



Arizona Commission

for the deaf and the hard of hearing

100 N 15th Avenue □ Suite 104 □ Phoenix, AZ 85007
acdhh.org

Hard of Hearing Task Force Meeting **Draft Minutes** Virtual Meeting via Zoom November 15, 2024

I. **Call to Order, Introductions, Housekeeping (HOH Specialist, Christy Abrams)**

Christy Abrams called the meeting to order at 9:00 am

Voting Members Present: Roz Siebold, Ron Tallman, Commissioner Melanie O'Rourke, Liz Booth, Harvey Smith and Cynthia Amerman

Voting Members Absent: Commissioner Fred Williams

ACDHH Staff Present: Nikki Soukup, Director of Public Policy and Community Relations / Michele Michaels, Hearing Healthcare Program Manager / Rob Voreck, Community Services Program Manager / Christy Abrams, Hard of Hearing Specialist / Latrina Harris-Lewis, Family Services Specialist

Others Present: CART Captioner and 2 ASL Interpreters

II. **Introduction of new Team Member:**

- Latrina Harris-Lewis, Family Services Specialist

III. **Review & Approval of Minutes 08/16/2024**

- Commissioner Melanie O'Rourke moved to approve the minutes as is.
- Liz Booth seconded the motion to approve the minutes as is.

IV. **Public Policy & Community Relations Report (Nikki Soukup)**

- We are actively watching any upcoming changes that may occur with the new federal administration. The President and Congress are Republican dominated. On the Arizona side we have a Democratic Governor, with a Republican-dominated legislature. We have 17 Republicans and 13 Democrats; which means that the likelihood of the bills passing will be more so on the Republican agenda.
- One priority need is to increase the funding for Support Service Provider (SSP) services for the DeafBlind and CVHL communities. Working on ways to involve members of the community to meet with legislators at the capitol. Rob Voreck ACDHH's Community



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Service Program Manager and Nikki will be meeting to discuss more about future legislative activities.

- We are funded by a small percentage of tax on all landline phones throughout the state of Arizona. As we push for DeafBlind funding we will also talk about the importance of ACDHH to have funding to grow and expand.
- Reena, our Community Engagement Coordinator, is not present today however, she's been working on various activities. In Prescott next week (Friday, November 22nd) ACDHH is doing a smoke alarm walk; home install at no cost to individuals who sign up who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing or DeafBlind. The Fire Department will be giving breakfast in the morning to the volunteers. If you are interested or know of people in the Prescott area please reach out. ACDHH will be hosting a Tucson Museum of Contemporary Art event in May.
- In the news is the story regarding Tyron McAlpin, a Deaf and disabled man. Police tackled him without realizing that he is Deaf and did not give him an opportunity to tell them he was Deaf as they approached. There has been national backlash as people were horrified to see what happened. Ultimately the charges against Tyron McAlpin were dropped. There is a news article that talks about how the Phoenix Police Department is doing a special investigation on this. Christy held up ACDHH visor cards and reminded everyone about the importance of having one of these in our glove box in order to help educate an officer on our communications needs if we are pulled over so they do not think we are ignoring their questions or instructions.

V. Hard of Hearing Specialist Report (Christy Abrams)

- Enormous shout-out to Ron Tallman recognizing all of his hard work and leadership in providing another awesome Arizona HLAA Walk4Hearing.
- Working hard to help consumers who reach out about our Hearing Healthcare Assistance Project (HHAP) in partnership with ASU, NAU and U of A. We've referred 104 people and in the past year have assisted hundreds of others with information, resources and referrals to other programs; VA, VR and other national programs.
- We continue to provide educational presentations and trainings across the state of Arizona; Americans Disability National Network, University of Arizona Disability Resource Center, Escalante Senior Center, contributed to the HLAA West and East Valley Chapters, Arts and Cultural Education and Community Engagement Group, and the Phoenix Indian Medical Center to name a few.



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VI. Hard of Hearing Program Manager Report (Michele Michaels)

- Has been with ACDHH for 17.5 years, really excited about all of the work we are doing with 21 staff members and a \$5 million a year budget.
- 1.3 million individuals are hard of hearing in Arizona and for our DeafBlind / CVHL community we are asking to double the amount of money to serve this population.
- The Arizona Burn Foundation Smoke Alarm Walk will be held in Prescott and Prescott Valley next Friday. It's crucial that we understand that when we have hearing loss and we are sleeping at night our safety can be at risk and we need access to smoke alarms.
- Regarding the Tyron McAlpin case. In 2017-2018, ACDHH spent about 18 months providing an in-person two-hour public safety training to all sworn Phoenix Police Department personnel so that they would understand what to do when they encounter someone who is not responding. ACDHH then worked with AzPOST, the Arizona Peace Officer Standards and Training organization, to create online video modules for officers throughout the state. It's a voluntary training but will help so much for police officers to have this training. We issued a public statement and we are starting to work with the Department of Justice to see how we and other national stakeholders can better reach police officers throughout the country.
- Health and safety are our priorities; installing smoke detectors, having the hard of hearing visor cards in our cars to educate police officers if we should be pulled over, those types of things make a big impact.
- Harry Wolfe, our guest today is a wonderful hard of hearing advocate and ally. Back in 2018 he was looking for a way to make his Toastmasters Club accessible. He came to ACDHH and Michele taught him about telecoils, Bluetooth and loop systems. Harry, being a go-getter guy, took off with this information and in 2019 started the first in the world Audible Talkers Toastmasters group which is now on Zoom since COVID. People from all over join! Kudos to the people in our community who see a need and create a solution for it.
- Since our last HOH Task Force meeting ACDHH staff have provided 23 presentations/trainings and staffed 11 booths to provide ACDHH information and resources.
- Latrina, our new staff member, is based in Tucson. It's really great to have Latrina in Tucson and we hope some of you who are in Tucson will get to know Latrina and connect with her.
- ACDHH has branded a new ½ hour interactive experiential activity, "Experience Our World" (EOW), which can be delivered in person to any audience of hearing people in AZ. Recently we provided this activity at Tucson Medical Center. The hearing staff there experienced



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what it is like when the tables are turned and the doctors, nurses, lab staff, etc. are all Deaf or Hard of Hearing. It is eye-opening and was very well received!

- Pine, Arizona recently had a wildfire approaching and there were ASL Interpreters at the community meeting but there were no captions. The ACDHH Executive Team is having a conversation about this. There should be captions at every community meeting in any type of emergency situation as there are 1.3 million hard of hearing people in Arizona and the majority of Hard of Hearing people do not know sign language. If you see these kinds of things happening please let us know about it so that we can engage in systems change.
- Vicki Thompson is our Assistive Technology Specialist and she's working to create a video to explain how the Arizona Relay Service works. Vicki will be providing this training to the City of Phoenix, one of the largest cities in the country, so that their employees will know how to answer a relay call.
- The Museum of Contemporary Art in Tucson (MOCA) has reached out to discuss ways to make their activities and venue more accessible.

VII. ALOHA Leadership Announcements (Cynthia Amerman)

- ALOHA celebrated their 40th anniversary on March 23rd and thanked Michele and Christy for both being in attendance and speaking. Lou Touchette who was an ALOHA board member assisted Cynthia with the celebration and Lou has since moved to Washington. Cynthia aims to resign from the ALOHA Board on December 31st and hopefully a search committee will find someone new. ALOHA has suffered a great loss of volunteers since COVID. Cynthia has been both President and Secretary which is a difficult job to do because of the quantity of work. They are doing all they can to prevent ALOHA from dissolving. They will be meeting with the Community Foundation for Southern Arizona Center for Healthy Nonprofits to move forward. More and more people are coming into ALOHA for assistance and it would be a shame to dissolve.
- Christy shared quote from Lou Touchette:
"Hearing loss is not merely a physical condition; it is a profound human experience that affects every aspect of one's life. It impacts communication, relationships, and emotional well-being. It can isolate individuals from the world around them, diminishing their sense of belonging and connection."

VIII. HLAA Chapter Leadership Announcements (Melanie O'Rourke / Ron Tallman)



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HLAA West Valley:

Volunteers have been really busy working on marketing and getting the word out. Melanie and Shannon Tyree often attend Senior Expos to reach more people and Shannon has been marketing in newspaper, print and online. Attendance is fairly good. Christy recently spoke about her cochlear implant journey which was really well received and a topic that members had been asking about. Sherri Collins gave a presentation; a walk down memory lane of ACDHH. It seems ACDHH has always been there and has always looked at ways to make things more accessible for individuals with hearing loss. It's been an ACDHH "trifecta" with Vicki Thompson who will be presenting in December on the telephone distribution program. Shared a survey with their group to determine their interests for future presenters and topics that they would like to hear. Christy mentioned one idea for marketing; target the retirement communities near them and share the HLAA Newsletter and monthly meeting notice to be posted at independent / assistive living communities.

HLAA East Valley:

Meetings continue right on schedule. October opened with a general session of open dialogue and discussion; Christy came out for that. The group discussed the HLAA National Convention experience. Also, along the lines of HOPE (Hearing Other Peoples' Experiences) talked about what was challenging, what was good/difficult during the summertime in relation to hearing loss. In November, Matt Goncalves came out from InnoCaption; he shared some great stories about how InnoCaption works as a captioning app on our smartphones. In December Kristi Nolde-Morrissey with Diamond Dogs will present. In January Dr. Susan Schmidt, Au.D., CCC-A; will talk on balance issues. In February, Vicki Thompson, Assistive Technology Specialist from ACDH will join us. In March, Ingrid McBride will be talking about upcoming changes that may affect all of us regarding Auracast. In April Dr. Rao and company will be out from ASU to provide a short presentation on Living Well with Hearing Loss. Finally, the season will close out with Amanda Luecker from the Association of Commuter Transportation on the challenges of traveling with hearing loss. Virtual HOPE meetings will continue on the fourth Thursday of every month. HLAA Chapter meetings attendance has been pretty good; averaging between 22-30 people, HOPE meetings are smaller and it often takes time to build up.

IX. AZ Walk4Hearing 2024 (Ron Tallman)

Arizona's ninth annual Walk4Hearing was held on Saturday, November 2nd. Agreeing with Michele and Christy it was just absolutely great! We had twice as many children in attendance than ever



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before; we danced, played music, had ice cream, we walked. It was just a great Arizona fall day. The energy that was out there and the individuals that attended was just absolutely phenomenal. We had 433 registered walkers and we raised just over \$43,000 and 40% of that money can stay right here in Arizona. We look forward to next year which will be Arizona's 10th year participating and it looks like it will land on November 1st so mark your calendars!

X. Audible Talkers Toastmasters (Harry Wolfe)

- Harry provided a speech and demonstration of Toastmasters Table Topics. Audible Talkers Toastmasters gives hard of hearing people an opportunity to practice public speaking, running a meeting and giving impromptu speeches. It's a safe place to build skills, increase confidence and obtain helpful feedback.

XI. Employment (Harvey Smith)

- The job market is changing. We are seeing a decrease in new job postings and that means one of two things. Either there's less jobs available or companies are being really cautious seeing what the new administration will look like, seeing what the lay of the land will look like in the next six months.
- Employers are getting a little bit more precise on their education and work experience. The days where if you showed up and made an effort, you were pretty much guaranteed a job seems to be over.
- We are seeing signs of stress in the labor market; Intel laid a few thousand people off a couple of weeks ago. Boeing laid people off last week and one company based in Tempe laid off people just yesterday.
- The new administration that's coming in is going to cause a lot of challenges, depending on what agency you are in. For example, if you are working in sustainable energy, you might have a problem. If you're working in mining, you might be guaranteed a job for four years. So, there are changes coming.
- With the uncertainty, it is a great time to try something new and so if you're thinking of changing careers or looking into something else, this is a wonderful opportunity.
- Questions? Please feel free to reach out to Harvey at ARIZONA@WORK or <https://arizonaatwork.com/>. Their job board has about 51,000 posted jobs on it as of yesterday afternoon. He is seeing some employers being sensitive to those that have hearing loss and efforts made to accommodate people with hearing loss. Christy sent



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an email with all of the links provided in chat. Also please reach out to Christy
c.abrams@acdhh.az.gov with any questions.

XII. Announcements/Ideas/Suggestions (All)

- Melanie, shared for HLAA West Valley, please bring family and friends for brown bag lunch an hour before the meeting starts. Shannon is providing informal information and it's been a great way to connect and share information.

XIII. Next Meeting Date/Adjournment

- Meeting Adjourned at 11:00 am / Next Meeting Date TBD

DRAFT HOH TF Minutes 11/15/2024