

Catskill Center for Independence

Winter 2007

Pass The Salt, Please!

Helen Benlisa

Project HAVA Coordinator

Information about the new types of voting machines is, at best, confusing. There is a mountain of opinions, news articles, reports and documentaries to sort through. It is getting harder to tell fact from fiction especially when our doubts and fears are elicited by diatribes and debates about voting machines, not to mention all the other misinformation about HAVA in general.

Of course we must ensure our elections are secure and the new types of voting systems are dependable. We also must ensure these voting systems, as well as the polling sites where we use them, be accessible to everyone. Think about the big picture. Think about how frequently and casually we use ATMs or on-line services. Think about sliced bread! Technological progress is not always smooth nor is it always welcome, but we must look to the future with inclusive vision and open minds. The options before us may not be perfect, but until every single citizen who is eligible to vote is able to vote, privately and independently, there will be no such thing as a fair and honest election. To be sure, there never has been.

For HAVA-related articles, check out our website:
www.ccfi.us

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Adaptive Aids and Services

Charles Reichardt

System Advocate

Hardly a business or work environment exists in our culture today that does not utilize the enormous power of computer technology.

It is conceivable then, that most jobs held by people with disabilities will require them to use computer-based tools, and other assistive technologies. Such technologies have made the development of devices that can compensate for barriers imposed by limited physical capabilities possible. Senior citizens, people with disabilities, educators, and helping professionals (armed with the proper information) can now identify assistive and adaptive devices that can increase independence, facilitate education, and improve their quality of life.

It is essential that people with disabilities coexist in integrated settings where they can learn, work and play with their non-disabled peers, participate in the same programs and services, and enjoy the same benefits of society. To accomplish this, persons with disabling conditions often need adaptive aids and services to level the playing field. Examples of such aids include:

- Qualified interpreters
- Assistive listening headsets
- Closed and open captioned videos
- Telecommunications devices for persons with impaired hearing (TDDs and TTYs)
- Computers equipped with speech recognition capability and synthetic speech output
- Tape-recorded texts
- Brailed materials
- Videotext displays
- Transcription services
- Computers with adaptive equipment (a special mouse or sip-and-puff technology)

To learn more about the life changing technologies that are available to assist persons with disabling conditions on their quest to become as independent as possible, contact us at the Center.

**Don't forget to check us out online at:
www.ccfi.us**

American Sign Language: A Skill Everyone Should Master

Don Wyczkoff

Architectural Barrier Consultant

For a large majority of the earth's human inhabitants, verbalized speech is the tool most often used to communicate thought. For most of us one language is all we can use and understand leaving us at a disadvantage over those who are bilingual. But imagine if you will a language that could translate across all borders and boundaries, a language that could be used in any part of the world and be understood by everyone as easily as the expression of laughter.

Welcome to the world of American Sign Language (ASL). ASL is just that: a universal language. The problem is most Americans would no better understand ASL than they do Hebrew or Chinese. So what is the solution?

To this writer, the solution is simple: all children should be taught sign language alongside their traditional spoken language. In doing so, future generations would be able to silently communicate in a universal language which may in turn encourage a better understanding of different cultures and open the doors for effective communication to people all over the world.

Sign Language Accelerates Learning

Studies have shown that learning language and ASL, in coordination with one another, actually makes learning more effective and fun. DeViveiros and McLaughlin (1982) found that young hearing children who learned sign language better understood the use of adjectives and adverbs, that signs were a valuable addition to a reading-readiness program and that sign language and finger spelling held the children's attention much longer than did traditional lessons in language alone. Another study (Sensenig, Mazeika & Topf, 1989) realized that subjects learning to read words which were accompanied with sign identified and retained more vocabulary than did student learning in a traditional manner. This strengthens the position that learning ASL would not only assist us in communicating universally, but also enhance the actual process of learning. It makes sense that using sign language along with traditional language teaching promotes linguistic development, as it is reinforced by visual stimuli. So with this understanding, it would be wrong not to utilize such a useful addition to traditional teaching techniques and, it remains difficult to find a reason why we should not incorporate ASL into class curriculum worldwide.

ASL Incorporates Fun and Learning.

It is interesting to note, that besides lip reading and the act of writing, sign language is one of the few forms of language that can be communicated silently. This, in part, may be the reason children are so fascinated and have the desire to learn ASL. It seems as though to children, sign language is the "invisible ink" of human communication. Ellison, Baker and Baker (1982) noted that the "secret code" aspect of signing motivated hearing children to learn ASL.

There may also be additional physical benefits of ASL being mastered universally. Ellison, Baker and Baker (1982) report that sign language is kinesthetic; ASL combines abstraction with concrete muscle movement and provides a bridge to learning for children in the preoperational stage of development. The act of effectively signing requires one to rapidly use individual accurate hand shapes and gestures, making it more likely the signer will develop better dexterity in the hands and fingers. The dexterity required to effectively use sign language may also assist in other abilities that require meticulous hand coordination, such as computer use, playing a variety of musical instruments or drawing. The bottom line is that there are many reasons for mastering sign language and all we have to do to make this happen is incorporate ASL into our class curriculum, as well as in our daily lives.

In conclusion, our world is full of differences that we cannot change, but there is one large hurdle of difference that we can change: the ways in which we communicate. By making ASL the world's official second language we will enable children all over the globe to learn more effectively and communicate efficiently anywhere they go. Another more obvious benefit of everyone mastering ASL is the elimination of communication barriers for the hearing disabled. So if a person became deaf by a congenital defect, a traumatic injury, or just old age, that person would not lose the ability to effectively communicate. Incorporating ALS into our society and asking all to master it, is one step we can collectively take to ensure a dialectal understanding that surpasses spoken language and opens the doors of communication to all.

References

- DeViveiros, C. D., & McLaughlin, T. F. (Summer 1982). *Effects of manual sign use on the expressive language of four hearing kindergarten children*. *Sign Language Studies*, 169-177.
- Ellison, G., Baker, S., & Baker, P. (1982). *Hand to hand: The joy of signing among hearing children*. *Young Children*, 37(4), 53-58.
- Sensenig, L. D., Mazeika, E. J., & Topf, B. (1989). *Sign language facilitation of reading with students classified as trainable mentally-handicapped*. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation*, 24, 121-125.

New Face at the Center

Hi,

My name is Sam Ashley and I'm the "new guy". That term fits me very well since I have never worked in the human services field. I have spent the last 20 years in customer service, employee training, and retail management.

I have always enjoyed helping people in the various positions I have held, but there was always something missing. Since joining CCFI I have discovered what that was. I was missing the feeling that comes from going home at the end of the day knowing you have made a difference in someone's life.

I was originally hired as an Independent Living Specialist but after a couple months of training and working with youth in the Work Readiness Program, our Director decided I should be the Employment Specialist. It feels good to help young people prepare for their future.

Since September I have been running the VESID orientation in Sidney. This is a work in progress, but I feel it is going well.

A little about myself. I grew up in Troy, NY and lived and worked around the Albany area most of my life. I fell in love with my wife and the area she grew up in over ten years ago. My wife and I have been happily married since 2005. I am the father of a six-year-old boy and twin two-year-old girls. My son is very happy that Daddy now has a job where he can be home nights and weekends. Daddy is happy too.

Donate Your Ramp and Give the Gift of Independence

Our goal is to connect individuals with disabilities with the opportunity of obtaining a ramp that they may not otherwise be able to afford. If you have a ramp or building materials to construct a ramp and would like to make a tax deductible donation, please contact Donald Wyckoff at 607-432-8000

There are literally hundreds of disabled citizens in our community that need our help now. Together we CAN make a difference!

REMEMBER...



TELL YOUR STORIES! MAKE YOUR VOICES HEARD!

.....
CCFI's Project HAVA and NYSILC's Project Vote are in the process of collecting voter discrimination complaint forms from this past Primary and Election Days. If you have a complaint but did not have a form to fill out, visit our website www.ccfi.us to access a voter discrimination complaint form. Fill it out and submit online or print it out and mail it to:

Catskill Center for Independence
PO Box 1247
Oneonta, NY 13820
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Winter is here...please call before you come!!

Occasionally, "Ole Man" Winter gets the better of us and our office may be closed or may open later than usual if the roads are too dangerous. So please, if there is any question about whether or not the office is open, give us a call. That way, if we are closed, you will save yourself a drive on dangerous roads.

VESID Fast Track

Jade Pendol

Administrative Assistant

I have recently been added to the VESID Fast Track team here at the Catskill Center for Independence. VESID stands for the Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities and is part of New York State Education Department. They provide vocational rehabilitation (VR) services to eligible individuals to prepare them for employment consistent with their strengths, abilities, and interests.

At the Center, we gather all the paper work for students who are exiting secondary education and are applying for VESID services. Lately, we have been traveling around to many of the schools we work with to meet the students and conduct interviews. We compile all the necessary information for the applications; discuss what the student's disability is and what sort of accommodations they are receiving now, and what they may need for college or work. Next we discuss with them their interests and hobbies, as well as who is in their support system. We also provide them with information about the Center, the services we provide and how they can access those services.

Once we have all the information we need, we send the student's application to VESID and the students will then meet with a VESID counselor to discuss what services they will need in the future.

VESID can help determine the services needed that will best help each student to achieve their employment goal. If you would like more information about VESIC, find the VESID office nearest you by calling: 1-800-222-JOBS. You can also visit their web page at: <http://www.nysed.gov/vesid/vesid.html>
Or, feel free to contact the Center at 607-432-8000 or www.ccfi.us

Our Newsletter on Tape/E-Mail

Would you like to receive our newsletter on tape or via email? There is no charge for either service, though it is helpful if those who are receiving the tapes return them if they are just planning to throw them away.

Please contact the Center at 607-432-8000, or you can e-mail us at ccfi@ccfi.us if you would be interested in this service.

Nursing Home or Home?

Rina Riba

Independent Living Specialist

Things are changing for those people with disabilities who need personal assistance and skilled nursing care on a continuing basis, what is known as long-term care.

For many years, decades in fact, in New York and throughout the United States, much of this care has been provided in skilled nursing facilities, i.e. nursing homes. Those individuals and families who could afford to hire private home care could make a choice between this and residential placement. For those without the ability to pay for home care, the choices, except for some limited Medicaid-covered home services, were between having family members do it or going to stay in a nursing home paid for by Medicaid.

The choice has been reduced further by changes in American society. Families have become smaller and are often spread out all over the continent. Formerly many women were homemakers and therefore on hand to act as caregivers. In recent years, women have entered the work force and are no longer as available as they once would have been. Although they might wish to take care of a loved one, they may not be able to give up income earned outside the home, as they struggle to make sure their families have a roof over their heads and food on the table. Finally, in order to contain costs, hospital stays have been radically shortened in the past few years. Hospital discharge planners, under tremendous pressure to get patients out as soon as they are medically stable, find it easier to make one referral to a nursing home rather than take the time to pull together a variety of services including personal care, skilled nursing or therapy, housing accessibility, and medical transportation.

For those consumers who cannot afford to pay for long-term care, Medicaid has often been the source of payment for it. Until now there has been a bias in Medicaid regulations towards institutional and residential placement. Over time, 75% of Medicaid long-term care dollars have gone for these services leaving only 25% for a variety of home and community based services. Under these federal rules, states were required to provide skilled nursing facilities for people in need of long term care services, but setting aside funding for community services was not mandated.

Now, with changes at the federal level including President Bush's New Freedom Initiative, and at the state level in New York, Medicaid-eligible consumers will be able to explore all their options. They will be able to use funding available to them to decide where they want to be and, to some extent, how they want to utilize it. This will take careful planning and coordination for which they may need some guidance and assistance, but it can be done.

The New York State Nursing Home Transition and Diversion Waiver, which allows for the redirection of Medicaid funding, is expected to be put into place in the coming year as soon as some final questions get resolved about how Medicaid eligibility is to be determined for community home services.

For many, it won't be a moment too soon.

Work Incentive Planning and Assistance Projects – WIPA

In October 2006, the Social Security Administration (SSA) replaced the Benefits Planning, Assistance and Outreach Program (BPA&O) with the Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) Program. The Program has been renamed because of an increased emphasis on work incentives, return to work supports and jobs for beneficiaries.

Do you receive Social Security Disability Benefits (SSDI)?
Do you receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI)?
Do you want to work?

Each agency providing WIPA services has at least one staff member who has received special training through the Social Security Administration about public benefits. They have up-to-date information concerning work incentives. They also have information about the effects of earnings on other state and federal benefit programs.

The WIPA Program administered by the Catskill Center for Independence provides these services to individuals who reside in the following counties:

Broome

Chenango

Chemung

Delaware

Sullivan

Tioga

For more information:

Catskill Center for Independence
P.O. Box 1247
Oneonta, NY 13820
607-432-8000
1-866-724-8666 Toll Free
Email: wipainfo@ccfi.us
Website: www.ccfi.us/wipa.html

If you reside in Otsego County and need assistance, contact:

Kathy Brown
Resource Center for Independent Living
409 Columbia Street
Utica, NY 13502
315-797-5837 (Voice)
315-797-4642 (TTY)

Calendar of Events

Video Day

On the last Wednesday of each month, at 2:00 pm, we will be showing a video for anyone who is interested. All videos will deal with some aspect of a disability-related issue and discussions will follow each video.

Space is limited. Please contact us to reserve your space by the close of business the Monday prior to each video showing.

February 28, 2007

No Barriers for Business

This video explores how businesses can become “disability - friendly.” A good opportunity for business owners and human resource trainers/supervisors.

Subject areas: Accessibility/ADAAG/Business.

March 28, 2007

Ten Small Business Excuses

Information on the Americans with Disabilities Act and what small businesses need to know to comply.

Subject areas: Accessibility/ADAAG/Business

April 25, 2007

Now Serving Every Customer

Shows how people with disabilities should be treated as customers. Good example of using TTD/TTY & relay services.

Subject areas: Accessibility/ADAAG/Business

Upcoming Computer Classes

If you are interested in learning a little something about using computers or surfing the “Net”, please call Ed at the Center to sign-up. Spaces and times are limited, so do not hesitate to call us at 607-432-8000 or email ccfi@ccfi.us.

For Sale:

Electric lift chair, new condition with limited use. Full range of positions from prone to standing. \$600.00
May be seen by appointment.

Robert J. Garaham, 607-432-0182
West Davenport, NY

The Center does not endorse the information contained in this advertisement as to its accuracy

