

>>> NOVEMBER 2024

West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing NEWSLETTER



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

Executive Director

Erik Essington, Ph.D.



Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions or would like additional information.

erik.j.essington@wv.gov

I had the privilege of attending the *Literacy2024: Creating Connections With Language* conference from October 24-26, 2024. Literacy is a cornerstone of success, especially for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind individuals in West Virginia. For these children, the path to literacy and language proficiency relies on interactive education, focused reading practices, parental involvement, and innovative communication methods tailored to their needs.

Language is not just a tool for learning—it is the foundation for building relationships and achieving personal and academic success. This conference underscored the importance of creating meaningful connections through language, empowering us to advance literacy initiatives that will directly benefit West Virginia’s Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and DeafBlind children. Together, we are committed to fostering opportunities that ensure every child can thrive.



How Can We Keep our Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children Safe During School Emergencies?

Deafness is often referred to as an "invisible disability" because there are no readily apparent physical signs to indicate someone is deaf or hard of hearing. Unfortunately, this situation can create significant misunderstandings and a lack of awareness about the unique challenges that deaf and hard-of-hearing students face in their communication and everyday lives. It is crucial for school administrators and teachers to recognize the pressing reality that these students often lack proper access to essential safety measures, which can jeopardize their well-being.

The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) website serves as an essential resource for school districts by providing a comprehensive Crisis Prevention and Response Plan (CPRP) template. The WVDE website also includes additional documents that outline critical procedures on evacuation, crisis communication, and mitigation planning specifically tailored for students with special needs. It’s important to note that while the WVDE CPRP template Addendums suggest that student-specific planning is optional for those requiring special assistance, we strongly encourage schools to consider implementing these tailored strategies to ensure the safety and well-being of every student in their care.

The Supporting Success for Children with Hearing Loss website released a crucial article titled "School Preparedness for Students with Hearing Loss." This article underscores an essential truth: if a student’s communication needs are defined in their IEP (Individualized Education Program) or 504

Parent-To-Parent Gwen Bryant

plan, those needs must be integrated into the school's safety plan. Implementing this practice not only ensures compliance but also guarantees that all students—especially those with hearing loss—are fully prepared to respond effectively in emergencies.

The article also presents key questions for administrators and IEP/504 teams, including parents, to consider when developing preparedness strategies for emergencies like fires, severe weather, active shooter scenarios, and other threats. It’s vital for schools to prioritize these considerations to create an inclusive and safe environment for every student.

Please scan the QR Code to access the WVDE CPRP template and additional crisis planning resources.



Please scan the QR Code to access the complete article, *School Preparedness for Students with Hearing Loss*.





Community Spotlight Paul See



Introduction

Hello! I am Paul See, the chairperson of the West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (WVCDHH) Board. I have served on the board since 2011. I grew up in Moorefield, where I currently reside. I have been married to Renee See for 22 years, and together we have three boys: Jaydon, Brody, and Drew.

Jaydon is currently a senior at Fairmont State University, where he also plays football. Brody is a senior at Moorefield High School and hopes to attend college and play football as well. Drew is an eighth grader at Moorefield Middle School.

Academic, and/or Professional Background

I attended the West Virginia School for the Deaf and Gallaudet University, where I obtained a BA in Biology in 1998. I am an Environmental Microbiologist at the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, where I have worked for 25 years. My responsibilities include testing the water quality of watersheds in the Eastern Panhandle as part of the Chesapeake Bay clean-up program. Additionally, I perform microbial testing on soft-serve ice cream samples collected from restaurants and other establishments to ensure that soft-serve ice cream machines are maintained properly.

I have been a coach on the Moorefield High School football coaching staff for the past eight years, and I have also served as the head coach for the Moorefield Middle School Boys Basketball team for the same duration. Before joining the coaching staff at Moorefield schools, I coached boys' basketball teams at the West Virginia School for the Deaf for 15 years.

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?

I applied to serve on the Board because I believe I can offer valuable insights. Growing up in the beautiful state of West Virginia and working for a state agency has given me a deeper understanding of how our state operates. I've faced many challenges on my journey to get to where I am today.

What initiatives or projects are you most proud of contributing to during your time on the board, or in your professional capacity, and how have they made a difference for individuals in West Virginia's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community?

During my time on the Board, I participated in the selection of Executive Directors and temporarily managed the organization while the Executive Director position was vacant, before hiring Mr. Earnest Covington as the new Executive Director. Additionally, I established partnerships with several state organizations, including the West Virginia Disability Rights Association.

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 challenge we are facing is the rapid progression of technology since COVID-19. Virtual meetings have become more popular, which poses significant accessibility challenges for deaf individuals. Additionally, I hope we can address the shortage of interpreters that we are currently experiencing in the state of West Virginia.

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

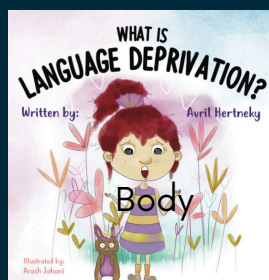
My favorite quote is, *"If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward."* – Martin Luther King Jr.



What is Language Deprivation?

Avril Hertneky (Author)
Arash Jahani (Illustrator)

In this book, the author recounts her childhood experiences as a Deaf girl raised by immigrant parents who did not comprehend the importance of providing access to sign language. Her story is heartbreaking, yet it offers an honest portrayal of the reality faced by many in the Deaf community, particularly since 95% of infants identified as deaf are born to hearing parents.



Monster Hands

Karen Kane and Jonaz McMillan (Authors)
Dion MBD (Illustrator)

Two best friends use rhyming ASL to help vanquish their fear of the monster under the bed in this fun, interactive bedtime read-aloud.

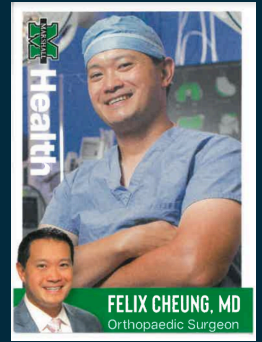




Deaf-Friendly Dr. Felix Cheung

Dr. Cheung is an orthopedic surgeon with Marshall Health and a true advocate for patient rights! When I arranged an appointment for my son, Dr. Cheung immediately recognized the vital role of clear communication and ensured that American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting services were available. Upon our arrival, his staff promptly connected with the video relay ASL interpreter and set up the video device in a way that maximized visibility for both my son and the interpreter. Throughout the visit, Dr. Cheung demonstrated exceptional dignity and respect in his treatment of my son. He engaged with him directly, rather than speaking to the interpreter or referring to my son in the third person. By taking the time to ensure my son fully understood the information being shared, Dr. Cheung greatly enhanced our experience. His approach not only fostered clear communication but also empowered my son during the visit. We are truly grateful for your care, Dr. Cheung!

G.B., St. Albans



Deaf Ecosystem



The passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975, originally known as the Education for All Handicapped Children, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990 were landmark achievements that have greatly enhanced the quality of life for countless individuals. However, persistent systemic barriers, such as inaccessibility and insufficient educational training opportunities, continue to severely limit the ability of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) community to secure stable, well-paying jobs.

The National Center on Postsecondary Outcomes reports that more than 46 percent of the nation's Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) population face unemployment or disengagement from the labor force. This issue is even more pronounced in West Virginia, where the figure climbs to over 56 percent. Despite their significant contributions to the economy, even DHH business owners encounter societal barriers that impede their ability to sustain and grow their businesses.

The term " Deaf Ecosystem, " refers to a vital strategy for addressing the alarming rates of underemployment and unemployment that many DHH individuals face. The Deaf Ecosystem's primary mission is to tap into and amplify the collective socio-economic power of the DHH community's individuals, organizations, and businesses.

What can we do to build a strong Deaf Ecosystem?

- Foster an inclusive entrepreneurial environment where DHH individuals can realize their potential
- Support and patronize local DHH businesses
- Hire DHH professionals and employees

By working together and supporting one another, we can create a robust Deaf Ecosystem and lasting change that uplifts the entire community!

Do you know of a deaf-friendly or deaf-owned shop, restaurant, business, agency, etc. you would like highlighted in our newsletter?

OR

Have you experienced a situation where you were not provided access to activities, services, or programs as defined by the ADA?



if so, we want to hear from you!



Please scan the QR code and let us know!





Deaf-Owned



LOST RIVER

VACATIONS

A “deaf-centric” tiny home resort open to all!

Lost River Vacations was created, built, and is run by the Deaf community.

This project was done entirely by the Deaf ecosystem. We hired a Deaf designer to do our logo, and a Deaf developer developed our website. A deaf printing company has printed apparel and other items for us, and we hired a deaf wood artist to create a beautiful wooden sign. A deaf photographer took all of our promotional photos. We hired a Deaf company specializing in environmental issues and trail building to advise us on the building process. Deaf videographers captured the whole process.

We started Lost River Vacations completely from scratch.

Our 23 acres of land is two miles from the state park, and when purchased, was completely wild. We have created a road and parking lot, established electric connections, drilled for a well, and set up septic. Shawn (one of our Deaf owners) and other Deaf craftsmen built two tiny houses completely from scratch, fully customized. We currently have a hot tub at one house and a disc golf course on property. We also have a sauna and EV charger. The houses are currently on our property in Lost River, and are being rented. Our long-term dream is to have a resort with approximately 8 unique small dwellings, each with customized, individual design, in a variety of styles and sizes. We plan for the first four to be tiny homes, and have created the infrastructure to support this.

We have big dreams and goals for Lost River Vacations.

We would like to provide a signing cooperative membership, where signing members get discounts on their rentals, and have special event weekends for the Deaf community, as well as provide general rentals to the public. Eventually, with revenues from Lost River Vacations, we will buy a second plot of land and build a mess hall, two dormitories, and other features for children's camps and other retreats to support Deaf non-profit organizations. We have already successfully hosted two retreats on the property - one for Deaf Artists and another also for the Deaf - a mindfulness retreat.



Owners

Jane Jonas

Hometown: Berkeley, CA
Interests: Literature, Animals,
the Outdoors, Jigsaw &
Crossword Puzzles,
Technology, & Espresso.



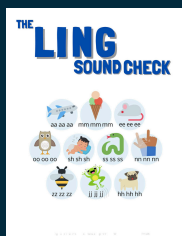
Shawn Harrington

Hometown: Frederick, MD
Interests: Renovations,
Outdoor Adventures, Cats,
Coffee, Computer Games
and Sports.

Please scan the QR code to learn more about Lost River Vacations or make a tiny home reservation.



>>> Things to Do <<<



Ling Sound Check Webinar

November 21, 2024
6:00 PM via Zoom
Learn how a sound check can help show how well your child is hearing speech.



To register please scan the QR Code



OR

go to

<https://forms.gle/D88YP1SrwNaZndlb8>

WEST VIRGINIA DEAF SERVICE CENTER (WVWSC)

Deaf Coffee Chat

ASL activities, games, Deaf culture, and More!
All ages welcome

Charleston 912 Young Street, Charleston, WV 25301

Fridays, 5:30-8:30 PM

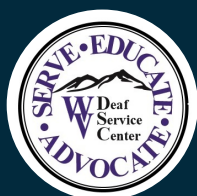
December 6, and December 20, 2024

Parkersburg 2501 Dudley Ave. Parkersburg, WV

Tuesdays, 4:00-7:00 PM

December 10, 2024

www.wvdeafservicecenter.org



Mountwest ASL Student Association

Deaf Santa Brunch

December 7, 2024

10:00 AM

MCTC

1 Mountwest Way

Huntington, WV 25701

To register please text
LEIGH-ANN BREWER
304-417-3244



Deaf Social

December 14, 2024

2:00 PM - 5:30 PM

Games-Crafts-Light Refreshments

Hot Chocolate Bar-Door Prizes

Brannon Auditorium

301 East Main Street

Romney, WV 26757



WEST VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF (WVAD)

13th WVAD Annual Christmas Party

Saturday, December 14, 2024

1:00 PM - 11:00 PM (Dinner served at 4:00 PM)

Parkersburg

Wood County Society

317 E. 8th Street

Parkersburg, WV 26104

\$25.00 (18+) - Includes dinner and a door prize

\$15.00 (13-17) - Includes dinner

\$10.00 (6-12) - Includes dinner

LIMIT OF 75 PEOPLE

MUST RSVP TO VERONDA HARRISON
AT 304-964-6035 BY DECEMBER 11TH

www.wvad.org



Please email newsletter questions, concerns, and suggestions to Gwen.L.Bryant@wv.gov



West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

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