

>>> AUGUST 2025

West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

NEWSLETTER



“Advocacy is empathy, compassion, and community at work.”- Janna Cachola



Letter from the Executive Director

Back-to-School Season: Vision, Values & Support for Deaf Students



Dear Community Members,

As fall begins to settle in and the leaves start their colorful transformation, we are reminded that change and growth go hand-in-hand. This back-to-school season marks more than the return of early mornings and packed lunches; it is a time of fresh starts, new responsibilities, and renewed commitments to our Deaf and Hard of Hearing students across West Virginia.

At the West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (WVCDHH), we are proud to support the evolving needs of Deaf youth and their families throughout the state. Over the summer, we’ve worked alongside several counties to ensure that Deaf and Hard of Hearing students return to classrooms with the support they need, whether that means updated IEPs, access to qualified interpreters, or tools that foster inclusive communication.

For some, the school year begins in familiar elementary hallways. For others, it means navigating the transitions of middle or high school or even stepping into the world of higher education. We recognize that the journey doesn’t end at graduation. Recent high school graduates are now entering colleges and vocational programs, learning how to advocate for themselves, access services through disability support offices, and take ownership of their futures. These transitions, though exciting, can also feel overwhelming. That’s why WVCDHH remains a steady resource for Deaf students and their families, providing guidance, community connections, and culturally affirming support.

I remember my own “fresh start” vividly, my first day as a California State University, Northridge (CSUN) student, walking into a classroom where I didn’t know a single person. As a first-generation college student, I was filled with a mix of hope and nerves, unsure of what to expect or where to turn. Thankfully, I found incredible support in my Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) counselor, Colleen Gaither, and Lucinda Aborn, my advisor at CSUN’s National Center on Deafness (NCOD). Their guidance and belief in my potential helped me navigate challenges I didn’t even know I’d face. With their encouragement, I learned the power of asking for help and connecting with people who truly understood my journey.

This fall, let’s recommit to building a more connected, informed, and inclusive West Virginia. Whether you’re a parent, teacher, service provider, or advocate, your role is vital. Together, we can ensure that every Deaf and Hard of Hearing student has the tools they need to succeed, not only in school, but in life.

Warmest wishes for a safe and successful school year,
EJE





Deaf-Owned

58 Creativity



Meet the Founder



To learn more, go to:
<http://58creativity.com>

or

Scan the QR Code



Brittany Castle is a Deaf digital artist and designer who founded 58 Creativity. Growing up in California with her Deaf twin sister and hearing parents, she was part of the Deaf world. Her father is a proud child of Deaf adults (CODA). Despite being hearing, Brittany's parents know how to sign and provide Brittany with full access to ASL at home. She is always grateful to have access to ASL with her family.

After graduating from Gallaudet University, Brittany worked as a freelance graphic designer. Brittany had a successful experience with her series of artwork called "Ladies in Sign Language: Love, Inspire, Imagine," being featured at the Seattle Deaf Art Exhibition.

Her lifelong dream was to own her own business, so she decided to open an online store that eventually became the 58 Creativity we know today. Through her art, she continues to celebrate and express her strong roots in Deaf culture and ASL.

Our Story

58 Creativity is dedicated to bringing the beautiful American Sign Language to life through art. Our collection includes posters, puzzles, apparel, accessories, and many more that shine a unique light on ASL.

The meaning behind the name "58 Creativity" represents our mission with this online store. The number "58" stands for "Discover" and "Interest" in ASL. Combined with "creativity," it becomes "Discover interest in creativity." This is the main value of our store: encouraging everyone to explore the majestic world of creativity and ASL.

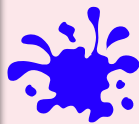


What We Do



Art

We create artwork that highlights the beauty of American Sign Language and Deaf culture. By naturally blending ASL into our artwork, we add a personal touch to each piece. Our creativity has endless potential, so you will discover many unique series of artwork that celebrate ASL in inspiring ways.



ASL Education

We use this platform not only to distribute art but also to educate people about ASL. Since the language holds a lot of rich culture, a close community, and love, we want to share that experience with you. We also want to spread awareness about ASL so people can recognize its importance within the Deaf community.



Products

We offer a variety of products, including apparel, games, accessories, and stationery. Our goal is to bring joy to you through ASL, so each product features unique ASL designs. You will feel the love and care from the moment you receive our products.





Tell us a little bit about yourself and your role as WVABLE Program Director.

I joined the WV State Treasurer's Office in July of 2019 as the director of the WVABLE savings program. I consider it an honor to work for a program that is instrumental in helping those who are eligible to live a life of greater independence. A big part of what I do routinely is conduct varying types of outreach that include working closely with partner organizations that help us inform WVABLE-eligible individuals and their families about the program. I enjoy building these relationships and collaborating with our partners on ways to help reach the individuals they serve. I especially value the opportunities when I get to meet ABL-eligible individuals and families and hear firsthand how the program makes a difference in their lives.

What is the WV ABL program, and who does it serve?

WVABLE Savings program is an important financial planning tool for individuals with a disability, as well as parents and families who have a child or loved one with a disability, and is made possible by the federal Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act. The law recognizes the extra costs associated with living with a disability and raising a child with a disability- and aims to ease financial strains by making tax-free savings accounts available to cover qualified disability expenses. With WVABLE, eligible individuals and families are able to save and invest above the \$2,000 imposed asset limit without losing eligibility for certain government benefits that are critical to their health and well-being, such as SSI and Medicaid. Funds in a WVABLE account grow tax-free and can be used at any time for qualified disability-related expenses.

Who is Eligible?

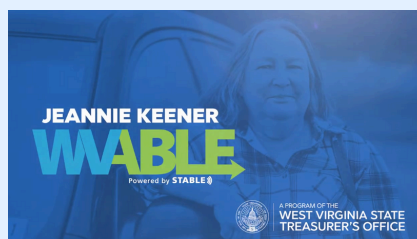
Any resident of West Virginia who developed a qualifying disability before the age of 26 is eligible for a WVABLE account. The disability type includes physical, intellectual, developmental, nervous, or other types of impairments. * The individual must be eligible or entitled to receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or have a physician certify their diagnosis. We also have a quick quiz on our website at wvable.com that can help an individual determine if they are eligible.

ABLE is expanding to help even more people whose disability occurred at a later age. Landmark federal legislation, the ABL Age Adjustment Act, is set to take effect on January 1, 2026, and will raise the disability age of onset for eligibility to 46 (currently 26).

What are the key benefits of having a WVABLE account?

- Account owners who are receiving SSI benefits may have up to \$100,000 in their WVABLE account.
- Funds contributed to a WVABLE account may come from any source and are not considered income or an asset for receiving SSI, Medicaid, SNAP, and HUD benefits.
- All WVABLE account holders, or their Authorized Legal Representative who is managing their account, are eligible to receive a free STABLE Visa Debit Card. This allows easy access to the WVABLE funds from anywhere. The card also includes features to protect its use and facilitate record-keeping.

Jeannie Keener of Elkins, WV, shared how having a WVABLE account has positively impacted her life as an individual with a hearing disability. Scan the QR code to watch her story.



To learn more or open an account, go to:
<https://wvable.com>

or
Scan the QR
Code



A HARD WE CHOSE

“Parenting is only hard when you’re trying to do the right thing for your kids.” Kati, my wife, told me this years ago. If you didn’t care, you wouldn’t choose the hard path that’s better for your kids. Even when life throws a curveball, you can choose how hard you want to engage with the problem, with your kids.

Ellie, now 5, was 18 months old when we got the curveball and learned she was deaf. Her newborn screening indicated that she was hearing; we had no reason to doubt that until she started missing language milestones and blissfully napping through the demolition stages of a kitchen remodel. The doctors told us we had to wait six months to get her ABR, and then more waiting for assistive technology after that. We knew we couldn’t afford to lose any more of this critical time getting her caught up linguistically. Kati and I enrolled in the first American Sign Language class we could find, taught by a retired interpreter at the local hospital.



We were intimidated knowing that we had to model a language that was not our own, while learning it at the same time, and acknowledging that we would make mistakes; she immediately began babble signing back at our clumsy, budding foreign language. Ellie was already very expressive and smart, she intuitively knew how to get us to understand what she needed, but giving her access to a genuine language was a game changer. Suddenly, things had names and labels. We cried when she pointed at our pet conure and signed “bird,” her first sign. Now she could tell us she wanted milk instead of pointing frantically, that she was mad and why, or what she’d prefer to have for lunch.

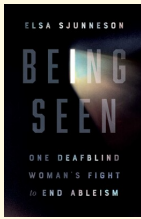
Stories from the Deaf community told us about children isolated not just in their communities, but in their own homes due to lack of shared language, sitting at the dinner table excluded from the family conversation. We met Deaf adults who did not go home for holidays because their family had not learned to communicate with them. We did not want a childhood that she looked back on as lonely, or a future in which she chose not to come home over something we could remedy. We doubled down on our language learning, seeking out apps and Deaf teachers, but still we faced many eye-opening events into our blind spots and assumptions as hearing parents of a deaf child.

The first came when Early Intervention Services began visiting our home on a regular basis. During one of the initial meetings, we saw that she didn’t know her own name, something you just assume your (hearing) child has picked up. It is hard to convey the gut-wrenching feeling of failure, knowing our nearly two-year-old child not only didn’t have language, but also didn’t know who they were. We quickly came up with a home sign name for her, for her brother, all the pets, and anybody she met who didn’t already have a sign name. This was the first of many fumbles, and while we felt awful for it, there was no time to linger on the failure; we had to keep moving, keep learning. I can thankfully say that despite our mistakes, Ellie is thriving today. She creates and shares vivid stories, fearlessly engages the world, and makes friends everywhere she goes.

Despite the assistance we had from state and non-profit agencies, the biggest challenge was and is still finding a community for Ellie. We met Deaf adults who lived their entire childhoods alone, without meeting another deaf person. Additionally, she is an extremely extroverted person who only knows two kinds of people: friends and friends she hasn’t met yet. So we took her to Gallaudet, to the American Society for Deaf Children’s Family Conference, and myriad other meetups in many states. We even started our own playgroup for children who use ASL. This was a challenge for her introverted parents, but she needed peers, and we all needed mentors. We are constantly looking for events and ways to get her in touch with the Deaf community.

To say that this has been life-changing is an understatement. It has been frustrating, hard, heart-breaking at times, but it is also rewarding and heart-warming, not just in seeing her grow but in the connections we make with people. This is a hard we choose, everyday, as parents trying to do the best we can for our kids.

Cody Sharp



Being Seen: One Deafblind Woman's Fight to End Ableism

Elsa Sjunneson (Author)

As a Deafblind woman with partial vision in one eye and bilateral hearing aids, Elsa Sjunneson lives at the crossroads of blindness and sight, hearing and Deafness, much to the confusion of the world around her. Part memoir, part cultural criticism, part history of the Deafblind experience, Being Seen explores how our cultural concept of disability is more myth than fact, and the damage it does to us all.



deaf not Deaf

Christian Fusco (Author), Kostis Pavlou (Illustrator)

Rian is starting her sixth-grade year in a new home and at a new school in Northeast Philadelphia. On her first day, she is greeted by Shack, the class bully, who wastes no time breaking one of her cochlear implants. She's used to feeling like an outsider, but nothing could prepare her for life at John Hancock Elementary. Her teachers can't pronounce her name, the "normal" kids think she's Deaf and the Deaf kids think she's a joke, especially Luis Rodriguez, a Deaf boy who uses American Sign Language to communicate with his small circle of family and friends.



WEST VIRGINIA DEAF SERVICE CENTER (WVDSC)
ASL Summer Camp

August 4-7, 2025
160 Old Jacksons Mill Rd.
Weston, WV 26452

Come join us for swimming, STEM, literacy, ASL activities, s'mores, and more!
FREE for deaf/hard-of-hearing children ages 8-13.

Things to Do

Scan the QR Code
to register



BECKLEY ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF
Annual Picnic

Saturday, August 16, 2025, 11:00 am - 7:00 pm (Dinner at 3:00 pm)

Little Beaver State Park
1402 Grandview Rd
Beaver, WV 25813

Cost: Free
Contact Jon or Robin at 304-513-2275 (VP) with any questions.



CHARLESTON ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF
77th Annual Picnic

Saturday, August 23, 2025, 12:00 pm - dark

Hurricane City Park
Red Barn
3511 WV 34
Hurricane, WV 25526

Burgers, Hot Dogs, Splash Pad, Door Prizes, Dingo, and Cornhole!

**Cost of admission includes
your meal and a door prize ticket.**
**Bring a covered dish
for an extra door prize ticket!**

Adult \$25
Child 12-17 \$10
Under 5 FREE

charlestonassociationdeafhoh@gmail.com



LUKE LEE LISTENING, LANGUAGE & LEARNING LAB

Hear We Go 5k Run/Walk

Tuesday, October 4, 2025

Registration: 7:30 am, 100-yard dash kids race: 8:30 am, 5k run/walk: 9:00 am

Learning Lab (The L) at Marshall University is hosting a 5k run/walk and a kids' race this fall at Ritter Park. This event aims to raise awareness and support for children who are deaf and hard of hearing who use listening and spoken language.

Registration Fees:
5K Race: \$25 Pre-registration
\$30 Day-of Registration
Kids' Race: \$5 Pre-registration
10 Day-of Registration

Scan the QR Code
to register



**LANGUAGE FIRST****Learning Opportunities cont.****Interpreting for Suicide and Self-Harm Evaluations in the School Setting****Tuesday, August 5, 2025, 6:00 - 8:00 pm ET**

This session will examine how the educational interpreter faces the mental health setting within the school system. Participants will have the opportunity to explore common mental health terms, diagnoses, intake procedures, and statistics regarding mental health in the deaf community, followed by hands-up practice with common suicide and self-harm assessments used in the school system.

Workshop Fee: \$39 *This course offers 0.20 ASHA CEUs and .20 Professional Studies CEUs

Collaboration with Deaf Interpreters in the Field of Speech-Language Pathology**Sunday, August 24, 2025, 2:00 - 4:00 pm ET**

This webinar deepens a professional's knowledge of Deaf Interpreters (DIs) as interprofessional collaborators to the field of speech-language pathology (SLP). This webinar proposes a standard of practices by offering an in-depth discussion into the roles of DIs and SLPs in the care of the Deaf/hard-of-hearing populations (DHH) across the lifespan.

Workshop Fee: \$39 *This course offers 0.20 ASHA CEUs.

Cultivating New Beginnings: A REAL South x Language First Conference**September 12-14, 2025****Atlanta School for the Deaf****Clarkston, GA**

It will be from 12-6:30 pm on Friday, September 12, 8:00 am - 4:00 pm on Saturday, September 13, and 8:00 am - 12:00 pm on Sunday, September 14. All registrations include a hotel stay at the Atlanta Evergreen Resort at Stone Mountain.

Cost: from \$90

For additional
information
or to register
go to

language1st.org/events

OR

Scan the QR Code

**WEST VIRGINIA COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING (WVCDHH)****Medicare: Eligibility, Enrollment Periods, IRMAA****Thursday, August 28, 2025, 10:00-11:00 AM via Zoom**

Join us for a FREE monthly virtual workshop series presented by Kimberly Stephens, Social Security Public Affairs Specialist covering 27 SSA offices across West Virginia and Western Pennsylvania. With over 20 years of experience—including roles such as SSI Claims Specialist—Kimberly brings deep insight into Social Security programs and services. ASL interpretation and captioning provided.

Scan the QR Code
to register**WEST VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF****Opportunity for Interpreters to Earn 8 hours of CEUs!****Friday, August 8, 2025, and Saturday, August 9, 2025**

Canaan Valley Resorts, Davis, WV

Reserve your room using Group ID Code: 1057WK

Target Audience:

Educational Interpreters, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, Teachers of the Deaf, School Counselors, Administrators of Schools and Districts, as well as parents or Guardians.

Educational Objectives:

1. Review, understand, and identify the key laws that impact Deaf students' rights.
2. Implement best practices to empower Deaf students while maintaining professional neutrality under WVDE policies and the NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct.
3. Recognize systemic barriers to Deaf students' participation in educational decision-making.
4. Apply strategies to collaborate with educational teams while supporting student self-advocacy.
5. Ensure Deaf students actively engage in IEP and 504 meetings, transition planning, and vocational rehabilitation discussions.
6. Address student misconceptions about their rights in education and employment.
7. Analyze the effects of Power, Privilege, and Oppression (PPO) on language access and self-advocacy.

44th Biennial Conference**August 7-10, 2025**

Canaan Valley Resorts, Davis, WV

TREASURE OF RESOURCES!

Come join us for a weekend full of resources, socialization, and fun!

- Friday and Saturday Night Socials
- Saturday Evening Entertainment
By Keith Wann, ASL Comedian
- Saturday Lunch
- Workshops
- General Assembly
- Exhibits/Resources

Trainer Charity Reedy Warigon

Fee: \$75

(Includes Saturday Night meal)**Registration:****Email Chris Mick at****WVADPRESIDENT@GMAIL.COM**

For additional information **OR** Scan the QR Code
or to register, go to
<https://www.wvad.org>

