



WORLD

Technology News and Commentary for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People



Review of
TDI's 24th
Biennial
Conference

RESET & RECONNECT

ALSO INSIDE:

TDI IN ACTION

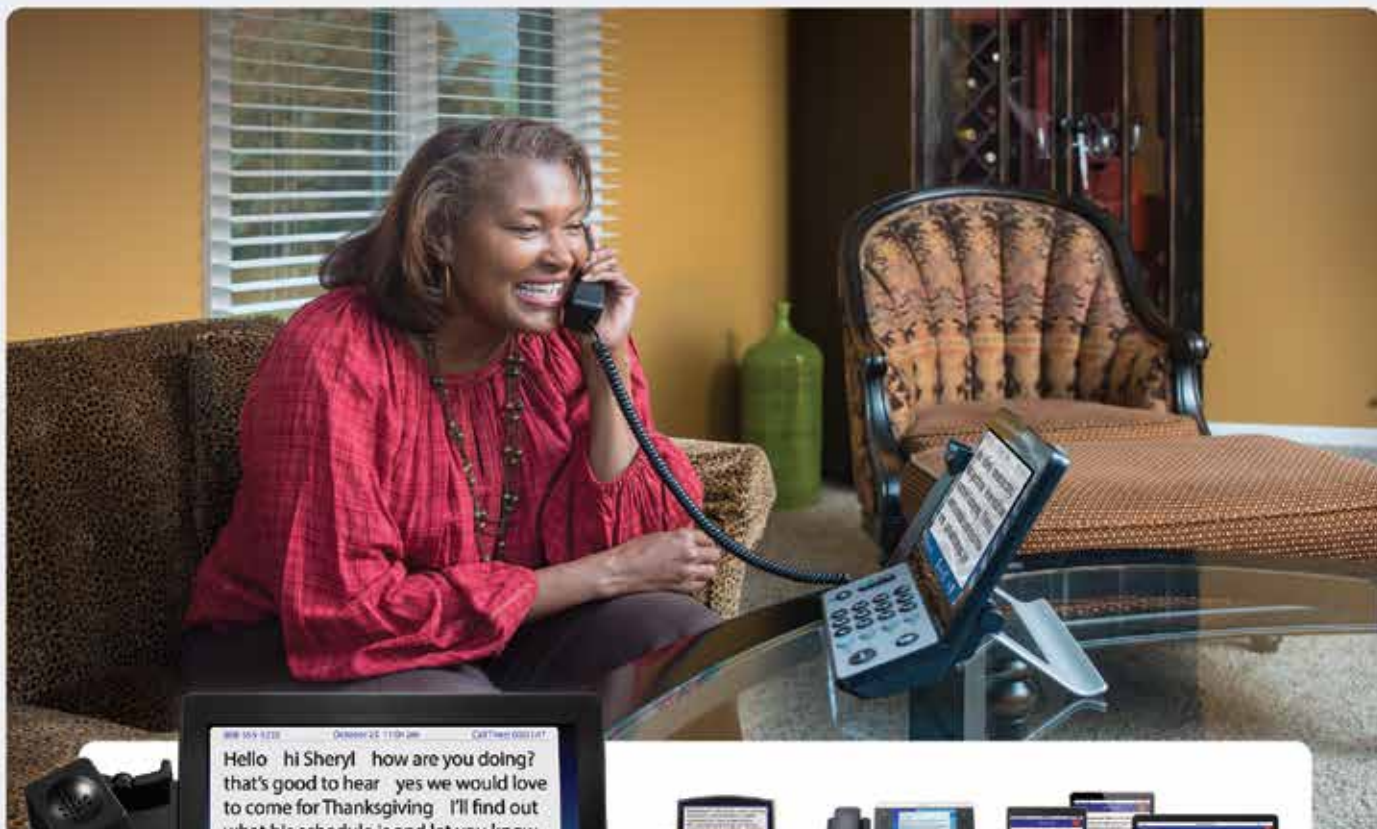
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WHAT WE DO

“TDI shapes the Nation’s public policies in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to advance the interests of the 48 million Americans who are deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened, deafblind, and deaf with mobility issues.”

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Shaping An Accessible World

Board Views



JAN WITHERS

*TDI President and Board Member,
Southeast Region*

“The fully virtual nature of the 2021 TDI Biennial Conference symbolizes a paradigm shift in how we network and learn from one another.”

President's Reception

What a grand experiment and experience the 24th TDI Biennial Conference in July 2021 was! The COVID-19 pandemic compelled us to make this year's conference 100% virtual. In many ways, the conference is emblematic of how the pandemic threw so many of us into a cauldron of experiments as we scrambled to find ways to maintain our communication with one another and our access to information.

A brave new world, indeed – when TDI CEO Eric Kaika and the TDI Board of Directors decided to make the conference fully virtual due to safety considerations, there were initially many unknowns. What platform could we use? How could we ensure it is accessible to participants with a wide range of accessibility needs? How could we retain some semblance of the traditional elements of the biennial conference such as the breakout sessions, President's Reception, and TDI Awards Luncheon? What type and number of personnel would we need to ensure a well-functioning conference? I marvel at Eric's creativity, planning, leadership, and ultimately, courage in tackling such a monumental challenge. Please join me in giving Eric and his team a huge round of applause for a successful conference!

Of course, there were glitches, for which we truly apologize. The segue from plenary sessions to breakout sessions could have been smoother, the captions could have been easier to access and manage, and comments in the Zoom chat box should not have blocked the captions, to name just a few examples. As one who has experienced communication inequity all too often, it was painful to see these glitches adversely impact some of the registrants. Nevertheless, I was

relieved to see how much of the virtual conference technology worked and how accessible it was.

Recognizing the many benefits of a virtual conference, the TDI Board determined at its July 31, 2021 virtual board meeting that all future conferences will be hybrid, or asynchronous, to be more specific. Pre-pandemic, there were always individuals who wished to attend but were unable to travel or had scheduling conflicts. A virtual conference offers flexibility and increases the number of individuals who could register and participate. Plenary and breakout sessions could be recorded, allowing registrants to view them at their convenience. (By the way, the recordings of the 2021 conference can be viewed at <https://tdiconf.com/recordings/>.) As in past conferences, there will continue to be opportunities for networking on site, hands-on learning of emerging technologies at exhibits, to name just a couple of the benefits of having a conference on-site.

We have not only made careful note of the technological and logistical lessons learned but we have also recognized that, in line with TDI's mission and vision, TDI's biennial conferences in the future should set an ongoing bar for fully accessible conferences. Of course, we will continue our long tradition of featuring national leaders, cutting-edge technologies, and stimulating panel discussions, all with a focus on assuring equity in Information and Communications Technology. And we will continue to find innovative and stimulating ways to present information as we did recently with the “Fireside Chat with the CEO” featuring the President of Gallaudet University, the Executive Director of Hearing Loss Association

PRESIDENT'S RECEPTION • Continued from page 2

of America, and the CEO of the National Association of the Deaf.

In closing and on behalf of TDI's Board of Directors, I want to once again thank Eric and his team for rising to the challenge despite many unknowns and for pulling it off. I am especially grateful to all the sponsors for their confidence and steadfast support for such an endeavor. I also want to thank the following entities for providing pro bono support: the Rochester Institute of Technology/ National Technical Institute for the Deaf for managing the platform (Zoom) during the conference, Convo for their sign language interpreting services, CaptionFirst for their captioning services, Gallaudet University for the use of their studio, videographers and film editors for the "Fireside Chat with the CEO" feature, and Diana Markel for providing interpreting services for the pre recorded content. Also very much appreciated is the fact FCC Chair Jessica Rosenworcel and all the presenters on the program for Thursday, July 29 prerecorded, edited, and provided captions and sign language interpreting services for their plenary presentations.

Finally, thank YOU for registering with us and participating in the conference. Because of everyone's forward-looking and can-do spirit, the 24th TDI Biennial Conference was a huge success and truly a time to "Reset and Reconnect" and propelled us into a brave new world.

Our Mission:

TDI, in collaboration with its partners, serves as a national leader in policy advocacy, education and innovation to foster full accessibility, equity, and inclusion in Information and Communications Technology.

Our Vision:

All individuals and communities experience the world of Information and Communications Technology with the same ease, access, and inclusion, resulting in full and equitable participation in society.

Recent Elections/Appointments:

John Kinstler, Midwest Region, 2nd term

David Coco, Central, 1st term

Matt Myrick, Member-at-Large, appointed by the full board to serve a second term



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OPENING CEREMONY

TDI President Jan Withers

TDI President Jan Withers kicked off the start of the 24th Biennial TDI Conference, recognizing it as TDI's first-ever fully virtual conference and the 31st anniversary of the Americans with the Disabilities Act (ADA). "This landmark Act paved the way for increased accessibility in many areas of the lives of people who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, Late-Deafened, DeafBlind, Deaf with other disabilities, and who have other communication disabilities" said President Withers.

"Heightened focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion in all aspects of society including information and communication technology."

Withers continued "Another reason today is a special one is this is the first time we have a fully-virtual conference." Hosted online, conference attendees were able to tune in and participate from all over the world. With over 300 registered from 400+ States and 6 countries, as well as portions being live-streamed. All conference programming will also be available for viewing anytime at TDIConf.com

Jan mentioned how the pandemic made people recognize the barriers that communities are experiencing and affirmed the need to continue advancing accessibility. She highlighted TDI's vision "All individuals and communities experience the world of Information and Communications Technology with the same ease, access, and inclusion, resulting in full and equitable participation in society." Withers continued by honing in on the theme 'Reset and Reconnect'—"the fact the pandemic has truly upended our world and the need for us to be inclusive of all kinds of communities and individuals make it clear we need to reset and find ways to reconnect with people."



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Jessica Rosenworcel, FCC Acting Chairwoman

FCC Acting Chairperson, Jessica Rosenworcel, gave some brief recognition of TDI's past actions and celebrated Claude Stout's retirement in 2019. She remarked that "TDI continues to foster collaboration and offer expert advice to make FCC policy better and smarter."

She went further explaining that one of her biggest accomplishments during being in office was to see the 21st Century Communications and Accessibility Video Act (CVAA) through the process of becoming a law and saw personally that the President signed it into law effectively! She believed that the functional equivalency is very important since it allows the Americans with hearing loss or speech impairment to be able to pick up the phone, reach out, connect, and participate more fully in the world. Still, she agreed that we need to be more proactive to ensure that we make the most from laws such as CVAA.

Due to the pandemic, we noticed the issues in technology and broadband accessibility. For instance, we realized that broadband is not that advanced enough nor accessible for everyone. The FCC saw that problem and set up the emergency broadband benefits program so people can have access to the internet. Moreover, the emergency connectivity fund was also set up by the FCC in order to assist schools and libraries to have internet connectivity. We also have to improve telehealth to make it equitable for everyone. Telehealth is recognized as an important issue by the FCC's disability advisory committee. Not only that, the FCC is working on ensuring the availability of the telecommunications relay services (TRS). The FCC is continuing to work on other issues such as communication services, accessibility, measurable standards and metrics for captioning delay and accuracy for IP CTS, and wireless handset hearing aids

By improving communication accessibility to individuals with disabilities, "we strengthen our economy, civil life, and our nation."

FCC TOWNHALL



By Mark Seeger,
TDI Central Region, Secretary

The TDI's Opening Town Hall with the Federal Communication Commission at the 24th Biennial Conference immediately following opening remarks from FCC Chairwoman Rosenworcel was a great success including panelists Diane Burstein (Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau - CGB), Suzy Rosen Singleton (Chief, Disability Rights Office - DRO), Eliot Greenwald (Deputy Chief, DRO) and Will Schell (Deputy Chief, DRO).

We discussed several topics such as Emergency broadband benefit (EBB) helping households connect during the pandemic. According to Suzy, there is already a "broadband... 3.2 Billion dollars initiative to allow people to have a discount for broadband services for their bills." If you think you are eligible for that benefit, go to www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit. She also added that the FCC set up the Emergency Connectivity Fund to support schools, libraries, students, and staff to be able to connect to wifi hotspots through their devices. If you think your school needs that fund to assist with education and other services, then reach out to your school to know about that benefit.

There are other mentioned topics such as Emergency access with effective communication options vital for a person in danger; how to seek assistance from the FCC when wanting to file a complaint about lack of access; and how to file comments during open proceedings where the Commission is soliciting feedback from all parties impacted by services such as CapTel, VRS, legacy TRS (TTY), Captions, etc.

If you want to file a complaint, then see the instructions on how to file a complaint in the FCC website, FCC.gov/accessibilitycomplaintsform or other link, DRO@accessibility.gov.

Furthermore, Suzy added that we will have an emergency nationwide suicide prevention lifeline with a phone number, 988, that will be established on July 2022. They already closed the rule-making process on that lifeline on August 10th but they invite you to bring your comments on their website, DRO@FCC.gov. The docket number is 1-8-366.

Several websites and internet links were posted in the CHAT of the Zoom session for participants so that they could easily contact the FCC for additional information in specific areas of interest as a result of great questions and answers fielded from audience participants. To see a recorded copy of the one hour FCC Town Hall Meeting on the internet, please click here: [FCC Townhall](#).

"Emergency access with effective communication options vital for a person in danger; how to seek assistance from the FCC when wanting to file a complaint about lack of access; and how to file comments."



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TOWN HALL WITH FCC'S DISABILITY RIGHTS OFFICE



By Eric Kaika,
TDI Chief
Executive
Officer

With the conference kicked off, the first program was the FCC

Townhall featuring the DRO team: Diane Burstein, Consumer and Governmental Affairs Deputy Bureau Chief, Suzy Rosen Singleton, Chief of the Disability Rights Office, Eliot Greenwald, Deputy Chief of DRO and Will Schell, Designated Federal Officer.

They touched on an array of topics, the CVAA, the suspension of some TRS rules during the pandemic, their authority limitations with 911 and 988 centers, and its support to families, schools, tribal lands and rural areas

with broadband communications.

They talked about their public notice on updates to the 21st Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA), which closed last month. They asked all stakeholders to “provide input on aspects of the [their] CVAA implementation that are working well, on specific areas in which commenters believe improvements are needed, and on requirements that may not be serving their intended purpose or have been overtaken by new technologies.” [Note: TDI filed a lengthy omnibus filing highlighting many potential improvements]

In addition, they shared their progress with the emergency services and programs they launched to assist people in need including people with disabilities during the COVID pandemic. They encouraged

people to review their broadband initiative (<https://www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit>), emergency connectivity fund, telehealth services, emergency notifications.

They also elaborated that their authority is mainly on the phone carriers, and have no authority on the 911 or 988 centers, which are under the Department of Justice. However, the FCC did require that when 911 call centers are ready to take Real Time Text (RTT) calls, the phone carriers are required, and readily able to pass through the messages to the centers. If the 911 call center is not able to take RTT or text messages, then the carrier is required to bounce back the message.

The FCC noted their web page which tells consumers what type of digital services their local 911 centers can receive.

The FCC mentioned they recently updated the rule for the national nationwide suicide prevention lifeline (988) to accept text messages..

Will Schell closed out with the two different kinds of complaints consumers can file with the FCC: a standard complaint or the request for dispute assistance (RDA). The standard complaint only covers issues such as closed captioning or relay services. The latter covers the issue which the consumer is requesting for assistance in which the FCC will be a mediator between you and the covered entity for 30 days to resolve the matter.

If the matter is not resolved, then the complainant will file a complaint to the enforcement bureau so they can determine if there is any violation. The FCC has the ASL customer support line for sign language users to directly communicate with the consumer complaint specialist that will personally write the complaint form for the complainant.



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Fireside Chat with CEO, Kaika

I thought it would be neat to have a kind of fireside chat where we can discuss anything and get information and resources from experts in any field. I was able to invite the distinguished representatives, Barbara Kelley (Executive Director of HLAA), Howard Rosenblum (NAD), and President Bobbi of Gallaudet University.

First thing I mentioned was to bring up the issue of virtual communication. Howard responded that there were several barriers such as masks to the complex ones like technology and accessibility. In addition, he explained that we were reactive to any changes and “we have to remind the outside world to think about us and include our needs such as captioning, communication, sign language, so many different levels both technologically speaking and in person.” Kelley added that there “was a whole sense of isolation,” another barrier during the pandemic to the people with hearing loss, especially

with the use of masks that made it difficult for deaf and hard of hearing people to read lips or read facial expressions. Still, Bobbi stated that despite the pandemic, we were able to come together due to our shared life experiences of having to negotiate the spoken language environments. I agreed and commented that, “People with disabilities are natural born engineers. We come into the world ready to find solutions to problems we encounter.”

We went further to discuss universal design such as having CART, interpreters, captions in video conferences and virtual classrooms. We noticed that in press briefings, they have the interpreters similar to the one that the White House has and it became a new normal to see the interpreters on the screen in any social media and TV news channels. It was a good change.

However, we discovered that through airlines carriers, they do not provide

“People with disabilities are natural born engineers. We come into the world ready to find solutions to problems we encounter.”

accessible accommodations such as TV captioning, emotional animal support, wheelchair accessibility, and much more. We need to fight to get accessibility in airports, especially for the deaf-blind community who experience much difficulty navigating the airports and ability to get accessibility. As Howard remarked, motivation and imperative was what drives the people to keep going to improve accessibility and spread awareness of it. In sum, I agreed with

AWARDS CEREMONY



By Jim House,
TDI West
Region

During our
biennial
conferences,
TDI honored

an elite group of movers and shakers, individuals, organizations, and businesses with six awards for their outstanding achievements to improve access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT). The TDI Awards committee was chaired by Jim House, TDI Board Member from the West Region with CM Boryslawskij, Board Treasurer from the North East Region, and Opeoluwa Sotonwa, Member-at-Large.

I have worked with Claude on the awards for many TDI Conferences since its 30th Anniversary Gala in 1998, I created the inscriptions for the Awards plaque that are given out to every recipient since then. But this year was different because as a Board Member, I was a part of the decision making process as the Chair of the Awards Committee. With CM and Ope on the committee, I felt confident we could rise to the challenge of picking six leaders out of many excellent nominations. As a Weitbrecht Award recipient in 2013, and a co-author of *A PATH TO AN ACCESSIBLE WORLD*, I have gained a profound sense of awe and respect for TDI as an organization and all the past, current, and future TDI Award recipients!

SPECIAL RECOGNITION DURING THE BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

TDI's Awards ceremony was hosted during its biennial conference in the late afternoon on Monday, July 26.

Congratulations to the six award recipients for their outstanding achievements and note-worthy recognition for their work that promotes accessibility and/or contribution to Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities!



The *H. Latham Breunig Award for Humanitarian Efforts* was awarded to **Christopher Soukup**. This award is given to individuals, organizations, or companies who have made outstanding contributions to the program or activities of TDI. In recognition of Christopher's enormous in-kind support, CSD has generously furnished TDI with back-end support for our website and technical advice on the Training Institute using the virtual model in spite of nationwide restrictions on gatherings imposed by the pandemic.



The *James C. Marsters Award for Promotion* was awarded to the **DPANtv**. This award is given to individuals, organizations, or companies who have made outstanding contributions in improving accessibility in telecommunications or media through promotion, marketing, or public relations. In recognition of DPANtv's excellent live coverage of the Presidential and Vice Presidential debates by providing full access for viewers

with access to high-quality American Sign Language interpreters and live captioning.



in accessible design, Zoom's interface enables deaf and hard of hearing participants across America to fully participate in virtual school, work, civic, and social gatherings online.

The *Robert H. Weitbrecht Award for Telecommunications Access* was awarded to **Zoom Video Communications**. This award is given to individuals, organizations, or companies who have made outstanding contributions by any means to improve accessibility in telecommunications and media. In recognition of Zoom's commitment to accessibility on its video conferencing platform. By providing leadership



The *Andrew Saks Award for Engineering* was awarded to **Joe Duarte**. This award is given to individuals, organizations, or companies who have made outstanding contributions in improving accessibility in telecommunications or media through efforts in design, electronics, or engineering. His entrepreneurial spirit resulted in two successful business enterprises. With Duartek, his custom engineered solutions focus on the needs of people who use hearing aids. He envisioned InnoCaption's potential to improve the lives of callers with hearing disabilities using mobile captioning to

SPECIAL RECOGNITION • Continued from page 9

maintain connections every day with their hearing peers in America.



The *Karen Peltz Strauss Award for Public Policy* was awarded to the **DHHCAN**. This award is given

to individuals who have made outstanding contributions in improving accessibility in telecommunications, media, and information technology through efforts in public policy development. In recognition of DHHCAN's 28-year history of spearheading coalition efforts across many deaf and hard of hearing organizations by sharing policy reports and progress in legislative developments. During Election cycles, DHHCAN creates in-depth policy proposals covering 7 essential topics benefiting the deaf and hard of hearing community for Presidential nominees' election and transition teams on the road to the White House.



The *I. Lee Brody Lifetime Achievement Award* was awarded to **Claude Stout**. This award is given to individuals who have devoted

time and energy over an extended number of years to improve accessibility in telecommunications, media, and information technology. In recognition of his dedication to access as the Executive Director of TDI from 1997 to 2020. During his 23-year tenure, he elevated TDI's status and nurtured its growth to maintain access as communication and information technology underwent a rapid transformation from analog TTYs to a wide array of digital communication devices!

PLENARY SESSION: THE NEXT GENERATION RELAY SERVICES

David Bahar, Director of Telecommunications Access of Maryland of the Maryland Department of Information Technology, presented on how relay services came to be, its current issues, and what it can look like in the future.



"Generations of deaf people grew up without being able to use the phone. Instead, they relied on the kindness of strangers, friends, and family."

Bahar explained the history of telecommunications for deaf and hard of hearing people evolved over time. For nearly 100 years, deaf and hard of hearing people were unable to utilize the telephone until the late 1960s with the creation of the TTY. And in a span of thirty years, we had near equitable experiences using captioned telephones and video communications. Thanks to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the relay system became a nationally mandated service at no cost to consumers.

In the 1980s, relay services were largely a volunteer-based service funded by individual users or grant funding. "That was quite a leap in creating autonomy for the deaf community, especially since it happened before the existence of ADA" remarked Bahar.

With the passage of the ADA, Bahar explained the goal was to create a "functional equivalence, [meaning] a level playing field. And the pillars needed to support the community was that service. To be able to make a call any time... functional equivalence."

A decade later, technology brought us captioned telephones and the video relay service (VRS). Despite the convenience of communicating in one's preferred language, there were a lot of limitations. Broadband access, instead of telephone lines, was required to make calls. It was different for hearing people to call deaf and hard of hearing users, connecting to emergency services (9-1-1) were also cumbersome due to no location information

being transmitted (which is still an ongoing issue).

In 1996, the Congress passed the Telecommunications Act which allowed phone numbers to be ported between carriers, resulting in consumers keeping their phone numbers when they switch carriers.

Thanks to the work of the FCC, the telecommunications industry, and deaf and hard of hearing organizations, access to telecommunication and technology radically transformed everyone's lives. Real-Time-Text (RTT) is the modern version of the TTY but relies on internet protocol for routing data. We are able to use RTT using cellular service and when data and wifi are unavailable. It is also a way to directly connect with emergency services and allow them to pinpoint our location. Bahar further emphasized that "for real functional equivalence, for mental health, the telecommunication system must be inclusive."



“The first question was to reveal what leaders think VRS can do with the right technologies, and the right policies in place to spur innovation in industry and academia.”

BREAKOUT SESSION NG RELAY: VRS PANEL



By Jim House, TDI West Region

Working with the panelists, Zainab Alkebsi from NAD, Spencer Montan from RIT/NTID, Lance Pickett from Sorenson, and Michael Scott from the FCC has opened the eyes of VRS users across the country to the potential of VRS services.

The first question was to reveal what leaders think VRS can do with the right technologies, and the right policies in place to spur innovation in industry and academia. The panelists feel that VRS has not fully met the standards for a functionally equivalent system where the deaf user experience is equivalent to the non-deaf user experience with robust competition and innovation. Several features were mentioned, such as diversity of deaf and hearing interpreters, skills-based routing where certain calls to doctors, attorneys, tech support, and others are handled by interpreters that specialize in these areas. The VRS industry has been hampered with undue focus on fraud, waste, and abuse for many years since evidence pointed to several schemes where video relay providers engaged in fraudulent activities to artificially increase reimbursement rates for calls not performed. While reforms were implemented, the lack of new features meant that deafblind or deaf-plus users were not receiving due consideration for communication equity. The COVID pandemic has spurred rapid innovation in virtual meetings that have not factored in VRS services as accessibility features like automated captioning. Virtual meeting providers add accessibility as an afterthought but VRS providers have not achieved full integration with other virtual meeting platforms. The sign-up procedure to receive VRS service is drawn out over several days, not instantaneous like in mainstream wireless services. Ten-digit telephone numbers for VRS equipment and software are not multi-functional like cell phones where you can use one number for text and video messaging.

The second question applies to any technical barriers that stand in the way of full communication access. When there is a need to call 9-1-1 during an emergency, the public safety answering point needs to know where you are. If you are in a high-rise apartment or office building, GPS can find your building address, but responders still don't know what floor you are on. If you are away from home, you need to provide the current location of where the emergency is occurring or the responders will go to your residence. There are messaging apps that function like a videophone without cross-technologies but operate in their own silos where a Google user cannot call directly to a FaceTime user for example. This raises the question of why deaf users are not participating in industry research and design (R&D) activities? People within the deaf community should be at the table, not only with the FCC but also other corporations who develop video platforms.

The next question is how can the FCC and the industry help us overcome these barriers? There's different kinds of gaps to look at. What needs to be the steps forward taken by the FCC? Are there other constituencies we're

VRS • Continued from page 11

missing? What do the VRS providers need to do? What do they need for their next technological progress forward, where they can go? The FCC has spent a lot of time focused on correcting past issues of fraud, waste, and abuse, and we have to make sure it doesn't happen again. But at the same time we need to encourage innovation and progress. One change that took a long time to make but was made was at-home video calling. The FCC started a pilot program. We got that off the ground, and that actually had very opportunist timing because COVID happened because we really needed interpreters working in their homes and all the providers have a small mechanism for building on what they had started in the trial programs, and that helped. The FCC has pending petitions to look at our next steps there. For example, the FCC has freed up some funds for research and development and loosened up some rules where possible.

The last question covered the temporary waivers that the FCC enacted in response to the pandemic. Which of those waivers should be made permanent? We already mentioned allowing the VRS interpreters to work from home while maintaining privacy and a robust internet connection. The panelists commended the FCC for being proactive on this ruling because it expanded the pool of available interpreters that can answer our calls within a reasonable timeframe. They did raise the concern about virtual conference hosts' unnecessary focus on costs, and ignoring their obligation to hire an interpreter to make their meetings accessible thus making us call through VRS. Spencer Montan from RIT/NTID brought up IRIS, a prototype solution being developed by RIT's Center on Access Technology with funds from MITRE and the FCC. IRIS would enable VRS users to use one number integrated with your contact list for video calls and text messaging among other uses. This would eliminate the need for us to pass out two different numbers, one for text and one for VRS. The scope of FCC's authority regulates the VRS industry but does not have jurisdiction over interpreters or video calls that take place outside of the ten-digit telephone numbering system.

We were working as an advisor the past couple of years, this concept is called IRIS and it's named after a Greek goddess messenger. We want your mobile device to have full access as a hearing person — a non-deaf person's device, so that means you have one number which integrates your dialer system, according to Spencer Montan from RIT/NTID.

So by going into accessibility settings, you can turn, you know, like your VRS and your CTS calls, you can have the option to call — communicate with these people, your loved ones, and we are actually developing a prototype now, a CAT, the center of access technology, a lot of different projects we're working on, but this one particularly, project IRIS, is the most exciting and we're hoping this project will fit the needs of VRS and the industry out there. Hopefully, it would lessen missed calls and we could integrate with your address book, your contact list.

There were two questions from the audience on how to stop the interpreter from announcing the relay call saying this person uses sign language and a pilot program allowing deaf interpreters on a VRS call. There should be a setting in your default VRS profile where you can either allow the interpreter to announce or not to announce when the other party answers your call. TDI and other organizations in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumer Advocacy Network have long advocated for including deaf interpreters in VRS calls to make telecommunications more equitable for people who are deafblind or those who are deaf with mobility disabilities. We hope that our advocacy will lead to some results soon.

BREAKOUT SESSION NG RELAY: IP CTS PANEL



**By Tina
Childress,
TDI Member
at Large**

As a newer
Board member,
I was blown
away by this
year's caliber of

presentations and panelists for our virtual conference! Even though we weren't able to meet in person, there was still a sense of camaraderie in the various sessions as people chatted in the Chat Box, asked questions and shared information. I am looking forward to the time when we are able to meet in person and I can put a face to the numerous names I saw in attendance.

I had the honor of moderating two panels, that is, IP CTS and Tele-Conferencing. Now I will discuss the IP CTS panel.

Nathan Gomme, Eliot Greenwald, Lise Hamlin and Dixie Ziegler had lively conversations related to IPCTS. Our goals were to discuss our vision for the next generation of relay services as well as understand current technology, policy limitation and consumer needs. We touched on the topics of smartphones replacing desktop caption phones, how the FCC is addressing the increased use of ASR, the viability of IP Relay in today's world, and even the possible integration of IPCTS/VRS/IP Relay choices into one product. Such great conversations!

BREAKOUT SESSION NG RELAY: DEAFBLIND PANEL



By John Kinstler,
TDI Vice
President,
Midwest
Region

We were
fortunate to
have four

distinguished panelists for our “Next Generation Relay: DeafBlind Panel” this year. The four panelists were Keith Clark - Associate Accessibility Manager with T Mobile, Gabrielle Joseph – COO, GlobalVRS, René Pellerin – DeafBlind Advocate, and Bill Wallace – Attorney Advisor, FCC: DRO. A great mixture of panelists of DeafBlind users and organizations that provides funds and services for DeafBlind individuals.

COVID-19 and the DeafBlind Community

We started out with both Keith and Rene sharing how the pandemic impacted them and how there were a lot of challenges that were placed for the deafblind community. Both Keith and Rene prefer using VRS via Pro Tactile, an in-person interpreter for their video relay and videophone calls. They had an issue with the social distancing guidelines and having to stay six feet apart, and many were fearful of just contacting one another. There was a lockdown and a lot of businesses and organizations closed down – there was no access to information. “It was the worst nightmare of anyone who is deafblind because we were so disconnected from the world,” Rene said.

Not All VRS Are Available For The DeafBlind Community

So, their preferred method of communicating via VRS is Pro Tactile,

an in-person interpreter that couldn’t be used. The other method would be the IP Relay which is typing to the relay and the relay types back what was said and the text would be converted into braille on the braille reader. On the contrary, the sighted deaf people were able to maintain using the VRS service with no problem. VRS companies have been giving out free software, laptops, and videophones to sighted deaf people for free so they can use their service. The deafblind didn’t have that. The deafblind would need additional equipment to use the service.

FCC Update

Bill said that “*FCC is voting on adoption of a notice of proposed rule-making (NPRM) that is directly at modifying the compensation methodology for providers of IP relay...one of the important parts of the NPRM is that FCC is asking for comments on those who use IP Relay and want to know what the benefits of the service to help FCC figure out how to sustain this service.*” FCC authorized 10 million to be spent in the national deafblind equipment distribution program so that deafblind individuals can get equipment such as computers, braille displays to use to make calls to whoever they want to. This will allow deafblind individuals to be able to get equipment for free – if the applicant qualifies. Those who don’t qualify would have to pay out-of-pocket.

GlobalVRS, the only VRS Company for DeafBlind and Deaf Low Vision

Gabrielle shared how Global VRS is the only VRS company to provide video relay service for the deafblind community. They are the only company that has software customized to be used in conjunction with existing technology used by DeafBlind and Deaf Low Vision communities.

The deafblind person can express themselves in sign language to a camera then the interpreter will actually type back what the person is saying to them, which appears on the braille reader or interpreted on a large monitor for those who are Deaf Low Vision. The technology/software needed for the deafblind can be secured through the NDBP, but only for those who qualify.

Comments and Suggestions

I want to highlight some of Gabrielle’s comments:

In regards to the qualification criteria with NDBP, she added that there should not be any income gaps in order to get access to some of the technology.

There are alternative ways that software can be developed for deafblind and funded in a different mechanism whether it’s an exogenous reimbursement mechanism or another tool where these costs can be absorbed and innovation can be made specifically for the deafblind communities.

There’s an opportunity in the future to maybe write into the rulings may be interoperability or technology specs that are specific to the deafblind community of specific settings that should be available to all and not just, again, if you happen to be under a certain income gap.

There should be a collaborative partnership between VRS companies and the NDBP as far as using a user registration database.

Real-Time Text (RTT) – Another Service To Consider?

There was also some discussion on Real-Time Text (RTT). If RTT can be much more widely available and standardized. It is a really big change that could be formalized among all providers so that you can have that

DEAFBLIND • Continued from page 13

experience during any relay call and that would also be a significant impact on the experience. RTT can become much more widely available and standardized, it gives a much different experience. Because with RTT you might not need VRS.

Wrapping Up

To wrap up, here are things to consider:

- Encourage the deafblind individuals to share their complaints with FCC at [FCC.gov/accessibility](https://www.fcc.gov/accessibility) under the NDBP page so FCC can be aware of what the deafblind need as far as using the relay service
- Push telecommunication needs of the DeafBlind community further up on the priority list
- Have a mechanism where ALL DeafBlind can have access to the DB VRS software, not only those in the NDBDP where income caps exist. This can be accomplished by petitioning Congress to change the determination factors or petitioning the Commission to have some sort of exogenous cost reimbursement for the distribution of the app.
- All VRS companies should offer their service/products for free for the DeafBlind community. Money/Return of Investment (ROI) should not be the driving force.
- Work with innovative technology companies to be mindful for DeafBlind when creating products and software
- Change cannot happen with innovative companies and FCC in regards to equity with the deafblind community. It's important to also include the DeafBlind community to take part in this project so that the DeafBlind can be equal participants to the society.

BREAKOUT SESSION

NO MORE CRAPTIONS: TV CC



By Opeoluwa Sotonwa, TDI Member At-Large

TV Caption

Reset and Connect was just the perfect panacea to the raging uncertainties of the future of work, technology, and accessibility caused by the Coronavirus pandemic. It was gratifying to be a part of this conference. The opportunity to lead candid conversations regarding TV captions with industry experts provided the audience with the impetus to learn about emerging technology and the policy initiatives that can improve the lived experiences of TV viewers who are deaf or hard of hearing.

One of the panelists, Karen Peltz Strauss, provided historical background into current trends and the work TDI and other consumer advocacy groups have done over the years. Christian Vogler expertly dissected the policy framework that has led to the current gaps -- He noted cable television has made great improvement with captions, however, with the popularity of online streaming services such as YoutubeTV and Sling, TV viewers now have more options -- these online streaming options still have more work to do to improve the lived experiences of viewers who are deaf or hard of hearing. He submitted that he does not think Automated Speech Recognition (ASR), despite its advancement, is at a point to meet reasonable accommodation standards under the ADA. Larry Walke spoke about current law and mused on the idea of more engagement with regulatory agencies, such as FCC, to see if there is a national framework in the pipeline to address the disparity. The panelists all agreed that the technology that will allow individuals the flexibility to move the caption around is already there, in fact, one manufacturer already included it in their latest products, but work will need to be done to standardize Closed Captioning.

Some attendees shared their frustrations about the seemingly unequal access that will meet the burgeoning technological revolution taking place. The frustrations also included unequal experiences occasioned by a lack of

standardized policy and regulatory framework. I was enthused by the quality of representation from the cream of industry experts that shared their thoughts and offered insider tips on burgeoning technology.

DEI Panel

My personal highlight was the opportunity to lead a panel discussion on diversity and inclusion when it comes to technological accessibility. For far too

BREAKOUT SESSION

NO MORE CRAPTIONS: WEB CLOSED CAPTIONING



By CM Boryslawskyj,
TDI Treasurer, Northeast Region

As I had an opportunity to host this session on the Web: Captioning, I was thrilled to see that all of the speakers strongly advocated for accessibility, especially on the captions on some media platforms and TV! The speakers all agreed that the hearing

community does recognize the benefits of closed captions in TV and any media.

Some of us discussed Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) and we agreed that ASR does have some benefits for captioning, however, ASR is not perfect yet to provide us proper captions to get the full information. Sean Forbes, co-founder of DPAN.tv remarked that he did not think ASR captioning is not that great and usually turns it off when he sees it is used on any media platforms. Heather York, VITAC VP MKG & Gov't, added that she noticed that there are various ASR engines and expressed her concern that ASR is used often in the sports, especially in Olympics, with no change of tone or punctuation from broadcasters.

Joshua then discussed his approval of Chrome's new extension with captions and he found that captions were satisfying by watching old music videos from the 60's to 80's. However, he admitted that Chrome captions still need some improvements since it sometimes popped out as overlapping captions so he had to turn it off. Later, he commented that in his Facebook watch videos, some of them show subtitles while others do not have captions. If any video did not show any captions, he will move on to the one that has captions.

I inquired with Sean about his experience of live streaming the presidential debate in 2016 and he explained that 500,000 Deaf people watched it through his media platform. He realized that Deaf community really needs access or get involved with politics to get the updates and current news. He stated that it is really important the Deaf people have their voices heard or express their opinions including their views. He noticed that in 2020 presidential debates, the captions were not that great in several TV channels so he hired his own captioner to ensure that he gets full and accurate information and statements from presidential candidates for the Deaf community. He then commented

CRAPTIONS - WEB CLOSED CAPTIONING • Continued on page 18

BREAKOUT SESSION NO MORE CRAPTIONS: CTS

by Matt Myrick, TDI Member At-Large



During our Captioned Telephone Service (CTS) panel; TDI had the privilege of inviting experts in the area of its rapidly growing demand with ASR advancements based on significant growth, product and production. The prime purpose of this panel is to address Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR); which has been changing the world in many different ways, especially when it comes to

accessibility in the deaf and hard of hearing community in recent years. In 2018, the FCC ruled that Internet Protocol Captioned Telephone Service providers could use ASR to generate captions without human assistance. Our panel today is composed of individuals from both industry and research and will focus on ASR as it applies to captioned telephones. One of the main concerns of this technology was to address the accuracy and transparency when it comes to

using Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS) which must be transparent to the user. ASR which relies on machine learning like artificial intelligence and machine learning will provide greater support for relay operators, in which they can ensure that the conversation is transparent between callers.

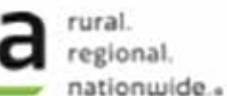
Dr. Linda Kozma Spytek a Senior Research Audiologist - Technology Access Program at Gallaudet University shared greater details on the different technologies consumers can choose from when opting for an IP CTS provider (there are currently seven providers) that offer these services nationwide which mainly use Communication Assistants (CA) Assisted ASR (Revoicing), CART/Steno and ASR and ASR only services. The panel was also split into two sections to provide greater details on the quality of ASR captioning, researchers and consumer facing providers. Dr. Christopher "Cre" Engelke - Director of Linguistic Research and Interaction Design - Ultratec and Linda are researchers evaluating quality of ASR captioning as providers and

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CRAPTIONS - TV CC • Continued from page 14

long, the needs of the underserved communities were often swept to the back burner of policy discourse.

Speaking with community thought leaders like Rogelio Fernandez Mota and Johnny Reininger echoed this. For tribal folks, the capability to access rapidly evolving and critical lifesaving information during the pandemic was a luxury due to their inability to access broadband internet and, for some who participated in government programs, the internet capacity provided by such a program was very limited.

Johnny noted that interpreters who currently provide access as majorly white -- They are not equipped to provide culturally appropriate and linguistically accessible services to

members of the tribal population. Rogelio agreed that distinct cultural meaning cannot be adequately conveyed by those who are not members of the same community. It is also noteworthy that ASL has a lot of dialects across America. -- These are influenced by historical, morphological and dominant culture in each region.

Rogelio opined that technological accessibility and policy were often shaped through a white lens and thus the product may not necessarily benefit the minorities. He also contended that marketing and advertising of products are geared towards white population, making the minorities feel those products are not meant for them and in some

instances, the community's outreach is afterthought after the market is already saturated. Rogelio concluded that these companies are losing money by not expanding their market outreach. He made a case that the companies creating these products should hire workers from the community who can bring their lived experiences to bear when developing their products.

Some attendees who chimed in agreed on the needs to increase diversity and inclusions for product designs as well as hiring of qualified minorities to level the playing field. Some also suggested the need to always ask members of the minority community about how they want to be identified or portrayed by technology products.

CRAPTIONS - WEB CLOSED CAPTIONING • Continued from page 15

that he hoped that "this responds to a new generation of Deaf politicians, a new generation that Deaf people involved with government, just really opened the doors for the Deaf community to be involved in this process."

I asked Joshua how to bring people on board to use captioning in their media platforms. He responded that we should provide the explanation of benefits in having captions. During

his years in the University of Florida, he asked for captions on the big video screen during pep rallies and they did provide it. Later, his sisters went to that same university and found that they still use captioning because they noticed that the older alumni loved to watch captions on the screen since it was loud so they preferred to look at the captions to understand what was going on.

Finally, we answered questions from

the Q&A chat box. An attendee asked about captions in gaming or video games. Rikki Poynter, captioning activist, responded that she grew up playing video games. She explained that sometimes it was frustrating trying to read the captions since it was either hard to read or too skinny. To be exact, the white text with no background in which it made it difficult for her to understand nor read.

CRAPTIONS - CTS • Continued from page 15

shared great information for how they evaluate quality of ASR captioning. In addition both Erik Strand - Founder of MachineGenius & Cristina Duarte - Director of Regulatory Affairs - InnoCaption, as providers they went into greater details for how they evaluate quality of ASR captioning.

From breakthrough research and development efforts at Gallaudet

University to the expanding capabilities of ASR technology, captioning technology progress has been extraordinary in recent years. Amidst all the technology development; one day we will go beyond the simple captioning of spoken words to the full translation of what is spoken being dubbed on-screen and reproduced in the original speaker's voice (think

of a football announcer yelling "TOUCHDOWN!" in the same voice, energy and tone simultaneously across hundreds of languages and devices. ASR is becoming the enabler in the dawn of a fully online and connected society. Overall, this was a great topic and panel discussion!

Special "Thank you" goes out to Dr. Linda, Dr. Cre, Cristina and Erik.

PLENARY SESSION: ASR CAPTIONING WITH LARRY GOLDBERG (VERIZON MEDIA)

By **Eric Kaika**,
TDI Chief Executive Officer

Larry Goldberg explained that he is a caption user since he lost his hearing about 10 years ago. He understands the usage of the captioning and he was involved in many projects working on captioning ranging from local news to movie theater to virtual reality.

He recalled that in 1971, there was none to little captioning but in 2020, the captioning grew a lot. To the point, he explained that there was no available captioning in video conferences two years ago but now the captioning is everywhere! The technology really evolved that fast within 50 years.

Later, he explained the usefulness of ASR in which it allows people to be on equal footing – level playing field, so to speak. He recalled the history of captioning and recognized the people who played the role in advancing the need of the telecommunications, especially on closed captioning.

He then explained what Verizon Media is doing now, working on closed captioning in their media and internet to provide news to internet users including the videos. ASR is also on the rise along with other captioning versions. ASR is one of the ways that benefits the dhh communities to get closed captioning in internet and video services. ASR still has some improvements to go, but it was a good place to start. They still work on the betterment of captions, especially on the correction of the words according to the words spoken but sometimes the ASR mistakes the word for other words especially, misspelling the people's names.

Verizon Media did create the quality measures for the metrics to see the quality of the captioning but when they provided that measurement to the FCC, the FCC was not comfortable with it at first.

PLENARY SESSION: TELE-ACCESS WITH CARRIE LOU GARBEROGLIO

Dr. Carrie Lou Garberoglio, Director of the National Deaf Center (NDC) on Postsecondary Outcomes, joined us live after for the question & answer session after her recorded presentation. She shared that she grew up in the period of AOL and AIM chat before the evolution of advanced communication technology, and that she considers herself a “child of the Internet.”

She cautioned that people should not assume everyone has access to the internet. There is a sizable percentage of individuals that remain offline due to lack of equipment or cost. For instance, many deaf people living in rural communities often lack sufficient income to afford broadband services. Additionally Dr. Garberoglio noted many Deaf people are unable to afford mobile internet services and it is a “reality [of the] deaf community around the United States”.

A participant asked about state agencies providing technological devices such as computers, tablets, phones, and much more. She supported this approach and noted States are starting to provide these devices to individuals and the college students who lack these devices. There is also the Emergency Broadband Benefit, a program of the FCC, to subsidize qualifying households' internet bills to help them connect to the internet.

She further explained the NDC website and how it gathered information from deaf people's personal stories to build data and statistics to understand Deaf individuals' experiences with lack of access. An attendee asked if the NDC has data/statistics about colleges or universities resources and accessibility for disabled students and deaf students. She replied that policies vary in each state and some colleges do have wifi hotspots and laptop equipment for students in general. But she will look into it to see if any state has a special policy for the Deaf and disabled students this fall regarding the data on universities resources and accessibility.

Lastly, one participant asked about using smartphones with ASR in the classroom. Carrie Lou explained that the technology isn't fully accessible [and lacks quality standards] right now and can provide inaccurate captioning. She ended the discussion with the response that technology should advance at the same speed as policies because technology is advancing rapidly and that the policies have a tremendous amount of catching up to do.



“If the Internet is not great, accessibility doesn't happen.”

BREAKOUT SESSION

SHAPING THE ACCESSIBLE TELE-WORLD: TELE-HEALTH



by **Matt Myrick**, TDI Member At-Large

More healthcare providers are offering to “see” patients by computer

and smartphone. It’s true that we are living during unprecedented times where the pandemic has had positive and negative impacts. I could ramble on about this topic “telehealth” but to narrow it down; Mei helped kick-off the panel by explaining what telehealth is... Mei Kwong - Director of the Center for Connected Health Policy (www.cchpca.org), a national nonprofit organization. Kwong “working to maximize telehealth’s ability to improve health outcomes... etc...” CCHP is the federally designated National Telehealth Policy Resource Center and funded by Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) (www.hrsa.gov). CCHP along with the 13 other telehealth resource centers provide technical assistance to people with telehealth questions. We offer resources and tools to help telehealth programs get started and information for consumers on the subject. Lisa Bothwell, a Program Analyst in the area of policy at the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) expanded on the requirements for accessibility for telehealth providers and supports the Administration for Community Living (ACL). ACL works toward advancing independence, integration, and inclusion of people



“Why are telehealth platforms not accessible enough?”

with disabilities and older adults by funding services and support provided by community-based organizations. Lisa currently leads the Federal Interagency Partners in Accessible Telehealth which brings together different federal agencies with the goal of educating telehealth providers of, and helping them meet, accessibility requirements for people with disabilities under federal law.

Next, we had Dr. Mike McKee, a Deaf physician based in Michigan who served on the national coalition that developed telehealth guidelines. Suzy Rosen Singleton “*our patient during the panel*” and respectively she is the Chief of Disability Rights Office, Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau, FCC. Suzy was able to shed some light on her recent personal experiences when she tried to contact her medical provider during the pandemic. Singleton shared that the FCC, through its various telehealth and connectivity funding initiatives, supports efforts of healthcare providers to continue serving their patients by providing telecommunications services, information services, and connected devices necessary to enable telehealth

during the COVID-19 pandemic. Suzy serves on an interagency accessible telehealth working group led by HHS. Additionally, as a deaf person and native user of American Sign Language, Suzy worked with her medical provider to stand up an accessible telehealth portal even for unscheduled appointments. Dr. McKee added that he provided the health care provider perspective on those who have hearing loss. During the panel, we asked questions like “Why are telehealth platforms not accessible enough?” “What features would make a telehealth platform fully accessible for all?” McKee added great information around what works and what does not.

Finally, while telehealth remains a hot topic and its benefits outweigh those who don’t have to drive to the doctor’s office or clinic, park, walk or sit in a waiting room when you’re sick/injured. We hope you had some key take-aways to better understand what the industry is working on to address these important accessibility and privacy needs.

Special “Thank you” goes out to Dr. Mike McKee, Suzy, Mei and Lisa.

BREAKOUT SESSION

SHAPING THE ACCESSIBLE TELE-WORLD: TELE-CONFERENCING



By Tina Childress,
TDI Member
At-Large

Roberto Cabrera, Sam Sepah and Christian Vogler were on the Tele-conferencing

panel. Our goals were to provide consumers with a framework to propose accessibility standards and rules across all teleconferencing services as well as understand current technology and policy limitations, including from the perspective of individuals who are DeafBlind. We shared information on accessibility barriers to remote and hybrid work situations, the importance of using universal design principles when looking at accessibility, consumers knowing their rights and knowing what to specifically request for access, using ASL to submit feedback to companies, responsibility of providing accessibility including for DeafBlind individuals, addressing the need to improve live and ASR caption technologies, and recognizing the needs of individuals who are DHH and have other disabilities such as cognitive impairment. So much learned and so much that still needs to be investigated!

If you were not able to attend the virtual conference, be sure to check the TDI Conference website where you can view recordings and access transcripts. I'm looking forward to the next conference in 2023!

BREAKOUT SESSION

SHAPING AN ACCESSIBLE TELE-WORLD: TELE-EDUCATION



By Mei Kennedy, TDI Member At-Large

No one anticipated the drastic shift to learning across the nation as schools scramble to virtual learning when the pandemic outbreak occurred. The panel invited Dr. Sheryl Burgstahler, Director of Accessible Technology Service and Affiliate Professor at the University of Washington; Raja Kushalnagar, IT Program Director at Gallaudet University; and Chris Sano, Software Engineer at Microsoft to discuss their experience teaching and working virtually. Looking at

providing the consumers with the accessibility and limitations of teleconferencing in an academic setting Dr. Burgstahler stated, "one of the challenges is that so many videos out there are not captioned, and even those that are captioned are captioned by a computer and not edited."

Mr. Sano shared how shifting to working remotely has unexpectedly positively impacted him as it afforded him an improved ability to participate in meetings because he now can view the interpreter besides the coding work that is being discussed.

When asked about the future of remote learning, Dr. Brugstahler stated that from her experience hybrid teaching complements the best of both worlds, giving the students the opportunity to learn through in-person interaction and access the content at their own pace online.

Mr. Kushalnagar raised the issue of software changing accessibility over time and how individuals with disabilities should be consulting on the features that are critical to the community accessing the platform. Mr. Sano shared that "accessibility is not going to be a one size fits all...the disability spectrum is so broad that it can be hard to think about all of the different possibilities (of defining what a fully accessible product is)."

In closing, as Dr. Burgstahler said, "we have to keep pushing for Universal Design that not only includes people who are deaf and hard of hearing but many other people as well, including English language learners or people with disabilities...everybody!"

"We have to keep pushing for Universal Design that not only includes people who are deaf and hard of hearing but many other people as well, including English language learners or people with disabilities...everybody!"

PLENARY SESSIONS IN REVIEW

By Angela Rogers



Sarah Herrlinger
Apple Inc.

Herrlinger would explain the powerful features in the range of products from iPhone to iPad to Apple Watch in order to support the needs of d/hh communities and to educate them about health. Apple personally believed that the most powerful technology is designed for everyone and built the products with accessibility in mind. In addition, Apple also tried to include many assistive technologies while building their products – accessibility is the core of their products.

Apple is the first company to create the Bluetooth that supports the direct connection between hearing aids and iPhone and iPad and iPod touch

Our congratulations for the Apple Giveaway Winners!

Richard L Ray, Barbara Chertok, Judy Stout, and the rest of the anonymous winners received neat prizes!

We hope that they enjoy the prizes and we are looking forward to the next winners for the next conference!

by working with top hearing aids companies to create the hearing aids that have accessibility technologies and tools for any user. Also, there is another accessibility feature that is tailored for deafblind and people with motor limitations such as Voiceover screen reader – that describes things happening in any Apple devices, people detection inside magnifier – idea that originally came from a blind employee who wants to know when the line moves during commuting or shopping, and People Occlusion – that tracks the distance of people moving in the line of the camera view.

Furthermore, Apple also creates the unique disability focused emojis that allow the users to create their own momojis along with things such as hearing aids or sound processors to represent who they are. It is a neat feature that is quite inclusive for everyone! Apple TV+ also includes subtitles in 41 languages where it is available in certain countries and audio description in 9 languages for blind and deafblind communities. Not only that, Apple also provides the caption tracks to support Braille displays. Moreover, Apple provides closed captioning in Apple Fitness so people can follow their favorite trainers with easier access to captioning.

If you want to see more information about Apple accessibility, you can find it in apple.com/accessibility. You can also email them about possible bugs or technical issues so they can fix them.

Additionally, Apple recently launched a new service called Sign Time in which customers are able to communicate with AppleCare and retail Customer Care by using ASL, BSL, FSL, and much more with a remote interpreter.



Jennie Lay Flurrie
Microsoft

Flurrie explained that Microsoft was invested in accessibility since the 1990s, however, in 2014, the new CEO, Satya Nadella, made it its mission to empower every person and organizations that include people with disabilities. Microsoft and she realized that the statistics on disability has grown a lot and mental health is going at the same pace as well.

Flurrie is deeply grateful for technology and Microsoft's mission that grounded her to keep going despite experiencing frustrating situations due to her deafness. Microsoft is dedicated to ensure that their employees receive the access and accommodations they need.

During the pandemic, Microsoft is focused on captioning by providing a high quality automated artificial intelligence in their website and main platforms. In fact, they saw a 30% increase in April 2022 using captions a lot compared to February 2020. She acknowledged the captioning is not perfect yet but machine learning and artificial intelligence had revolutionized the captioning.

On the other hand, the gap in societal inclusion/exclusion has been growing

PLENARY SESSIONS IN REVIEW

• Continued from page 22

and it is a concern. Microsoft made a five year commitment to tackle that gap and bridging the disability divide by creating partnership with organizations, public and private agencies, and governance that advocate community. Also, Microsoft recently set up a forum that invests in the future of sign language research building on the experts from Gallaudet University to RID/NTID.

Flurrie suggested that people should try out different features that Microsoft design for people with disabilities and they will love to hear any feedback from customers. They do provide Deaf technical support staff to answer questions or offer assistance.



Sam Sepah,
Google

Sam explained his presentation about technology and the plans Google is working on. Google's "mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful." Therefore, it means inclusion is included and the products Google manufactures are for everyone. In addition, Google's vision is to make Google more helpful for everyone and aims to provide people "tools they need to increase their knowledge, health, happiness, and success."

So, Google created the Live

"Our mission is to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful."

Transcribe, an application that became increasingly popular and everyone uses it for daily errands. This product was created with accessibility in mind. On automatic captions, people can see the Youtube Shorts that have captions as an option that was recently released. YouTube Shorts is "a feature enables creators to make short clips using their mobile device to create bite-sized content" with captions turned on automatically. Chrome Live Caption is in the settings in Chrome software in which you can find it through advanced settings and click on accessibility and turn on Live Caption for any video content to be able to have captions. Google Slides Captions also have this option by having the google slides on the web, then click on more options, captions preferences, and finally toggle captions. However, the captions are not stored but if it is recorded, then you can see the captions. Also, it is possible to add captions to the videos uploaded to Google Drive. First, upload the video to Google Drive, then go to the menu on the top right corner – three vertical dots, select the Manage Caption Tracks. Through this option, you can upload the caption file or a transcript file that contains the content of the video. Google Drive will take care of the rest by syncing the captions to the content of the video.

For Google Accessibility for remote work, learning, and meetings, in Google Meet, select Menu, then Captions, then Languages, and

click Apply, then you can see the captions during the Meet. However, the captions will not appear in the recorded call though. Sepah claimed that the accuracy of the captions in the Meet is up to 99% accurate. In Google Meet Layouts and Presentations Options, you can choose any layout options for the better visibility and easier access to the information and content.

Sepah encourages you all to join the Google Accessibility Trusted Tester Program to submit any ideas or feedback so they can improve or create better accessibility products in the future.

Sepah then closed with the final note demonstrating Google's recognition and appreciation of the TDI founders' work that led to the dhh community to have technological and communication accessibility.



Peter Korn,
Amazon

Korn introduced Amazon's philosophy for the dhh community by creating the products, services, and experiences

Continued from page 23

accessible and enjoyable for customers to use. Also, one of Amazon's principles is customer obsession. So Amazon's goal is to ensure that they provide satisfactory and enjoyable products with the help of their hiring team consisting of dhh employees to design accessible products and services.

Brendan Gramer, an Amazon colleague, helped create the ASL interpreter program that is staffed by full-time employees to support deaf employees. Not only that, he also created the ASL fingerspelling logo that is used everywhere.

Amazon has created various designs that are inclusive and designed in mind for various communities such as dhh, deafblind, blind, and people with motor disabilities. Amazon received some feedback and positive comments from these communities claiming that these products really helped them to become independent and more confident doing things on their own. In particular, Echo and Alexa still serve as important devices for blind or visually blind customers. Moreover, Alexa has several features tailored to hard of hearing customers; preferred speaking rate – adjust preferred speaking rate, connectivity of external speakers to many echo products, bluetooth devices, or headphones, and equalizer – adjust audio settings such as volume to customer's preference. Additionally, Alexa Communications offered several features that allow customers to use Alexa enabled devices to connect with family and friends with additional drop-in options to check in with their loved ones.

Korn closed with the statement that is why Amazon put its importance on the customer obsession in order to deliver products that everyone enjoys and able to use to meet their needs.



Monica Desai,
Facebook

As Desai works for Facebook, she recognized that Facebook strives to work on accessibility constantly to ensure that the dhh community gets the access they need. Few years ago, Facebook enabled the users and live streamers to manually add the captions to their videos.

In addition, Facebook adds alternative text (alt text) to its platform but not many people realize the purpose of having the alt text. Still, the statistics of last March 2021 showed that more than 80% of the images in Facebook and Instagram have alt text. That is quite positive news! Not only that, Facebook also added the live audio rooms in which it allows the users to join the live conversations with public figures and selected facebook groups.

Facebook has a certain research tool, user feedback and research, to receive feedback from users to improve its accessibility. Extended reality (XR) is the emerging technology that Facebook is focused on by creating the Oculus 30 that was recently released on June 17th. They did add an accessibility tab into Oculus settings that allows the users to customize their virtual reality experience. Also, they add the color correction setting for users to choose their preferred color setting.

Facebook is one of the best workplaces 3 years in a row for disability inclusion.

Desai closed the address with the final note that “it was important to build products that are accessible that require a workforce that can represent

and advocate for the diversity of the users.”



Gary Behm,
RIT/NTID

“Future technologies designs must always include dhh communities and people with disabilities in consideration for full and inclusive access.”

Gary opened his presentation by explaining the usage of the Center on Access Technology – Director of the center – for the deaf community. The Center on Access Technology was important because its purpose was to address the challenges that the deaf people experience regarding “accessibility to communication information in the classroom and various technologies. Thus, people in the center research these experiences in order to understand and improve accessibility for dhh students. He offered the example; some dhh students attend the hearing classes and some of them prefer the real-time captioning during the lecture so RIT ensures that they get the full and correct captions to get full information. He emphasized that the future technologies designs must

PLENARY SESSIONS IN REVIEW

• Continued from page 24

always include dhh communities and people with disabilities in consideration for full and inclusive access.

Then, he addressed the issues that the dhh communities experienced during the covid pandemic concerning the video conferencing. The dhh community always uses video conferencing for many years but once the pandemic hits, the hearing community is also forced to use video conferencing. However, the hearing community did not think to reach out to the dhh community for their input to improve the video conferencing accessibility. In deaf people's perspective, the video conferencing was not quite deaf-friendly and lacked certain accessibility tools for them to be able to see individuals clearly or receive accurate captioning. Therefore, the developers for the video conferencing should have asked the dhh community in order to improve the video conferencing accessibility. It showed that they held the dhh community in low regard. Still, after the pandemic, the US eventually had to adjust to the new normal with mostly remote work and tele-health.

Behm then explained the usefulness of mobile phones and how the dhh community relies heavily on that device. However, the accessibility is still not satisfactory enough for the dhh community because the dhh community will have to set up a few phone numbers for text messages, and another one for video relay services, so it is not quite accessible. He hopes that in the future, the dhh community will only need one phone number for any purposes including the video relay services.

Furthermore, Behm believed that the Internet of Things (IOT) is the future

since it is able to do everything in technological devices making people's lives easier and turn their homes into a smartphone. In other words, smart homes are the future. Also, machine learning is another one that will be the future. Machine learning is to develop a smart system that can make appropriate decisions based on collected data. There are several technologies developed that Behm thought positively such as automatic speech recognition (ASR) and Sign Recognition.

Behm believed that the solution was to convince the big companies to include accessibility or use inclusive design in their future products by having the dhh community actively communicate their needs and continue to advocate for better accessibility. He added that there is power in collective groups instead of individuals.



Chris Soukup,
CSD

Soukup opened the comment by first recognizing the 31st anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act and then explained how the functional equivalency and reasonable accommodations came to be.

In the 1990s, the deaf community used the TTY to make calls through relay and was considered "functional equivalent." Therefore, that term is used when the best available

"CE evokes the true spirit of the ADA... a communications experience for deaf that is the same as the experience for non-deaf"

technology communication is provided to the deaf community. In the 1990s, TTY was considered as the best available technology at that time. In the present time, the smartphones with video calling capabilities are considered as best available technology communication, thus a functional equivalency to the dhh communities. As he put it in words, the functional equivalence (FE) is "functionally equal substitute or replacement." He challenged the meaning of that term by stating, "when you think about it from that perspective...is that really the best we can do?"

Do we consider FE a beautiful end state or do we see it as a minimum? When we get the FE, now we check the box of having the FE. If we see it as a basic minimum to comply with the law, then how do we describe that bigger, more perfect communication experience?" Thus, Soukup encouraged the dhh community to use the better term, communication equity to replace the term, FE. In his words, the "communication equity (CE) does not accept substitutes. CE seeks a complete removal of barriers. CE evokes the true spirit of the ADA... a communications experience for deaf that is the same as the experience for non-deaf. Communication Equity recognizes that there are many different ways to be deaf and that there is a broad continuum of identities that make up our deaf community." In addition, "CE encourages movement towards solutions that reduce and eliminate the distance between a deaf caller and the

Continued from page 25

party they are calling.” He provided the comparative example of FE vs. CE, for example, “some companies have worked to engineer solutions that connect deaf customers to their business through VRS or VRI. This provides basic access and exceeds the minimum standard required under the ADA so we could say this solution is FER, but is it delivering an experience that is truly equal? Is this the goal?” Instead of that, the corporation offers direct communication by having the deaf person connect directly with a corporation representative in ASL, that is, the example of CE. In his company, CSD, CSD estimates that 80-90% of all customer service interactions currently supported by intermediaries can significantly improve by moving to direct communication. In his words, “CE does not disregard older solutions, but becomes a mechanism for continuously pushing to reduce the gap... eliminate the gap that separates deaf people from the rest of the world.”

However, Soukup acknowledged that the laws and common practices are not catching up well with the rapidly changing technology. So, the advocates for technology communication need to keep working on that so the regulations will be on the same page and at the same pace with evolving technology.

He then closed it with the hope that “the world fully shifts its perspective of deaf people, realizing and recognizing our voluminous talent and abilities as equals.”



Leah Cox,
UNC

Leah Cox, Vice Provost for Equity and Inclusion and Chief Diversity Officer

“So being a part of the conversation, getting engaged in your local government and community policies, commissions, all of those things make a difference.”

at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, shared her knowledge and resources explaining about how people can resolve racism and audism in their communities, workplaces, and at home. She also interacted with conference attendees via the question and answer format .

One participant asked, “How do you see the deaf community, ASL, improving our awareness of racism and audism within our community?” She responded that the Deaf community should educate themselves and to the community and to realize that they usually focus on one identity, ie. Deafness, instead of realizing that there are many identities that intersect with deafness. Dr. Cox emphasized that educating oneself by reading books such as Black Software or getting involved in local communities can really open their minds and understand how to be anti-racist and anti-audist.

Another conference attendee asked why hearing people don’t recognize/ understand the term ‘audism’. Cox explained that the hearing community is not aware the term exists because they’re focusing on systematic racism causing them to overlook other identities that they have to learn about. She suggested that an organization such as deafhood should exist to provide a deeper understanding of the Deaf culture, identity, and especially the existence of audism to help the hearing community to understand the Deaf community on a deeper level.

An attendee remarked that nowadays some people are targeting the black community and convincing black people from not taking science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) classes and asked how they can help to reduce racism and modify policies to help the black community. Cox suggested having conversations about racism and bias everywhere including those marginalized and minority intersectionality communities. Also, people should keep engaging those issues at the local and state levels in order to bring better changes for the minorities.

Another person asked a similar question but toward the telecommunication providers to practice anti-racism and anti-audism. She responded that people should keep sharing the meaning of these terms and that people should truly understand what these terms mean and use the right resources and appropriate responses to these situations. She also added that we should start with a basic list of terms to have people understand the meanings, then move deeper into practicing anti-racism and anti-audism.

For deafhood itself, people should reach out and connect with deaf black, and brown communities and organizations to understand all aspects of deaf culture. She added that we should not forget the Indigenous, Asian American, and aging deaf people because by supporting ghtem, we are supporting the entire community. We should not let anyone oppress others and we can help by calling them out and educating them to do better.

She finished with the note that “we need to include everyone. It’s about bringing folks in, not pushing them out.” Therefore, we need to see and welcome people of any and all identities, backgrounds and support them in any way we can in order to make the world a better place for them and future generations.



COMMUNITY FORUM: DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN TECHNOLOGY



By Opeoluwa Sotonwa,
TDI Member
At-Large

My personal highlight was the opportunity to lead a panel

discussion on diversity and inclusion when it comes to technological accessibility. For far too long, the needs of the underserved communities were often swept to the back burner of policy discourse.

Speaking with community thought leaders like Rogelio Fernandez Mota and Johnny Reininger echoed this. For

“For far too long, the needs of the underserved communities were often swept to the back burner of policy discourse.”

tribal folks, the capability to access rapidly evolving and critical lifesaving information during the pandemic was a luxury due to their inability to access broadband internet and, for some who participated in government programs, the internet capacity provided by such a program was very limited.

Johnny noted that interpreters who currently provide access as majorly white -- They are not equipped to provide culturally appropriate and linguistically accessible services to members of the tribal population. Rogelio agreed that distinct cultural meaning cannot be adequately conveyed by those who are not members of the same community. It is also noteworthy that ASL has a lot of dialects across America. -- These are influenced by

INCLUSION • Continued on page 28

COMMUNITY FORUM: GAMING FOR ACCESS



By Mei Kennedy,
TDI Member
At-Large

The gaming for access panel introduces the consumers to the framework

for accessibility across gaming and VR/AR/XR services. We were joined by Wendy Dannels, Research Faculty at the Center for Culture and Language

at National Technical Institute for the Deaf; Mari Kyle, Game Producer at Oculus and Chris Robinson, co-founder of DeafGamersTV.

Mr. Robinson shared a video he made with his co-founder about how it is navigating gaming that relies on the use of the microphone. The message they wish to share: “We can use resources to help games to be more inclusive. The only way and best way is to ask the disabled community to help with testing, design, features, feedback, or anything that might be overlooked.”

Ms. Kyle shared how as a person with Trauma Brain Injury, captioning and visual cues became critical accessibility features for her when playing video games. She went on to explain how a good design principle designs with the inclusion of accessibility features to make the gaming experience better for everybody. Should you be interested in learning more about accessible games, and support the movement, Ms. Dannels encourages you to check out the organization, AbleGamers (<https://ablegamers.org/>) which focuses on advocating for making games accessible for all.

GAMING • Continued on page 28

COMMUNITY FORUM: CONNECTING DHH AMERICANS TO BROADBAND



**By CM
Boryslawskyj,**
TDI Treasurer,
Northeast
Region

We have the
opportunity to
discuss and learn
the benefits of

internet accessibility. Sarah Leggins, CTIA Director of Regulatory Affairs, stated that wireless accessibility is a must, thanks to the COVID pandemic, that allows us to recognize the necessity of that accessibility. She further added that there is the information on the Global Accessibility Reporting Initiative (GARI database) and remarked that people can find more information on GARI or resources on wireless services on access.wireless.org. To be specific, she explained that from that website, CTIA shares information about wireless services, handsets and apps that help create new possibilities for all Americans and can help increase opportunities and inclusion for people

with disabilities by helping people with a range of disabilities find the right mobile device that meets their unique needs. The visitors can select from categories to help easily navigate which types of information you're looking for, including hearing, vision, mobility, speech, and cognition as well as resources for seniors and veterans as well. And the GARI tool is actually embedded right within the database in the website and it allows users to search and compare accessible devices and apps.

Corian Zacher, Policy Council of Next Century Cities (NCC), added that they were working on the broadband mapping reports that was recently released last May on state and local governments' data collection. We were quite aware that the 50% of the Deaf community cannot really afford to pay for high speed internet monthly and we intend for them to be connected instead of being disconnected to their local and state news and current affairs. We discussed the solutions and acknowledged that there are some

improvements on 4G speed. Sarah noticed that the wireless connectivity became even more crucial so as social distancing kicked in consumers leaned more and more on their wireless services and we saw huge increases in voice and data traffic in different places as well as a host of new use cases that we didn't see before.

We had an ongoing discussion on the emergency broadband benefits for Deaf people with roommates concerning the need to have a high speed internet connection to be able to work and learn from home. Furthermore, there is the question about 3G networks that will stop their service in 2022. Sarah again responded that since 4G and 5G networks are expanding rapidly due to its better internet speed, better coverage, and enhanced security, the 3G networks are transitioning to the current expanding networks. Zachary Bastain, Strategic Alliance Manager of Verizon, added if a person wants to have a 5G phone, they have to buy a certain phone type to have that network and its services.

INCLUSION • Continued from page 27

historical, morphological and dominant culture in each region.

Rogelio opined that technological accessibility and policy were often shaped through a white lens and thus the product may not necessarily benefit the minorities. He also contended that marketing and advertising of products

are geared towards white population, making the minorities feel those products are not meant for them and in some instances, the community's outreach is afterthought after the market is already saturated. Rogelio concluded that these companies are losing money by not expanding their market outreach. He made a case that the companies creating these products should hire workers from the community who can

bring their lived experiences to bear when developing their products.

Some attendees who chimed in agreed on the needs to increase diversity and inclusions for product designs as well as hiring of qualified minorities to level the playing field. Some also suggested the need to always ask members of the minority community about how they want to be identified or portrayed by technology products.

GAMING • Continued from page 27

The audience was captivated by the development work of oculus (Ms. Kyle) and mixed reality (Ms. Dannels). Ms. Kyle discussed the importance of raising awareness to the gamers by reaching out to share our perspective

of the design and how our experience could be elevated.

We received many questions from the audience ranging from advice for those who might be interested in becoming a game designer to a particular game that is highly recommended for its accessibility features. In response

to some of the questions about the game recommendation, Mr. Robinson shared that DeafGamersTV produced their first Video Game Award DeafGamersTV in 2020 recognizing games that are best, from the standpoint of deaf gamers. The video is presented in ASL only -- <https://youtu.be/4nVReYHdFhw>.

FIRESIDE CHAT WITH KAIKA • Continued from page 8

him that “accessibility is a civil right, it’s a human right.”

Nevertheless, I need to bring up that technology does need financial support and much more. In other words, “it requires a lot of things that are in play to make sure that everyone has an equitable experience, that our service, our products are inclusive and equitable for every individual.” All of the speakers agreed with that. President Bobbi further added that there was a need for economic justice in which we should ensure “in terms of opportunities that are afforded to deaf people in this country.”

There was another solution, we should expose our future generations to learn sign languages and other languages at an early age from birth to 3-5 years old. So that these children will be able to influence people around them to learn some languages as well. Howard supported that by saying that “we need to expose the youth to different

cultures and different languages but also we need to start exposing them to different people, their backgrounds and needs including disabilities.” Thus, they will learn how to handle different situations and people of diverse backgrounds well with respect and understand how to accommodate their needs better.

Later, Howard remarked that there was a shift of politics that caused the deep division of the US and left out the marginalized communities, especially the BIPOC and people with disabilities by not considering their needs and improved accessibilities. President Bobbi confirmed that by saying that “our systems of laws really do not work well enough for people with disabilities. They just don’t. And for BIPOC people as well.” Therefore, we need to work on having laws that support and help the communities of BIPOC and people with disabilities better. I explained that one of the few better ways to “influence change is sharing stories.” These stories will

“Technology is one way for us to connect to share our stories, gather that data, find ways to have a dialogue to change the world for the better.”

become our reliable data so we can justify our experiences and engage with our members of the communities. Howard affirmed it with the last note, “technology is one way for us to connect to share our stories, gather that data, find ways to have a dialogue to change the world for the better.”



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TDI In Action

July – September 2021

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

COMMENT ON THE FCC'S PUBLIC NOTICE ON CONVO'S PETITION

Telecommunication Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities

CG Docket Nos. 03-123

Structure and Practices of the Video Relay Service Program

CG Docket Nos. 10-51

(July 19) TDI, ADARA, ALDA, DSA, NAD, and NCSA filed a comment to the Federal Communications Commission, about Convo's petition proposing changes to certain Video Relay Service ("VRS") service rules.

Convo requested the revision of two discrete waivers made during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic due to the shortage of VRS Communication Assistants (CAs). Convo requested the Commission to permanently raise the limit of relay call minutes that can be routed to remote workstations (at-home CAs) to 80 percent, and to permanently allow independent contractors to relay up to 30 percent of a VRS provider's call minutes per month. Lastly, Convo asked the FCC to extend the Commission waivers granted in 2020 allowing CAs to work remotely and independent contractors to relay calls with revised rules mentioned above.

TDI has no issue with the first request to relax the monthly minute limit a VRS provider made through remote CAs only with the implementation of safeguards. However, we opposed the second request due to the previous experiences of problematic issues of fraud and wasteful activities with independent contractors. We noticed

that the petition does not offer any solutions to address future situations that may arise concerning the independent contractors.

We had no objections to the waiver extensions allowing VRS providers to offload more traffic through remote workstations and allow subcontractors to relay VRS calls in the near term given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges of safely staffing call centers. But we urged the Commission to immediately restore the obligation that VRS providers answer most calls within 120 seconds.

Additional oversight and performance obligations must accompany any Commission relaxation of limits on monthly minute volume relayed through remote workstations

The Commission should not relax the current prohibition on independent contractors relaying VRS calls

The Commission should extend waivers regarding remote workstations and subcontractors expiring in August 2021, but restore VRS call answer time obligations effective immediately

We look forward to continuing our work with the Commission to improve the integrity and performance of next-generation VRS services.

<https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/10719283281816/TDI%20et%20al.%20Comments%20on%20Convo%20Petition.pdf>

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

COMMENT ON A RESPONSE TO SORENSON'S COMMENT ON CONVO'S PETITION ON PROPOSING CHANGES TO CERTAIN VIDEO RELAY SERVICE ("VRS") SERVICE RULES

TDI IN ACTION • Continued on page 32

ORGANIZATIONS WE WORKED WITH IN 2021

ACCESSOS

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL ASSOCIATION FOR THE DEAF

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAFBLIND (AADB)

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF THE BLIND (ACB)

AMERICAN DEAFNESS AND REHABILITATION ASSOCIATION (ADARA)

AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND (AFB)

AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR DEAF CHILDREN (ASDC)

ASSOCIATION OF LATE DEAFENED ADULTS (ALDA)

CALIFORNIA COALITION OF AGENCIES SERVING THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING (CCASDHH)

CEREBRAL PALSY AND DEAF ORGANIZATION (CPADO)

CLEAR2CONNECT COALITION

COMMUNICATION SERVICE FOR THE DEAF (CSD)

CONFERENCE OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS OF SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS FOR THE DEAF (CEASD)

CUESIGN

DEAF SENIORS OF AMERICA (DSA)

GEORGIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (WIRELESS RERC)

GLOBAL ALLIANCE OF SPEECH-TO-TEXT CAPTIONING

HEARD

HEARING LOSS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA (HLAA)

HELEN KELLER NATIONAL CENTER FOR DEAFBLIND YOUTHS AND ADULTS (HKNC)

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE AGENCIES OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING (NASADHH)

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF (NAD)

NATIONAL BLACK DEAF ADVOCATES (NBDA)

NATIONAL CUED SPEECH ASSOCIATION (NCSA)

NATIONAL DISABILITY RIGHTS NETWORK (NDRN)

NATIONAL HISPANIC LATINO ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF (NHLAD)

NORTHERN VIRGINIA RESOURCE CENTER (NVRC)

REGISTRY OF INTERPRETERS FOR THE DEAF (RID)

REHABILITATION ENGINEERING RESEARCH CENTER FOR WIRELESS INCLUSIVE TECHNOLOGIES

REHABILITATION ENGINEERING RESEARCH CENTER ON TECHNOLOGY FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING (DHH-RERC)

REHABILITATION ENGINEERING RESEARCH CENTER ON UNIVERSAL INTERFACE & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ACCESS (IT-RERC)

RIT/NTID CENTER ON ACCESS TECHNOLOGY (CAT)



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TDI In Action

July – September 2021

Continued from page 30

The Telecommunication Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities

CG Docket Nos. 03-123

Structure and Practices of the Video Relay Service Program

CG Docket Nos. 10-51

(August 3) TDI, CPADO, DSA, and NAD filed a comment to the Federal Communications Commission, about Sorenson's comment on Convo's Request for changes to certain VRS rules.

We responded to Sorenson's comments urging the Commission not to implement a cap on the percentage of VRS minutes relayed through remote workstations on a monthly basis.

As mentioned in our initial comments, we do not oppose having an increase of the percentage of VRS minutes relayed through remote workstations of up to 80% – as long as additional safeguards are in place.

However, we opposed having no cap on VRS minutes relayed through at-home workstations until clear and proper policies and procedures are made. It is very important that the FCC take measures to ensure that at-home networks are secure, reliable, and redundant. Privacy is paramount and additional oversight must be exercised to ensure that Communication Assistants (CAs) take appropriate steps to ensure the privacy of calls relayed through their remote workstations.

Also, the Commission should require VRS providers to implement appropriate measures to provide a call-back option and connectivity to the next available CA in case a problem arises. VRS providers must ensure remote workstations have the same reliability and redundancy that dedicated call centers enjoy including measures to reroute a call or reconnect for any dropped calls

Thus, the FCC should not set any unlimited cap on minutes until it establishes clear and proper policies and procedures in place.

<https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/108031065709708/TDI%20et%20al.%20Reply%20to%20Comments%20on%20Convo%20Petition.pdf>

OTHER

COMMENT ON ACCESSIBILITY COALITION CARCERAL COMMS FIFTH FNPRM

The Rates for Interstate Inmate Calling Services

WC Docket Nos. 12-375

(September 27) HEARD, with the assistance of TDI's legal representation, filed a comment to the Federal Communications Commission concerning the communication accessibility for the Deaf and other marginalized people in correctional facilities.

We asked the FCC to require the inmate calling service (ICS) providers to provide modern communication services such as TTY (text telephone devices)-based telecommunications relay services, the Video Relay Services (VRS), Internet Protocol captioned telephone service (IP CTS) or captioned telephone service (CTS), Internet Protocol relay service (IP Relay), and speech-to-speech relay service (STS), as well as direct video and text communications services, including direct video calling and real-time text (RTT) in all correctional facilities for Deaf individuals.

According to certain provisions under Communication Acts and the FCC's legal authority under certain provisions under that Act as well, the FCC has the authority to require the ICS providers to provide access to TRS services. Also, the FCC should require these providers not to charge for any TRS calls including the provision of direct video and text communication with no charge.

Therefore, the correctional facilities must provide modern and updated communication services for these incarcerated individuals with disabilities to have equal and proper communication access, in addition, to reintegrate them successfully back into society. Not only that, the proper and equitable communication services will ensure that Deaf individuals have an improved quality of life, mental and physical well-being, and access to information.

Finally, the FCC should expand the annual reporting requirements to include all TRS and direct video and text communications. The FCC acknowledges that it previously "found the burdens of reporting TTY-based calls to be far outweighed by the benefits of greater transparency and heightened accountability on the part of inmate calling services providers.

<https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/10927245844157/2021.09.27%20Accessibility%20Coalition%20Carceral%20Comms%20>



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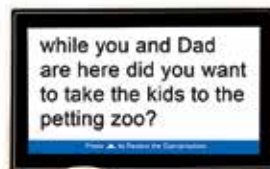
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