

THE COMMUNICATOR

NEBRASKA COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER



NCDHH Committee & Board Openings: We Need You!

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead



Our immediate past president, Jeremy Fitzpatrick used this quote often when describing the work of NCDHH and those that serve on the various boards. In order to effectively collaborate with all of our stakeholders we need support and work of volunteers to serve on our various boards. As Robert Kennedy once said even the smallest acts of public service represents a “tiny ripple of hope,” and that those ripples can eventually “build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance”.

We have a few advisory board that are looking for volunteers to accept the call to public service to make a positive impact on our community. Please take time to review these board vacancies opportunities and consider serving. We need your support and participation.

Full Commission Board

The Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing was established by the State Legislature in 1979. The Commission consists of nine members who are appointed by the Governor subject to approval by the Legislature. Statute 71-4720 requires that a majority of the commission members who are deaf or hard of hearing shall be able to express themselves through sign language. The commission members shall include three deaf persons, three hard of hearing persons and three persons who have an interest in and knowledge of deafness and hearing loss issues. The Commission was created to improve the quality and coordination of existing services for deaf and hard of hearing people and development of new services when necessary.

2021 Vacancies: A Hard of Hearing representative that has some proficiency in ASL

2022 Vacancies: Openings in January of 2022 include- (2) Professional representatives: an individual with a knowledge of deafness and hearing loss issues

How to Apply: <https://governor.nebraska.gov/board-comm-req>

Continued on next page

We Need You!

John Wyvill, Executive Director

Telecommunication Relay Services Advisory Committee:

To provide guidance for the development, monitoring, and promotion of state-wide telecommunications relay and equipment distribution program services in Nebraska. Annually discuss the surcharge and rules and regulations established by the Public Service Commission. The Committee was created in 1990. The Committee consists seven people: two deaf or hard of hearing people, one speech-impediment person, and one person represents the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, one person represents the public.

Vacancies: A representative from the telephone industry, a deaf representative, and an individual with a speech impairment

How to Apply:

https://ncdhh.nebraska.gov/sites/ncdhh.nebraska.gov/files/doc/trs_application3.28.14.pdf

Nebraska Sign Language Interpreter Review Board (IRB)

The Board was created in 2002 to develop guidelines and regulations for the licensing of sign language interpreters. The Board consists of eight people: one Director of Health and Human Services or his/her designee; one Director of the Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing or his/her designee; two Deaf or Hard of Hearing people; two qualified interpreters who must be licensed interpreters within one-year of their appointment; and 2 members representing local government

Vacancies: Interpreter representative, and a deaf or hard of hearing representative

How to Apply: <https://ncdhh.nebraska.gov/meet-the-team/sl-interpreter-review-board>

2021 STRATEGIC PLAN PROCESS

Success Through Collaboration



Virtual Town Hall Meeting **November / December 2020**

- Organize virtual Town Hall Meetings with Q&A from community

Survey **January / February 2021**

- NCDHH team to organize survey to distribute to community & stakeholders
- Collect Survey Feedback - Present at March Full Commission Board Meeting

Develop Town Hall Meetings **April / May 2021**

- Plan & conduct Town Hall Meetings throughout Nebraska including Lincoln, Omaha, central Nebraska - Grand Island/Kearney area, and Western Nebraska
- Collect Town Hall Meeting Feedback - Present at June Full Commission Board Meeting

Review **Summer 2021**

- Review & analyze collective feedback
- Review Goals / Missions / Values
- Adapt & draft updated Goals / Missions / Values
- Present draft at September Full Commission Board Meeting

Panhandle Happenings: *Heartbreak in the Valley*

Susan Whitaker, Advocacy Specialist - Scottsbluff



The Panhandle has been abuzz with an advocacy case involving a young wrestler from Gering High School who is deaf. Paul Ruff has been deaf since birth and got a cochlear implant when he was two years old. His parents chose to raise Paul orally. He has clear speech and does very well reading lips and communicating with his implant on. Many people in our local area did not know Paul was deaf. This fact was brought to light when effective communication was not provided to Paul on wrestling mat in the last match of his high school career. Paul has been wrestling since he was very young. When he wrestles he removes his implant so it doesn't hurt him or get broken during the match.

Without his implant he is profoundly deaf. Many panhandle referees have been involved with Paul in his wrestling matches. These refs are made aware that Paul is deaf prior to the match and they need to touch him when they blow the whistle, make sure they have eye contact with him so he can read their lips and other adjustments to ensure clear understanding.

The day of the state championship match, Paul had won several other matches to get himself into the championship match. During these other matches the referees easily made the necessary adjustments to accommodate Paul's need to have effective communication during the match. It was now time for the big match- the state championship match. As with what was done in every match, the Gering coaches made sure to tell the referee at the championship match that Paul is deaf and then described the things he would need to do in order to make sure Paul understood him and have effective communications. With COVID requirements the referee was wearing a mask. In this situation the ref would need to make gestures and/or pull his mask down so Paul can read his lips.



Paul Ruff, in Blue/Gold pictured above

As the match proceeded, the communication was being made clear. The referee was making the necessary adjustments to accommodate Paul's need for effective communication. Inexplicably, as the match went into overtime and double overtime "effective communication" stopped. At least seven times the Gering coaches reminded the referee that Paul was deaf.

At one point it is reported that the referee was talking to Paul and the other wrestler from behind while wearing a mask! Paul was being cautioned for having his knee on the line when they set up to start. However, Paul could not understand what the ref was trying to communicate to him. He was confused as to if the caution was for his hands, his knees or what? He tried to let the ref know that he wasn't understanding but the ref refused to pull his mask down or gesture to him about what he wanted. It was clear that Paul was not understanding. He was cautioned again for the same thing and once again the communication was not made clear. Because of the second caution, the opposing wrestler was given a point which then gave him the win of the match and the championship by the score of 1-0.

After the match, NCDHH provided advocacy support for Paul and the family as they addressed the lack of communication access that was provided at the State Championship that led to a heartbreaking result.

Heartbreak in the Valley cont.



The family has made requests of NSAA, one being the demand for changes to be made ensuring this violation of the law does not get repeated. Paul wants to make sure that no other deaf or hard of hearing athlete will have to experience the injustice that he did. This has been a great learning experience for Paul and the family as well as everyone who has heard or read about this story. Paul learned that he has rights, by law as a person who is deaf, and that he can stand up and advocate for himself when those rights are violated. It has also been good for our community and beyond to understand what people with hearing differences deal with on a daily basis.

We all experience heartbreak and pain in life. Heartbreaks, loss, and disappointment are unfortunately all too common as we advocate for inclusion and effective communication. Even in this depth of pain, Paul and his family have seen an outpouring of support which has lead Paul to even greater growth. People who have never met Paul have spoken up about the lack of effective communication access they also observed and commented that it was not right.

The National Association of the Deaf, the Nebraska Association of the Deaf and the Nebraska Commission of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Full Board have reached out in support of Paul. Many in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community have observed what we all have come to know; Paul is an extraordinary young man who handles himself with dignity and class. He now serves as a positive role model for so many up and coming student athletes. Paul's State Senator John Stinner has recognized Paul's accomplishments with a legislative resolution.

One failure to provide effective communication, while heartbreaking, has provided opportunity for many positive changes. Sadly however, it has to come to this and the struggle for effective communication is still very real. If you are needing the support of NCDHH with an advocacy issue, don't hesitate to reach out and contact an advocacy specialist near you. Together we will make a difference.

Editor's note: Please make sure you monitor Facebook for the latest developments in this story.

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



ADA Issues at Omaha Eppley Airport

Ashley Wulf, Advocacy Specialist – Omaha



Many people today prefer traveling by plane, which means the airport is required to provide accommodation for everyone with disabilities. Eppley Airport provides accommodations for most people with disabilities; however they lack some accommodations for Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities.

On the airport website, the use of offensive terms such as “hearing impaired” appears. There were several other accommodation concerns including the usage of TTY, visual paging that was overlooked, lack of training in their staff, and more. NCDHH has contacted and addressed our concerns to Eppley Airport management. Some of the concerns we expressed are listed below.

- Installation of Videophones: There are about 5 TTYs throughout the airport. With the rapid technological change, there should be a videophone installed in the airport for individuals who use American Sign Language (ASL). ASL is the preferred language for many people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Enhanced visual paging: There are two visual paging systems available at each terminal and are covered if not in use. That is an issue for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community since we cannot hear the announcement. How can we know that it is visual paging for us to look at? There should be visual paging at each gate for announcements so we can be part of the community and understand what is going on with flight information.
- Hidden Disabilities Program: Some airports have a “hidden disabilities program” where a person who has a hidden disability, such as deafness, wears a sunflower lanyard. Staff is trained to acknowledge these individuals and be prepared for specific accommodations and knowledge of different cultures and accessibility.
- Establish a disability citizen advisory committee: This recommendation made by NCDHH would be comprised of a group of volunteer representatives to provide information, training and suggestions on how to improve accessibility and accommodation throughout the airport.

If you or someone you know is experiencing accessibility issues or concerns traveling outside the Lincoln or Omaha area airports, please contact our agency at 402-471-3593 or you may reach me directly via email at ashley.wulf@nebraska.gov.



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*

New Beginnings

Sharon Sinkler, Interpreter Program Coordinator



"If we had no winter, the spring would not be so pleasant; if we did not sometimes taste of adversity, prosperity would not be so welcome." – Anne Bradstreet

Welcome to Spring of 2021. A new beginning. The promise of sunshine, warmer weather, life blossoming around us and hopefully, a shining, bright light at the end of our pandemic tunnel.

If you are a community licensed interpreter and want to receive a COVID-19 vaccination but are having difficulties getting approved and scheduled by your local public health department, please contact our agency for assistance. As stipulated in a December 16, 2020 memorandum from the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters have been identified as critical infrastructure workers. As such, ASL interpreters are eligible to receive an early phase vaccine within our state. Also, please see the pdf document entitled, "Guidance on the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce: Ensuring Community and National Resilience in COVID-19 Response," Version 4.0 (August 18, 2020) which outlines the identification of essential, critical workers. Here is a link to this document:

https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/ECIW_4.0_Guidance_on_Essential_Critical_Infrastructure_Workers_Final3_508_0.pdf (specifically, under Communications and Informational Technology, page 18, 8th bullet point on the pdf)

July 1, 2021 represents another "new beginning." **Interpreter/Transliterators/Intermediary licenses expire this year on June 30, 2021.** Applications for license renewals can be found on our website at <https://ncdhh.nebraska.gov/licensing>. Scroll down to the Renewal category, print, complete and sign your Renewal Interpreter/Transliterators or Intermediary Application and mail it to NCDHH along with your licensing fee. Make sure your submission includes everything on the checklist. Please feel free to mail (postmarked by June 30th) or drop off your renewal application with supporting documentation and licensing fee **any time prior to June 30, 2021.**

For proof of continuing education, you may scan and email your certificates of completion or attendance to me at sharon.sinkler@nebraska.gov or you can include copies with your renewal application. If you are an RID member, you can download your official transcript and submit that as proof of your continuing education requirements. Just make sure that your certificates or RID transcript covers the period from July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2021. As a reminder, Rules and Regulations state that you "must have completed 24 clock hours (2.4 CEUs) of approved continuing education during the preceding 24-month period. A minimum of 18 clock hours (1.8 CEUs) must be completed in the area of Professional Studies, of which 3 clock hours (0.3 CEUs) must be related to interpreter ethics. A maximum of 6 hours may be completed in the area of General Studies." If you have any questions about this, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for everything you do for the people of Nebraska! You are valued and appreciated. Happy Spring! Be safe and stay well.

The Mind Grows Lonely – The Effects on Memory & Hearing Loss

Abby Giambattista, Advocacy Specialist - Lincoln



Prolonged isolation inflicts negative effects on any given day - much less a *year long* stint stuck in one's home or living facility.

Senior citizens have been one of the main neglected demographics during this pandemic season. The era of masks, window chats, indirect errand running, and other sudden desultory practices has led to countless struggles. It is safe to say that every generation has wrestled with loneliness, confusion, and fear during this time; however, it is important to note our elderly friends and family have a differently complicated experience than most.

Studies over the past several decades have shown that loneliness can lead to a large number of behavioral and biological issues such as, depression, anxiety, paranoia, sleeping issues, etc. Granted this is nowhere near a comprehensive list, though the facts remain the same.

According to the Mayo Clinic, since the start of the pandemic last year, loneliness levels have sky rocketed within most demographics, but especially within the elderly community. The Gerontological Society of America reported in 2020, that increased levels of loneliness were linked to hearing and vision loss. And on the flip side, studies have shown that late-deafness can invoke loneliness via social discomfort, misunderstanding, and much more. So why bring this up? Social distancing and voluntary isolation have demonstrated protecting the physical health, however effects on the mental and cognitive are discouraging (especially, for those who are older and living alone or in care facilities). The extended stay-at-home orders have emphasized these issues for many. Alzheimer's patients have progressed at surprising levels, Dementia has crept up in unexpected ways, and the commission has even received calls from community members who just need social support because all of their usual connections are gone.

So how does one alleviate this catch twenty-two? There seems to be so much more to learn on the topic. Fret not! Hope is not lost. Reaching out to loved ones or acquaintances you know *can* make all the difference! In every instance, community and intentionality can ease the stress of being in physical isolation. Phone calls, video chats, letters, socially distanced events in person, and personable acts of kindness and communication are all great steps toward fighting against the negative effects of loneliness. Just because physical isolation might be a current reality, does not mean this demographic should feel alone emotionally. Connection and intentionality really do defend the mind and body more than we know.

[Mayo Clinic – Social Isolation during Covid-19](#)

[Sensory Loss and Cognitive Decline among Older Adults: An Analysis of Mediation and Moderation Effects of Loneliness](#)

Deaf-Owned Mental Health Services

Cody McEvoy, Behavioral Health Coordinator



With the COVID-19 pandemic and many months of spending time isolated, secluded, social distancing, it can have an effect on our mental health. Spring is here, giving us more sunlight, warmer weather, and more opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. But seasonal depression can still impact some others as we are still limited from traveling, visiting some of our loved ones still, and other events happening in our lives.

In the Deaf and hard of hearing community, we may already be familiar with those individuals who provide mental health services and support. This can make people feel uneasy knowing some of those individuals personally. I wanted to share two telehealth counseling companies that can offer counseling and therapy from the comfort of your own home.



They have a team of licensed therapists in various states to give you some flexibility to find someone that you may not be familiar with. You can meet your therapist through a secure HIPAA compliant video chat link and choose if you want therapist-led sessions or support circles. The resource links are:

<https://www.nationaldeaftherapy.com/>

<https://deafcounseling.com/>

NCDHH has several new therapists familiar with Deaf culture or know ASL that we have added to our behavioral health list on our website. You can find a list of those therapist/counselors at the link below. Or you can reach out to me at Cody.McEvoy@Nebraska.gov and I would be more than happy to help out!

<https://ncdhh.nebraska.gov/services/behavioral-health>

A Little Bit About Noise Exposure

Aaron Rothenberger, Advocacy Specialist - Kearney



I have mostly only lived in small towns. Things are usually quiet with the occasional sound of a train rolling by or the emergency services vehicle driving past with full sirens blasting. The amount of noise exposure I get in my city is minimal. Some cities are not like that at all. They have loud noise from construction, airplanes, or even just regular traffic. The noise pollution of megacities like New York and Los Angeles can be incredible.

Besides being annoying, science has found there are detrimental health effects from noise pollution as well. We usually focus on the hearing aspect of noise here at the Commission. Still, hearing loss is only one of the many things that noise pollution can cause. *(cont. on next page)*

(continued)

Studies have shown that high amounts of noise at the workplace can be connected to hypertension and high cholesterol in workers. (Reference 1) It may seem crazy that working in noise can lead to health effects, but being around noise is stressful, and stress can damage the body. “The body responds to stress in a variety of ways, including increasing heart rate, increasing blood pressure,” Liz Masterson.

But it isn't just adults that deal with the issue of noise pollution. Children can be affected as well. In 2018 the World Health Organization analyzed several studies that showed that noise exposure for children leads to worse reading comprehension and long-term memory. (Reference 2) It is thought that stress might play the same factor in those results as the workplace study above.

It's not just workplace noise either. Overhead noise such as planes or transit noise such as railways can also cause high blood pressure and possibly lead to an increased risk of fatal heart attacks. A joint report by the WHO and European Commission's Joint Research Centre showed evidence of this. “There is overwhelming evidence that exposure to environmental noise has adverse effects on the health of the population,” the report concludes. (Reference 3)

My main takeaway from all of this is to limit your noise exposure as much as you can. It not only can cause loss of hearing, but it can also lead to other health issues and problems. Stay safe out there!

Kerns, E, Masterson, EA, Themann, CL, Calvert, GM. Cardiovascular conditions, hearing difficulty, and occupational noise exposure within US industries and occupations. *Am J Ind Med.* 2018; 61: 477–491. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajim.22833>

Clark C, Paunovic K. WHO Environmental Noise Guidelines for the European Region: A Systematic Review on Environmental Noise and Cognition. *Int J Environ Res Public Health.* 2018;15(2):285. Published 2018 Feb 7. doi:10.3390/ijerph15020285

<https://www.euro.who.int/en/publications/abstracts/burden-of-disease-from-environmental-noise.-quantification-of-healthy-life-years-lost-in-europe>

Join the IEP Table as a Team

Jessica Larrison, Education Advocate



How many parents use the parent concerns or parent information section of an IEP document to put down something basic? For example, before I knew how important they are I would put down how my son loves to jump, go swimming, and struggles with his speech. Now, I know how important those questions are and why you really need to be thinking on how to respond before you send it to your IEP team.

This is the perfect time to talk about your child's strengths as well as you want them to be working on in the next year and the future depending on their age. You can send this in advance so the IEP team can collect data and do any assessments that needed to answer questions you may have. This will also help guide teachers in writing goals for your child to guide them.

Remember you do not always need to have an IEP meeting for everything outside of your yearly IEP. If you can open up that communication to your IEP team and work on being collaborative together, this is something that can be discussed well in advance. So, take a step back and look at your relationship with the school: is it good, bad, or non-existent? This is the time to make the change, open up communication with the school, and join the IEP table.

Creating an Advocacy Toolbox

Kim Davis, Advocacy Specialist – Lincoln



Advocacy plays an important role within individuals who seek to obtain access to effective or reasonable communication and technology accommodations in order to fully participate in programs and services from public or private entities or from employment venues. Here are some initiatives to consider creating in your advocacy toolbox.

What Are Your Accommodation Needs?

Communication and technology accommodation needs vary within our Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing population. You play an important role in knowing what may be effective or reasonable to meet your accommodation needs. And you have the responsibility to make a request for accommodation. The public or private entity and the employment venue has the responsibility to arrange the requested accommodation. A list of auxiliary aids and services that will fit your needs to obtain effective or reasonable accommodation access may be handy to include in your advocacy toolbox. Also include how they can find the requested accommodation if they have no prior experience in obtaining a communication service provider or purchasing a specialized technology.

What Are Your Civil Rights?

Within a public or private covered entity's programs or services, obtaining effective communication and technology accommodation varies for each individual, and it may also depend on the nature, length, complexity and context involved. And within an employment venue, obtaining reasonable communication and technology accommodation varies for a qualified individual to do their essential job functions. Many covered entities and employers are required to be in compliant with relevant federal and state statutes and regulations. However, there are some entities and venues that may be exempted from being in compliant with civil right statutes, or from honoring a particular accommodation request that may either be based on undue financial and administrative burden or based on the availability of the requested auxiliary aids and services (accommodation). Being aware and creating resources for your advocacy toolbox on what civil right statutes and regulations may or may not apply to your accommodation needs may also come in handy. Especially for times when you need to activate your advocacy skills and to share civil right resources.

What to Do If Your Request Is Turned Down?

If your request is denied, seek reasons for their denial. There are several circumstances that could lead to not obtaining the requested accommodation. If the reason is because the requested accommodation could not be found, an alternative effective accommodation option could be considered or, if possible, the appointment could be rescheduled. If the reason is because they do not honor requested accommodations, seek to speak with an administrator who make chief decisions with their entity or venue's policies and procedure on accommodation needs for individuals with disabilities. There may be times front line service providers or office employees are not aware of their legal obligations. Providing educational advocacy with your readily made resources may come in handy when needed with the administrator or management team. If the administrator or management team continues to feel they do not need to honor accommodation requests, you may wish to file a complaint with the proper federal, state, or local civil rights entity or obtain an attorney.

What if I Need Additional Assistance or Resources?

Since the establishment of NCDHH in 1979, our state agency has been advocating with and for individuals who are Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing within various public and private entities and within employment venues. Reach out to us for additional initiatives to have in your advocacy toolbox, to advocate with you, to provide sensitivity training, or to assist in filing a civil complaint.

Caption Phones – One Might Be the Right Fit for You!

Kathy Scusa, Advocacy Specialist – North Platte



If you have worked with an advocacy specialist or listened to one of our presentations, you have probably heard about captioned phones. Most people don't realize that caption phones aren't only for people with severe hearing loss. There is no minimum hearing loss requirement for you to qualify for a caption phone. Even people with mild or moderate hearing loss will find numerous features of caption phones that will benefit you.

Trouble hearing on the phone is common, even with hearing aids. Regular phones make it hard to distinguish speech tones. Captioned telephones work like any other amplified telephone with one important addition: it displays every word the caller says throughout the conversation. Caption phones add visual support to what you hear. Users can listen to the caller, and also read the written captions in the display window.

In addition to captions, caption phones have many features available:

- Caption Phones are amplified phones with adjustable volume settings.
- Nearly real-time captioning.
- Can turn Captions on/off as needed.
- Some models have a speakerphone.
- Caller ID.
- Answering Machine/Voice Mail.
- Phone book for number storage.
- Ability to save conversations so you can read it back again later.
- Customer Service Agents help improve caption accuracy compared to computer voice recognition.
- Some models can pair wireless hearing aids for extra convenience.
- Some providers offer captioning software for your smartphone.



Caption phones and telephone captioning is an essential ADA service available at no cost to people diagnosed with hearing loss. Caption phones work with a captioning service as part of a federally-funded program that supports telephone accessibility for people with hearing loss. This free telephone captioning service is paid through a fund administered by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). No costs for the Captioning Service are passed on to consumers – no monthly fees and no service agreements. Your monthly phone bill does not change. There is no cost to qualified individuals whose hearing loss inhibits their phone use. If you have trouble hearing on the phone, contact any NCDHH advocacy specialist or your audiologist to certify you for a caption phone. If you have an interest in caption phones or questions about the different models, I invite you to read about different models available at the websites included at the end of my article. If you have questions about qualifications to obtain a new phone or requirements for installation, please contact the advocacy specialist in your area. When you are ready to make the move to better communication, please contact us! .” 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.

- <https://clearcaptions.com>
- <https://www.captel.com/>
- <https://captioncall.com/>

NCDHH

Nebraska Commission
for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing



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