

Monthly Communicator

NJ Department of Human Services | Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

MARCH 2015 | www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddhh/home/index.html

Chris Christie, *Governor*

Kim Guadagno, *Lt. Governor*

Elizabeth Connolly, *Acting Commissioner*

David Alexander, *Director*

Governor Christie Announces the Departure of Department of Human Services Commissioner Velez

On Tuesday, February 16, Governor Chris Christie announced that Department of Human Services' Commissioner Jennifer Velez is resigning at the end of the month. The following was in his press release: "Jen Velez has been one of the smartest and most dedicated people I have had the honor of knowing during my time as governor. She has been a tremendous advocate in our efforts to deliver effective, cost-efficient, and high quality services to the most vulnerable New Jerseyans, and has done so with a genuine fervor and compassion to help make people's lives better," said Governor Christie. "I thank Jen for her service and for the passion and effort she has poured into this job for nearly a decade and wish her well as she moves on to her next endeavor."

The longest serving department Commissioner, to date, Velez is leaving to become the Senior Vice President of Strategy and Planning for Barnabas Health in West Orange, NJ.

"Serving this department under the Governor's leadership has been one of the most gratifying and fulfilling roles I've ever had," said Velez. "I have worked alongside an incredibly talented team of subject-matter experts who really understand and are committed to positive reforms that improve the lives of some of New Jersey's most vulnerable residents. I'm grateful to have been a part of this Administration and to have enjoyed unwavering support from the Governor."

Elizabeth Connolly, the department's current Chief of Staff, will become acting commissioner. Connolly has worked in various roles at the department for 26 years. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree and Masters in Public Administration from Seton Hall University and lives in North Brunswick.

Assistive Technology Demonstration Centers

One of the services offered by the DDHH is to operate assistive technology demonstration centers, where constituents are able to learn and gain hands on experience with equipment and devices that can enhance the quality of lives of people with hearing loss.

DDHH evaluates these sites in terms of frequency of use, ease of access and location to ensure that we are able to reach the maximum number of constituents. Of the five statewide centers, it has been decided to relocate two of them in order to better serve our constituents. One of the centers currently located at the New Jersey School for the Deaf, in West Trenton will be relocated to the new DDHH Offices at Quakerbridge Plaza, Hamilton. The other center, currently housed at Burlington County College, Mt Holly, will be relocated to a yet to be determined location in southern New Jersey.

DDHH wishes to express its appreciation to the New Jersey School for the Deaf and to Burlington County College for partnering with the division and permitting it to use their facilities to serve our constituents.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Awareness Day

For the past 31 years, the DDHH in collaboration with its partners, New Jersey Association for the Deaf, NJAD, New Jersey Deaf Awareness Week, and New Jersey Relay Services have sponsored Deaf and Hard of Hearing Awareness Day at Six Flags. This event strives to provide awareness activities and resources to educate the thousands of visitors to the park about hearing loss.

DDHH also works with the park providing consultation on strategies to make the park's activities and show communication accessible for individuals and their families who are Deaf and hard of hearing. DDHH staff provides sensitively training about hearing loss to park employees. The training includes teaching basic sign language, which employees eagerly use when greeting people throughout the park. Sign language interpreters are available at many of the popular animal events, making the shows communication accessible.

This year, Deaf and hard of Hearing Awareness day is planned for Saturday June 6. Please mark this day on your calendar and plan to join us for a fun filled day at the park and to participate in this awareness event. For more information or to purchase specially discounted tickets please contact Lauren Lercher at: GATickets@aol.com.

On Friday, January 30 the NJ Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing's Advisory Council met at the East Brunswick Public Library. Annmarie Buraczeski and Michelle Cline gave a very informative presentation entitled "Deaf Advocacy Project on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault." (See attached article by Catie Purrazzella to learn more about this Project).

The council meets on the last Friday of the month, four times per year. The next meeting is scheduled for :

Friday April 24

DDHH Advisory Council Meeting

East Brunswick Public Library

Public is Invited

The public is invited to attend and bring up issues of importance to them. The meetings are accessible with sign language interpreters, realtime translation services, and assistive listening devices.

DDHH Develops New Database System

The DDHH has developed an exciting new database system called eMARS. This stands for electronic Management and Records System. It will digitize data maintained by the division such as the Equipment Distribution Program, the NJ Hearing Aid Project, the Communication Access Unit, and the activities of the field representatives. This will enable the staff to respond quickly and efficiently to phone calls received from consumers seeking the status of their applications. It also will enhance the divisions ability to track statistics on division services and consumer feedback. The system was designed by the Department of Human Service's Information and Technology Office precisely for the DDHH programs and services it provides.

Meridian Health Systems and NJ DDHH Collaborate for Health and Wellness Fair

By: Jason Weiland, DDHH Field Representative

The New Jersey Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, in collaboration with Meridian Health's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community Advisory Network and Ocean County College Interpreter Training Program, are excited to announce March 28th, 2015 as the date for Meridian's first Accessible Health: Health and Wellness Fair for the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and hard of hearing community members, families, and friends.

The Fair will be held at the gymnasium located at Ocean County College from 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm. This free event will include health screenings, presentations on health topics, information booths and community resources. In addition, ASL interpreters and CART will be provided. Other accommodations are available upon request. Attendees are encouraged to register in advance but it is not required. Interested individuals from all counties are welcome to attend.

As a member of the advisory, NJ DDHH has taken the lead to help establish the first ever Health and Wellness Fair through Meridian Health Systems. The need for accessible health information the Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing has been identified over the years and collaboration with Meridian allowed this event to become a reality.

For more information and to register for the Health and Wellness Fair, please call 1-800-Doctors.

Finding New Homes for “Old” Devices

By Traci Burton, DDHH Field Representative

Many wish to donate old and/or no-longer-needed technology. Our consumers often ask where they can donate devices such as amplified phones and hearing aids. Although DDHH does not accept contributions, there are agencies that may accept them.

For devices such as telephones, alerting technology and other similar equipment, gently used pieces can become part of the Back in Action program, <http://backinaction.drnj.org/home.php> Back In Action is a “classified ads” feature that connects people with available assistive technology and is a project of the Assistive Technology Advocacy Center (ATAC), a program of Disability Rights New Jersey (DRNJ). DRNJ is a nonprofit corporation. This is a user-driven database with entry, edit, delete and search capabilities. Back In Action is primarily for residents of New Jersey, although entries from neighboring states are accepted. The program is designed to facilitate equipment exchange between individuals and is not for the use of vendors or distributors. DRNJ does not profit from the sale of listed devices. The Internet is the easiest way to access Back In Action listings. If you are unable to access the internet, or have specific problems in viewing the Back In Action listings, please contact ATAC for assistance at 1-800-922-7233 from within NJ, or call the main number at 609-292-9742.

If you have a used hearing aid and wish to donate it, we have the place. Used hearing aids will be reconditioned and dispensed to others in need in New Jersey. The New Jersey Hearing Aid Project initiative is a joint venture with the New Jersey Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Sertoma, Inc., and Montclair State University. The Project graciously accepts donations of ALL hearing aids regardless of function, style, or age of instrument. A tax deduction letter will be mailed to the donor if a name and address are included with the donated items. Please send the aids in a padded envelope or box, or unlabeled prescription container to:

New Jersey Hearing Aid Project
Montclair State University
1515 Broad Street, Bldg. B
Bloomfield, NJ 07003

or

New Jersey Hearing Aid Project
Hearing Charities of America
1912 East Meyer Blvd.
Kansas City, MO 64132

Some wish to support library programs and there are thirteen libraries in New Jersey that participate in the Assistive Listening Technology Loan Program. Go to www.state.nj.us/humanservices/ddhh/aldloan/ for a list of the participating libraries. If you wish to make a donation to a local library, call them directly to learn their procedure for accepting such gifts.

There are several reasons why we find ourselves with equipment for which we no longer have a use. If you are able to find a new home for these pieces then the technology will continue to bring the same sense of independence that it brought its original owner.

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

Transition Conference Planned

The first annual Transition Conference for Individuals Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing will be held on Saturday April 11, 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 to 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.

Social Security Presentation

By Catie Purrazzella, Service Coordinator

In February, the New Jersey Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DDHH) in collaboration with Carl Robinson, Public Affairs Specialist for the Social Security Administration, held a presentation for the deaf and hard of hearing community in Freehold, NJ. Approximately thirty deaf and hard of hearing people were in attendance.

Many deaf and hard of hearing individuals work while receiving Social Security benefits and Mr. Robinson's presentation focused on Social Security Work Incentives for both the Social Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) programs. Accommodations including American Sign Language Interpreters, Deaf-Blind Interpreters, CART, and Assistive Listening Devices were provided.

(Picture insert: On left Deaf community member, Dominic Figaro, asks Mr. Robinson a question. Mr. Robinson, center, and American Sign Language interpreter, Melissa Jenkins, on right)

DDHH wants to note that the deaf and hard of hearing community has helped DDHH become increasingly aware of communication access issues at social security field offices in NJ. In response to the community's concerns, DDHH met with key Social Security representatives including Mr. Robinson to address these concerns. Carl Robinson and DDHH worked together to develop a phone contact list for each NJ Social Security field office so deaf and hard of hearing individuals can reach out to their local Social Security field office directly and make sign language interpreter requests. If you need a copy of this list, please contact DDHH at the contact information below.

DDHH and Mr. Robinson continue to work closely to improve communication access for deaf and hard of hearing individuals at various social security field offices in New Jersey. DDHH is grateful for Mr. Robinson's continued support for the communication access needs of deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

If you either continue to experience communication access issues at your local field office, have questions, or need additional information, please contact Catie Purrazzella at: Catherine.Purrazzella@dhs.state.nj.us or (609) 503-4862 (VP) for further assistance.

DDHH wants to thank both Mr. Robinson for his time and the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired for allowing us to use their space for this event.

Deaf Advocacy Project

By Catie Purrazzella, Service Coordinator

In March 2014, the Deaf Advocacy Project was initiated after two Deaf representatives of the Deaf and hard of hearing community, Annmarie Buraczeski and Michelle Cline, approached the NJ Coalition for Battered Women (NJCBW) to discuss the gap they saw in services for Deaf and hard of hearing survivors of domestic violence (DV) and sexual assault (SA).

To bridge the gap in services for Deaf and hard of hearing victims and survivors of DV and SA, a committee consisting of representatives from NJCBW, Woman Space (Mercer County), NJ Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA), and the NJ Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DDHH) was established. The committee developed project goals and objectives for improving access for victims and survivors. The major goals included regional trainings called "Getting to know Deaf people better"; recruiting potential DV& SA advocates that are fluent in American Sign Language; and train the advocates on how to become more effective.

DDHH helped support this project by providing communication access sponsorship for regional trainings that took place in Hamilton, Voorhees, and the upcoming March training in Morristown and for committee meetings.

Michelle and Annmarie developed plans to recruit potential advocates for Deaf and hard of hearing victims and survivors. To obtain victim counselor privilege in New Jersey, the state law requires 40 hours of DV and SA training. Advocates will be expected to take the trainings through Woman Space's DV and SA Response Team training program. The committee is also working on bringing in 18 hours of specialized training provided by a Deaf DV and SA expert.

The committee has requested financial support from the Office of Victims of Crime Training and Technical Assistance Center to fund this training.

For additional information, please contact Catie Purrazzella at: Catherine.purrazzella@dhs.state.nj.us or (609) 503-4862.

Other Organizations Serving People with Hearing Loss

■ HLAJ-NJ News:

Submitted By Joel Strasser, APR, Fellow PRSA, Trustee and Public Information Officer, Hearing Loss Association of New Jersey (HLAA-NJ)

HLAA-NJ will provide \$1500 Scholarship Grants to NJ High School Seniors with Hearing Loss. Application can be found at www.hearingloss-nj.org, and questions should be addressed to Alice J. Glock, HLAJ-NJ Scholarship Chair at: alice.glock@hearingloss-nj.org.

HLAA NJ Chapter Meetings

- **March 1:** Ocean-Monmouth Hearing Loss Support Group - for additional information, email; Ocean-Monmouthhla@yahoo.com
- **March 7:** HLAJ-Essex County Chapter to launch first meeting. To get onto the new chapter's mailing and distribution list, please contact: Latisha.porter-vaughn@shu.edu.
- **March 14:** Morris County Chapter Meeting. Please call Pat Dobbs at 973-479-8083 or email at Pat.Dobbs@hearingloss-nj.org for more information go to: www.hearingloss-mcnj.org

■ State Rehabilitation Council – NJ Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Public Forums

The New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVRS) and its State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) will be conducting public forums during the month of March. DVRS is a division within the Department of Labor and Workforce Development and provides services to eligible individuals with disabilities to achieve employment outcomes consistent with their strengths, priorities, needs, abilities and capabilities. Written comments: Can be included with the registrant's electronic registration or a hard copy provided to the DVRS/SRC representative or faxed to the attention of S. Walker-Hunt at 609. 292.8347 indicating the DVRS/SRC public forum date and location. Online Registration: You can register on the Department of Labor and Workforce Development's at: http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/lwdhome/content/DVRS_PublicForums.html

■ Center For Family Services Provides Substance Abuse Training

In his recent State of the State address, Governor Christie mentioned the importance of treatment for people with drug addiction. The Center for Family Services is a recipient of grant funds from the NJ Division of Mental Health Services to provide addiction services for people who are deaf and hard of hearing. Its Recovery Network for Deaf and Hard of Hearing provides free training that can meet the requirement for an annual in-service training regarding cultural competency. This training can provide staff members a better understanding of how to address the treatment needs of a client who has hearing loss. For more information about this and the full range of services contact:

856-874-8230 Video Phone

856-428-8373 TTY

856-874-8229 Voice

856-428-0949 Fax

Email: rndhh@centerffs.org

www.centerffs.org

■ **Sprint Relay Services**

Sprint Relay is the current state-wide contractor for the NJ Bureau of Public Utilities, providing relay services for residents of NJ who are Deaf and Hard of hearing. Sprint Relay provides IP Relay Services. An American Sign Language video with open captions about Sprint IP Relay and the registration process is available on the Sprint Relay website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bogDMy3ACGw> .

New customers looking to register for Sprint IP Relay should visit mysprintrelay.com. IP Relay customers who are blind or have low vision may obtain registration information in an alternative readable format by sending an email to: relayuserregistration@sprint.com

■ **New Jersey Deaf Education Affiliates, Inc.**

New Jersey Deaf Education Affiliates, Inc is sponsoring a workshop entitled “Educating Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students from Other Countries” on Saturday, March 21, 2015 from 8:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.

It is hosted by Middlesex Regional Educational Services Commission, Piscataway, NJ and communication access is provided by the NJ Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Additional information may be obtained via email at: juliann.toone@gmail.com.

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