of the first ABLE programs in the nation to be up and running. The plan is the result of the Nebraska Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act passed by the Legislature in 2015 and signed into law May 26, 2015, by Gov. Pete Ricketts. A start-up date has not yet been announced.

Sen. Kate Bolz of Lincoln sponsored legislation to establish the ABLE program in Nebraska, following Congressional action in December 2014 to create Section 529A of the Internal Revenue Code. Section 529A allows for a tax-favored savings program for eligible individuals with disabilities to be used to pay qualified disability-related expenses, similar to Section 529 which allows for tax-advantaged programs for college savings like the Nebraska Educational Savings Trust (NEST).

The disability must have occurred before age 26 for a person to qualify for an ABLE account. The State Treasurer's Office oversees both NEST and the state's ABLE program, which is called the Enable Savings Plan. As State Treasurer, I am Trustee of both NEST and Enable. First National Bank of Omaha is program manager for both.

My staff and I are eager to start this new program with our trusted and valued partner, First National Bank. I am especially pleased with First National's approach. In developing its proposal, the bank said it set out to learn as much as it could about Nebraskans with disabilities. First National didn't choose to design a program from the bank's perspective, but rather it chose to work with the disability community to develop a program to meet the varying needs of Nebraskans.

In its proposal, First National Bank said it gained valuable insight through interviews with disability organizations and families. First National wrote the following: "Most importantly, we learned people with various disabilities have a similar outlook on the 'ideal' ABLE program and how they would use it. Their dreams are just like those people without disabilities—some want to live on their own or with others their own age, some want to go to college, others want to work without federally-restricted asset limits, and others want to save for a new service dog or a sport wheelchair. Still others just want to go to the grocery store and use a debit card to pay for groceries."



Photo: Nebraska State Treasurer Don Stenberg announcing details of the Enable Savings Plan at a Nov. 19 news conference in the Capitol Rotunda. On the right is Deborah Goodkin of First National Bank of Omaha, program manager for the Enable Savings Plan. Photo courtesy First National Bank of Omaha.

## **Enable cont.**

**by: Don Stenberg, Nebraska State Treasurer**

I have said I am committed to developing our ABLE program as quickly as possible. At the same time, I want to do it right and build a strong and effective program to address the unique needs of our ABLE account owners, keeping in mind convenience, ease of use, and cost.

As with 529 college savings plans, ABLE accounts allow contributed funds to grow tax-free, and to be withdrawn tax-free for eligible expense, including long-term and short-term needs such as education, health care, housing, transportation, and special equipment. Family and friends, as well as the account owner, can contribute to an ABLE account; however, only the account owner is eligible for a Nebraska state income tax deduction for contributions he or she has made. The Nebraska tax deduction for a contribution made by the person with the disability is up to \$10,000 a year.

Account owners will be able to save up to \$14,000 a year to pay for their care and education as well as other disability-related needs without the risk of losing Medicaid or federal Supplemental Security Income benefits. An account can grow up to \$100,000 without jeopardizing some federal benefits.

First National Bank will provide a range of services to ABLE account owners for an annual fee of \$50 per account. In most cases, a minimum initial deposit of \$250 will be required, as will a minimum required balance of \$50. Each account owner will be charged a program management fee of 50 basis points (bps). A basis point is equal to one-one hundredth of 1 percent of the average daily net assets in the client's account.

While the proposed federal regulations for ABLE programs are still under review by the Internal Revenue Service, I am very pleased and encouraged by interim guidelines announced in November. Those interim guidelines addressed several of my concerns and will allow us to move forward with our Nebraska ABLE program in the manner in which we had hoped to do when we announced key details at a news conference Nov. 19 in the Capitol Rotunda.

The Nebraska ABLE program will include the following features:

Check writing capabilities with a debit card for daily and ongoing expenses.

Bill pay from a checking account.

Qualified withdrawals online, over the phone, or through the mail.

A bank saving option insured by the FDIC, like the one available to NEST account owners, for Nebraskans seeking stability of principal.

Three low-cost, risk-based long-term investment choices – a growth portfolio, a moderate portfolio, and a conservative portfolio – all with underlying funds from Vanguard.

A call center to be managed by the same team that serves our NEST program, making it easy to transfer calls between NEST experts and ABLE experts. Processes will be in place for non-English speaking callers and for callers who are hard of hearing or deaf.

More information is available on the Enable website at [enablenebraska.com](http://enablenebraska.com) and on the Treasurer's website at <https://treasurer.nebraska.gov/csp/able/>.

# Junior National Association of the Deaf

by: Brenda Chappell, Field Representative



The waves turn over for deaf youths in Nebraska: A small group of students went to St. Augustine, Florida for Junior National of the Deaf (Jr. NAD) Conference last November. From there, they went from ordinary to extraordinary. The National Association of the Deaf (NAD) was founded as a non-profit organization in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1880 to advocate the rights of deaf people. Its first president was Robert P. McGregor. The organization spread not only to 50 states, but is also a member of the World Federation of the Deaf. It was part of Deaf President Now (DPN), the protests at Gallaudet University in the election of the first deaf president in 1988. It also strongly fought for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the federal law that requires businesses and companies to accommodate "deaf-friendly" devices.

The Jr. NAD program was established in 1964 with the appointment of Mervin Garretson as its first national director. He was considered the "Father of the Junior NAD." The program offers deaf and hard of hearing students of middle school and high school age to help them develop their leadership skills. Science teacher Larry Forrestal, who later became the president of NAD, founded the Nebraska School for the Deaf (NSD) Jr. NAD chapter in 1968. From their rich experiences, the students later became leaders in the state of Nebraska. After NSD closed in 1998, Brent Welsch, former president of the Nebraska Association of the Deaf (NeAD) and Natasha Kraft, the activity coordinator of Metro Regional Program (MRP), started the new chapter in 2003. In the fall of 2005, Linsay Darnall, Jr., the Youth Liaison for NeAD, took over as an advisor. Eventually, Nebraska Jr. NAD chapter became a part of the NeAD Youth Program. Now it includes students from mainstreaming schools and deaf school in Nebraska and Iowa and the chapter was renamed to the Nebraska/Iowa Chapter.

Students hold a meeting biweekly mostly at Omaha Association of the Deaf (for which they are truly grateful). They prepare annual prom, host a spaghetti event, and attend bowling for socializing. Last November a small group of selected students flew to St. Augustine, Florida for the National Jr. NAD Conference. It was quite an adventure for students who flew out of the state for the first time. They had a tour at the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind. They met many deaf and hard of hearing students from across the country. They also attended workshops, which helped to polish their leadership skills.

The National Jr. NAD hosted a Jr. NAD Ambassadorship Program competition. There were 13 participants and two of them were from Nebraska/Iowa chapter, Isabelle Graves and Elizabeth Van Camp. A male contestant from Rochester, New York and Isabelle won and selected to represent as Mr. and Miss Ambassadors for the next two years. It got better – Nebraska won a bid to host the Jr. NAD Conference in 2017 in Omaha. The National Jr. NAD Committee was formed to develop Jr. NAD curriculum and to promote social media among youth and stakeholders. Linsay Darnall, Jr. was selected as the Chair. When I asked a Jr. NAD alumnus, Vickie Hoyer, about her experiences, she said that she joined Jr. NAD for social experience, but she realized it was more than that. There she learned about leadership. She was involved in Public Relations and eventually she was elected a president. She went to a national conference in Texas in 2009. She was taught to be a better role model, and developed a desire to do more for the deaf community. She was encouraged to join NeAD, and has since served on the NeAD board.

Ryker McSorley commented that Jr. NAD offers much support; he was taught that deaf people can do anything and helped him to accept himself. He was one of students who went to Florida. He couldn't believe that he met so many deaf youths like himself and so various unlike at his school with only 15 deaf students. He was amused to see how others signed in their regional accents and tried to figure out what they were saying but he went through workshops and lectures without any voice interpreter. He felt good knowing that he was no longer alone and that there are many others like him.

It is good to have an organization like Jr. NAD available to deaf and hard of hearing youths. It helps them build their confidence and develop leadership skills. It is also resourceful; it offers activities and sends interested members to the NAD Youth Leadership Camp in Oregon in the summer. If you are interested to have your deaf or hard of hearing children join Jr. NAD, please contact Linsay Darnall Jr. at [Ldarnalljr@hotmail.com](mailto:Ldarnalljr@hotmail.com).

*Acknowledge: Thanks to Linsay Darnall, Jr. for sharing history of Nebraska Jr. NAD, participating in interview, and helping with the article. Thanks to Jr. NAD students and alumni for interviews.*

# When an American Sign Language Interpreter May Not Be Available

by: Kathy Scusa, Field Representative



Anyone from the North Platte area, who is Deaf or works with Deaf individuals, can tell you a story about how hard it is to find an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter. The North Platte Field Office includes 25 counties in the west-central part of Nebraska, covering almost 28,000 square miles (about 37% of our state). While our area may not be high density for Deaf persons who use ASL, in many circumstances having an ASL interpreter is needed for effective communication. At this time, there are no certified or licensed interpreters in our area. When someone in the North Platte area is needing to hire an interpreter, it is best to submit a request two or more weeks in advance if possible. Understand, there is cost involved when a business or individual hires an interpreter. This may include but is not limited to, hourly interpreter rates and mileage. Depending on the time and duration the interpreter is needed, it may also include hotel stays and per diem. The good news is there are tax benefits for businesses providing accommodations services. Visit [www.irs.gov](http://www.irs.gov) for more

information. If the business or person is unable to find an interpreter, alternative means of communication can be used. What is important is finding an alternative that still provides the deaf individual effective communication. If having an ASL interpreter is still your communication preference, consider rescheduling your appointment to allow time for one to be arranged. Below are some alternative forms of communication to consider.

- **PEN & PAPER**

The old stand-by...writing notes back and forth, can ultimately be effective, however, it is slow and cumbersome.

- **UBI DUO** <http://www.scomm.com/>

Communicating on the UbiDuo is much like instant text messaging for face-to-face communication technology. The two UbiDuo screens allow anyone to have a conversation in real time. It uses its own wireless protocol so no WiFi connection is required. The units can be side-by side or up to 300 feet apart for your conversation.

- **COMMUNICATION ACCESS REAL-TIME TRANSLATION (CART)**

To use CART, you need a high-speed Internet connection, a microphone and an audio output. CART is a real-time captioning method which transforms speech into text. With CART, everything that is said is transcribed with almost perfect accuracy, which is why CART writers are required to hold a CART certification and/or be court certified stenographers. CART is perfect for live events, business meetings and classroom settings in which the deaf or hard of hearing person wishes to capture every word, pause and background conversation. The text produced by the CART service can be displayed on an individual's computer monitor, projected onto a screen, combined with a video presentation to appear as captions, or otherwise made available using other transmission and display systems.

- **SPEECH TO TEXT TO SIGN-LANGUAGE CONVERSION**

Software to purchase for your computer, tablet or smartphone has the ability to translate speech to either text or ASL. There are many Apps (some are free) for tablets and smartphones that give you voice to text capability for communication. Search in your App Store or Internet Search for "Speech to Text" and it will give you lots of options. iCommunicator promotes independent communication for persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and encourages increased literacy by "translating" English in real-time. iCommunicator can translate speech to text, speech to Video Sign-Language, and Speech to Computer Generated Voice. It combines computer software and hardware and can interface with a user's hearing aids, cochlear implant speech processor, or FM listening system. <http://assistivetechology.about.com/od/DHHSC1/p/The-Icommunicator-Translates-Speech-Into-Text-Or-Sign-Language.htm>

- **VIDEO REMOTE INTERPRETING SERVICES (VRI)**

VRI is the use of an interpreter from a remote location. The interpreter listens remotely via video conferencing to the audio portion of the communication event, interprets that audio into sign language, and transmits the interpretation to the end user via webcam and high speed Internet connection. There are numerous companies that provide this service. They employ a staff of qualified interpreters that are nationally certified, state-screened and professionally evaluated (ADA & HIPAA compliant). Many of these companies have interpreters trained in ASL from other countries or who translate in other languages. Use of these services can be scheduled beforehand by making an appointment, but most are also available on-demand with no appointment. The charges for VRI are usually rated per minute.

**The NCDHH Team Reached out to  
18,784 People  
to Assist with Better Communication**

**in the year 2015**



*Where It All Begins*

# Social Media and Technology

# NCDHH

Nebraska Commission  
for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing



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Available to Nebraskans, NCDHH has a free media center loan program. Available materials include books, videos, and teaching materials on topics from American Sign Language, deafness, interpreting, hearing loss, and more

Browse and Submit Your Request at:

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or by phone:

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