Looking Back During Deaf History Month

KCDHH Makes Impact on Their Own—20 Years Ago

Sometimes we get caught up in the moving tales of passion and dedication shared by an employee and you just can’t wait to tell their story.

Jessica Endler Smith started working in 2013. She is a hard working employee that understands the benefits of the Telecommunications Access Program (TAP) first hand. At a young age of 14, Jessica’s mother completed an application for specialized TAP equipment. This is when Jessica received her first TTY.

Fast forward 20 years later and Jessica is now our Administrative Specialist II and reminded me that March 27 is National Assistive Technology Awareness Day. I asked her if she remembers joining the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH) in July, 2013. She said she started out using a TTY (a text telephone) before she eventually received her first smart phone.

Jessica told me she remembers that acquiring an assistive communication device opened up a whole new beginning for her.

“I grew up in the hearing world,” said Jessica. “The only way I could communicate with my friends was at school. When I got my first TTY, I could talk to my friends anytime and I could even talk to my friends in Florida.”

For Jessica, graduating to a mobile TTY was the only way her mother would also allow her to drive a car. Then, when she turned 21 years old, she saw her first video phone (VP) and, once again, technology changed.

“Video phones were great when they came out because ASL is a visual language and we could see to communicate,” said Jessica. “Now, I realize how bad the internet speed and phones were back then, especially compared to the smart phones we have today.”

When Jessica started working for KCDHH, she couldn’t wait to let people know what was available to them.

“I knew about KCDHH because of my TTY,” said Jessica. “I knew KCDHH had visor cards too. But, what I learned was how I could empower people and provide them with communication accessibility.”

The KCDHH was established in 1982 and serves as an advocate for deaf and hard of hearing persons on legislative issues, as well as a consultant to the governor, General Assembly and various state and local governmental agencies. KCDHH provides information, referral and advocacy services, interpreter referral services for state agencies, produces the bi-annual Kentucky Deafestival and various resource materials, as well as provides the Telecommunications Access Program (TAP) for eligible deaf and hard of hearing Kentuckians.

“My goal is to get more people to apply to TAP,” said Jessica. “There are over 750,000 individuals in Kentucky who are considered deaf or hard of hearing. I want to help reach these people and help them see a new world too.”

Jessica lives in Shelbyville with her husband and their four children.

Please share with us how KCDHH has impacted your life or the lives of others we have assisted by sending your story or contacting us on facebook. Visit kcdhh.ky.gov for contact information and resources or call 502-573-2604.
KCDHH’s Dowd EHDI Panelist

KCDHH Executive Staff Advisor, Anita Dowd, was one of eight panelists presenting at the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) March meeting in Chicago. These panelists were deaf or hard of hearing individuals serving in leadership roles in EHDI Systems and discussed the characteristics, strategies and current practices of developing and increasing family access to DHH leaders.

Dowd said she never really considered herself in a leadership role.

“Becoming a leader wasn’t really a conscious decision that I made,” said Dowd. “I was perfectly content being a silent follower. However, when my youngest daughter’s needs weren’t being met at school and I had no one to turn to for help, I had no choice but to educate myself in order to advocate for her as best as I could. I spent many nights at the kitchen table with coffee, stacks and stacks of legal documents and a highlighter. A red pen led to a burning desire to fight injustice, not just for my child but for all children with hearing loss. It didn’t take long to realize that if I truly wanted to make a difference, I would have to stop being a silent follower and step up. How could I not do that when my child depended on me? Thus began my transition.”

**“Deafness is a sensory difference. It only becomes a disability when the educational system fails the child and family.”**

-Christine Yoshinaga-Itano, Ph.d. • Research Professor
  Institute of Cognitive Science

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During Deaf History Month

“I See the Crowd Roar” Set to Debut in May

I See the Crowd Roar—The Story of William “Dummy” Hoy is set to be released during Deaf History Month sometime in May. It is an inspirational story of one of the major league baseball’s first deaf players, William “Dummy” Hoy.

Deaf History Month takes place annually from March 13 to April 15 and is an opportunity for communities and employers to come together to improve their understanding and support of the deaf community.

KCDHH released the video trailer last year during DeaFestival 2018 with actor Miles Barbee, who portrays Hoy. Writer/Director, David Risotto, was also on hand during DeaFestival to meet with attendees.

KCDHH also assisted with coordination of interpreters for a lot of the filming that took place in Kentucky.

Watch KCDHH for upcoming messages regarding the official release date.

Test Hearing During Better Speech & Hearing Month

An estimated 48 million Americans experience some type of hearing loss. Of the more than 48 million Americans with hearing loss, just 20 percent of those individuals seek help (ASHA, 2012).

During May, Better Hearing and Speech Month is celebrated by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), who raises awareness about hearing and speech problems, encouraging people to analyze their own hearing and speech, and to take action if they think there might be a problem.

The Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH), through its Telecommunications Access Program (TAP), ensures that deaf, hard of hearing, speech impaired and deaf/blind individuals receive equal access to telephone services.

If you are experiencing difficulty hearing, take time during Better Hearing & Speech Month to schedule an appointment to have your hearing checked. If a hearing loss is detected, a variety of equipment is available through KCDHH that may help you.

Visit kcdhh.ky.gov to find Assistive Hearing Equipment!