

THE COMMUNICATOR

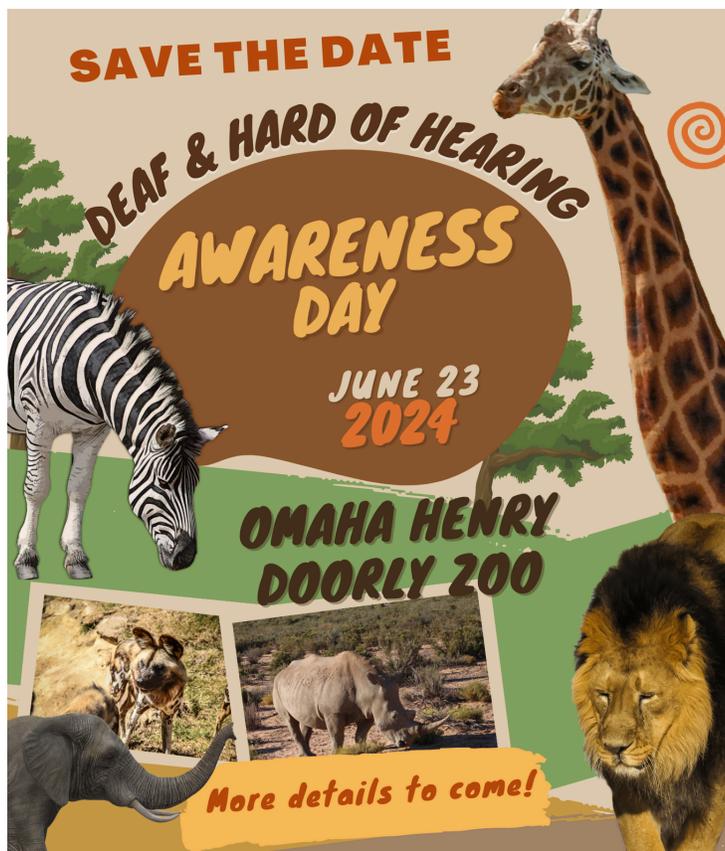


JUNE 2024: DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING DAY AT THE OMAHA ZOO!

We are very excited to be partnering with Omaha Henry Doorly Zoo this year on Deaf and Hard of Hearing Awareness Day! Our event will be held on Sunday, June 23rd from 9:00AM to 12:00PM in the Aquarium Center.

There will be a LIMITED amount of tickets for free entry into the zoo. These tickets will be on a first come, first serve basis and can only be given to residents of Nebraska.

During this fun, family friendly event, we will be collaborating with multiple stakeholders and agencies around Nebraska who work with children and families who are deaf, deafblind or hard of hearing. There will be activities, presentations, and door prizes! Stay tuned for more information as we get closer to June!



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THE E-COMMUNICATOR

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

Jim Pillen
Governor

Updated Eligibility Criteria for Communication Access Fund

A VLOG with this message in American Sign Language can be found on our agency YouTube channel.

Commission Members

- Frances Beurivage
Lincoln
- Jonathan Scherling
Omaha
- Peggy Williams
Lincoln
- Vali Hitz
Raymond
- Sandra Shaw
Seward
- Diane Schutt
Fairbury
- Brooke Fitzpatrick
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- Candice Arteaga
Greenwood

In April 2024, Gov. Jim Pillen approved LB1412: A bill to change appropriations for operation of federal funds allocated to the State of Nebraska from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021.

Included in LB1412 were updated eligibility criteria for the federal funding NCDHH received through ARPA. The updated criteria include reimbursement for communication access support involving in-person or virtual interpreting and communication access that includes auxiliary aids and services as defined with the Americans with Disabilities Act, for both rural and urban areas.

The program, previously known as the *Rural Communication Access Fund*, has now expanded the service area allowing communication access reimbursements to all of Nebraska's rural and urban areas – including the Lincoln and Omaha metro areas. Due to this expansion, the program will be referred to as the Nebraska Communication Access Fund.

A full guide, reimbursement forms, FAQ and more can be found on our agency website. Criteria for the Legal Communication Access Fund remains unchanged.

All questions, please contact NCDHH at 402-471-3593 or ncdhh@nebraska.gov.

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Rejoicing Our NCDHH Teammates!

Kim Davis, Lead Advocacy Specialist - Lincoln

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I want to take the opportunity to celebrate the heart of our agency and its dynamite teammates that drives this agency forward. Our agency teammates are the bustling hive of various activities that characterizes our agency's programs and services. Their dedication behind the scenes, tirelessly work to ensure that our mission, vision, and goals are fulfilled, and the requests of our community in various locations of Nebraska are met. You will find our teammates providing presentations or training,

outreach activities, one-on-one or group meetings, advocacy services, and assisting individuals or entities with our available programs. Our teammates' passion, commitment, and resilience are the driving force behind our agency's success. Whether you are an individual who is Deaf, DeafBlind or Hard of Hearing or one that either lives, works, serves, or socializes with this population, our team seeks to collaborate with you or your group to make a positive impact and build a brighter future for our state and its communities. If I could steal a moment of your time, it would be wonderful if you reach out and rejoice our teammates along with me!



SUSAN WHITAKER, FROM OUR SCOTTSBLUFF REGIONAL AREA OFFICE, CO-HOSTING A DISABILITIES DISASTER PREPAREDNESS WORKSHOP.



JEREMY DAFFERN, FROM OUR OMAHA REGIONAL AREA OFFICE, SPEARHEADING THE PUBLIC SAFETY DAY EVENT.



KATHY SCUSA, FROM OUR NORTH PLATTE REGIONAL AREA OFFICE, DOING AN INTERVIEW AT A RADIO STATION.



KATIA CASTRO, FROM OUR LINCOLN REGIONAL AREA OFFICE, DOING OUTREACH AT A REGIONAL HEALTH FAIR EVENT.



AARON ROTHENBERGER, FROM OUR KEARNEY REGIONAL AREA OFFICE, NETWORKING AND PRESENTING AT A REGIONAL SENIOR CENTER.



ASHLEY WULF, FROM OUR STATEWIDE REGIONAL OFFICE, DOING AN ASL STORYTELLING ACTIVITY FOR A GROUP INVOLVING YOUTHS AND FAMILIES.

Summer Camps for Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Ashley Wulf, Youth and Family Advocacy Specialist - Statewide
ashley.wulf@nebraska.gov



Summer is coming up! I am sure your kids are looking forward to their summer break from school. If you are planning to send your child/ren to a camp- that is a great idea! There are great benefits to sending your child/ren to a deaf and

hard-of-hearing camp. These camps can improve their self-esteem and self-confidence, while reducing feelings of isolation and help them feel connected with their peers. There are also family immersion camps for entire families during summer too! The purpose of a family immersion camp is to get families who have deaf and hard-of-hearing child/ren together and learn more about each other and learn more about deaf and hard of hearing culture. In the chart below I have included several summer camp and family immersion camp options, both in Nebraska as well as out-of-state camps that allow nonresidents to join.

Local Deaf & Hard of Hearing Camps

Camp	Location	Dates	Link	Offer Scholarship
Explorers <u>Hobbytown</u>	Iowa School for the Deaf	June 16-21, 2024		N/A
Weekenders Chef It!	Iowa School for the Deaf	July 11-14, 2024		N/A
Iowa Baseball Camp for the Deaf	Johnston Little League 7501 NW 54th Ave, Johnston, IA 50131	June 24-28, 2024	https://iowadeafbaseball.com/	N/A
Camp UBU	Lake Poinsett, Arlington, South Dakota	June 23-28, 2024	www.campubu.com	N/A
Camp Anderson at Fort Robinson	Crawford, NE	July 14-19, 2024		N/A
Sign Camp	Fremont, NE	July 27 th , 2024		N/A

Family Immersion Camps

Camp	Location	Dates	Link	Offer Scholarship
Listen CI Camp: Families Sharing Success	YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park, Colorado	June 27-30, 2024 (5 th grade to high school age) July 25-28, 2024 (3 years old to 4 th grade)	https://www.listenfoundation.org/	Yes
<u>CueSign</u> Camp	Gallaudet University, 800 Florida Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20002	July 7-11, 2024	https://www.cuesign.org/	N/A
Holley Institute	<u>Carls</u> Family Village, 1142 <u>DeSales</u> Dr., Brooklyn, Michigan 49230	June 30-July 5, 2024 July 7-12, 2024 July 14-19, 2024	https://www.holleyfv.org/family-week	Yes
Lions Bear Lake Deaf and Hard of Hearing Family Camp	Lapeer, MI	June 28-30, 2024	https://www.bearlakecamp.org/index.php/summer-camps	N/A
Montana Family ASL: Signing Weekend in Missoula	Missoula, MT	August 8-11, 2024	www.montanafamilyASL.org	N/A
Apache Creek Sign Language Camp	Apache Creek, NM	July 1-6, 2024	http://www.apachecreeknm.com/	N/A
Camp Mark Seven: ASL and Deaf Culture Immersion Week	Old Forge, NY	June 23-29, 2024	https://www.campmark7.org/programs/3	N/A
Family Camp	Ellensburg, WA	May 3-5, 2024	https://portal.laserfiche.com/19356/forms/famcamp2024	N/A

Summer Camps for Deaf and Hard of Hearing

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Deaf & Hard of Hearing Camps

Camp	Location	Dates	Link	Offer Scholarship
Camp Abilities Tucson	Arizona State School for the Deaf Tucson, AZ	June 2-8, 2024	https://www.campabilitiestucson.org/	Yes
Deafquake : 8 th grade to 12 th grade	Cook Springs, Alabama	July 21-26, 2024	https://www.deafquake.org/camp-info	N/A
ASD "Hands on Learning" Summer Camp	Arkansas School for the Deaf	June 3-7, 2024, June 10-14, 2024		Yes
Lions Wilderness Camp for Deaf Children	Wrightwood (South at Teresita Pines) and Nevada City(North at Ross Relles)	July 7-13, 2024 (South) July 28-Aug 3, 2024 (North)	https://lionswildcamp.org/	Yes
Camp Grizzly (CODA)	Camp Ronald McDonald at Eagle Lake, Gallatin Rd, Susanville, CA 96130	July 21-27, 2024	https://campgrizzly.org/	Yes
Deaf Camp	Bill Rice Ranch, CO	June 10-14, 2024 June 24-28, 2024 July 8-12, 2024	https://billriceranch.org/deaf-camp/	N/A
Camp Arts for All in Sign	Yorklyn , Delaware	August 5-9, 2024	https://www.ccart.org/arts-for-all	Yes
Financial Wizards	Gallaudet University, 800 Florida Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20002	June 15-22, 2024		N/A
GenCyber	Gallaudet University, 800 Florida Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20002	June 15-22, 2024		N/A
Immerse into ASL	Gallaudet University, 800 Florida Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20002	June 15-22, 2024 June 23-30, 2024		N/A
Bison Sports Camp	Gallaudet University, 800 Florida Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20002	June 23-30, 2024		N/A
Camp Discovery	Gallaudet University, 800 Florida Avenue NE, Washington, DC 20002	July 1-5, 2024 July 8-12, 2024 (4-12 years old) July 15-19, 2024 July 22-26, 2024 (4-10 years old)		Yes
Summer Quest 2024	Florida School for the Deaf and Blind	June 16-21, 2024 (ages 8-12) June 23-28, 2024 (ages 13-17)	https://www.fsdhk12.org/summer-programs	N/A
Camp Julienna	LaGrange, Georgia	July 14 - 19, 2024	www.GCDHH.org/campjulienna	N/A
Signs of Fun Summer Camp	"Pahoa Parks and Recreation" 15-3022 Kauhale St , Pāhoa , HI 96778	July 22-26, 2024	https://www.signsoffuncamp.org/hawaii	No

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Deaf & Hard of Hearing Camps

Camp 1839	Illinois School for the Deaf	June 25-29, 2024		N/A
SIUE Camp Launch	Edwardsville, IL	July 8-11, 2024	https://www.siu.edu/access/deaf-services/CampLaunch	N/A
Stan Mikita Hockey School for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	Bensenville, IL	June 8-15, 2024	https://ahiha.org/programs/annual-hockey-school/	N/A
Indiana Deaf Camp	Camp Mack, Milford, IN	June 23-28, 2024	http://indeafcamps.org/camp/	Yes
Camp <u>Dirigo</u>	Rome, ME	Aug. 19-25, 2024	https://pinetreesociety.org/camp-home/pinetreecamp/dirigo-experience/	Yes
Bridging Hands Camp	Camp <u>Manidokian</u> , Knoxville, MD	June 30 to July 6, 2024	https://www.bhcamps.org/home	No
Frederick ASL Camp	Restoration Church, 7899 Opossumtown	May 18, 2024	https://frederickca.org/asl-camp	N/A
Deaf and ASL Camp	Camp <u>Manidokian</u> , Knoxville, MD	July 21-26, 2024	https://deafcampsinc.org/2024/01/17/2024-registration-opens-feb-1st/	Yes
Camp Chris Williams	Greenville, MI	Aug. 4-10, 2024	https://www.michdhh.org/camp-chris-williams.html	No
Asian KODA & Deaf Youth Summer Camp	Bass River State Forest, NJ	July 25-28, 2024	https://www.madanyc2002.org/event-details/koda	No
Apache Creek Deaf Camp	Apache Creek, NM	July 8-13, 2024	http://www.apachecreeknm.com/summer-2024.html	N/A
Camp Mark Seven-DEAF	Old Forge, NY	July 14-20, 2024 (Deaf Youth) June 30-July 12, 2024 (Deaf Teen)	www.campmark7.org	Yes
Tech Tigers	RIT	July 20-25, 2024	https://www.rit.edu/ntid/techtigers	Yes
Explore Your Future	RIT	July 6-11, 2024, July 13-18, 2024	https://www.rit.edu/ntid/EYF	Yes
Camp <u>Sertoma</u> for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children	Ellerbe, NC	July 28-Aug 2, 2024	https://campsertomaclub.org/register	Yes
Vineyard 2nd Generation Day camp	Fargo, ND	TBD	https://www.vineyard2ndgeneration.org/	No
Summer Camp	Garrison, ND	June 10-14, 2024	Linda Ehlers, Camp Director Linda.Ehlers@k12.nd.us	Yes
Youth Leadership Camp	Camp <u>Taloali</u> , 15934 Santiam Hwy SE, Stayton, OR 97383	June 27-July 22, 2024	https://youth.nad.org/ylic/	Yes
Camp <u>Taloali</u>	Camp <u>Taloali</u> , 15934 Santiam Hwy SE, Stayton, OR 97383	July 28 – Aug. 3, 2024 (Ages 12-15) Aug 4-10, 2024 (Ages 8-11)	https://www.taloali.org/summer-camp	Yes

Summer Camps for Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Ashley Wulf, Youth and Family Advocacy Specialist - Statewide
 ashley.wulf@nebraska.gov

Deaf & Hard of Hearing Camps

Camp Hero	Millville, PA	July 29- Aug 2, 2024	https://www.gocamphero.org/	Yes
Rhode Island Silent Camp	Charlestown, RI	Aug 9-11, 2024	https://rhodeislandsilentcamp.org/	N/A
Camp UBU	Lake Poinsett, Arlington, South Dakota	June 23-28, 2024	www.campubu.com	Yes
The Deaf Camp - Mini	Brentwood, TN	June 10-July 24, 2024, Mondays and Wednesdays, no camp week of July 4th	https://thedeafcamp.com/mini/	Yes
The Deaf Camp - Roots	Brentwood, TN	June 4- July 26, 2024, Monday through Fridays 8:30am-5:00pm	https://thedeafcamp.com/roots/	N/A
The Deaf Camp - Teen Summit	Brentwood, TN	June 4- July 26, 2024, Monday through Fridays 8:30am-5:00pm	https://thedeafcamp.com/teen-summit/	N/A
Camp Deaf	Brownwood, TX	June 17-21, 2024	http://www.campdeaf.com/	Yes
Signs of Fun	"Wilderness Presidential Resorts" 9220 Plank Road Spotsylvania, VA 22553"	June 24 -28, 2024	https://www.signsoffuncamp.org/virginia	No
CAMP LOUD & CLEAR	Holiday Lake 4-H Educational Center, VA	July 19-21, 2024	https://www.holidaylake4h.com/camp-loud-clear	Yes
Helen Keller National Center <u>DeafBlind</u> 28 th Annual Summer Program for Youth		July 22- Aug. 1, 2024	https://www.helenkeller.org/hknc/youth-programs/	



Katia Castro's Story: Growing up with Hearing Loss

Katia Castro, Advocacy Specialist - Lincoln
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My name is Katia Castro and I am 34 years of age. I was born in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. The doctor from Puerto Rico never diagnosed me with deafness. We moved to Rochester, NY at the age of 1. My hearing brother was born when I turned 2. At the age of 3, my parent took me to see the doctor to find out why I wasn't talking like my brother. Only to my parent's surprise, they found out I had severe to profound hearing loss. They provided my first hearing aids which I could hear for the first time. I learned my first Sign Language at Rochester School for the Deaf during that year. We moved back to Puerto Rico for a year, where Spanish became my first language.

At the age of 5, we moved to Ft. Riley, KS where my dad served the military. I went to Eisenhower Elementary school where I learned how to communicate in English and Sign Language. A big thank you to my Deaf Ed teacher, Mrs. Tolbert, who taught me so much in preparing myself for the real world. I took speech therapy to improve my speech and relied on sign language interpreters. I was put on a 2-year waitlist for a Service Dog from CARES, Inc. in Concordia, KS. I took a service dog training there to receive my first Hearing Assistance Service Dog, who is a Papillion, named Streaker. He alerted me with sounds such as doorbells, knocking, and alarm clocks. I attended Junction City Middle School with him. I had him for 5 years before he retired due to health issues. I attended three different high schools: Junction City High School, Chapman High School, and York High School. Every time I moved schools, it got harder for me to make friends. My family stopped learning sign language because I mostly relied on speech.

I attended a deaf event, Deaf Etiquette, where I met my amazing deaf mentor, Linsay Darnall Jr., who taught me so much about deaf culture, educating me about Video Relay Service as part of an effective mode of communication, which I have never heard of. He helps me believe that anything is possible. I was able to successfully navigate myself in an unaccommodating hearing world, knowing that there is no limit to what I can do.

I was one of ten deaf students to attend the 2008 Summer Academy at University of Washington for Advancing Deaf & Hard of Hearing in Computing to find my place in computer science, which was an amazing experience to learn more about this program and meeting other skilled Deaf/HH students. Later, I studied at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln for computer science. During my college years, I relied on TypeWell (Real-time Captioning Service) as my preferred mode of communication.

Katia Castro's Story: Growing up with Hearing Loss

Katia Castro, Advocacy Specialist - Lincoln
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I was 20 years of age when I moved back to York, NE to be close to my family, and changed my major to Business Administration after attending York College, graduating with a Business Administration degree in 2013. I moved to Lincoln, NE working various jobs. I worked as an Office Specialist for the State Unit on Aging for 7 years. Thanks to the State of Nebraska, they provided me with accommodation to include a sign language interpreter for any meeting upon request and Video Relay Services for any phone calls. I currently have two service dogs, Joey who is my Hearing Assistance, and Mina who provides support for PTSD. I have always dreamed of working with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community.

NCDHH has taught me that anything is possible, thanks to the resources that have been given to me and learning all about NCDHH. I look forward to being a wonderful advocate for those who need our service. Just know that there is no limit to what you can do. Please feel free to contact me any time at katia.castro@nebraska.gov.



Interview with Dr. Kim Andresen

Aaron Rothenberger, Advocacy Specialist - Kearney

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For our Spring Newsletter, I had the pleasure of interviewing Dr. Kim Andresen.

Tell us a little about yourself.

My first experience knowing someone who was hard of hearing was in sixth grade. She was born with profound hearing loss because her mother contracted rubella during pregnancy. She wore hearing aids and communicated with American Sign Language and oral speech. The school hosted monthly sign language club meetings and I became close friends with her through high school. I had a TTY at home to chat with her and observed what it was like for her to use other assistive technology at home and school. When it was time to declare a major for college, I selected Communication Disorders because I wanted to become an audiologist so that I could use my signing skills and fit technology to help all people with hearing loss make the best with the residual hearing they had left. I celebrate twenty years in private practice this year and still absolutely love this profession. I serve all ages in testing for both hearing and balance, fit hearing aids to all ages and serve the adult cochlear implant population at The Hearing Clinic in Grand Island.



What part of working with people with hearing loss matters most to you?

The most important part of working with people who have hearing loss is educating them on how the auditory and vestibular system work and what their test results mean in relation to their symptoms. It helps them understand what is going on with their body and empowers them to make the best decisions to improve their quality of life. I stress the importance of teaching good communication habits from the point of view for both the speaker and the listener. No matter what technology is available (and the last five years has been fantastic in the hearing aid world) I still am working with the body and brain the individual possesses. It is important for all people to have a hearing test at least once a decade of life until hearing loss is identified, then pursue hearing aid technology as soon as possible!

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

I have enjoyed speaking to many types of civic groups about hearing loss, hearing disorders and hearing technology. Some topics have been on children and hearing loss, women and hearing loss and noise protection and hearing loss. I have spoken to high school students and college students in the Communication Disorders major about the profession of audiology. Our Third City Sertoma club has helped procure classroom audio systems, personal FM systems, public hearing assistance and hearing loop systems in the Grand Island community. We want to do much more in providing access to hearing in public arenas for granting access to better hearing. I also enjoy fitting hearing aids sponsored by the Hear U, Lion's Club and Sertoma hearing aid banks of Nebraska to my patients.

Interview with Dr. Kim Andresen

Aaron Rothenberger, Advocacy Specialist - Kearney
aaron.rothenberger@nebraska.gov

What is something that hearing people don't know about hearing loss?

Hearing aids only work with the auditory system and brain at that present time. They stimulate the residual cochlear hair cells, the auditory nerve and auditory cortex that processes sound help slow down the hearing loss progression. This means keeping the brain engaged (even more important for the aging with generalized cognitive decline) and open opportunities to be more engaged with family and at social events. Those who do not hear become more physically and socially isolated, which is not healthy as it increases problems with depression and anxiety. Chronic hearing loss causes several similar emotional characteristics to those with chronic pain. It often changes the person's personality and once treated helps people feel more like themselves again. Do not wait until the hearing loss is "bad enough" to get help!

Get in Touch with NCDHH!



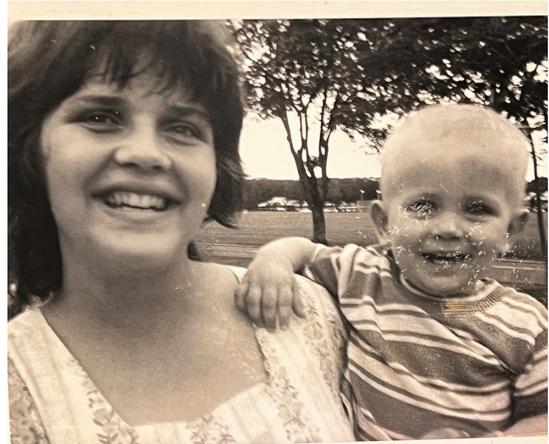


A Tribute to my Mother!

Jeremy Daffern, Advocacy Specialist - Omaha
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For Mother's Day coming up, I wanted to tell you all how lucky I have a wonderful mother out there who always looks out for me. I was raised that all mothers are supposed to be treated equally and be a housewife, but the perspective of that has changed dramatically when we face the cost of living increases and many times, both parents need to work. If you have deaf children, it can add another layer of stress if there are not enough daycare centers that use sign language to communicate.

This is for my Mother. I was born at a military base in the Philippines when my mother was at the young age of 18. My mother tended to my needs and doted on me. Around 18mos, my mother became concerned about my hearing as she noticed I did not respond when a door slammed shut after the wind blew. She called my name several times, no response. She took me to the audiologist on base and I was diagnosed as profoundly deaf. At that time, my mother had never met or known of a deaf person. She was advised to enroll me in an oral method school after we relocated to another military base in England. After a few school visits, Mother decided to enroll me at Kendall Demonstration Elementary School in



Washington, D.C. after the family once again relocated and returned to the United States. My mother had decided she wanted me to learn ASL and have access to visual communication and interactions with peers my age.

Being a Deaf child was not without communication or educational challenges for my mother. I am certain I gave her a hard time as was told by mother: one time I was standing outside with a garden hose running with water while she in the bathroom upstairs washing her hands and looked outside admiring the weather. She noticed me standing with a hose beside the gentleman sitting in the car reading the newspaper. I was looking at the hose and the gentleman back and forward. She realized I was going to do something mischievous to the gentleman. She yelled, "Jeremy!" but realized that I was deaf and ran downstairs to attempt to stop me from doing it. I put the hose in the driver's side window and the gentleman jumped out of the car, yelling "What the heck!" My mother apologized profusely to the gentleman, stating that I was deaf and couldn't hear my mother yelling.

The point of this story is that deaf and hard-of-hearing children are no different than hearing children, except they cannot hear. Have your deaf child meet a Deaf adult role model, consider the benefits of learning ASL and having access to communication. If you have more questions about Deaf role models, or learning more about the benefits of learning ASL as a family, please contact me at jeremy.daffern@nebraska.gov or Ashley Wulf, youth and family advocacy specialist at Ashley.wulf@nebraska.gov.

Hearing Loss & AI Technology

Susan Whitaker, Advocacy Specialist - Scottsbluff
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Artificial Intelligence or AI is a very hot topic in society right now. So how can AI benefit those with hearing loss. I have read several articles about this topic and wanted to share my findings with you.

What is AI? The definition that ChatGPT gives is “Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to the ability of computers or machines to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence. This includes abilities such as learning from experience, understanding and responding to language, recognizing patterns, solving problems and making decisions.”

Okay, now let's look at examples of how AI can benefit those with hearing loss. Below are examples of how AI can be of benefit:

- AI & Closed Captions
- AI & Sign Language
- AI & Voice Assistants
- AI & Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR)
- AI & Hearing Aids

How does AI work with closed captions? AI enabled captions work by converting speech to text and shows up on the screen in real-time. The use of AI in captioning is making it more accurate and precise. AI captioning uses automatic speech recognition (ASR) which eliminates the need to use manual captioning. This can now be done in real-time. Integrating AI in live, closed captioning will further enhance real-time captioning for live events and broadcasts.

Can AI help with the interpreter shortage in the near future? There is currently an AI powered translator that converts sign into a spoken or written language, and it can also then convert natural language into signs. With the use of a computer and a camera, the translator will recognize gestures and provide their translation in real time. A similar process happens when a hearing person is speaking. The system is “listening” to the speech and then transforms the words into sign.

AI generates human sounding voice to respond to the commands of voice assistants. This capability is used for text-to-speech functions. For example, text-to-speech can help facilitate communication when an interpreter is not available. New apps are utilizing AI to create software that can be trained to recognize, learn and predict speech. Voiceitt app can support spoken communication by recognizing, speaking, and displaying phrases in real-time, in-person conversations.

Hearing Loss & AI Technology

*Susan Whitaker, Advocacy Specialist - Scottsbluff
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Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) is used to translate speech-to-text for not only in-person conversations but also for phone conversations and video calls. Another way ASR is being used is to caption apps like TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. It can also be used to transcribe in-person conversations using various apps which display what is being said to facilitate clearer communication. ASR is used to provide real-time captions for phone calls thus making communication more accessible for people who are hard of hearing. Students who are deaf and hard of hearing also benefit from ASR, providing live captions of lectures. How it works: the teacher/professor uses a headset which generates captions that appear for the students. This technology allows students who are deaf or hard of hearing to receive the information at the same time as their hearing peers, allowing them to focus on taking in the information in real time.

AI can also help hearing aids and cochlear implants process sound, reduce the noise in loud environments and cutting down the background noise. Not only can it filter out noise, but it can also amplify sound in real time. When someone is talking too softly, the hearing aid will automatically amplify the sound. AI can also learn what sounds you like or don't like. It can automatically adjust your hearing aid to make those sounds clearer or softer. AI is also making huge changes in cochlear implants, with the ability to provide a richer and more nuanced auditory experience. The adaptive learning of AI ensures that performance continues to improve.

**AI technology is to be viewed as an enhancement to communication access, and may contain errors or inconsistencies. In many situations, AI should not be relied upon as a substitute for professional services, when available.*

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Hearing Services Dogs...Can You Qualify?

Kathy Scusa, Advocacy Specialist - North Platte

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How Does a Person Get a Hearing Service Dog? Hearing dogs are custom-trained to assist people who are deaf or hard of hearing by physically alerting their partner to many common sounds such as a smoke alarm, doorbell, alarm clock, telephone ring or child's cry. A hearing dog nudges or paws its partner alerting them to a sound and then leads them to its source.



Hearing dogs, for people who are non-verbal, can be taught to respond to American Sign Language. In addition to performing tasks related to differing hearing levels, a hearing dog can also be trained to assist with tasks related to other disorders or disabilities. A hearing dog can increase feelings of security and self-confidence by heightening awareness of environmental sounds.

Having a Hearing Service Dog is a huge commitment. Throughout the entire process: applying for the dog, the dog's training period, and throughout its service life, YOU are responsible for all aspects of the dog's well-being, care and continued training. Of course you will have agency support, especially through the initial training period. Never forget that this service dog may have up to \$70,000.00 invested in it. That's a lot of responsibility to take on!

The first step to getting any service dog is getting the permission of your physician. A doctor can prescribe a service dog to patients who have disabilities that are considered severe enough that they would have difficulty leading a normal life on their own. Once you have received permission from your doctor, you can begin the process of finding a service dog that will best meet your needs. It may take up to two years to find the right match for your needs, temperament, and lifestyle.

Hearing dogs are most often trained by agencies that specialize in providing service dogs to deaf individuals or people with diminished hearing levels. There are many organizations that train service animals. I have included links to a few of these organizations at the end of this article. An internet search will give you more options. Qualification requirements for these organizations are similar, and not all requirements always apply to every agency. The agencies I referenced are: Canine Companions, PAWS Hearing Dogs, The Sam Simon Foundation Assistance Dogs, International Hearing Dogs, Inc., and U.S. Service Animals. Look for an agency that provides animals in your area as not all agencies provide dogs to all 50 states.

Hearing Services Dogs...Can You Qualify?

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To qualify for a hearing dog:

- You must be 18 years or older.
- You must be d/Deaf or hard of hearing. An individual must have a minimum of moderate to severe bilateral (unaided) hearing loss or d/Deaf. (exceptions may be made on a case by case basis)
- You will complete a detailed online application and interviews, including information about a support person who would care for dog in an emergency (and background checks, if requested)
- You must have adequate vision to observe, intervene and manage a dog's behavior. (generally equivalent to DMV license requirements)
- If the dog is also trained for seizure tasks, an individual must have a minimum of one seizure per month.
- You must be physically and cognitively capable of participating in the training process, up to one hour a day.
- You must be committed to ongoing daily training with your dog and able to have your dog with you nearly always. (advance approval from your employer is required)
- You must be able to independently command and handle your Assistance Dog. You must be able to demonstrate the ability to safely and effectively control, manage and care for a dog.
- You must provide for the dog, financially, physically, emotionally, psychologically, and cognitively. You must prove the ability to provide a hearing dog's care, exercise, and daily training for many years.
- You must be in a stable home environment. You must live alone, with dependents, or with others who are d/Deaf or are profoundly and bilaterally hard of hearing (exceptions may be made on a case by case basis)
- You must actively improve their quality of life and pursue independence with your Assistance Dog.
- You may not have another dog in the home. (can have other animals)
- You may be required to live in an area serviced by an agency representative. (determined upon application)
- You will participate in a few months of online training and ungraded quizzes prior to being matched with a dog.
- You must be able to complete up to two weeks of training at the agency's training facility. This is at your own expense, including transportation and lodging.
- You may be required to attend on-going training classes and graduate support at the agency with the service dog chosen for you.

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