

West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing **NEWSLETTER**



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



**Letter from the WVCDHH
Executive Director
Erik Essington, Ph.D.
Erik.J.Essington@wv.gov**



Upcoming Virtual Resource Fair – Raising Awareness & Education

I believe that educating our fellow West Virginians about the experiences of individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or DeafBlind is a vital step in fostering inclusivity and accessibility. Understanding their culture, identity, and communication needs can enhance interactions and support in education, employment, and everyday life.

To support this mission, the West Virginia Advisory Council for the Education of Exceptional Children (WVACEEC) is hosting a Virtual Resource Fair on:

Thursday, February 13, 2025, 6:00 – 8:00 PM, via Zoom

I am proud to announce that two of our WVCDHH board members will be presenting during this event:

Dr. Christine Firkins, Ed.D.

What Every Parent of a Child Who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing Needs to Know: Access to Language and Early Intervention (1-hour session)

Nancy Gillispie, Au.D., CCC-A, F.A.A.A.

How to Read an Audiogram and the Implications of Hearing Loss

I want to extend my gratitude to WVACEEC for organizing this important webinar and for prioritizing the inclusion of specialized Deaf-related information that benefits not only the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community but also families, educators, employers, and community members. By increasing awareness and education, we can help bridge gaps in communication and create a more inclusive environment for all West Virginians.

I encourage everyone to take advantage of this opportunity to learn, engage, and advocate for greater accessibility in our state.

Stay tuned for more updates and initiatives from WVCDHH as we continue working toward a more inclusive future!

For more information, please contact WVCDHH or visit our website or Facebook page.

Together, we can build a more accessible and informed West Virginia!



Community Spotlight

Julie Ann Lewis Shoeman



Introduction

Hi! My name is Julie Ann Lewis Shoeman, and I serve as a board member for the West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HOH) as a representative for the D/HOH community. As a mom of four grown children and one fur baby, a mini dachshund named Lily, I've found a new sense of belonging here in West Virginia since moving in 2019. After relocating from Florida, I've truly come to appreciate the stunning beauty of Harper's Ferry and the surrounding area. The ever-changing scenery of the mountains and seasons continues to inspire me, especially as I enjoy taking walks and capturing the landscape through photography.

Academic, and/or Professional Background

In 2023, I earned my Bachelor's degree in Psychology. I will complete my Master of Social Work degree in May 2025, followed by my Master of Public Administration in May 2026. Throughout my academic journey, I've gained valuable experience through internships with the Gallaudet Accessibility Resource Center and organizations such as Deaf DAWN, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Maryland School for the Deaf. Professionally, I've worked as an interpreter coordinator, a job coach, and currently serve part-time as a Deaf interpreter specializing in working with DeafBlind (DB) individuals and utilizing ProTactile. This summer, I'll be taking two exams to become a licensed social worker (LMSW) and a Certified Deaf Interpreter.

What motivated you to become involved with the WVCDHH, and how have your experiences on the board impacted your views on advocacy for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Community?

Being born Deaf in a hearing family has given me firsthand experience with the impact of inaccessibility and barriers, shaping my determination to be a positive change agent. When I relocated to West Virginia in 2019, I quickly recognized the need for greater resources and support for D/HOH/DB individuals. Joining the WVCDHH felt like a natural step, as I believe in giving back to the community and working toward solutions that enhance accessibility and inclusion. Serving on the board has strengthened my belief in the power of collaboration, showing me that when passionate individuals come together with a shared vision, real progress is possible. This experience has deepened my commitment to advocacy and reinforced my resolve to ensure that Deaf/HOH/DB individuals in West Virginia have access to the resources, services, and opportunities they deserve.

What do you think are the biggest challenges currently facing the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing community in West Virginia, and how can community members, organizations, and policymakers work together to address these issues?

The biggest challenges facing the Deaf/HOH/DB community include a lack of interconnectedness, limited awareness of Deaf culture and sign language, and insufficient allocation of funds. Rural areas, in particular, face a shortage of interpreters, accessible healthcare, and community networks, leaving many isolated. There is also a lack of disability mental health awareness, limited access to qualified professionals, and employment barriers due to discrimination and inadequate workplace accommodations. Emergency responders and healthcare providers often lack proper training for effective communication, and Deaf and disability issues are frequently overlooked in policymaking, with too few officials receiving training on accessibility and inclusion. To address these challenges, collaboration is key. Community members, organizations, and policymakers must work together to expand resources, advocate for stronger policies, and secure funding. Increasing public awareness, improving training for emergency services and government officials, and fostering stronger community networks can create a more inclusive and supportive environment. By prioritizing these efforts, we can work toward a bright future where there's greater access, opportunities, and support to thrive.

How do you see the role of WVCDHH evolving in the future, and what goals or changes would you like to see implemented to further support Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals across the state?

I see WVCDHH as a driving force in strengthening community organizing and leveraging technology and social media to enhance connections across the state. Expanding outreach will ensure Deaf/HOH/DB individuals have access to essential resources and support. Key goals include securing increased state funding, improving literacy and ASL proficiency through accessible education, raising Deaf culture and ASL awareness in schools, businesses, and public agencies, expanding emergency service resources for effective communication, increasing certified ASL interpreters to address shortages, establishing at least three regional coordinators under WVCDHH for statewide support, strengthening state policies that protect Deaf/HOH/DB rights in healthcare, employment, and education, and developing a CoNavigator program to improve transportation access and independence for DB and disabled individuals. Additionally, I would like to focus on mental health access to ensure adequate resources and support for this marginalized community. By focusing on these priorities, WVCDHH can continue improving the quality of life for Deaf/HOH/DB individuals across West Virginia.

Do you have a favorite inspirational quote you would like to share?

Here's a quote I wrote and live by:

"Kindness is the bridge between all people, where compassion and understanding create a world of possibilities."





BUMBLEBERRY FARMS™

Spread a little sweetness

Deaf-Owned



Jon Mosholder, a passionate entrepreneur who is deaf, is the proud owner of Bumbleberry Farms, a company located in Pittsburgh and founded by his mother, Karen, in 2011. Starting in her kitchen, Karen crafted her signature award-winning honey cream spreads. The company's products are now distributed to retailers across the United States and Canada.

Upon taking over the business, Jon committed himself to not only expanding Bumbleberry's success but also to championing community activism. Being deaf himself, he made it his mission to support the deaf community, through his hiring practices. All Bumbleberry Farms employees are deaf or hard of hearing. In addition to providing a friendly and accessible workplace, Jon also works with the Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf and Pressley Ridge School for the Deaf, to provide training and opportunities for the next generation of deaf and hard-of-hearing.

Bumbleberry is the recipient of several accolades, including national awards like the Specialty Food Association's SOFI Award, which it received in 2020 and 2023 for its Pumpkin Spice Honey Cream Spread and its Chocolate Raspberry Honey Cream Spread, respectively. The company also received a grant from the Pittsburgh Pirates' Going to Bat for Small Business Initiative. In 2024, Jon was selected as one of Pittsburgh Magazine's 40 under 40 Honoree. This distinction is awarded to high-performing, high-impact professionals who are not only achieving personal success but are contributing to the success of the Pittsburgh region through their leadership and commitment to excellence.

Going forward, Jon hopes to expand the Bumbleberry Farms brand into new spreads and accessories, in turn expanding his activism for the deaf community.

For now, though, he has been happy to find his place in the growing Pittsburgh small business world and spread a little sweetness to his community and the people he cares about doing something he dearly loves.



**TO VISIT THE
BUMBLEBERRY FARMS WEBSITE**

GO TO [BumbleberryFarms.com](https://www.BumbleberryFarms.com)

OR



SCAN THE QR CODE



**Bumbleberry Farms Founder
"Queen Bee" Karen Mosholder**



**Bumbleberry Farms Owner
Jon Mosholder**



>>> Things to Do <<<



WEST VIRGINIA HANDS & VOICES

Moms Night Inn Plus

March 29-30, 2025

Courtyard by Marriott • 460 Courtyard Street • Morgantown, WV

Moms Night Inn is a retreat for moms or female caregivers who are raising children of ALL ages who are deaf or hard of hearing. It's an amazing time to meet and share experiences with other moms who "get it".

Registration Fees:

Moms Night Inn March 29-30, 2025

\$25 shared room / \$50 private room / \$5 no hotel room

Friday Night Arrival March 28, 2025

\$50 shared room / \$100 private room

For more info or to reserve your spot scan the QR Code



OR

register online at:

<https://www.zeffy.com/ticketing/wv-hands-and-voices-moms-night-inn-2025>

Activities:

Informational Presentations

Pampering Sessions (manicure or massage)

Crafts and Games

Relaxing by the pool



WEST VIRGINIA DEAF SERVICE CENTER (WVDCS)

Deaf Coffee Chat

ASL activities, games, Deaf culture, and More!

All ages are welcome!

Charleston

Fridays, 5:30-8:30 PM

February 21, March 7, 2025

912 Young Street, Charleston, WV

Parkersburg

Tuesdays, 4:00-7:00 PM

February 11, February 25, 2025

2501 Dudley Ave., Parkersburg, WV

To follow WVDCS on scan the QR Code



>>> Training, Learning Opportunities, and Conferences <<<



WEST VIRGINIA ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR THE EDUCATION OF EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

Virtual Resource Fair

Thursday, February 13, 2025, 6:00-8:00 PM (via Zoom)

Canaan Valley Resort, Davis, West Virginia

Sessions Include:

- Family Support Programs
- Transitioning From Early Intervention To School Age Services
- Supporting Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students
- Obtaining An Advocate or Getting Legal Questions Answered
- Navigating IEP Meetings
- Dispute Resolutions & Facilitated IEPs
- Requirements For Fostering & Kinship Care
- WVABLE And Investing In Your Student's Future
- Clinical vs. School-Based Therapies

Scan the QR Code to register



FRESNO STATE, COLLEGE OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

13th Annual Lecture Silent Garden Virtual Presentations on:

58-IN-MIND: Multilingual Teaching Strategies for Diverse Deaf Students

Saturday, February 22, 2025, 8:00 AM-4:00 PM (PST)

Featuring keynote presentations by a team of selected researchers and P-12 Teachers

Registration is free, however, 0.5 CEUs will be offered for \$35 through RID, BEI, or Fresno State (Generic).

Scan the QR Code to register



Training, Learning Opportunities, and Conferences cont.



2025 Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Conference

March 9-11, 2025, Pittsburg, PA

The EHDI Conference provides key stakeholders an opportunity to identify areas of concern, promote collaboration, and share best practices. Join with other professionals and parents intent on improving early hearing screening, diagnosis, and intervention systems for infants/young children and their families.

Who Should Attend:

- State EHDI program staff members
Audiologists
Physicians and other Health Care Providers
Families of children with hearing loss
Early Intervention Specialists
Speech-Language Pathologists
Advocates
Representatives from the major organizations working with EHDI programs
Students

For additional information go to: https://ehdiconference.org

OR

Scan the QR Code



THE MOOG CENTER

For Deaf Education Where Children Talk

Virtual Early Intervention Workshop Series

April 2, 2025, 7:00 PM CT

Working with Families: Why Empathy is Important

Presented by Betsy Moog Brooks and Liz Fales

Early intervention providers work closely with families during a critical and highly emotional time. It is essential for providers to engage using empathy to strengthen or develop rapport. This presentation will review the differences between empathy and sympathy in order to connect with families to improve outcomes for their children.

For additional information go to: https://www.moogcenter.org/workshops/early-intervention-informational-series

OR

Scan the QR Code



MARSHALL UNIVERSITY

American Sign Language (ASL) Summer 2025

ASL I June 16 - 20, 2025 • ASL II June 21 - 24, 2025 • ASL III June 20 - 24, 2025

Courses will be offered on the campus of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind, located in Romney, West Virginia. Housing is available at no cost to the student.

Combined, all three instructors have more than 50 years of professional experience in the field. These courses are fun and incredibly valuable. You will be amazed at what you can learn in just a few days!

\$250 for three credit hours • Seating is limited • Get on the waiting list today!

Co-Sponsors: MU - DHH Teacher Certification Program | WVSDB | WVDOE-OSP

For additional information contact

Julie Barie

barie1@marshall.edu

304-546-8499



WEST VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF

44th Biennial Conference

Treasure of Resources

August 7-10, 2025

Canaan Valley Resort, Davis, West Virginia

COME JOIN US FOR A WEEKEND FULL OF RESOURCES, SOCIALIZATION, AND FUN!

- Friday and Saturday Night Socials
Saturday Evening Entertainment
By Patrick Fisher (ASL Stories)
Saturday Lunch
Workshops
General Assembly
Exhibits/Resources

For additional information go to: https://www.wvad.org

OR

Scan the QR Code





Self-Identity Self-Advocacy Self-Determination



As parents, our primary goal is to provide our children with the love and support needed to grow, thrive, and become independent adults who can care for themselves and contribute positively to society. Self-identity, self-advocacy, and self-determination are important skills for all children, but crucial for children who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH).



Self-identity is essential for children, even at a young age, to feel confident and comfortable with their identity—within their family, among their friends, and in their community. As parents and caregivers, we play a vital role in helping our children take pride in who they are.

Tips on how to support your DHH child's development of Self-Identity:

- Talk with them about what makes them unique and celebrate differences.
- Make sure to read books that feature deaf characters.
- Find ways for your child to connect with other DHH children and adults. Often, DHH students find that they are the only ones in mainstream schools with hearing loss, which can feel very isolating. Meeting other DHH children and adults will help your child recognize their hearing difference as a part of who they are and give them a sense of belonging.



Self-advocacy for DHH children should start with learning about their hearing loss and assistive technology devices (if used). Many people who meet your child will have no previous experience of having met a person with hearing loss. Your child will need to be able to confidently communicate about their hearing loss, their devices, and their needs. They need to know the how, who, and when to ask for assistance.



Self-determination for DHH students means empowering them to take ownership of their education and lives by making informed choices, setting personal goals, and actively participating in decisions that effect their learning, all while understanding and managing their hearing challenges.

Media



Ling Ling Bird Hears with his Magic Ears **Tanya Saunders (Author)**

'Ling Ling Bird Hears with his Magic Ears' takes us on an exciting journey through the world of sound – ideal for helping young children in the early stages of learning to listen and speak.



Set Me Free (Show Me a Sign, Book 2,) **Ann Clare LeZotte**

Three years after being kidnapped as a "live specimen" in a cruel experiment to determine the cause of her deafness, Mary Lambert has grown weary of domestic life on Martha's Vineyard, and even of her once beloved writing.

Set Me Free is a masterful stand-alone companion to *Show Me a Sign*, and a searing expose of ableism, racism, and colonialism that will challenge you to think differently about the dignity and capacity within every human being.

