



WORLD

Technology News and Commentary for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People



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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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WORLD

Volume 52.4

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Shaping An Accessible World

Board Views



JAN WITHERS

*TDI President and Board Member,
Southeast Region*

**“Like phoenix,
the bird in Greek
mythology, TDI
rose from the ashes
of 2021 stronger,
better organized,
and with a greater
clarity of vision.”**

Phoenix Rising

When I surveyed the gathering at TDI's holiday party this past December, I felt enormous gratitude. Gratitude for the fact that we were able to proceed with TDI's major annual networking event, thanks to the requirement for proof of vaccination and the use of masks by many in attendance. Gratitude for the steadfast support of TDI's members and allies. Gratitude for the capable leadership of Eric Kaika, TDI's CEO, and TDI's Board of Directors. And gratitude for the fact TDI is stronger and better organized than ever, and that we have a greater clarity of vision for 2022 and beyond.

The year 2021 was, to say the least, a difficult year in so many ways. It began with tremendous anxiety and uncertainty as the world awaited the roll-out of vaccines to combat the COVID-19 coronavirus. Fundamentally, we had to figure out how to safely function not only in our daily lives but also in how we advocate for equity in the face of new and increased barriers in Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

In rising up to the challenges wrought by the pandemic, Eric demonstrated a remarkable capacity to maintain focus on his vision for TDI and to be adaptable and creative. He recruited six young interns from Gallaudet University to assist with a wide variety of tasks. He applied his forward thinking and administrative skills in instituting a number of significant improvements such as developing new membership tiers and new ways of raising funds, streamlining fiscal management, and hosting a successful, 100% virtual biennial conference, with the theme “Reset and Reconnect” which showcased technological and logistical creativity and accessibility.

Uncertainties regarding the future notwithstanding, TDI's Board of Directors and Eric collaborated to develop a two-year strategic plan, with new vision and mission statements and a new set of values

to guide TDI's actions. In the latter part of 2021, Eric hired Angela Rogers, TDI's Community Relations Manager, and contracted with Rikki Poynter and TS Writing to support TDI's public relations. Rounding out 2021, TDI's board received a report from the auditor noting TDI to be on sound financial footing, due in no small part to the hard work of Eric and John Skjeveland, TDI's Business Manager.

Looking ahead to 2022, we are excited about the opportunity to update the 21st Century Communication and Video Accessibility Act of 2010 along with TDI's continued policy advocacy work with the Federal Communications Commission under its new leadership. And we are committed to continuing the work begun in 2021 to engage a more diverse range of communities and individuals to promote equity in ICT. Another exciting opportunity is the launching of the TDI Training Institute to provide people the information and tools to enhance their access to ICT. Finally, we have just established an endowment fund for those who wish to make financial contributions, both restricted and unrestricted, for TDI's long-term growth.

Now, we want to hear more from you! To foster greater community engagement, we have created a new email address: info@tdiforaccess.org. In such a diverse and rapidly changing world, it is vital we have our finger on the pulse of the community we serve. We hope you will speak up and let us know your thoughts about what you've read in the *TDI World* magazine, TDIBlueBook.com, website, and social media. Let us know about your successes and struggles in the world of ICT as well as your suggestions to ensure equity in ICT.

Circling back to TDI's recent holiday party, the gratitude I felt most keenly was for the fact that everyone's presence at the party served as a clear indication of the hope and optimism we feel for 2022 along with a deep commitment to TDI's mission. Thank you!



Our Quest for Access



ERIC KAIKA
Managing Editor

“TDI is a small organization with a lot of legislative clout”

Reflecting on 2021

This year, 2021, was the first full year I served as CEO of TDI after coming onboard in April 2020. This meant I had the opportunity to work with the board to develop TDI’s goals and plans for the year of 2021. The year started with the hiring of six interns, who were of tremendous help to the organization, especially conference planning.

Another exciting milestone in 2021 was the awarding of six scholarship awards of varying amounts to high school graduates around the nation. This is a program TDI is especially proud of, and I’m pleased we were able to continue doing that during the pandemic.

In July 2021, Angela Rogers was brought in as Community Relations Manager becoming the first full-time employee during my tenure as CEO. Jumping in headfirst, Angela was instrumental in helping make the biennial TDI conference happen along with our interns and students from Gallaudet University. This was critical because it was the very first virtual conference in TDI history. This meant we had to throw out our previous conference playbooks and start from scratch.

The conference had a few requirements: maintain as much of its usual format as possible, be as accessible as possible, and be as engaging as always. We retained the president’s reception, TDI awards, and closing ceremony along with many outstanding workshops. Everything was pre-recorded, and we had one of the best audience engagements ever. This is an accomplishment TDI is proud of as well.

TDI is a small organization with a lot of legislative clout. What this means is the TDI team cannot do everything on its own, so we brought in several contractors to accomplish key tasks,

such as social media influencer Rikki Poynter for our social media platforms and Trudy Suggs of T.S. Writing Services for writing needs. Their services have been valuable in supporting TDI operations. We also contracted with Communication Service of the Deaf to provide live customer support. This means that people calling TDI now will have a live representative handling their inquiries instead of having to leave a message and hoping someone calls back.

The TDI board continued to be fully active throughout the year, with three board meetings in February, July after the conference, and then in December. While they were all held virtually, the next board meeting in April 2022, slated for Madison, Wis., will be in person. This will be the first in-person, onsite board meeting since 2019 — a remarkable milestone after the pandemic.

Another exciting event we had this month was the TDI holiday party, which was held after the 2020 version was canceled. In its place, TDI sent out a holiday video, but it just wasn’t the same. People attending this month’s holiday party were required to be vaccinated or show proof of a negative COVID-19 test, socially distance, and wear masks. We were all very pleased to socialize in person, grateful for the conversations and ambience. (After the party was held, none of the attendees tested positive for the virus.)

Throughout all these activities, TDI continued its daily operations and activities. On page 21 in this issue, you can read more about TDI in action, but here’s a brief overview. We filed over 30 filings in 2021, which averages out to two filings a month. We also expanded the number of organizations that signed our filings, something I’m especially proud of as well. TDI aspires

Thank you to our 2021 sponsors



OUR QUEST FOR ACCESS Continued from page 3

to represent the full spectrum of the deaf and hard of hearing community, including deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, late-deafened, cued speech users, non-signers, and so forth. We also aspire to include representatives from organizations such as A.G. Bell, Council de Manos, National Black Deaf Advocates, HEARD, Turtle Island Indigenous Tribes, and many others.

By ensuring full representation for TDI filings, we can ensure that every individual served by TDI has their stories shared.

We continue to make great progress with our Blue Book, which is now fully digital at www.tdibluebook.com. We successfully linked the membership database to our Blue Book database, and all the information is available on one platform. The website design will be updated by Spring 2022 (see page 12

for more).

The TDI Training Institute continues to take place, with at least two webinars planned for 2022. More information is on page 10. Stay tuned for further information!

As you can imagine, I'm very excited about what we have planned for 2022. I look forward to having you continue your involvement. Thank you for your continued support!



TDI In Action: Overview of TDI's Policy Comments in the Past 5 Years

Our comment filings typically cover the many aspects of information and communication technologies (ICT), including the Communications and Video Accessibility Act (CVAA).

TDI's strengths are in sharing the community's needs, specifically in telecommunication relay service (TRS), captioning quality (including closed captioning, open captioning, subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing, and speech recognition), emergency communications (911, emergency alert systems, and wireless emergency alerts), and real-time text. We also address accessibility issues in gaming and extended realities and any other communication technologies using cable, phone, and/or broadband communication networks. However, we do not do this work alone. TDI's success in its policy endeavors greatly lies with the many consumer advocates and educational researchers we closely work with.

TDI believes in making sure our filings and comments reflect the true diversity of the deaf and hard of hearing community. The deaf and hard of hearing community consists of people who are Deaf, deaf, hard of hearing, deafblind, lip-readers, cued speech users, veterans with hearing loss, aging senior citizens, deafdisabled, and/or have additional sensory, mobility, cognitive or other communication disabilities, along with socio-economic factors.

For TDI's comments on accessibility in ICT to truly represent the 48 million deaf and hard of hearing Americans, we must ensure as many deaf and hard of hearing organizations representing these communities as possible are involved in the process.

TDI is honored to have the following organizations signing on to our comments in 2021 (listed in alphabetical order).

1. Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf (AG Bell)
2. American Association of the Deafblind (AADB)
3. American Council of the Blind (ACB)
4. American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association (ADARA)
5. American Foundation for the Blind (AFB)
6. American Society for Deaf Children (ASDC)
7. Association of Late Deafened Adults (ALDA)
8. California Coalition of Agencies Serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CCASDHH)
9. Cerebral Palsy and Deaf Organization (CPADO)
10. CLEAR2Connect Coalition
11. Communication Service for the Deaf (CSD)
12. Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD)
13. CueSign
14. Deaf Seniors of America (DSA)
15. Global Alliance of Speech-to-Text Captioning
16. HEARD
17. Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA)
18. Helen Keller National Center for Deafblind Youths and Adults (HKNC)
19. National Association of State Agencies of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NASADHH)
20. National Association of the Deaf (NAD)
21. National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA)
22. National Cued Speech Association (NCSA)
23. National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
24. National Hispanic Latino Association of the Deaf (NHLAD)
25. Northern Virginia Resource Center (NVRC)
26. Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID)
27. Turtle Island Hand Talk
28. Center on Access Technology (CAT) at Rochester Institute of Technology / National Technical Institute for the Deaf
29. Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center for Wireless Inclusive Technologies (Wireless-RERC)
30. Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Technology for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH-RERC)
31. Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Universal Interface & Information Technology Access (IT-RERC)

A special thanks to TDI's pro bono legal teams for their assistance with our policy comments



Morgan Lewis



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TDI Holiday Party

2021 TDI Holiday Party gives our members a chance to share the holiday spirit (safely).





TDI World

This year will be the last run of *TDI World* in print — but don't worry. *TDI World* isn't going anywhere. TDI, like many other organizations, has decided to switch to a digital version to ensure accessibility for every reader.

While there's nothing like thumbing through a physical copy of a magazine, the print version wasn't very accessible to many readers. The digital issues will be accessible in written English and American Sign language (ASL), and also compatible with refreshable braille displays, and screen readers. This will satisfy the full spectrum of community accessibility and bring TDI's valuable work to a broader range of individuals.

Another key reason is the cost involved with printed copies. In addition to rising printing and shipping costs, TDI often receives returned issues because members did not update their addresses or other information. Going digital will bring significant savings to TDI's printing costs, especially since we will continue to feature advertisers and sponsors in each

issue. Most importantly, going digital allows TDI to deliver immediate and timely news, whereas the printed *TDI World* often arrives at the mailbox eight weeks after it is printed.

One exciting benefit of going digital is that all issues will be posted online with opportunities for reader feedback. In the past, readers sending feedback to the *TDI World* team often had to wait a few months to receive a response or to see their letters in print. With the digital version, readers can immediately post comments and feedback online, with greater interactivity between TDI and its constituents.

The current timeline is to become fully digital by the beginning of 2023. In 2022, there will be four printed issues that will focus on the usual topics, ranging from consumer accessibility to current technological trends for people in the deaf and hard of hearing communities. Currently, the tentative topics for each issue include an introduction to TDI BlueBook.com, scholarship recipients, and an annual review.



New Training Institute Established, Goal is to Educate and Empower Consumers

At the December 2019 TDI board meeting, the board members voted to establish the TDI Training Institute, which will provide opportunities for people interested in strengthening accessibility and knowledge through an array of methods.

The initial objective was to host the first Training Institute as a one-day, in-person event on April 2020. However, COVID-19 derailed those plans. Compounded with the leadership change at TDI, and the continuing pandemic, we revised the structure of the Training Institute, and will be hosting a series of webinars on a variety of topics relating to TDI's mission.

The Training Institute will begin with webinars in late 2022. The first webinar series will focus on emergency communications, and the second on captioning. Future webinars may include other training workshops such

as filing comments – or complaints – with the Federal Communication about captioning, relay services or other inequitable communication experiences through the broadband / broadcast / telecommunication networks.

Members are welcome to contact us at **info@TDIforAccess.org** and share other topics you want to learn about.

Each webinar will be recorded and added to the Training Institute website at a later date. The fundamental goal is to educate individuals on self-advocacy and resources for specific topics.

TDI'S WEBSITES

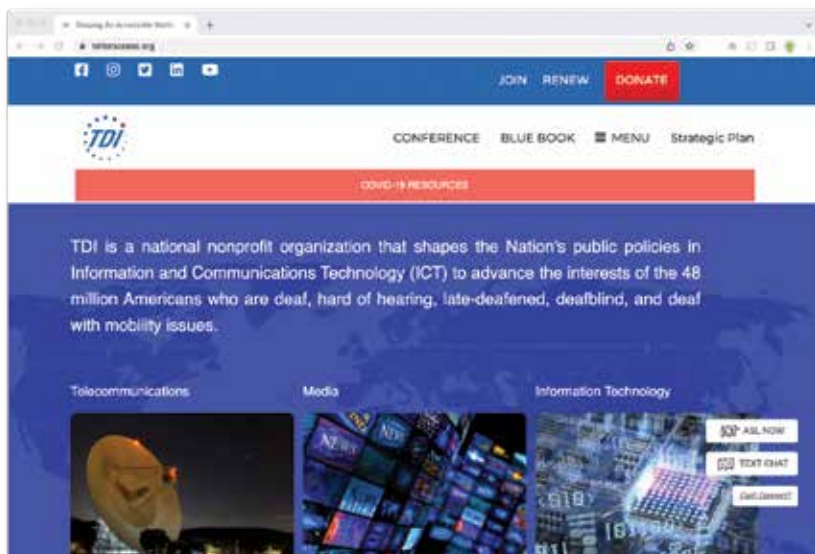
Did you know TDI has three different websites?

TDIforAccess.org is our main website where you can find everything there is to know about TDI, including our mission, membership, programs, people, news, filings, and history. This website is currently undergoing a complete overhaul and should be unveiled in May 2022. Some of the things we're doing is simplifying the website into five pages with fully accessible content (ASL videos, alt and descriptive text). The home page includes a quick overview of TDI, and the about page shares TDI's mission, vision, strategic plan, programs and activities, team, and history. There is also a resource page on topics such as captioning, emergency communications, and much more, and then a membership page and a page devoted to news and filings. Our other two websites are:

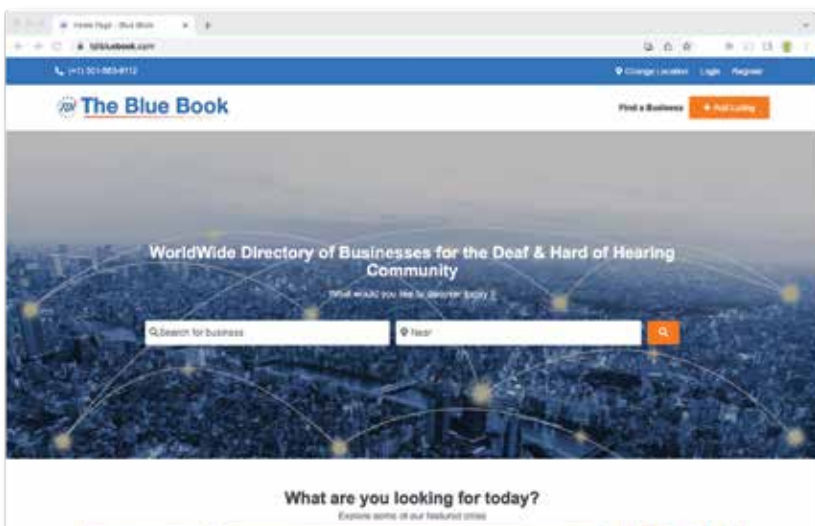
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To learn more about TDIBlueBook.com, check out page 12 in this issue. The current site will be released in April 2022 with revisions and updates.

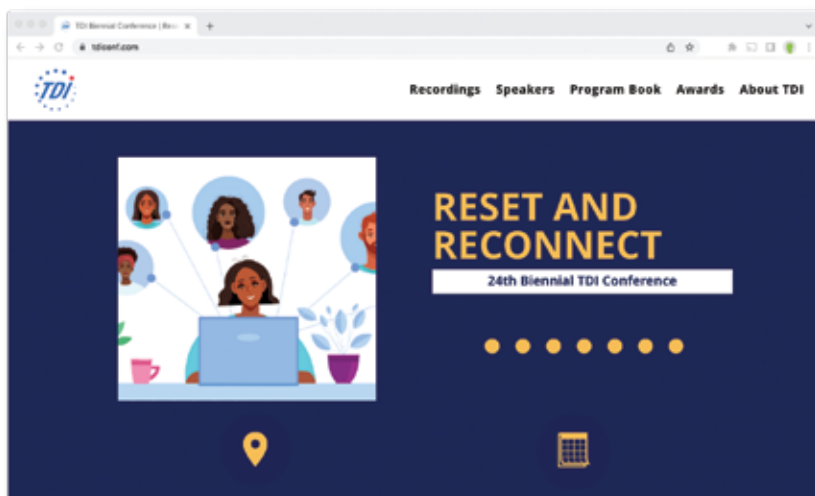
When you want to attend or virtually watch our conference activities, visit TDIConf.com. Here, you can purchase tickets, see the conference schedule, submit papers, read about TDI Award recipients, and more. The website, which currently has 2021 conference information, will be updated to 2023's conference plans soon. In the meantime, save the date: the 25th TDI Biennial Conference will be held on July 27-30, 2023, at the University of Maryland (UMD): 7777 Baltimore Ave, College Park, MD 20740. The format will be hybrid; that is, attendees may choose to attend in person or virtually.



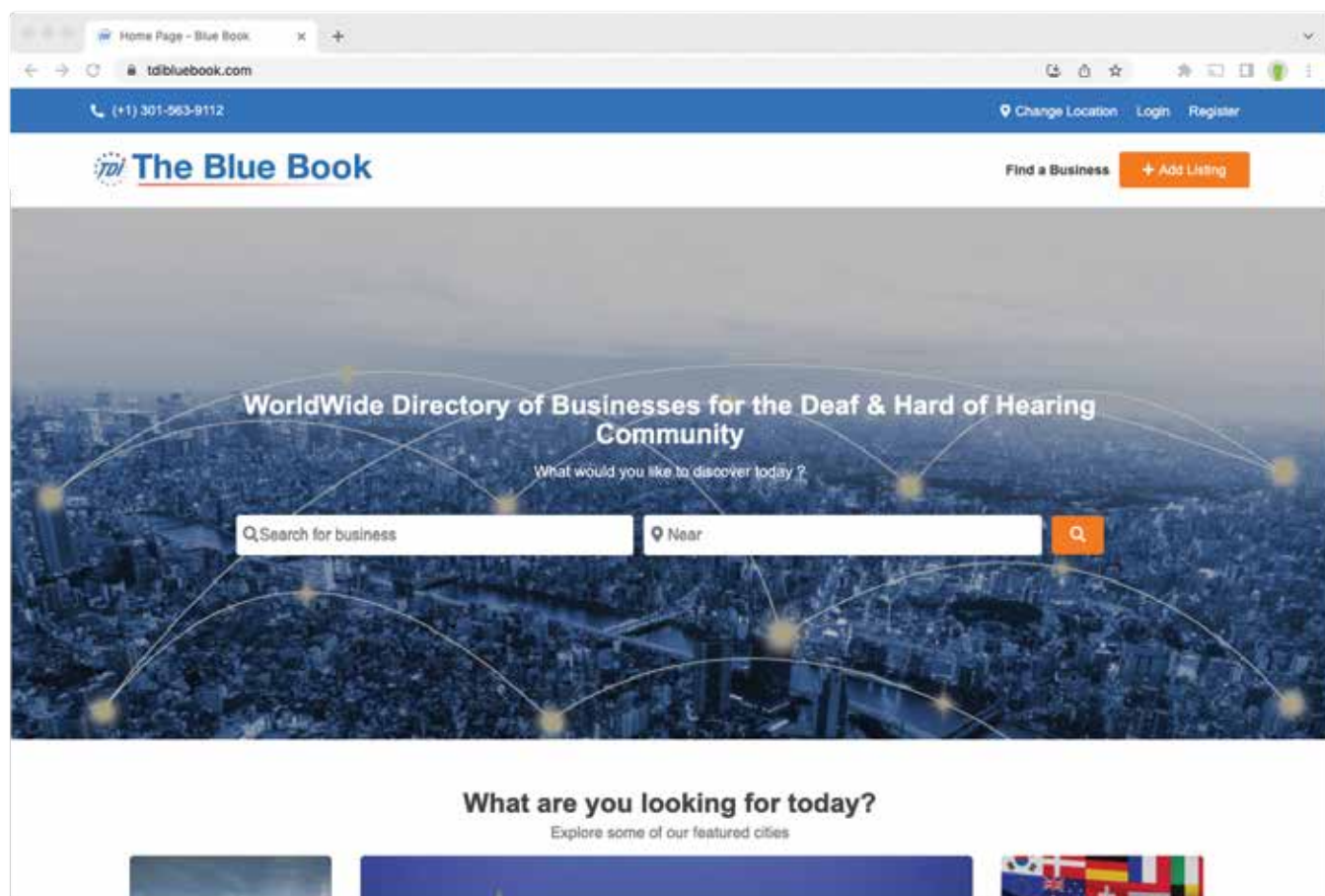
TDIforAccess.org



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The TDI Blue Book has gone fully digital!

The year of 2020 was the last year we published this iconic directory before we mitigated the information online. The year 2021 focused heavily on merging our membership database with our Blue Book listings, and the information is now all in one place.

The next goal is to upgrade the website interface and overall look to become more user-friendly and aesthetically appealing. The current version, while fully operable, is somewhat clunky. Once the design has been revamped, the focus will shift to creating a Blue Book app for anyone to download onto their mobile devices. The newest version of TDI BlueBook.com will be fully deployed in mid-April 2022.

With over a thousand listings of deaf and hard of hearing organizations, businesses, schools, agencies, and nonprofit organizations, the Blue Book (www.tdibluebook.org) is a beneficial resource for anyone wanting to find deaf and hard of hearing-centric services or businesses. Although the amount of listings is still small compared to what exists in our communities, TDI has the goal of expanding the listings to include international listings, which would likely bring the number of listings up to thousands, if not tens of thousands. This will make the Blue Book even more useful for individuals who travel. If they want to know about carpenters in their area, or deaf schools or organizations in a foreign country, they can simply look this information

up in the Blue Book.

Best of all, you can help us by listing the many other deaf and hard of hearing businesses in your area. It is free to use the Blue Book, including listing businesses. Companies are encouraged to claim their listing and add other essential details for the community.

TDI aims to bring back the Blue Book's versatility and usefulness, similar to the 1970s and 1980s when every household with a deaf or hard of hearing individual had this book. The Blue Book's wealth of resources can be accomplished only with your involvement, so check out the website (www.tdibluebook.com) today to add resources from your area.



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INTRODUCING THE 2021 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS



Connor Reed

Home: Alabama

High School: Muscle Shoals High School

College Attending: University of North Alabama



Tell us about yourself:

As a Christian, I am called to help others in need or who do not have the same resources as I do. That is one of the reasons why I volunteer in the Children's ministry, with community flood clean-up, and with Upward Basketball. I like to help others and see the joy and relief on their faces when they realize that they do not have to do something alone. Another reason is because I have been on the receiving end of others volunteering to help my family, my school, and my community. Their support sparked my interest in wanting to give back to others. In my spare time, I like to play basketball with my friends and design products to be carved out on scraps of wood. I plan on attending college at the University of North Alabama to major in Mechanical Engineering Technologies. One day, I hope to become an Imagineer at Walt Disney World, where I will assist in the design and creation of parks and experiences that give families the chance to make positive memories with each other that will last a lifetime.

Essay:

As technology advances and newer products come out that ease the lives of everyday citizens, some wonder what steps are being taken to accommodate those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Already, one resource that is in use is live, automated captioning that can be pulled up on any mobile device. Many use this technology, especially in the virtual, pandemic, world in which we are forced to connect and converse with others via Google Meets or Zoom. This use of technology has proved beneficial, even to those who are not hearing impaired.

However, this technology is not always easily accessible, especially if one is multitasking or not within range of a specific person in a live setting. My idea would be to engineer "smart" glasses, or a program for them, that provides real-time captioning through the lenses so that a deaf or hard of hearing user can converse with another. I came up with the idea from my deaf grandfather, who always carried around a small notebook and pen so that people who did not know American Sign Language could write down what they were saying for him to understand. Even though he was a proficient lip-reader, this provided him the ability to communicate with a greater number of people in his community so that he could meet his basic needs and wants.

These particular glasses that I am proposing would contain a microphone that would focus on an object in front of the user, and would provide a real-time captioning behind the lens, similar to a teleprompter. The glasses could have the ability to sync to a smartphone, which would allow the user to "save" conversations and review or print a transcript.

The advancement of technologies, especially achieved through the pandemic, further puts this idea within reach. Not only would it allow deaf and hard of hearing people to communicate with others, it could also allow for multilingual conversations. The potential for this technology is limited only by the imagination of the individuals who can implement their ideas. If the world was to focus on connecting others and providing opportunities for people to live a better life, then there is no reason why it would not become a better place to live.



Gia DiGiacomo

Home: Pennsylvania

High School: Pennsylvania School for the Deaf

College Attending: Temple University

Tell us about yourself:

I volunteer because I love helping others, love making someone else better and to also make myself feel better for knowing they are better because of me. I also love volunteering to gain my experiences and to learn more about myself and who I am.. I also do hobbies because I love enjoying myself, learning about what I can do and can't do. I also love medicating myself.

Essay:

I will advocate deaf, hh, deafblind, and those who are late-deafened or early communities, and myself to appeal to the people in high administration for education for all worldwide. I will make sure that education and colleges will provide ASL classes -- basic sign language -- so they will be able to communicate to these communities. We should fight for that access. Secondly, I will make sure to spread awareness about deaf and deafblind communities by making some videos myself, posting flyers, teaching sign language

including to hearing people, and also to teach in ASL classes to hearing people as a requirement. I can collaborate with DDHCC to work to improve interpreting services for hospitals, offices, work, and traveling in order to set the standard for all to have an equal access. So I will advocate for these needs so we all have the access to understand what is going on around us and continue to have stable access. In other thoughts, we should teach babies. Some people will wonder why we should teach our babies, but the deaf and hh babies can go to deaf schools, learn sign language, and learn how to self-advocate for themselves. Not only that, it gives an opportunity for families to learn too, including doctors to be aware of deaf and deafblind schools and interpreting services. So they can provide resources for parents who have deaf, hh, or deafblind babies, thus, they can know where to take their children to the right schools and appropriate equal access. That is what I believe in providing feedback and making some changes to make sure they know the policies such as ADA, and how to be involved as a Deaf person, and etc. I will advocate for them.

Janae Smith-Williams

Home: Delaware

High School: Howard High School of Technology

College Attending: Macalester College



Tell us about yourself:

I like volunteering because I enjoy giving something back to the community while allowing me to better myself. I also worked for Chick-Fil-A for two years and have learned a lot about employment that can benefit me in my future.

Essay:

After experiencing several traumatic events beginning at 15 years old, I became interested in psychology. I realized that working with children like me who suffered from trauma would be my calling. After all, I suffered the loss of my father at 15 years old. As I mourned, trying to make sense of my father's death, I struggled to find support and understanding from my mother. That caused a great deal of misunderstanding, eventually leading to her abandoning me last year. Fighting to survive, I mustered the courage to seek help from Child Protective Services. Those were very hard days as I continued to struggle mentally, still recovering from years of mental, physical, verbal, and spiritual abuse. Additionally, restarting my life as a minor who lacked everything from clothing, food, and familial support was a significant challenge. There were nightmares, and there were many panic attacks. Let me just say that it took time, a very long time, if you ask me, for me to accept the new reality and learn to live better.

After I finally received counseling and mental health support, I started to heal. I finally went through stages of grief to process the loss of my father and my mother's

abandonment. This healing has been that much more complicated given my deafness. But where there's a will, there is a way. I realized a long time ago that I would have to work four times as hard as hearing people to achieve my dreams and live a life of consequence. That is why, despite personal struggles, I would challenge myself to do what few deaf students were able to do. For example, I delivered a winning performance at the Mock Trial state competition and held employment that required me to communicate with my colleagues effectively.

As a mental health counselor, I hope to work with children to show them that there is a life after their trauma. I want to teach parents that their children's mental health deserves as much attention as their physical health. Through my work, I hope to impact the deaf and hearing community, children in foster care, and anyone who needs me. I hope to show them that through their will, they can overcome circumstances that objectively place them at a great disadvantage.

This scholarship will become the first step to my goal. It will advance me towards my career goals in the psychology field. Five years from now, I can see myself employed as a caseworker, involved in several communities, and mentoring young children as I pursue a master's and then a doctoral degree to become a clinical psychologist. I am determined to realize my dream of living a life of consequence, making a huge difference in communities across our nation and beyond. This scholarship will absolutely be the difference-maker when it comes to affording the education I need to achieve my goals.



Nicole Varghese

Home: New York

High School: Staten Island Technical High School

College Attending: HUNTER COLLEGE

Tell us about yourself:

I am a very hardworking and passionate student who has moderate to severe bilateral hearing loss. I wear hearing aids all the time and even though I have had a rough journey with my hearing loss, I have learned to embrace it as my strength. I love volunteering because service back to the community is something that gives me purpose. Throughout my high school career, I had involved myself in various clubs and organizations which have shaped me into the person I am today. My hobbies include spending time with family and friends, choreographing, traveling, learning about language and culture, watching movies, and making memories. I would like to attend law school in the future and become a lawyer. This is because I have always wanted to serve others and uphold the law of the land.

Essay:

I always thought my hearing loss was my weakness. Even though my hearing aids helped me connect with the world, I was ashamed of them because they made me feel different. However, I have come a long way to realize that I am capable of anything I put my mind to because my hearing loss has made me a stronger and more resilient individual. Through self advocacy, educating others on hearing loss, and changing personal perceptions, I can make a positive impact.

Firstly, it is crucial that members of the deaf and hard of hearing community are educated on the biological aspects of hearing loss as its implications. I recall learning about my ear and analyzing my audiogram in hearing education services which allowed me to better understand the root of my hearing loss and how to explain it to others. Being informed makes it comfortable for people to share their knowledge and experiences with others and create a more empathetic environment.

Self advocacy is crucial for opportunities for greater

communication access. I have learned how important it is to speak up for myself and always get what is necessary for me to grow and be successful. In order to be a strong self advocate, one needs to be confident and determined to go up to someone else to establish what they need to do to help out by getting them to be aware of your hearing loss. This includes asking for accommodations such as using hearing assistive technology, getting for extended time, preferential seating, and better communication access. Self advocacy is an essential tool which empowers us to seek improved accessibility in college, careers, and beyond.

I also have a formal business plan template that I worked on in my entrepreneurship class for my business called Shakti (which translates to strength in my mother tongue). This business produces hearing aids in the form of jewelry specifically as earrings. I want my customers to combat the notion that hearing aids should be hidden and rather incorporate it as part of their jewelry. My unique hearing aid jewelry serves a dual purpose to enhance the quality of hearing as well as allow for self expression through current fashion trends. This business venture would help people in the community to embrace their hearing loss and hopefully change their negative perception of it.

Overall, I strongly believe that before being able to improve accessibility, people in the community need to learn self advocacy and become more educated. I am a strong self advocate and well educated through my personal experiences. I hope that through my actions, I can be a proponent for greater communication access for members of the hard of hearing and deaf community. I want to inspire others and help them realize that they should never be underestimated because of their disability or let it define who they are. Rather, our different experiences as members of the community should empower us and ignite a fire in us that illuminates wherever we go.



Rhiannon Wagner

Home: New York

High School: Hampton High School

College Attending: Rochester Institute of Technology

Tell us about yourself:

I am very passionate about volunteering beyond the required hours for high school graduation. I took on the blanket making for local nursing home residents because I heard that the residents of this particular home received government issued Christmas gifts, and it greatly saddened me. Some of my many hobbies include painting, sewing, paper making, embroidery, gymnastics and tumbling, watching TikTok videos, baking, and thrift shopping. During the summer, I work at my township's community center as a day camp counselor. This summer, I am being promoted to the sub-coordinator position. During this past school year, I have also been working as an Instacart grocery shopper. I am looking to pursue a career in biomedical engineering.

Essay:

I am extremely fortunate to only have moderately severe hearing loss. I have little trouble in conversation and meeting daily expectations. However, this can make seeking accommodations even more difficult. I do not require an ASL interpreter, a cochlear implant, or live captioning. Especially with my thick, curly hair covering my hearing aids, my disability is largely hidden. Many classmates have made comments like "I forgot you have hearing loss!" or "I didn't even know!" It is not automatically known that I need people to speak louder, look at me when speaking, or turn on captions on videos and movies. Especially during this time of mask wearing, I have realized how much I rely on lip reading as I am asking people to repeat themselves more than ever.

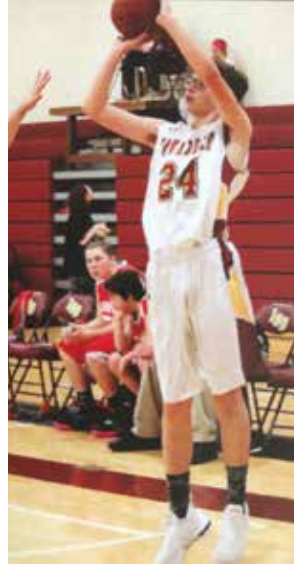
This fall, I am going to begin studying biomedical engineering at Rochester Institute of Technology. Within RIT lies the National Technical Institute for the Deaf. Studying biomedical engineering at a school with over 1,000 other deaf and hard of hearing students enables me to

explore the opportunity to develop new assistive technology for hearing and communication.

This unique setting will give me the opportunity to not only utilize my major to create technology for greater access and inclusion for deaf and hard of hearing individuals, it will also give me the platform and resources to use my voice to advocate for greater inclusion and accessibility. I can learn from the experiences of my peers and use my own personal experience to research and study how I can improve assistive technology.

For me personally, new assistive communication technology such as more discrete microphones that would allow more efficient and natural daily conversation would be incredibly useful. I often find myself feeling very much on the outside of conversations because I cannot hear what is being said, and I am afraid of ruining the joke or flow of the conversation by excessively repeating "what." Beyond COVID times, this would also be extremely beneficial for deaf-blind individuals who cannot rely on lip reading. In addition, technology that would allow voice magnification and clarity in large, atypical settings would also be life changing. It is often not an option to provide people with an FM system or Roger outside of a school or personal setting. Widely used amplification technology that is more easily paired with hearing aids would be ideal. To go along with this, more versatile and accurate live captioning services such as a smartphone app would be beneficial in situations where captions are not standard, such as live shows.

My ultimate career goal is to pursue tissue engineering with the hope of finding a more long term solution and cure for hearing loss. However, until that breakthrough, I will be working towards developing devices that improve the quality of life and social interactions for those who, like me, await that day that we can go through life without having to put in hearing aids or wear cochlear implants.



Travin Nipper

Home: Iowa

High School: Iowa School for the Deaf

College Attending: Rochester Institute of Technology

Tell us about yourself:

I am a High School Senior and Valedictorian. I have excellent time management skills, leadership skills, and an excellent listener. I considered myself a moderate athletic player. I am capable of creative thinking skills. I am a motivated student with a 3.5-4.0 GPA. I worked part-time at Heartland Harness LLC. I enjoyed biking, hiking, playing video games, fishing, woodworking, and exploring. I will attend Rochester Institute of Technology in the fall of 2021 to study Applied Mechanical Technology.

Essay:

I would begin with having an open discussion with civilians who have different types of disabilities and what daily challenges they experience with products made by a variety of companies. Companies that produce communication technology access should have a disabled staff organize this ongoing discussion to learn from each other their current struggles in the non-disability world and how to improve them by developing a device that fits the situation. For example, I own an Xbox and I really love to play games on it, but it is not fully accessible. I am Deaf and it lacks captions and sound visualization. Sound visualization is a setting that shows noises going on in your surroundings in the game world, for example, when footsteps are present, the icon of boots will show on your screen and point which direction it is occurring.

I would like to build up a demand for all new video games to have an improved sound visualization and captions option so people with hearing loss can enjoy the games they love. Not a lot of games have sound visualization, but I would love to see it on every video game available. This concept does not have to only apply to games, though. A sound visualization for the real-life environment would be beneficial to people who are deaf and have hearing loss.

Take smart glasses for example. It can have an option with a sound visualization on it for the user to use it for his or her daily routine by altering the person's environmental noises or a device that recognizes the emergency vehicle's sounds mounted inside the deaf driver's vehicle's dashboard. This way the driver can safely move over for the upcoming emergency vehicles. With inventions like these, people will be able to function in the world more smoothly.

Additionally, communication technology access at the hospital can be challenging because many deaf and hard of hearing people want an in-person interpreter instead of Video Remote Interpreting (VRI). VRI is almost like a videophone but lags, and interpreters sometimes have a hard time understanding the patient through the camera depending on where the patient is located between the camera. I believe not all communication access needs to be high-tech, but instead, we need technology options to balance out between the 1st choice of what we have and 2nd choice of having communication technology.

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TDI In Action

October - December 2021

AADB = American Association of the Deaf Blind

ALDA = Association of Late Deafened Adults, Inc.

ASDC = American Society of Deaf Children

CC – closed captioning

CCASDHH = California Coalition of Agencies Serving Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Inc.

CGB = Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau

CPADO = Cerebral Palsy and Deaf Organization

CTS – Captioned Telephone Service

DHHCAN = Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumer Advocacy Network

DRO = Disability Rights Office

E-911 – Enhanced 911

FCC = Federal Communications Commission

FNPRM – Final Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

HLAA = Hearing Loss Association of America

IP – Internet Protocol

NAD = National Association of the Deaf

NBDA = National Black Deaf Advocates

NG-911 – Next Generation 911

RERC-TA = Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Telecommunication Access

SCAT/SCABT = Speech Communications Assistance By Telephone, Inc.

SoA = Speed of Answer

TAP = Technology Access Program at Gallaudet University

TDM = Time Division Multiplexing, a method of handling electronic communications

TIA = Telecommunications Industry Association

TLPC = Samuelson-Glushko Technology Law & Policy Clinic

TRS – Telecommunications Relay Service

VRS – Video Relay Service

Closed Captioning

Reply Comment to the Accessibility of Children's Educational and Informational Television Programming

Modernization of Media Regulation Initiative

MB Docket Nos. 17-105

Children's Television Programming Rules

MB Docket Nos. 18-202

■ (November 8) TDI, along with the tagged consumer groups filed a reply comment with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) about its public notice regarding the accessibility of children's educational and informational television programming.

We stated that the Commission's 2019 changes to the children's television rules and its impact on the accessibility of children's programming remained unclear. The notice only provided a less than satisfactory page containing the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB)'s claims on the state of the children's accessibility.

We acknowledged NAB's declarations that the 2019 changes had little or no impact on the availability of children's

programming accessible to children with disabilities. In addition, NAB remarked that the "vast majority of... children's programming remains closed captioned." Regardless of these declarations, the organizations felt these statements were superficial. NAB admitted their beliefs were based on assumptions that programming is already captioned or similar.

The parents of children with disabilities will disagree with the above claims. The American Society for Deaf Children conducted a survey with more than 200 parents whose children watch children's programming and discovered that only 19% of them saw that children's programming has closed captions and/or audio descriptions. Such gaps raise the concerning possibility that changes to the children's television rules have resulted in a decline in the accessibility of programming to children who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, visually impaired, or deafblind.

NAB has the authority to gather and present valid data. Despite the forewarning of incoming inquiry on the programming, NAB still offered barely acceptable



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Continued from page 21

information. NAB must do better in the future in order to provide better analyses to improve programming accessibility for children with disabilities.

Thus, we urged the NAB to provide a serious and rigorous analysis of the accessibility of its member stations' children's programming, and to provide data and documentation of its findings, rather than mere conclusions, so that the Commission can verify that children with disabilities are not being left behind by such changes. We also urged the FCC to require the NAB to present the inquiry in a timely manner.

<https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/110861837124/2021.11.08%20Accessibility%20Advocacy%20and%20Research%20Organizations%20Children's%20Video%20Data%20Reply%20Comments%20final.pdf>

ADVANCED COMMUNICATION SERVICES

Comment to the Emergency Reliability and Resiliency In the Matter of Resilient Networks

PS Docket Nos. 21-346

Concerning Disruption to Communications New Part 4 of the Commission's Rules Concerning Disruption to Communications

ET Docket Nos. 04-35

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS

Amendment to Part 4 of the Commission's Rules

PS Docket Nos. 15-80

■ (December 17) TDI, along with the tagged consumer groups, filed a Comment with the Federal Communications Commission in response to the Commission's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking regarding the steps to improve the reliability, resiliency, and continuity of communications networks during emergencies, including but not limited to natural disasters such as Hurricane Ida and the recent tornado disaster in Kentucky.

The organizations commended the Commission's continued commitment to improving the reliability and resiliency of communication networks during emergencies. Still, we strongly urged the Commission to consider the specific

needs of the deaf and hard of hearing communities such as emergency alerts that have accessibility for them to use or have during emergencies. The emergency alerts mostly often are sound or voice-reliant. The deaf and hard of hearing community rely on multiple sources for emergency communications, including local television, wireless emergency text alerts, and text to 911. Cellular phones and broadcasted television continue to be the principal means by which deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals receive emergency alerts. Thus, a resilient and reliable electrical, broadcast, broadband, and wireless network is critical to the safety and health of this community.

We hence asked the Commission to take several specific actions to ensure that wireless emergency communications are reliable and resilient for the deaf and hard of hearing community. First, the Commission can expand the options for the distribution of emergency alerts. Second, the Commission must generally enhance the accessibility of emergency notifications. Third, the Commission should make sure that there is accessibility during and prior to the electrical grid failures by ensuring continued accessibility of wireline real-time text (RTT) and exploring the option of requiring communications networks to send out final alerts in anticipation of a power shutdown.

Not only these steps, but we also recommended the Wireless Network Resiliency Cooperative Framework to the Commission and the Framework should generally include requirements for best practices education and information distribution to the deaf and hard of hearing community for preparedness before and during disasters.

Finally, we emphasized that the Commission focuses on enhancing accessibility notification systems, outreach, instructions, and solutions that address the unique needs of the deaf and hard-of-hearing communities during disasters.

<https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/1217120708102/Comments%20of%20Consumer%20Groups%20Re%20Emergency%20Reliability%20and%20Resiliency.pdf>

OTHER

Reply Comment to the Accessibility Coalition on Commission's Fifth Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (Fifth FNPRM)



TDI In Action

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Rates for Interstate Inmate Calling Services

WC Docket Nos. 12-375

■ (December 17) HEARD, with the assistance of TDI's legal representation, filed a Reply Comment to the Federal Communications Commission, about the inequitable access to communication currently being provided to incarcerated people with disabilities.

We commented in a previous FCC filing about the Commission's Fifth FNPRM that the Incarcerated people with disabilities are routinely denied equitable access to communication in carceral facilities.

We confirmed that the Commission does have the authority to justify the civil and human rights of incarcerated people with disabilities by amending and enforcing its rules to ensure that inmate calling service (ICS) providers facilitate access to modern forms of telecommunications relay service (TRS) and direct video and text communications services. To be exact, the Commission has that authority due to Section 225 and Section 276 of the Communications Act along with the supporting clauses from Sections 225 and 271 of the Act.

Also, we discovered from the records of the decades of advocacy and recent testimonials from formerly incarcerated people with disabilities have shown that access to TRS and efficient forms of communication brings a wide range of critical benefits. These benefits include reduced reincarceration after release, better planning for life after release, decreased feelings of isolation, and better language retention.

Still, we had evidence that the incarcerated people with disabilities experienced poor treatment such as not receiving basic necessities and inequitable communication access. Thus, we believe that the registration requirements and reporting requirements within carceral facilities should be amended to address the current carceral environments and to include all accessible communication for full transparency.

We also emphasized that the carceral facilities should have modern TRS communication services to meet the needs and effective communication among the incarcerated people with disabilities and their relatives, lawyers, and important personnel.

We recognized due to the records that the costs from

the Commission implementing these proposed rules are minimal compared to the benefits, especially ICS providers. Nonetheless, the ICS providers will not provide modern TRS services for incarcerated people with disabilities without Commission's action. In addition, the records confirmed that the Commission should not charge for any form of TRS calls, direct video communication, or RTT.

<https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/12172818004459/2021.12.17%20Accessibility%20Coalition%20Reply%20Comments%20final.pdf>

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Comment to the Application of CaptionCall to Expand Its IP Captioned Telephone Service

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

CG Docket Nos. 03-123

■ (December 21) HLAA with the assistance of TDI's legal representative submitted a comment to the Federal Communications Commission about the CaptionCall expanding its Internet Protocol Captioned Telephone Service (IP CTS) service to include automatic speech recognition (ASR).

We are concerned that the Commission provides ASR-based provider certification without ensuring proper procedures such as setting up the technology-neutral minimum standards and providing adequate information available to the public about each provider's specific ASR offerings. In October, the Commission finally started the progress of developing the record on adding quality metrics for IP CTS offerings to the minimum TRS standards. Still, the Commission asked comments on providing ASR certifications to five providers and we did file some concerns for each provider. We are just concerned that the rules for ASR-based IP CTS remain unclear so we continued to express our concerns about that to the Commission.

Several Commissioners recognized that there was a problem with the rules on the ASR-based IP CTS offerings. One of them shared our same concerns that the research showed that "speech recognition services made far more errors when



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Continued from page 23

transcribing the speech of people of color than of white people.”

Previously, the CaptionCall made the similar concerns regarding the approval of ASR offerings on InnoCaption to the Commission since they acknowledged that the service-quality and ASR-specific mandatory minimum standards are needed before certifying any ASR-only/hybrid providers. As quoted, “ASR technology is vulnerable to bias and prone to errors in several important call contexts,” including “emergency calls; calls with minority speakers, speakers with accents, speakers who are soft-spoken, speakers with high- or low-pitched voices, and speakers with speech

impairments; calls with specialized or personalized jargon or speech content; and calls with difficult background conditions.” Also, they claimed that the ASR systems are most likely to “discriminate on the basis of sex, age, race, and a wide range of disabilities.”

Nevertheless, the Commission still pushed for the ASR offerings, we sincerely hope that CaptionCall will expand its answers in response to the comments and concerns raised regarding the ASR system and Commission’s commitment to follow up with answers before approving the CaptionCall’s application.

<https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/1221255600704/2020.12.21%20Consumer%20Groups%20and%20Accessibility%20Researchers%20CaptionCall%20Comment%20final.pdf>



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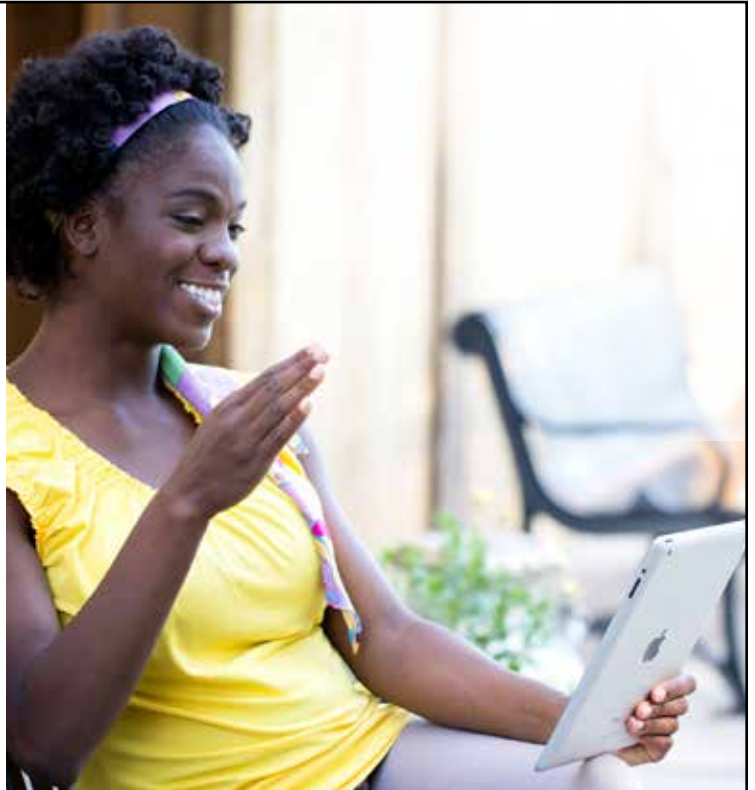
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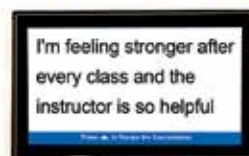
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