

OFFICE FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

FISCAL YEAR 2008 ANNUAL REPORT

To ensure that the variety of life's choices and equal opportunities are available to all deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing people.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES
OFFICE FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

1 WEST WILSON STREET ROOM 451
MADISON, WI 53703

FISCAL YEAR 2008 ANNUAL REPORT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Greetings from the Director	3
Wisconsin Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing	4
Central Office Updates	5
Regional Updates and Accomplishments	7
Information and Referral	11
Deaf Benefit Specialist	12
Wisconsin Interpreting and Transliterating Assessment (WITA)	13
Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG)	14
Service Fund	15

Greetings from the Director

It is my honor to present and highlight the accomplishments of the Wisconsin Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) for the fiscal year of 2008 (July 1, 2007 - June 30, 2008). This report provides valuable information about the work that ODHH does on a daily basis to reach out to the key stakeholders of the community that serves deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind citizens of Wisconsin. The question often arises “What does ODHH do?”, thus I present this report.

Encompassed within this year’s report is the theme of “Employment”. Due to the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant ODHH has been able to provide trainings, materials, and technical assistance to employers regarding the valuable workforce within the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind communities. We are pleased with the collaboration we have experienced with the employers thus far and hope that as a result we will see more employers looking to the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind communities for their staffing needs.

While much of our work has related to employment issues, we also have maintained a busy schedule with multiple trainings on issues such as: the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Introduction to Deaf and Hard of Hearing issues, Hearing Loss in Later Years, and other issues targeted to the unique service provider needs across the state. Staff has provided free in-service trainings and served in a multitude of other capacities. Whether providing information and referral services, consultation, or serving on committees, the mission of ODHH is being carried forward.

As many people are aware, the Wisconsin Interpreting and Transliterating Assessment (WITA) was suspended this year to improve the quality of the assessment process and the results of the participants. A more “in-depth” look into WITA will be covered in the report. Not only will we discuss the changes to the WITA, but also the number of interpreters utilizing the assessment as a tool to measure their skills and to identify areas in need of improvement.

ODHH continues to help pay for interpreting or captioning services for qualifying entities through the Service Fund. ODHH recognizes the financial impact of securing an interpreter or a captioner, and in qualifying circumstances is able to pay the fee for these services via the Service Fund.

We hope you will share in our excitement and pride as we look back at all that has transpired in Fiscal Year 2008.

Sincerely,

Linda Huffer

Linda Huffer, Director

Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Wisconsin Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

The Wisconsin Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is charged with providing advisory and consultative services to the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. William Mauldin chaired the Council during FY 08. Governor Jim Doyle appointed the following representatives of the deaf and hard of hearing communities: Jennifer Evans, Mary Jane Griffin, Dan Houlihan, Terri Matenaer, Tom Meitner, Stefanie Saltern, Eloise Schwarz, and Alex Slappey. Fiscal Year 08 has been a very productive year for the Council.

Council Accomplishments 2007-2008

- **Wisconsin 5-1-1 Traveler Information Services:** addressed and supported WI Telecommunications, Inc.'s position on accessible communication means for providing information to motorists traveling on Wisconsin highways and roads.
- **Loop Systems in DHS:** successfully obtained funding for loop systems (ALD) for two conference rooms in the DHS Building located at 1 West Wilson St. Madison, WI.
- **Mental Health-Deaf Specialist Position:** supported the choice of keeping this position active within the Bureau of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services at DHS.
- **Hearing Aid Insurance Bill:** participated in collaborative partnerships with state-based organizations and families; successfully advanced the bill through both Houses but was unable to have the bill passed during this legislative session.
- **Emergency Preparedness:** participated in a Center for Disease Control directive with the State of Wisconsin public health, social services and emergency management departments in identifying appropriate means of communication and action for special populations (including deaf and hard of hearing) in the event of a disaster or emergency situation.
- **Captioning:** requested and received captioning at public hearings with legislators
- **Regional Coordinator's Position for the Wausau Region Office:** supported the choice of keeping this position open and active.
- **Council Membership:** active and enthusiastic members of the Council seek to improve the lives of deaf and hard of hearing people in Wisconsin.

Central Office Updates

While much of the work of ODHH is done throughout the state by our Regional Coordinators, there is still much work to be done within the Department of Health Services building located in Madison, WI. Housed within the Central Office are the positions of: Office Director (Linda Huffer), Human Services Programs/Council (Alice Sykora), and Administrative Support/Budget (Karen Dishno). Provided below are some of the programs that ODHH staff have been involved in as well as a yearly update on the achievements.

Office Director: Linda Huffer

The various programs and services that are housed within ODHH require the diligence and oversight provided by our Office Director, Linda Huffer. Constantly pushing staff to “think outside the box” and be as creative as possible when considering new possibilities to serve the deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing citizens of Wisconsin, Linda continues to support the work that staff does as well as continue to look for more funding or grant possibilities to improve or expand the service provision of ODHH. Through her perseverance the pilot program of Deaf Disability Benefit Specialist has been sustained as an on-going service for the state of Wisconsin.

Administrative Support / Budget: Karen Dishno

An integral part of any office is budget oversight. Karen Dishno is not only our budget person, she also works on senior housing for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing persons, the Wisconsin Interpreting and Transliterating Assessment (WITA), and is the webmaster for ODHH. Karen contributes to the high quality standards of our work. Much of her work this year has been spent on making the recommended improvements to the WITA, as well as monitoring the expenses of all programs.

Human Services Programs/Council: Alice Sykora

Alice Sykora plays an integral role in many of the committees and programs at the state level focusing on topics such as: Affirmative Action and Civil Rights, Domestic Violence/Sexual Assault, Emergency Preparedness, and Transition. Below is a summary of the accomplishments within these programs.

Deaf Unity:

Deaf Unity is an organization of Deaf and hearing advocates, allies and interested community members committed to ending domestic violence and sexual assault in the Deaf community through education, empowerment, service delivery and alliance building.

- Hired statewide Coordinator of Victim Services for Deaf
- Established an Advisory Committee, composed of both Deaf and hearing allies and advocates to fight against violence in the Deaf Community
- Wrote several grant proposals to support Deaf Unity activities and the expansion of victim services

- Is applying for nonprofit status
- Continues collaboration with the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence, the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Disability Rights Wisconsin, local domestic violence and sexual assault programs and shelters
- Implemented a Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) pilot program with three programs participating
- Presented at local and regional networking meetings of domestic violence and sexual assault advocates and staff on American Sign Language (ASL), Deaf Culture, and Deaf victims
- Worked with the Office of Justice Assistance and Communication Services for the Deaf-Minnesota to host a “Deaf and Hard of Hearing Law Enforcement Training” on May 9th

Transition:

- Participated in interagency collaboration teams on transition services for deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing students age 14 and up.

Emergency Planning:

- Held a statewide Community Emergency Preparedness Information Network (CEPIN) training offered with 30 deaf and hard of hearing, emergency and law enforcement responders in attendance
- Regularly participates in Dane County Emergency Preparedness’ Special Populations Committee
- Worked with Dane County Emergency Management to distribute weather radios at a low cost for Dane County Deaf and hard of hearing residents
- Helped coordinate a volunteer registry drive to register Deaf senior citizens in Dane County
- Participated in Division of Public Health’s Pandemic Special Populations Task Force

Regional Updates:

Northeastern Region: Marge Liberski

Our Northeastern Regional Coordinator, Marge Liberski, serves the following counties: Brown, Calumet, Dodge, Door, Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Kewaunee, Manitowoc, Marinette, Menominee, Oconto, Outagamie, Ozaukee, Shawano, Sheboygan, Washington, Waupaca, and Winnebago. She has been providing training opportunities to interested parties, serving on councils, leading the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) project for ODHH, working with individuals, working with interpreters, and assisting in our Northern Regional office due to the vacancy of a Regional Coordinator. Below is a summary of the accomplishments that have occurred within the Northeastern Region in the past year.

- Worked with regional entities regarding employment opportunities for deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind persons.
- Provided consultation to various regional service providers on topics such as accessibility, communication, Deaf culture, hearing loss, regional resources, and more.
- Collaborated with the University of Wisconsin System to provide a satellite presentation entitled “View from the Other Side” to University of Wisconsin Stevens Point graduate students studying to become audiologists or speech pathologists.
- Presented at various conferences regarding the needs of deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind persons, as well as informing attendees of the services provided by ODHH.
- Provided information to justice system entities regarding legal issues, as well as addressing the needs of deaf Hispanics.
- Administered the Wisconsin Interpreting and Transliterating Assessment (WITA), both written and performance portions, to candidates within the region.
- With the financial assistance of the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, developed a DVD pertaining to employment for Deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind persons. Also provided consultation to regional employers and job centers on individual deaf employee concerns.
- Provided evaluation to the 4th semester Northern Technical College, Interpreter Training Program students.
- Assisted Community Abuse Prevention Team (ADAPT) by participating in Panel discussions relating to disabilities and abuse.
- Continued involvement in: ADAPT, Statewide Taskforce on Interpreter Licensure (STFIL), the Employer Coalition with Pathways and MIG, the NorthCentral Technical College Advisory Board, and the Physical Disabilities Council.

Northern Region: Vacant

Due to a staff resignation the Northern Region, (which serves the following counties: Adams, Ashland, Florence, Forest, Iron, Juneau, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Marquette, Oneida, Portage, Price, Taylor, Vilas, Waushara, and Wood), has been without a Regional Coordinator but not without service provision. Many who live within the Northern Region have become familiar with ODHH's Community Service Associate (CSA), April Thompson; who has taken on the responsibility of keeping the office running. For issues outside of April's realm, Marge Liberski and Carolyn Small have stepped in to assist with the service provision aspect. Both Regional Coordinators have provided trainings and consultation to the Northern Region and to the people who live within the area.

Western Region: Carolyn Small

The Western Regional Coordinator, Carolyn Small, serves: Barron, Bayfield, Buffalo, Burnett, Chippewa, Clark, Crawford, Douglas, Dunn, Eau Claire, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Pepin, Pierce, Polk, Rusk, Sawyer, St. Croix, Trempealeau, Vernon, and Washburn counties, and has been assisting April Thompson in the Northern Region while ODHH fills the vacant position of Regional Coordinator. Carolyn has spent much of her time training employers and also informing interested persons of the resources that ODHH has to offer. As our Hard of Hearing Liaison, Carolyn has maintained a collaborative working relationship with Hearing Loss Association of America as well as other hard of hearing organizations throughout the state. Some of the accomplishments for the Western Region for FY 08 are listed below.

- Collaborated with other Regional Coordinators to provide trainings to employers regarding employment opportunities for deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind persons in Wisconsin.
- Provided trainings and consultation to abuse shelter staff with the emphasis of accessibility, awareness, and communication needs for those wishing to receive services.
- Trained Placement Vendors how to work with deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind persons in the employment setting.
- Spoke to University of Wisconsin Eau Claire students enrolled in American Sign Language (ASL) classes on Deaf awareness and culture.
- Provided outreach at multiple conferences on the variety of programs and services that ODHH has to offer.
- Visited the local Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) to train staff on awareness, communication, and technology tips exclusive to the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind consumers served by the ADRCs.
- Administered the WITA, both written and performance portions, to interested parties within the Western Region.

- Encouraged continued collaboration with the hard of hearing community of the state.

Southern Region: Bette Mentz-Powell

The Southern Regional Coordinator, Bette Mentz-Powell, serves: Columbia, Dane, Grant, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Lafayette, Richland, Rock, Sauk, and Walworth counties. This fiscal year, Bette has been working to form collaborative relationships with other state agencies for the purpose of providing more training opportunities and education in the realm of HIV/AIDS and sexuality for members of the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind communities. Along with other staff, she has put a strong emphasis on creating more opportunities for employment through the help of the MIG grant. Regional accomplishments are:

- Continued trainings for placement vendors within the southern region on issues related to employment and the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind communities.
- Provided in-service opportunities to those entities currently employing deaf or hard of hearing staff.
- Presented at local Technology Expos on the current technology use within the community of deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind persons.
- Trained regional county staff on how to effectively work with, and communicate with deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind consumers of their services.
- Presented on the topic of “Hearing Loss in Later Years” to a variety of aging groups.
- Continued collaboration with Access to Independence to provide community workshops on issues such as: Employment and ADA, eye care for seniors, money management, VITA (tax), and more.
- Invited Heidi Nass from the University of Wisconsin Hospital to provide a pilot workshop on the topic of HIV/AIDS to the Deaf community which was so popular that more requests from other communities are being received and worked on.
- Continue provision of the WITA both written and performance assessments.

Southeastern Region: Jason Altman

Our Southeastern Regional Coordinator, Jason Altman, serves: Kenosha, Milwaukee, Racine, and Waukesha counties. As with the other Regional Coordinators, much time and energy has been put into employment related issues. Jason has provided trainings to a variety of service providers on the best approach to working and communicating with the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind community members. As well as providing trainings, consultation services, WITA, and representing multiple committees, Jason has been able to accomplish much for the Southeastern Region.

- Provided in-service opportunities to multiple law enforcement agencies on how to work more effectively with a deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind person.
- Trained firefighters on how to best work with the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind community members of whom they serve.
- Provided outreach to Post-Secondary Educational facilities within the region on a range of issues, including: deaf awareness, interpreting, WITA, and professional rapport to name a few
- Collaborated with employers and job placement vendors to provide trainings to interested entities on working with employees who are deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf as well as the hiring of such staff.
- Provided consultation and training to Benefit Specialists, VR Counselors, ADRCs, and other service providers.
- Discussed strategies with colleagues in the realm of crisis intervention as a way of education on the best practices in such settings.
- Worked with aging citizens to educate them on the basis of hearing loss.
- Represented the following Committees on behalf of ODHH
 - State of WI Court Interpreting Advisory Committee, Southeastern WI Employment Consortium Committee, Southeastern WI Community Organizations Active in Disaster, Wisconsin School for the Deaf Suicide Prevention Coalition, State Crisis Intervention Network Committee, Independence First's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Alcohol and Other Drugs Abuse Advisory Committee, Deaf and Hard of Hearing State Transition Committee, 2007 WESP-DHH Teen Getaway Planning Committee, and State Assistive Technology Best Practices Committee.

Information and Referral

One of the primary responsibilities of ODHH is information dissemination. ODHH fields calls on a daily basis regarding issues such as: ADA, accessibility, hearing loss, telecommunications and so on. As the primary contact for many entities across the state ODHH provides the information and referral services to assist callers on issues that pertain to deaf, hard of hearing, or deafblind issues throughout the state. As a way to better address the public, ODHH maintains an updated resource directory and seeks to stay abreast with the current trends in the community; to provide callers with the most current information available. Below is a chart of some of the fielded calls and the topics of inquiry. Due to limitations in data collection systems, the list below is not comprehensive.

ODHH Telephone Contact Log	
ODHH Services / Programs	1023
ADA & Legal Information	294
Interpreting / Captioning	207
Child Care Services	139
Assistive Technology Related	136
Deaf Community Resources	124
Employment	70
Hearing Aids	55
Education / Birth to Three	50
Hard of Hearing / Hearing Loss	36
DeafBlind Resources	24
ODHH Council Issues	17
Total	2175

Information dissemination is not only available via placing calls directly to the office, but also through the website, dhs.wisconsin.gov/sensory. Included on the website is information on the variety of services provided by ODHH including but not limited to: Communication, Hearing Aids, Employer information, Interpreter related information, Telecommunication Assistance Program, and Service Fund.

Deaf Disability Benefit Specialist Update

Wisconsin is fortunate enough to have a Deaf Disability Benefit Specialist who is able to provide support and assistance to members of the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind communities regarding issues pertaining to Social Security. Members of the community within the age range of 18-59 years of age who need assistance with benefit related information are able to receive assistance from a member of their own community, Jeffrey Cucinotta. He is able to provide work incentives and disability benefit related information to members of the deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind community across the state who communicate using American Sign Language.

Located within the Department of Health Services, Jeffrey collaborates with other Disability Benefit Specialists to provide information regarding the following topics: Social Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Income (SSDI), Food Share, housing and utility issues, Medicaid, Medicare, low-income tax credit, private health and disability issues, unemployment, and veteran's benefits. More information on this program it is available on the ODHH website.

New to the website is a Frequently Asked Question page in which Jeffrey provides answers to some of the most commonly asked questions of him in both ASL, and written English formats. For more information about the program or assistance please contact Jeffrey Cucinotta.

Jeffrey Cucinotta
Deaf Disability Benefit Specialist

(866) 769-9725 (TTY)
(800) 947-6644 (TTY Relay)
(608) 266-1000 (Videophone)
Jeffrey.Cucinotta@wisconsin.gov

WITA Update

Fiscal Year 08 has been one of change and advancement in the Wisconsin Interpreting and Transliterating Assessment (WITA). Early in FY08 an Advisory Committee was convened bringing together stakeholders from the interpreting community (Saul Arteaga, Pamela Sue Conine, Sue Gordon, Mary Maier, Lois Schleicher and Steve Smart) with the intention of looking at ways to improve the interpreter assessment in Wisconsin. With help from Karen Dishno and Linda Huffer from ODHH, the decision was made to suspend the WITA performance assessment as a way to make recommended changes in order to increase validity and reliability.

While the WITA performance assessment was suspended the Advisory Committee advertised the need for more evaluators to expedite the results process. The success was so great we now have a larger pool of WITA evaluators from different backgrounds to provide their expertise and feedback for the interpreters participating in the assessment. The new cohort of WITA evaluators being trained by Pamela Conine, Karen Dishno, and Mary Maier, have described the training as being highly beneficial.

The WITA performance assessment resumed being administered by the Regional Coordinators beginning in January of this year. As a way to better prepare the candidates for the performance assessment, ODHH has begun distributing the WITA practice tapes in DVD format. This entitles each participant who registers for the performance assessment to a DVD in which to practice for the assessment. The cost of the assessment has been raised from \$130 to \$150 to offset the cost of the DVD distribution and assessment administration.

Under the recommendation of the Advisory Committee, the WITA written examination will be replaced with the National Interpreter Certification (NIC) Knowledge examination offered by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). Beginning July 1, 2008, new candidates wishing to take the WITA Performance assessment will be required to show proof of passing the NIC Knowledge assessment. By requiring the candidates to take the NIC knowledge assessment, we have encouraged the candidate to continue the pursuit of national certification. After candidates have taken the NIC written examination, they are given a five-year time frame in which to take the NIC performance examination.

We feel strongly that the recommended changes set forth by the Advisory Committee will help us to improve the quality of our WITA Assessment as well as maintain high standards for the interpreters that work in Wisconsin.

Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG)

Wisconsin is fortunate to be one of the 41 participating states involved in the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) offered through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. This grant is provided as a way to assist states in developing their infrastructure to support working individuals with disabilities. There are many programs that are supported by this grant and ODHH is just one of many.

With the financial assistance of MIG, ODHH has been able to develop a training to employers educating them on the rich and often overlooked workforce consisting of deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing community members. There has been strong positive feedback from employers throughout the state regarding these trainings.

With this grant ODHH has been able to develop lasting collaborative relationships with other statewide entities such as, Worksource Wisconsin, the Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute (SVRI), Pathways to Independence, and more, with the common goal of increasing the knowledge base of employers on issues relating to the deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing workforce.

ODHH has been able to develop a manual for employers covering topics such as: the Americans with Disabilities Act, Accommodations, Communication Strategies, Technology, and other tips for working with an employee who is deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing. We look forward to more employers using the manual as a tool when working with a member of the communities which we serve.

In addition to the manual, ODHH has also produced a set of DVDs. DVDs are provided to employers and are used in our trainings. One of the DVDs entitled "Speaking in Harmony," captures the perspectives of not only the deaf or hard of hearing employee but also the employer and their fellow co-workers. This is a true to life DVD; the comments and the statements provided by all parties are true. The second DVD is about technology and its use when using it as an accommodation. With a special thanks to Hamilton Relay we have been able to use their filming and description of different technology features popular for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing members of the community.

We look forward to the upcoming year with MIG where we have planned more workshops focusing on employability, geared toward the community members as opposed to the employers. With this focus on the community we will be developing a resource guide for deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing community members including ideas and tips for applications, interviews, requesting an accommodation, and more.

Service Fund Update

ODHH understands the occasional monetary hardship of providing communication access for deaf, hard of hearing, and deafblind persons in situations not covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. As a way of supporting members of the community ODHH continues to provide funds to pay for sign language interpreting services or real-time captioning needs through the Service Fund.

ODHH fielded requests from many community members and others. For those entities who under the law are required to provide communication access, our Regional Coordinators provided the appropriate technical assistance and advocacy for both the deaf, deafblind, or hard of hearing community member as well as worked with the entity required to provide the service.