

Advisory Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Quarterly Meeting, June 3, 2016
OVR Building, Harrisburg, PA

Members present: Don Rhoten, chair; Devon Grant, Nancy Kingsley, Lori Leiman, Karen Leslie-Henry, Dale Long, Trisha Mader, Shatarupa Podder, Donna Reinaker, Sam Trychin (by phone)

ODHH staff: Sharon Behun, Denise Brown, Dee Dee Keiser, Ben Moonan

Guests speaking: Harry Barnum, Liberty Resources; Harvey Corson, PSAD executive director; David DeNotaris, OVR executive director; Scot Ferre, OVR RCD in York; Matt Krupp, OVR director's executive assistant; Kathy Marenic, Deaf Grassroots Movement of PA; Neil McDevitt, Deaf-Hearing Communications Centre (Swarthmore) executive director; Kay Tyberg, HLAA-PA & TRS council

Other guests: Ronnie Delvisco; Missy Derr (PUC); Rachel Hansel (interpreting student); Eric Jeschke (PUC); Jessica Marks (WPSD outreach center, Camp Hill); Margaret McKenna, CAP advocate (by phone); Connie Noonan, OVR executive secretary; Grace Shirk-Evans, PSAD president

.Minutes for March 11, 2016: The minutes were approved.

New Business and Updates

Grant Proposal—Sam Trychin

Of the 48 million Americans with significant hearing loss in one or both ears, around 1 million are culturally Deaf and rely on sign language, but there is no educational training for working with the nonsigners. Only 25% of hard of hearing people have hearing aids. They don't self identify. Training needs to be disseminated so service providers will recognize when a person may have a hearing loss and will know how to make it easier for the person to understand what is said. Sam had been working with Donna to have the Department of Aging develop an awareness program for service providers, but the project was halted when the budget went into limbo.

Options include the following. The Pennsylvania Assisted Living Association could be asked to provide an educational seminar for service providers. The Pennsylvania Homecare Association gets grants from the Department of Aging to produce educational videos, and one could be prepared for training people that are taking care of others. The ACDHH can write a letter of support validating the need for this training once the specifics are worked out.

Action Point: Sam, Donna, and Shatarupa will determine who should receive the training and how it can be arranged; prepare documentation showing why it is needed so a proposal for funding can be written; and provide an update at the next ACDHH meeting.

Membership Status

The ACDHH has submitted recommended names to the governor, but all appointments are on hold. Nine public members are appointed by the governor, one representative by the House, one by the

Senate, and six from state agencies. There are currently no representatives from the Department of Health, the Department of Labor & Industry, the House, and the Senate.

Action Points: (1) Nancy will write letters for Don to sign, requesting ACDHH representatives from the Departments of Health and L & I and will send Don copies of the letters that were sent to the House and Senate requesting appointments. (2) Don will contact the Senate and House recipients to remind them that the ACDHH needs their representatives.

L&I's attorney interprets the law authorizing the ACDHH as allowing public members one four-year term (in addition to filling part of another member's vacated term when first appointed, if that was the case). Nancy, Don, and Sam's terms are up in July, after which they can continue in USQ (until successor qualifies). Karen and Dale's terms expire in July 2017; Karen is eligible for appointment to her own four-year term at that point. Lori is in USQ but hasn't served a full four-year appointed term and was recommended for one. There are three vacancies, and Jerald Cohen and Kay Tyberg have been recommended for two.

Nancy noted that the NJ law for that state's deaf and hard of hearing council reads essentially the same as the PA one regarding terms but has never been interpreted to mean that members can only serve one term. Sharon said that PA's law is open to amendment.

Review of Bylaws and Procedures

Action Point: Don will review the ACDHH bylaws with Sharon for discussion at the next meeting and will visit the ODHH office to learn how it works.

Short-Term Actions Needed

Don asked for suggestions for short-term ACDHH actions, and several were offered...

Karen offered to take the lead on developing a presentation that each ACDHH member could give to one agency or one meeting about the ACDHH and how to access the resources on the ODHH website.

Donna offered to work with Sam to come up with an educational program for caregivers on how to communicate with seniors who have a hearing loss so they aren't isolated.

Don suggested asking people from the Deaf Grassroots Movement (DGM), PSAD, and HLAA to share what their organizations are doing at an ACDHH meeting, and Sharon added that the ACDHH could work on committee projects with them to obtain assistance from state agencies. ODHH could provide guidance and links to the appropriate people. Disability Rights Pennsylvania's DASH provides free advocacy training and could be asked to an ACDHH meeting.

Action Point: At the next meeting, ODHH staffers Sharon, Denise, and Ben will discuss some of the things they do on a regular basis and some of their accomplishments

"Employment First"—David DeNotaris, OVR Executive Director

David said he is working with Steve Suroviec, the special assistant to Secretary Ted Dallas at the Department of Human Services, as co--leader of Governor Wolf's Employment First Executive Order. This project is intended to increase competitive integrated employment for Pennsylvanians with a disability. He came to the ACDHH to ask for ideas from members and guests on how to accomplish this, for the report that will be made to the governor on July 8, and a number of people responded.

Harvey Corson said that the Executive Order requires measuring employer progress in providing requested technical assistances, so OVR should include a mention of the provision of interpreting or CART for job interviews and after the person is hired.

Neil McDevitt said that Dr. Kubby Rashid, who was one of President Obama's White House fellows, recently wrote a white paper analyzing why the government is behind on hiring deaf and hard of hearing people. She found that agencies each have their own accommodations budgets, which she recommended compiling into one centralized budget instead. Also, many organizations have a conflict of interest because the staff member who orders interpreting services is the same one who determines whether a civil rights violation has occurred, so those responsibilities should be separated.

Nancy Kingsley said that the ACDHH spent two years working on a proposal involving OVR services for nonsigning people with hearing loss, but the agreed upon actions had not yet been taken. Currently, OVR counselors for people who are deaf and hard of hearing are required to know ASL, which enables direct communication for those who sign. However, if the counselor only communicates in ASL, an interpreter is needed to facilitate communication with nonsigning customers. The following was noted in September 2014: "The human resources department plans to modify the job description for the rehabilitation counselor for the deaf and hard of hearing to include an ability to serve hard of hearing clients via communication strategies such as speech reading and speech-to-text. OVR will begin online VR hearing loss training for general VR counselors and RCDs once CRC credits are arranged."

Action Point: Nancy will provide David with the information concerning the plans for OVR to provide appropriate services for nonsigning people with hearing loss.

Kay Tyberg said that the last time she used OVR, she had to wait six months for an appointment, so that needs to be corrected. It should be possible for OVR applicants to give a text number or email address rather than being called by voice phone. Some employers conduct interviews via telephone, which makes a necessary for people to mention their hearing loss before being offered a job. OVR should ask employers to let OVR train the co-workers on how to accommodate the new employee.

Kathy Marenic said that when Deaf people apply for a job, they need to be able to get immediate OVR authorization for interpreting services. Many Deaf people have poor English skills, which makes it difficult for them to fill out an application online. Employers are often reluctant to communicate with an applicant through the relay service, so perhaps it could be explained to corporations at job fairs.

Harry Barnum said that potential employers often worry that they will be unable to communicate with a Deaf employee. Short explanations can be written, and interpreters don't need to be there all day.

Employers should be told that if the phone is needed for a job, Deaf people can use it through the video relay service. OVR shouldn't assume that Deaf customers belong in low-functioning jobs.

Sam Trychin said that a document needs to be prepared to explain to job interviewers and co-workers that people with hearing loss hear better in some situations than others. Some factors can be corrected, e.g. background noise and communication behavior barriers.

DONNA Reinaker asked whether the program could be extended to include people with disabilities who are aging, and David said yes.

Scot Ferre said that he would bring the comments about employment issues to a statewide training for rehab counselors for the deaf and hard of hearing that was being held in two weeks.

David said that the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires OVR to invest 15% of its federal budget, around \$20 million, on pre-employment transition services for students aged 14-21 to help them obtain summer, weekend, or evening employment. Students with disabilities who have such experience are twice as likely to find jobs after high school as those who don't. David would like to know of any organizations that are interested in helping OVR create these employment opportunities.

Public Comments

Kay Tyberg said she is an ombudsman with the office on aging and has been doing hearing loss presentations in senior centers, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities. One facility has a late-deafened resident with no means of communication, and the staff said they didn't have time to type or write to her. The Departments of Aging or Human Services need to ensure that this doesn't happen.

Neil McDevitt said that the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf is making major changes to the certification process, and Act 57, which requires interpreters to be certified and registered with the state, depends on that certification. Many interpreters have been forced to either stop working or hope that nobody reports them for not being registered yet.

Action Point: Don will put Act 57 on the agenda for the next ACDHH meeting and invite Neil to discuss the issue further.

Harry Barnum said that the Pennsylvania Council on Aging (PCA) had a workshop about disabilities and provided relevant trainings but hasn't covered deafness despite promises to do so. In other cases, when such trainings were conducted, the recipients didn't follow through with the recommended actions.

Deaf senior citizens don't have the technology they need, such as videophones, in nursing homes, so they should be enabled to stay in their own homes when possible, by having a visiting nurse come, etc.

Department Reports

Department of Aging—Donna Reinaker

The Department of Aging is working on its state plan for the next four years and is encouraging people of all ages but specifically seniors to communicate their wishes for the end of their lives.

Governor's Cabinet for People with Disabilities—Devon Grant

SB 879 (Act 17 of 2016), the PA-ABLE Act, enables the creation of tax-exempt savings accounts for people with disabilities and is modeled after the 529 college savings plans. House Bill 400 (Act 26 of 2016) makes work experience for high school students with disabilities a priority. It covers what OVR must do and mirrors WIOA requirements.

The Governor's Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities has never had new appointments since the original ones were made by Governor Rendell, so it has dwindled down. There are about 16 on the list now. The Executive Order that set up the committee does not define any specific terms or limits or numbers. It just says the Governor will appoint members. GACPWD is doing listening forums, with the first one set up for Erie on June 21, to hear what issues are important to stakeholders with a disability.

The Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Programs is offered by the federal Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) to assist states to increase competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities. Last year was its first in Pennsylvania. The program offers national subject matter experts who come to advise the state team, made up of various state agencies. The team asked ODEP to provide resources to assist with provider transformation for sheltered workshops, so they can help their clients obtain competitive, integrated employment in the workplace rather than in the sheltered setting. Sixteen providers attended a boot camp in March, and four were selected to receive direct assistance from the subject matter expert. Community of Practice webinars are being offered, and a local template is being developed to help school districts collaborate with OVR and local administrative entities in transitioning students to competitive integrated employment. ODEP also offers a monthly Employment First Community of Practice Webinar Series that is open to the public.

The art contest for Pennsylvania artists with disabilities will be held again this year. The PA Disability Employment & Empowerment Summit (PADES) will be in Erie this year to bring together employers, government agencies, service providers, and people with disabilities to discuss how to improve services.

ODHH—Sharon Behun

Because the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) put a moratorium on testing, PSAD, PARID, and ODHH feel that Act 57 needs to be amended. Sharon submitted documents to the Department of Labor & Industry to set up a stakeholder group to discuss the proposed amendments.

ODHH has been working with the Department of Human Services regarding emergency management and mass care. A new position will be created for an integration specialist to ensure, if there is an emergency, that people with disabilities or special health needs have their access and functional needs met. A task force is being set up to address these needs before the position is posted.

The ACDHH is invited to arrange for an exhibit table at the Hearing Loss Expo on November 2-3.

Department of Labor & Industry—Matt Krupp

OVR developed an employer survey concerning the Employment First Executive Order, sent it to over 100,000 employers, and is analyzing their responses. OVR is planning a deaf and hard of hearing summer academy for next year, similar to the one at Penn State for students who are blind or visually impaired. OVR is also planning a three-week transitional vocational initiative this summer. OVR is participating in a pilot internship program for Area High School students to place them in various agencies across the state. If it's successful, the intention is to specifically recruit students with disabilities next year.

Comments by ACDHH Members

Donna made a motion for a committee to be created to develop a tool to share that explains the best practices of communicating with people with hearing loss and Dale seconded. In the following discussion, it was noted that Sam, Shatarupa, and Donna had previously planned to work on this. No vote was taken.

Action Point: At the next meeting, Sam, Shatarupa, and Donna will present a recommendation for an educational approach on communicating with people with hearing loss

Candidates for membership on the ACDHH will be interviewed at the next meeting. [*Update: due to unavailability of the meeting room for proposed date changes, the remaining 2016 meeting dates remain September 30 and December 9.*]

(Meeting adjourned at 12:48 p.m.)