



DON'T FORGET TO SEND IN YOUR MEMBERSHIP FORM AND DIRECTORY UPDATE!

(included in November newsletter, or email niwri2@msn.com, or call 1-208-324-7544)

GOVERNOR PROPOSES ENDING STATE FUNDING FOR CDHH

In his recent State of the State address, Governor Otter proposed spending cuts to carry Idaho through another year of recession. One "minor" cut would be to reduce the state's support of the Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing by 25% this year, 50% next year, and so on until 2014 when it would receive no state funding.

The CDHH was established by state statute in 1991. An early project was the establishment of Idaho Sound Beginnings, which moved to the Infant-Toddler Program a couple of years ago. They also helped get Idaho Hands & Voices up and running by finding grant money for the organization, and have helped us in numerous ways since our founding. They maintain a lending library, a website full of resources, a directory of interpreters, and proposed and advocated for the legislation which led to the Educational Interpreter Act, requiring that the interpreters and transliterators (sign, Cued Speech or oral) that provide access for our children in public schools meet a set of qualifications.

The Council's budget is very small, around \$150,000 per year (less now, with holdbacks.) This makes them one of the lowest-funded among the 38 states that have a council, commission, or other agency specifically serving the deaf and hard of hearing population, even when compared to states of similar population. There are not many sources other than state money for funding it, and searching for those sources will use time that the two-person staff could better use doing their real jobs.

Whether we continue to have a Council is going to depend on whether the Legislature decides to follow the Governor's lead. If we lose it, it could be a long time before we get it back.

FEDERAL HEARING AID TAX CREDIT PROPOSED

Currently working their way through the U. S. Senate and House are two bills that would provide for a tax credit of up to \$500 per hearing aid (\$1000 for a pair) once every 5 years. The Senate and House versions are slightly different in that the House measure (H 1646) would apply to taxpayers 55 or older and for those purchasing hearing aids for a dependent, while the Senate version (S 1019) would have no age restriction. The Hearing Aid Tax Credit Act is being co-sponsored by Idaho Representative Minnick in the House. Both bills are currently in committee. As most parents have found out, medical insurance does not often cover hearing aids, even for children, and these bills would help families that do not qualify for other assistance. You can easily make your feelings known to your representatives by visiting www.hearingaidtaxcredit.org.

EMERGENCY ALERT SYSTEM IN DEVELOPMENT

The Idaho Bureau of Homeland Security (BHS) has entered into a professional services agreement with MyState USA of Boise, Idaho to develop and test the Idaho State Alert and Warning System (ISAWS). They are starting with a pilot program in Boise County, but hope to extend it to the entire state within the next couple of years. By subscribing to this service, you can choose which kinds of alerts you want to receive in addition to the basic list, how you want to receive alerts, and indicate whether you have special needs. As your children get older and sometimes end up at home alone, this could be a life-saver! A link is

available at the Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing's website (www.cdhh.idaho.gov; go to the Resources page and look for Emergency Alert System) or <https://mystateusa.com/alertSignup.aspx?region=670> to access the sign-up page directly.

(Editor's note: I'm reminded of the story I heard several years ago about the cops evacuating a neighborhood by driving through with a bullhorn, due to an armed and dangerous fugitive in the area. They missed notifying the Deaf mother and her small children, of course. And by the way, this is another service coming your way because of advocacy by the Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.)

SOUND BEGINNINGS FOR IDAHO CHILDREN

by Andrea Amestoy

Idaho Sound Beginnings, the Newborn Hearing Screen program in Idaho is celebrating 10 years of screening infants born in Idaho for hearing loss.

The NHS program is well established in Idaho. Idaho has continued to rank near the top tier of states when it comes to percentage of babies receiving a hearing screening before hospital discharge. Since most of the state's larger hospitals are now using AABR equipment they are also able to perform a second/rescreen before discharge when it is needed. This change in protocol has led to a drop in the number of babies lost to follow-up at the second/rescreen stage, and since the rate of referral from AABR screening is considerably lower than the average rate of OAE there has not been a significant change in the number of infants referred for audiology testing.

My three year old son Ryder was one of the fortunate babies screened by this successful program. With no family history of hearing loss, my term baby referred on his hearing screen. Following the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) goals set forth by the CDC, Ryder was identified with a hearing loss at 4 weeks of age and had hearing aids at 6 weeks of age.

Thanks to the concerted effort of Idaho Sound Beginnings, early interventionists and Ryder's audiologist and speech therapist, Ryder is a talkative preschooler who loves singing songs and listening to music, and I am now the parent education consultant for Idaho Sound Beginnings.

Idaho Sound Beginnings works mostly behind the scenes, under the Infant Toddler Program, to ensure that this system of care continues to be refined and strengthened. Idaho Sound Beginnings staff and consultants conduct in-services at all birthing hospitals throughout the state providing instruction on equipment issues, troubleshooting, referral forms, data entry procedures and parent discharge education. In addition, we have been able this year to assist hospitals by offering them grants for the purchase of updated hearing screening equipment.

Idaho Sound Beginnings receives hearing screening data from each birthing hospital. This information includes a breakdown of how many babies passed, babies who missed their hearing screen, babies who passed with risk factors and those babies who referred on their hearing screen. For our small staff it can be a daunting task to attempt to ensure follow-up for all referred babies, but our follow-up rate has been slowly increasing as doctors and parents receive more education on the importance of hearing to early brain development.

As the parent follow-up consultant, I attempt to contact the parents whose babies referred and make sure they understand the importance of a timely audiological evaluation. I may provide them with financial information, answer any questions they may have and mail information to them.

Had my son not received a hearing screen at the hospital, I would not have picked up on his hearing loss for many years. Valuable time in developing speech and language would have been lost forever.

With hearing loss being the number one birth defect (or birth challenge, as I prefer to call it), Idaho Sound Beginnings plays an instrumental and invaluable service now for all newborns born in Idaho and for their future.

Idaho Sound Beginnings staff includes: Cynthia Carlin, program coordinator; Janette Lytle, data and referral specialist; Andrea Amestoy, parent contact and education specialist; and a recent addition, Jane Clark, administrative assistant (but we're slowly turning her into a data and follow-up specialist in her spare time.)

A few of our focuses for the new year, in addition to helping hospitals upgrade their equipment, include upgrading our data follow-up system to increase efficiency, providing extra training to hospital staff, providing educational outreach to family physicians to increase their understanding of the importance of early identification and developing a mentoring/training program for Idaho audiologists to ensure that all babies are receiving recommended testing and follow-up. As always, we will continue to work with other programs such as Idaho Educational Services for the Deaf and the Blind and the Infant Toddler Program to tighten the information flow between programs to better ensure that all families are aware of the resources available to them.

We would love to hear feedback and stories, or suggestions, from families as to their experiences and their continuing journeys; just be aware that we might ask you to present your story at one of our trainings!

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UPCOMING ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

Region 5 (Magic Valley) Valentine Party Saturday, February 6 at the Jerome Public Library, 100 1st Ave East in Jerome. We're planning to do cookie decorating and Valentine-making, much as we did last year. Lorna will also conduct a mini-class in making and using your own stencils, especially for the adults and older kids—this should be a fun additional way to decorate your Valentines. Call 324-7544 to RSVP and for more information, and watch for a postcard.

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Editorial: I'm old enough to remember raising a deaf child without an Idaho Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. At that time, Idaho was one of only ten states that did not yet have a telephone relay system to allow deaf TTY users the ability to make telephone calls to hearing people without the help of a family member or other interpreter. This is huge, in terms of independence! Year after year legislation to establish a relay system was introduced and failed to pass, and I was beginning to think I would be interpreting calls for a teenage daughter—not good for either of us. The federal Americans with Disabilities Act was passed in 1990, mandating state relay services. For once I felt pretty good about federal mandates!

Things are different in Idaho today. Thanks to the CDHH, we are actually on the leading edge of the bell curve when it comes to newborn hearing screening (see article by Andrea Amestoy, above.) We no longer have to put up with inadequate interpreting services for our children in school, now that the Educational Interpreter Act has taken effect; the CDHH was instrumental in researching the need for better services and getting the legislation passed. The Council website is a tremendous resource. Steven Snow, the Executive Director, has been working to educate law enforcement and judicial officials about the needs of deaf and hard of hearing citizens. Last summer he even attended the Hands & Voices National Leadership Conference, to find out more about the needs of parents of deaf and hard of hearing children!

The Council has done a huge amount with what is actually a very meager budget. Eliminating it will not do much to help get Idaho through the recession. We recognize that it may have to manage on reduced funds (as it already is) but keeping it alive until the economic situation improves is a better option than losing it altogether. Our Idaho Hands & Voices President Renee Higbee and I urge you to call or to write to the Governor, and your State Senator and Representatives soon, and let them know that Idaho really does need a Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

Office of the Governor: PO Box 83720, Boise ID 83720 www.gov.idaho.gov

Idaho State Legislature: PO Box 83720, Boise ID 83720-0038 (House)
PO Box 83720, Boise ID 83720-0081 (Senate)

www.legislature.idaho.gov (you can easily send a message to the entire Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee, where it will probably do the most good at this point.)