

THE COMMUNICATOR

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



NCDHH Full Board Approves Agency Strategic Plan

Mission Statement

We advocate to create opportunities by raising awareness through collaboration.

Vision Statement

Access for all

The NCDHH Full Board has finalized and voted on the agency's new strategic plan, including updated mission, vision and goals. The strategic planning process was extensive and wide spread throughout 2021, with input from community members, agencies and stakeholders. Feedback was sought through multiple different avenues, including voluntary surveys, VLOG submissions and virtual town hall meetings held throughout all of Nebraska.

The Full Board met to discuss the feedback and findings to work throughout what updated mission, vision and goals were best for the agency. Meetings were facilitated with the help of Nebraska Department of Administrative Services Shared Services Administrator, Serenity Kinney.

Strategic planning is important for an agency or organization to continue to define and update the vision and goals for the future. This process helps the Commission stay focused in our mission and improve continually in our advocacy performance.

"I'm glad we are updating the strategic planning on the mission, vision and goals for NCDHH," NCDHH Board Chair, Candice Arteaga, said. "We want to be more clear on those three things on what NCDHH is about. There's always room for improvements. Thank you for those who gave feedback and suggestions."

A full view and detail of the agency's updated mission, vision and goals can be found [on our website](#).

Lead On! Lead On!

John Wyvill, Executive Director



“Justin Dart was the Abraham Lincoln of the disability community, and no one could ever replace him. So many millions of Americans with disabilities never knew his name but they owe him so much. He was a champion who was at the forefront of disability rights for decades.”

—*Senator Tom Harkin*

Justin Dart Jr. passed away 20 years ago. He was best known as the father of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and has been referred to as the Martin Luther King of the disability civil rights movement. Mr. Dart was much humbler about his accomplishments and often referred to his vision of revolution of empowerment which he states was “a revolution that confronts and eliminates obsoleted thoughts and systems, that focuses the full power of science and free-enterprise democracy on the systematic empowerment of every person to live his or her God given potential.”



Justin Dart

He received several awards for his work and was one of the three people with disabilities on the podium when President Bush signed the Americans with Disabilities Act. Dart was quick to always point out the success was due to hundreds of advocates working together. After he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, Dart sent out replicas of the awards to disability advocates across the country, letting them all know that the award really belonged to them.

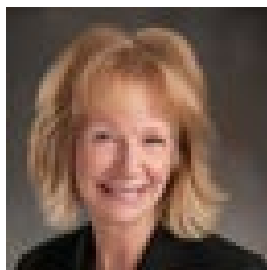
Twenty years since the passing of Justin Dart, we are still fighting for equal access in employment, health care, and the list goes on. The NCDHH Full Board updated the strategic plan for the agency, including the vision for our work for the next five years: Access for all. Our charge is simple working together all of us must:

Lead on! Lead On!



Community Spotlight: Dr. Carol Lomicky

Carol Lomicky's Hearing Loop Advocacy Journey, former NCDHH Board Member



My journey as a hearing loop advocate began some 10 years ago, although without having experienced hearing loss myself, I—like so many other hearing people—would have remained unaware of the particular challenges faced by individuals who suffer hearing loss. For years, I had functioned pretty well with one ear having experienced hearing loss from what the doctors attributed to Meniere's syndrome, which causes vertigo.

Ultimately, a labyrinthectomy (surgery to relieve the vertigo) eliminated the dizzy spells, but the surgery left me totally deaf in my right ear. Then, some years ago, I inexplicably experienced a sudden and profound loss of hearing in my "good" ear. A hearing aid helped, but I was only able to continue in my profession as a university professor with the assistance of transcribers, who typed students' questions and comments as I read them on a computer screen while conducting my classes. It got me through, but, frankly, it was clunky.

When I learned the labyrinthectomy did not preclude a cochlear implant, I jumped at the chance. That was in 2009, and I continue to relish in the sounds of a hearing world—a world that I thought had been lost to me forever. That being said, challenges remained, especially in large group venues (church services, film and performing arts venues, meetings) where understanding speech was particularly difficult.

I served for two terms on the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Board of Directors from 2010-2016, and at one of my first meetings the room had been set up with an induction hearing loop—a technology I'd never heard of. As instructed, I turned on the telecoil in both my assistive hearing devices, and I was amazed. It was as if someone was talking to me directly into my hearing processors. No annoying background noise to impede understanding, and the clarity of the spoken word was remarkable. I became a hearing loop advocate right then and there!

Someone once said, "If you build it, they will come." And build it (installing hearing loops) Kearney did! With the financial assistance of Kearney Sertoma, a non-profit that puts hearing at the top of its philanthropic list, public venues in Kearney began installing hearing loops. First, the World Theatre, then the Merryman Performing Arts Center, Kearney Community Theater, Peterson Senior Center, and on and on. Zion Lutheran Church was the first church to loop its sanctuary; others soon followed. When Prince of Peace Catholic Church installs its hearing loop sometime in 2022, it will bring the total number of looped churches in Kearney to 10. Indeed, Kearney is one of the most looped cities in the state outside of Lincoln and Omaha.

It bears noting that that churches and other public venues have not been ignoring the plight of the hearing impaired. Many are equipped with FM assistive hearing technology, which delivers microphone sound to a user's ear using headphones or ear buds and a handheld receiver box. But most people with hearing loss say such systems really don't do the job. One reason: the one-size-fits-all technological approach is often incompatible with individual users' hearing needs. Not to mention the issues of dignity. FM systems require people to take the initiative to locate, check out, wear, and return special equipment—oftentimes conspicuous headphones.

Community Spotlight: Dr. Carol Lomicky *continued*

Carol Lomicky's Hearing Loop Advocacy Journey, former NCDHH Board Member

A hearing loop (a copper wire that is configured throughout a room that transmits sound through an electromagnetic field to a person's hearing aid or cochlear implant) is the only assistive listening technology that simply requires the push of a button to activate the telecoil. And thus far Bluetooth technology works best on an individual basis and not in large group settings.

I may have started the loop initiative in the Kearney area, but it couldn't have flourished here without the advocacy of so many people who suffer hearing loss, as well as their family members and friends. As more individuals experienced hearing in a looped setting, they increasingly pushed for more places to follow suit.

But there's still work to be done. Not all churches are looped, and not one funeral home in the region has installed a loop. Moreover, the education piece is sorely missing. So many people with hearing loss aren't advised about hearing loops; they don't know what a telecoil is or even if their hearing aid has one. Hearing health care providers could do much more on that front when advising their patients, and places that have loops installed need to do a better job of informing their patrons about the loop and how it works.

In 2017, I received the *Kearney Hub* Medical Health Freedom Award for my hearing loop advocacy. And I remain hopeful still that within the Central Nebraska region—church by church, public facility by public facility, and, yes, business by business—caring people and institutions lead by example by continuing to provide hearing accessibility with induction loop technology.

If you have questions or would like more information about hearing loop information, please reach out to NCDHH at ncdhh@nebraska.gov or 402-471-3593.

***Follow NCDHH on Social Media for Information, Updates,
Community Events, Advocacy Tips, and More!***



What's New in 2022?

Sharon Sinkler, Interpreter Program Coordinator



Happy New Year! I hope that you were able to carve some time out for yourself during the holiday season. With a new year, comes new transformations within our agency. The NCDHH Full Board has finalized our strategic plan which includes a new mission and vision statement, as well as goals to guide our work. Check it out on our website, ncdhh.nebraska.gov. There are also several new policies and procedures that have been implemented.

- On April 9, 2021, NCDHH announced that we would no longer be a RID CMP/ACET sponsor effective July 1, 2021.
- On July 1, 2021, a new policy was implemented stating that licensed interpreters are now required to keep track of their own Continuing Education Units (CEUs) and/or Certificates of Attendance during their two-year licensing cycle.
- On September 10, 2021, the full board voted to remove contact information for Nebraska licensed sign language interpreters from our website. **Effective January 1, 2022**, NCDHH now lists all Nebraska licensed interpreter's names, license numbers, license type, date of license issuance and expiration on our website. Anyone wanting to find a sign language interpreter will be directed to the list of Interpreter Referral Agencies located on our website.
- On December 10th, 2021, the full board adopted two internal agency policies.
 - A. In order to be listed as an Interpreter Referral Agency on the NCDHH website, you must attest to the following criteria:
 1. Your business entity must be registered with a state as such¹; and
 2. You will follow an ethical business model and employ practices consistent with interpreter referral agencies; and
 3. You will have a mechanism in place to be able to be contacted 24/7
(¹ In Nebraska, the Secretary of State's office has information regarding starting a business: <https://sos.nebraska.gov/business-services/new-business-information>. It is highly recommended that you seek legal, tax and financial advice from professionals before starting a business.)
 - B. A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) has been developed and will be used to dismiss informal complaints that are deemed without merit.
 1. Investigator designee presents all informal complaints to the IRB Chairperson and Vice Chairperson.
 2. If the IRB Chairperson and Vice Chairperson deem that the informal complaint has merit, it will go forward and a formal investigation will be conducted.
 3. If the IRB Chairperson and Vice Chairperson deem that the informal complaint is without merit, the complaint will be dismissed.
 4. Notice of the dismissal order must be provided to the complaining witness in writing within ten business days.
 5. Within ten business days of the date of the dismissal letter, the complaining witness may file a written notice of appeal of the dismissal order with the NCDHH Executive Director.
 6. Upon receipt of the notice of appeal by the NCDHH Executive Director, the complaining witness's request for reinstatement of the informal complaint shall be heard by the NCDHH Full Board at their next regularly scheduled meeting.
 7. If the NCDHH Full Board agrees with the complaining witness's request, the informal complaint process will resume.

As always, we at NCDHH appreciate everything you do to advocate for and support our Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing communities. If you have any questions, please reach out to me at Sharon.sinkler@nebraska.gov. Wishing you a healthy, happy new year in 2022!

NCDHH Issues Deaf Interpreter (Intermediary) Licenses

The Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) has issued Intermediary Licenses to three of our staff members who recently completed Deaf Interpreter (Intermediary) training and testing. An Intermediary or Deaf Interpreter (DI) is an individual who is deaf or hard of hearing who has demonstrated knowledge and understanding of interpreting, deafness, the Deaf community, and Deaf culture. Holders of a Nebraska intermediary license have specialized training and experience in use of gestures to enhance communication and possess native or near-native fluency in American Sign Language (ASL).

NCDHH team members Ashley Wulf (Omaha – Advocacy Specialist), Cody McEvoy (Omaha – Behavioral Health Coordinator) and Kim Davis (Lincoln – Advocacy Specialist) each received their Intermediary licenses.

Deaf interpreters will usually work in tandem with a hearing licensed ASL interpreter, working in situations where linguistic and cultural differences are present. Situations might include communicating with deaf individuals with limited communication skills or by using tactile signing with DeafBlind individuals.

“The Deaf-Hearing interpreter team ensures that the spoken language message reaches the Deaf consumer in a language or communication form that he or she can understand, and that the Deaf consumer’s message is conveyed successfully,” NCDHH Interpreter Program Coordinator, Sharon Sinkler, said. “Having a Deaf interpreter has its advantages as they present the message through fluency and fluidity in American Sign Language.”

More information can be found on deaf interpreters on our [website](#).



Ashley Wulf, Cody McEvoy, Kim Davis

Community Resources

Abby Giambattista, Advocacy Specialist/Staff Interpreter - Lincoln



In the past two years, we all have learned the value of community more than ever. So, with this in mind below are some groups and associations that have provided community and support for many members of Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities. Deaf and Hard of Hearing professionals as well as community members are stepping up all over to spread awareness and aid. It's easy to feel isolated or to not know what steps to take, but there are slews of wonderful organizations to help ease those feelings and provide support. Here are some resources at national, state, and local levels:

National:

National Association of the Deaf

- Website: <https://www.nad.org/>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/NAD1880>

Association of Late Deafened Adults

- Website: <https://alda.org/>

Deaf Counseling Center

- Website: <https://deafcounseling.com/>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/deafcounseling>

Hearing Loss Association of America

- Website: <https://www.hearingloss.org/>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/HearingLossAssociation>

State-wide:

Nebraska Association of the Deaf

- Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/441167219316137/>

iCanConnect – Nebraska

- Website: <http://www.icanconnect.org/how-to-apply/nebraska>

Omaha:

Omaha Association of the Deaf

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/61806777852/>

Hands and Voices

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/handsandvoicesne/>

Boystown

- Website: <https://www.boystownhospital.org/services/center-for-childhood-deafness-language-learning>

Scottsbluff:

Panhandle Hearing Loss Support group – Susan Whitaker (NCDHH) Contact: susan.whitaker@nebraska.gov

Misc.

Denver Tinnitus Support Group – Richard Marr Contact: richard.marr@ccd.edu

Lincoln:

Lincoln Deaf Club

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/837805092918153/about>

While this is not a comprehensive list of everything out there, it is a glimpse into what kind of organizations are available. If you are curious about any other resources or want to get connected with a group you do not see here, please feel free to give us a call at the Commission. We are happy to explore options with you. You can reach me directly at Abigail.Giambattista@nebraska.gov.

Panhandle Happenings

Susan Whitaker, Advocacy Specialist - Scottsbluff



Tinnitus affects approximately 30% of people who have hearing loss. This can be an aspect of hearing loss that is extremely difficult to live with. The sounds a person hears are not from external noises but are from problems with the cochlea (which receives sound) or possibly problems with a joint in the jaw. It can also be caused by issues with how the brain processes sound.

So what are some of the signs and symptoms of tinnitus? The symptoms vary among individuals. Some people experience noise in the ear like ringing, roaring, buzzing, hissing or humming. Others may hear a clicking sound. Sometimes these sounds can become so loud that it becomes hard to concentrate or hear other sounds. Tinnitus can be a constant sound or it can come and go. Either way it can interfere with one's daily life.

When you visit with the doctor about the sound you are hearing, do your best to describe it. This can possibly help the doctor find the cause of your tinnitus. For example: a clicking sound can suggest muscles contracting in and around your ear; pulsing, rushing and humming can be caused by blood vessels; low-pitched ringing can indicate blockages in your ear canal, Meniere's disease or otosclerosis; high-pitched ringing, the most common sound, has likely causes of loud noise exposure, hearing loss or medications.

Most often tinnitus can't be cured. This leaves the individual searching for ways to cope with it. Here are some suggestions that may make the noise less noticeable. Noise suppression, using white noise machines or masking devices to help "mask" the sound of the tinnitus. Fans, humidifiers and air conditioners can have the same affect. Counseling is another way to help someone cope with tinnitus. Changing how you feel about your symptoms can help in coping. Some types of behavioral treatments include Tinnitus Retraining Therapy (TRT) and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). With TRT you use sound masking and counseling combined. The counselor has you wear a device in your ear to mask your symptoms while they conduct the counseling session. Using CBT is simply learning coping techniques to make your symptoms less noticeable. It also helps with other issues you may be experiencing in your life that cause an increase tinnitus, like anxiety and stress.

Some people report making specific life adjustments can help make symptoms less bothersome. Limit alcohol, caffeine and nicotine. These substances can increase blood flow and make your tinnitus worse. Lessen the amount of sugar you consume. Suggestions for alternative treatment that have worked for some are acupuncture, Ginko Biloba, Melatonin and Zinc supplements.

Finding a tinnitus support group is a great way to cope with you tinnitus. Get involved with a group of other tinnitus sufferers. Not only is it good therapy to share your struggles with others who understand, but you may find a coping skill you have not tried before. The experience of others can help you with being able to handle your symptoms. Stress management is also very important in making the symptoms less. Anxiety and stress can cause the noise to increase. Being part of a support group can help you release your stress and anxiety.

Researchers are continually working to find other treatments for tinnitus. A possible treatment in the future is the use of magnetic or electrical stimulation of the brain. One example is Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS). Another possible future treatment is deep brain stimulation. There are clinical trials being conducted using these treatments. Maybe someday in the future these treatments will significantly help those who suffer with tinnitus.

If you or someone you know is experience tinnitus or you would like more information, please contact me at susan.whitaker@nebraska.gov.

Article source: Tinnitus (n.d.) Retrieved from Mayo Clinic: www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/tinnitus/symptoms-causes/syc20350156

Conversations about Language Deprivation

Ashley Wulf, Advocacy Specialist - Omaha



There is a topic that people have been avoiding talking about and that is language deprivation. For some of those who don't know what language deprivation, it means when a child isn't exposed to any language and will struggle getting language acquisition once they are older. This is the most common issues for children who are deaf and hard of hearing as they tend to struggle with spoken English and/or writing English.

I came across this article from the website "The Hearing Journal" called "The Importance of Signed Languages for Deaf Children and Their Families" by Joseph J. Murray, Wyatt C. Hall, and Kristin Snoddon. I will include the link on bottom for you if you are interested to read it.

In the article they explain that language development has become a concern to infants that have any form of hearing loss if they aren't expose to language early enough. This includes infant/children that are deaf and hard of hearing utilizing hearing technology. Many times, families aren't aware of sign language and a lack of resources on where they can learn them, or doctors and audiologists do not always provide all the options or resources about sign language. Children who are deaf and hard of hearing who wear hearing aids or cochlear implants that have been exposed to sign language as an infant/early age can also develop a good spoken English and/or written English.

It is up to the parent and child to make the decision on how they want to expose language to their child. It is important for the child to be exposed to visual language. There are several different kinds of sign languages: you can learn American Sign Language (ASL), Pidgin Signed English (PSE), and Signing Exact English (SEE).

For any parent who is interested in learning sign language the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) provides ASL word of the week on our Facebook. Also, NCDHH does provide a sign language book and DVD through our media loan library. If you have more questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at ashley.wulf@nebraska.gov.

"The Hearing Journal"

https://journals.lww.com/thehearingjournal/fulltext/2020/03000/the_importance_of_signed_languages_for_deaf.6.aspx



Don't forget to check out our YouTube channel. See updates and VLOGs of our team with what is happening around the office and around Nebraska!
YouTube Channel: *Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing*

A Healthy Diet Can Affect Your Hearing... For the Better!

Kathy Scusa, Advocacy Specialist – North Platte



Hearing loss affects millions of Americans. Its impact is often downplayed in our society but living with hearing loss can be frustrating and affect your quality of life in unexpected ways. Everyday activities—listening to the TV, making phone calls, chatting with friends—suddenly become exhausting as you spend more and more time trying to figure out what people are saying.

Many people ask the question, "Is there a cure, or a way to quickly and easily restore or repair hearing levels to normal?"

The reality is: Fully fixing or restoring hearing loss is only possible in very limited cases. Most adults lose their hearing slowly, over time, due to aging and noise exposure. The delicate hair cells in the ear, which detect sound, are permanently degraded or damaged. For these people, there is no cure. The reality is that there is no drug, natural remedy (like essential oil or CBD oil), or alternative remedy (like acupuncture) that will restore hearing to a pre-damage hearing level. "A Quick Fix" to cure hearing loss simply does not exist. In most cases, hearing aids will be the recommended treatment. If you suspect you have hearing loss, contact your local hearing aid provider or audiologist for a test.

There is some good news regarding damage prevention relating to your ears. What you put into your body has a direct effect on your health and well-being. Nutrients, such as vitamins and minerals, are required to keep your body healthy and functioning properly. With that being said, one of the ways you can protect your ears is to eat more of the foods that may improve hearing. While nothing is a miracle cure, eating right benefits your ears, as well as your body, and can help keep your ears healthy. Think of it as another form of hearing protection, outside of wearing noise-canceling headphones or earplugs. If you want to help keep your body and your ears healthy, eat more of the foods that may improve hearing!

Magnesium: Magnesium can help maintain nerve function and help protect the hair cells in the inner ear when exposed to loud noises. Magnesium can also help improve blood flow, while a lack of it can cause oxygen deprivation. So to help keep your ears healthy, and to help guard against hearing loss (especially noise-induced), eat more of these magnesium-rich foods: ***Dark chocolate, pumpkin seeds, flax seeds, nuts (particularly Brazil nuts, cashews, and almonds), whole grains, avocados, salmon, legumes, kale, spinach, and bananas.***

Potassium: It is believed that a drop in the levels of fluid in the inner ear can contribute to hearing loss, but getting enough potassium can help regulate the fluid in the body. As you age, your potassium levels are more likely to drop, so make sure you get enough potassium-rich foods in your diet: ***Cucumbers, mushrooms, sweet potatoes, potatoes, eggs, bananas, apricots, cantaloupe, oranges, peas, avocados, spinach, coconut, watermelon, and edamame.***

Folate: Your circulation plays a crucial role in your ears' health, and folate can help increase circulation in the body. Proper circulation helps keep the inner ear's hair cells healthy, so it's understandable that getting enough folate in your diet can help prevent hearing loss. Up your folate intake by eating these folate-rich foods: ***Brussels sprouts, kale, spinach, broccoli, peas, kidney beans, chickpeas, liver, fortified breakfast cereals, whole grains, lemons, melons, bananas, eggs, peanuts, and sunflower seeds.***

A Healthy Diet Can Affect Your Hearing... For the Better! *continued*

Kathy Scusa, Advocacy Specialist – North Platte

Zinc: Believed to help with cell growth, zinc can also help boost the immune system, helping to ward off ear infections. Eating enough zinc has also been linked to a lowered chance of developing tinnitus and presbycusis. To help boost your immune system and your ability to heal, add more of these zinc-rich foods into your diet: **Dark chocolate, oatmeal, yogurt, beans, lentils, peanuts, cashews, oysters, lobster, crab, pork, beef, dark meat chicken, mushrooms, kale, spinach, garlic, and pumpkin seeds.**


Omega-3s: Omega-3s are often overlooked, but getting enough fatty acids in your diet can help keep your ears functioning properly as you age. Omega-3 fatty acids can help delay or prevent age-related hearing loss, so make sure you add more of the following foods to your plate: **Walnuts, flax seeds, chia seeds, fortified eggs, fortified milk, hemp seeds, purslane, Brussels sprouts, spinach, sardines, tuna, mackerel, herring, oysters, and salmon.**

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.

Resources:

<https://www.healthyhearing.com/report/52790-Can-you-restore-your-lost-hearing>

<https://thenewyorkhearingcenter.com/2020/11/foods-that-improve-hearing/>





Deaf & Hard of Hearing Awareness Day

Lincoln Children's Zoo

Sunday, April 24 2022 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Join us for fun activities and events throughout the day!
More details to come...



Using Interpreters Through Cyberspace

Kim Davis, Advocacy Specialist – Lincoln



Using sign language interpreters through cyberspace, namely through high-speed internet-based connection, has rapidly become an alternative method in place of physically presented onsite interpreters. This particular method is known as Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) services, which means, as defined in the Americans with Disabilities Act, “an interpreting service that uses video conference technology over dedicated lines or wireless

technology offering high-speed, wide-bandwidth video connection that delivers high-quality video images.”

Many VRI services are offered nationwide, which makes it possible to secure an interpreter when; such examples, but not limiting to, onsite interpreting services cannot be secured due to scheduling issues or up-to-the-moment’s notice, due to a lack of qualified interpreters in one’s area or based on an economical service fee. Or through many virtual video platforms such as Zoom, Go-to-Meeting, WebEx, Microsoft Team Meeting, and a host of other names that are rapidly forming due to the current COVID-19 pandemic.

The Federal Department of Justice mandates that a public accommodation that chooses to utilize qualified interpreters via VRI shall ensure that it provides: (1) *Real-time, full-motion video and audio over a dedicated high-speed, wide-bandwidth video connection or wireless connection that delivers high-quality video images that do not produce lags, choppy, blurry, or grainy images, or irregular pauses in communication;* (2) *a sharply delineated image that is large enough to display the interpreter's face, arms, hands, and fingers, and the participating individual's face arms, hands, and fingers, regardless of his or her body position;* (3) *a clear audible transmission of voices;* and (4) *adequate training to users of the technology and other involved individuals so that they may quickly and efficiently set up and operate the VRI.*

Any individuals, including purchasers, who may be dissatisfied with the VRI service, whether it is the technical issues and/or the interpreter’s professional conduct or qualification, have the option to address the situation or file a complaint with the appropriate party or parties. Such party or parties to consider may be the administrator of the facility where VRI is being provided, the administrator of the VRI agency, the Nebraska Sign Language Interpreter Review Board, the National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), and/or the appropriate federal agencies.

Check out NCDHH’s website for a list of state licensed VRI Companies. There is also a list of Interpreter Referral Agencies who assist in arranging state licensed sign language interpreters for onsite or remote interpreting services. Additionally, any one of us NCDHH Advocacy Specialists will be happy to provide guidance, advocacy service, and referrals to federal and state statutes and regulations highlighted in this article.

For additional information: *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), www.ada.gov; Nebraska’s interpreter licensure procedures and how to find a sign language interpreter or file a licensure complaint, www.ncdhh.nebraska.gov. Feel free to contact me for other questions or concerns at kim.davis@nebraska.gov.*

Can Isolation and Coronavirus Affect Your Well-Being?

Jeremy Daffern, Advocacy Specialist – Omaha



Yes, it can impact your well-being and mental health! According to authors, R. Clair, M. Gordon, M. Kroon and et al (2021), the effects of isolation and restrictions of social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic does affect mental health. The need for physical distancing due to virus mitigation efforts has exacerbated the isolation felt by many adults. Many young adults and teenagers feel a need to socialize with their own peers. When viruses or anything that impacts a community restricts them from socializing, some may act out and fight back senselessly.

Many researchers and scientists believe that isolation and coronavirus has impacted well-being in the population and has affected the way they process their thinking and behaviors. In addition to the isolation, occurrences of divorce and domestic violence are high because parents had to stay home during the isolation and stressors started to build up, which triggered the violence in the household.

According to the Department of Homeland Security pamphlet (2021), there are some helpful activities to ensure you and your children feel safe and entertained...

- Reassure children that they are safe. Let them know it is okay if they feel upset. Share with them how you deal with your own stress so that they can learn from you how to cope with stress.
- Limiting exposure to news coverage of the pandemic, including social media. Children may misinterpret what they hear and can be frightened about something they do not understand. This is particularly important for parents.
- When limiting exposure is not possible (i.e. if school resumes virtually), conduct open dialogue with children about what they are hearing/seeing to encourage critical thinking skills and to aid them in constructing their own views about the pandemic and its effects. This is crucial to fostering open lines of communication and building resilience.
- Keep regular routines. For parents, if schools remain closed, create a schedule for learning activities and relaxing or fun activities.
- Both parents and teachers should be role models. Take breaks, get plenty of sleep, exercise, and eat well. Connect with friends and family members. Discuss these activities that you do yourself with children.
- Spend time with your child or your spouse in meaningful activities – reading together, exercising, playing board games, etc.
- Take a walk or go to a park with your family or your spouse.

As long as you and your peers keep your well-being and mental health in check and follow the CDC guidelines to be safe, we can beat this coronavirus pandemic and get back on track with our lives. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at Jeremy.daffern@nebraska.gov.

The Old Education Advocate

Jessica Larrison



As some of you may know January was my last month at NCDHH. As bittersweet as it is, there are memories and skills I have learned here from my coworkers, the community, and other stakeholders that I will take with me and never forget. From Monday morning meetings, to IEP meetings with families, there was a wide range of emotions felt every day. But to see the Commission grow alongside its community has been something that I will forever cherish.

I want to remind the stakeholders and my coworkers that they are making a difference for Nebraskans who are deaf and hard of hearing, and ones that will have lasting effects.

To the families, I saw so much passion, fire, and strength behind those tears and frustration. I saw parents/caregivers with love for equal access and a quality education for their children that brought warmth to my heart. I want to say thank you for three amazing years and how much I have enjoyed every second of my job working with each one of you, and to remember that everything we do is for the children and a better future. Keep up the good fight for an appropriate education and making changes that will better Nebraska.

My team member, Susan Whitaker, will be the point of contact for any education, IEP, classroom, or schooling questions. You may contact her at susan.whitaker@nebraska.gov.

Cody Bids Farewell

Cody McEvoy



For those who have missed the news either on social media or word of mouth/conversations: It is true, I am leaving the Commission to pursue work into mental health counseling. For those who have read my previous newsletters or follow my work through NCDHH, you can see my passion in mental health, particularly for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities. I will be heading over to work at Boystown Research Hospital.

The Commission has been a huge part of my last three years, just being able to contribute and enhance the mental health/behavioral health well being in the daily lives of our Deaf and Hard of Hearing Nebraskans.

My departure of NCDHH does not mean that I will not be around, I will still look forward to supporting NCDHH's annual events such as the Saltdogs game and the zoo event.

NCDHH has posted the job for anyone interested in applying to replace me as the new Behavioral Health Coordinator. You may view the job listing [here](#).

My last words really is to all the stakeholders and organizations that I've had the pleasure of working with to collaborate to see what we can do to increase accessibility and awareness in working with our Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals to increase equity for all!

"Farewell, it's not a goodbye, but a see you around"

Editorial note: The job listed was posted on 1/22/22 and closes on 2/10/22

NCDHH

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