

Monthly Communicator

Chris Christie, Governor

Kim Guadagno, Lt. Governor

Elizabeth Connolly, Acting Commissioner

David Alexander, Director

Velez Visits DDHH and Bids Farewell



On Thursday February 28, NJ Department of Human Services Commissioner Jennifer Velez (at head of table) stopped by the Divisions of Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Disability Services, and DHS Office of Emergency Management to say farewell. After eight years at the DHS helm she exchanged fond memories with staff who wished her well. Sign Language Interpreter Steve Toth, left of the Commissioner, provides communication access.

From the Director...

By David Alexander

DDHH Technology Services:

Our technology programs serve as a safety net for many individuals with low incomes who are not able to afford special adapted equipment to promote independence and home safety. The Equipment Distribution Program (EDP) provides a wide range of telecommunications equipment such as captioned and amplified phones, in addition to signaling devices such as smoke, carbon monoxide and baby cry alerts. These devices are available at no cost to eligible individuals. A complete list of technology, eligibility requirements and application forms are available [here](#).

During the month of February, 2015 our staff processed and approved 47 applications for telecommunications and signaling devices. In addition, 10 individuals were approved to receive reconditioned hearing aids through our New Jersey Hearing Aid Project.

The division often receives notes from recipients of DDHH technology. It is a pleasure to learn how the equipment we provide improves the quality of life of our constituents. Below is a short note received from one of our recipients (*Note: the name of this recipient has been withheld to preserve privacy*).

“Dear Department of Human Services. A note to thank Human Services for sending the (amplified) telephone, carbon monoxide detector and smoke alarm. I am now able to hear and understand words and a conversation. I’m deeply appreciative for each item. Thank you again so very much! P.S. I love the phone! So helpful!”

DDHH has a close working relationship with the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights (DCR). Our Service Coordinator, Catie Purrazzella works with constituents who have been victims of discrimination and assists them with the process of filing complaints with DCR.

Acting Attorney General John J. Hoffman, announced approximately \$2.2 million in settlement payouts in 2014 on behalf of alleged discrimination victims last year. One of the settlements was for failure to accommodate the communication needs of a deaf or hard of hearing person. The suit was brought against The Medford Care Center, a private nursing facility located in Medford, Burlington County. As part of the settlement, Medford Care agreed to update its disability policy to include specific protocol for accommodating the deaf and hard of hearing. Medford Care also agreed to train all personnel regarding the updated policy. For more information about this settlement, as well as others, please click [here](#).

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Awareness Day

The 31st annual event will be held at Six Flags Great Adventure on Saturday, June 6 in Jackson NJ. To purchase tickets contact Lauren Lercher at: GATickets@aol.com and additional info; www.deafnjad.org.

DDHH Communication Access Services

By Cathy Grehlinger, Coordinator

As Coordinator of Communication Access Services, my primary function is to coordinate and schedule sign language and CART services for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Frequently there is an enormous amount of advocacy required.

I have advocated for interpreter and CART services in a myriad of situations, including medical, mental health, legal, vocational/job related, educational and social services. Every day DDHH is contacted for information regarding the provision of communication access services.

The contact may come from a service provider who receives a request to provide an interpreter or CART for the first time and they are uncertain what to do or how to go about providing the services. We are also contacted by consumers who face resistance from the entity or organization from which they require services. In these cases, we provide tools and resources to empower individuals to advocate for themselves. This approach is usually successful, but when it is not effective, DDHH will reach out to advocate for services.

One of the most common situations in which advocacy services are required is in medical situations, usually with private physicians. When a doctor’s office learns that they are responsible to offer and pay for an interpreter or CART provider, reactions range from appreciation for being given information about the law and how to deliver the most effective and efficient services to their patient, to anger and frustration. It is explained that the interpreter/CART services benefit for both parties. We educate the service provider by disseminating the ADA and other applicable laws and offer our communication access referral services.

In many cases these advocacy issues become a team effort, working with other DDHH staff and other state departments to resolve problems. Some complicated issues may take a while to resolve but we always strive to achieve the ultimate goal of effective and equal access to communication for people with hearing loss.

Grace's Law

By Jeanine Gleba

In December 2008, NJ became the 13th state to enact legislation, otherwise known as Grace's Law. The NJ Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing worked closely with the NJ Department of Health and the NJ Department of Banking and Insurance to develop an information package to inform our constituents of this new benefit. This law mandated certain health benefit plans to provide limited coverage of \$1000 per hearing aid for children 15 years and younger every 24 months.

New federal health rules prohibit the recently enacted Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care Act (ACA) prohibits annual or lifetime benefit limits on essential health benefits. As an essential health benefit, hearing aids cannot be subject to an annual or lifetime benefit limit. Thus, as of January 1, 2014, the \$1,000 benefit limit no longer applies.

It's important to note that the original Grace's Law benefit payment was the allowable cost of the hearing aid minus the application of any deductible, co-pay or coinsurance. The maximum amount the benefits plan would pay after these deductions was reduced to \$1,000. Now there is no limit placed on the reimbursement after the applicable deductions are met! For example let's say a hearing aid cost is \$2500, and the full \$2,500 is an allowable amount under the plan, and this person's plan has a \$500 deductible. After the \$500 deductible is met there is \$2000 remaining. Now that person would be eligible for a Grace's Law reimbursement of \$2000 whereas it would only have been \$1000.

So in conclusion, the changes made have actually increased the potential reimbursement amount. However, it's important to note that health benefits plans still may or may not be subject to the requirements of Grace's Law. As an example employer self-funded plans are still not required to follow the mandate. In addition the benefit continues to be subject to medical necessity as prescribed by a licensed physician or audiologist and this "essential health benefit" is only for children 15 years and younger.

Three Reasons Why People Do Not Seek Treatment for Hearing Loss

By Traci Burton, DDHH Field Representative

There are several reasons why people do not seek treatment for hearing loss. Ignoring the issue can lead to isolation, depression, and other negative consequences. It can be frustrating and difficult not only for the loved one struggling, but also for friends and family. Healthy Hearing has narrowed down the lengthy list of reasons for not seeking treatment to a top three.

"Hearing loss treatment means getting hearing aids."

Many people living with hearing loss feel that being diagnosed will mean hearing aids. Hearing aids are equated with aging, and who wants to admit they are getting old? The cost of hearing aids is also a deterrent. And even when one is able to overcome the stigma and cost factors, hearing aids do not give you back the hearing you had when you were younger. This is when people complain about problems with them, concluding that they do not work.

Hearing aids today are so discreet that people won't notice you're wearing them, thereby keeping you from looking old. There are programs that offer financial assistance to help defray the cost, making hearing aids more affordable, such as [Medicaid](#) and the [New Jersey Hearing Aid Project](#). Also, hearing aids take a lot of work to adjust to and it is important to have realistic expectations. It is not unusual that several visits to the audiologist are necessary to program the hearing aid to best fit your needs.

Hearing loss is as individual as the person who has it, and any treatment will be equally individualized. It is important to get your hearing checked and receive treatment most appropriate for you – which does not necessarily mean hearing aids. One may benefit from an assisted listening device in certain situations.

Sometimes the issue is something physical like a buildup of ear wax. Untreated hearing loss has been shown to correlate highly with isolation, depression, and dementia. Once your hearing loss is treated, you will notice that you will still be able to live an independent and quality life.

“I hear just fine.”

Hearing loss is indeed a normal part of the aging process and can come on gradually, which means you may not realize you are losing your hearing. Maybe you do realize you are losing your hearing and are in denial, or even a combination of the two. Healthy Hearing explains that hearing loss starts out with sounds being distorted – not getting softer. Consonants that have a similar sound become more difficult to hear than others. Healthy Hearing continues to say that in the English language it is the consonants that carry the meaning; “sit” is turned into “fit,” the meaning of the statement is changed and confusion is the outcome.

Denial tends to be exhibited through statements like “Everyone mumbles” and “I hear just fine.” Hearing loss is indeed a loss and it is normal to grieve, denial being one of the steps in the grieving process. It may take a little while before someone living with hearing loss is ready to admit to himself that he needs to take steps to treat their hearing loss. Some feel their hearing loss isn’t that bad, or to the point to warrant seeing doctor. They may not realize how much they are missing, such as the happy babbling of their grandchild.

“What does it matter, anyway?”

When someone asks the above question, they are tired of hearing about their hearing loss. Perhaps they feel that because it is a part of the aging process they just have to live with it. As we’ve mentioned a couple times in this article, ignoring your hearing loss symptoms can negatively impact relationships and the overall quality of life. Some may ask this question because they are already feeling depressed. The state of depression may not only be from isolation due to hearing loss, but also the general state of aging and noticing that things have changed.

If you suspect that you may have hearing loss, see your doctor! They may make a recommendation to see an ENT or audiologist for further testing. Should you need to locate a hearing health professional, follow this link to the Division of Consumer Affairs’ website for a listing of licensed professionals in your area: [Click Here](#). Your hearing health professional will also help guide you down a path of services and resources that are best for you.

Traci Burton, Field Representative can be reached at 609-588-2648 or traci.burton@dhs.state.nj.us.

Transition Conference Planned –NEW DATE

In the March 2015 edition of the Monthly Communicator, we informed you of an upcoming conference in April. The first annual Transition Conference for Individuals Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing has been rescheduled and will take place on Saturday September 26, 2015 at the NJ School for the Deaf in West Trenton, NJ. This free conference is sponsored by Bridges to Employment, a Division of Alternatives, Inc. and the New Jersey Department of Labor, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. DDHH is involved in the planning and Traci Burton, Field Representative will be on site the day of the conference to aid with various conference needs, including Assistive Listening Devices for the workshops, as well as present a workshop on technology available for the home and workplace. As this is a conference for students transitioning into the next phase of their scholastic/employment careers, students, parents and professionals are welcome. For more information please e-mail Alyse Betso at abetso@alternativesinc.org. Professional credits available – communication access provided.

Other Organizations Serving People with Hearing Loss

HLAA-NJ News and Meeting Dates

Submitted by Joel Strasser, APR, Fellow PRSA, Trustee, Public Information Officer, Hearing Loss Association of New Jersey (HLAA-NJ), joel.strasser@hearingloss-nj.org

HLAA-NJ Scholarships:

Scholarships in the amount of 1500. Are available to to NJ high school seniors with hearing loss. Applications may be found at www.hearingloss-nj.org. For further information, contact Alice J. Glock, HLAA-NJ Scholarship Chair at alice.glock@hearingloss-nj.org

HLAA-NJ Chapter Meetings:

April 4 – Essex County Chapter. For further information, contact Shelly Simpson at richelles007@yahoo.com. Location 11:30 AM to 1:45 PM at Union Public Library, 2nd Floor, 1980 Morris Ave., Union, NJ. Guest speaker Tony Vaughn. Open to public, as well as all persons with any level of hearing loss in Newark area.

May 30 – Morris County Chapter. For further information, call Pat Dobbs at 973-479-8083 or e-mail Pat.Dobbs@hearingloss-nj.org or for more information, go to: www.hearingloss-mcnj.org. In addition, 18-35 year olds are also invited to form separate group of their own.

The Center for Family Services' Recovery Network For Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Hearing Loss:

CFS offers 12 step meetings conducted in ASL. For more information, please go to: <http://www.centerffs.org/programs/recovery-network-deaf-hard-hearing-and-hearing-loss>.

The Haddonfield/Philadelphia area Cochlear Implant Support Group:

Meeting are held on the following dates at Grace Episcopal Church on Kings Highway in Haddonfield from 6:45 p.m. - 8:45 p.m

April 23, 2015

June 4, 2015

October 22, 2015

For info: cochlearimplant1@yahoo.com.

Save the Date:
September 20, Deaf Fest 2015
www.njdaw.org

Calendar of Events

Friday April 24

**DDHH Advisory Council Meeting
East Brunswick Public Library
Public is Invited
Communication access is provided**

Saturday June 6

**31st NJ Deaf and Hard of Hearing Awareness Day
Six Flags Great Adventure
Jackson, NJ
Ticket info: GATickets@aol.com**



**DDHH Regular Office Hours: Monday – Friday: 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM
Closed Friday, April 3 - Good Friday**