

CALLER

THE COMMONWEALTH

Virginia Relay: Telecommunications services for the deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind and speech disabled

Spring 2015

New CapTel® Captioning Devices for People with Hearing & Vision Loss

People with both hearing and vision loss have long felt limited or even locked out of using the telephone as their unique communication needs make talking over the phone a challenge. New services currently in development from CapTel are designed to unlock the telephone for people with low or no vision who cannot hear over the phone.

CapTel captioning service allows people with hearing loss to read text captions of what's said to them during telephone conversations, much like the captions on TV. Those same telephone captions will soon be available to people with low or no vision through a variety of large display or braille output devices.

How it works: As a caller speaks over the phone, his or her words are transcribed into captions that appear on the CapTel user's phone. For people with low vision, the captions can be displayed on a large screen HD TV or on a Visual Display CCTV (Closed Circuit Television System) device at an enlarged font size with multiple high contrast colors for easy reading. For those who are DeafBlind, the captions can be read on a dynamic braille display. This allows CapTel users who have both hearing and vision loss to be able to read what the caller says, then speak and respond like any other phone conversation.

These new CapTel services are scheduled for release later this year. For more information, visit online at www.CapTel.com/braille, e-mail Braille@CapTel.com, or contact the Technology Assistance Program (TAP) through the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) at frontdsk@vddhh.virginia.gov or 804-662-9502 (V/TTY).

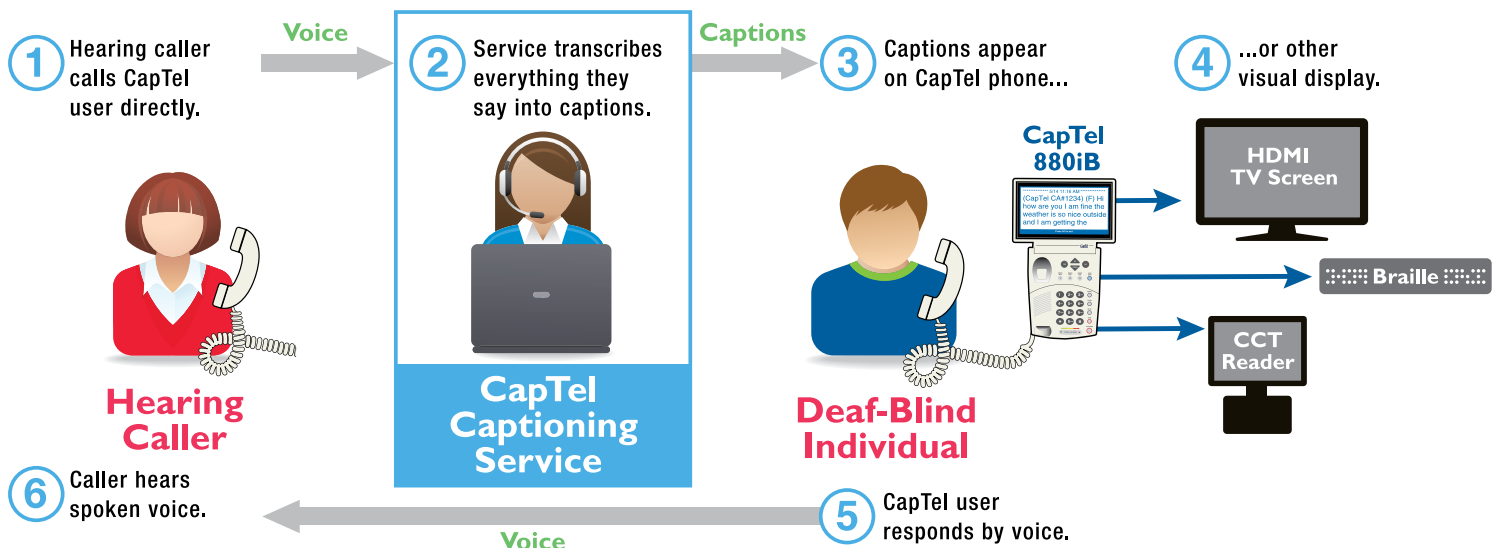
Virginia Relay Welcomes a New Relay Service Provider

As of August 1, 2015, the Commonwealth of Virginia will welcome a new provider of Virginia Relay's Traditional Relay Services (TRS): Hamilton Relay of Aurora, Nebraska. Hamilton Relay is currently the contracted service provider of Virginia's Captioned Telephone (CapTel) services. With Hamilton Relay as our new partner, Virginia Relay will have the opportunity to provide an array of new Relay technology, calling features, and community outreach programs as we continue to provide the highest quality telecommunications access for people who are deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind, or have difficulty speaking. For more information about the new contract and new services, please stay tuned to our next newsletter, due out in late summer. To learn more about Hamilton Relay, please visit www.HamiltonRelay.com.

That's what I'm talking about

HAMILTON
relay

CapTel captioning service allows people with hearing loss to read text captions of what's said to them during telephone conversations, much like the captions on TV.



CapTel is a registered trademark of Ultratec, Inc.

HKNC Senior Adult Services: Empowering DeafBlind Seniors to Live Confidently

According to The Helen Keller National Center (HKNC), senior citizens (age 55+ years) living with combined vision and hearing loss make up the largest number of people who are DeafBlind in the United States. Paige Berry is coordinator of Senior Adult Services for HKNC, and she works out of Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. Paige assists seniors, families, and service providers nationwide in developing a greater understanding of the abilities and needs of older adults who are DeafBlind or who are experiencing age-related vision and hearing loss.

One of the biggest initiatives Paige oversees is the Confident Living Program (CLP). Held twice each year at HKNC in New York, CLP brings together a group of six seniors for five days of peer support and education for coping with life with vision and hearing loss. The week consists of one-hour classes that cover everything from orientation and mobility to communication and technology, and includes presentations by professionals including an audiologist, an optometrist, and an elder law attorney.

"CLP is not necessarily about training, but it's about providing a peer support group and lots of information and resources," says Paige. "It is often life-changing to just be together with people who understand how the combination of vision and hearing loss affects daily life. Through CLP, seniors gain new tools to empower them to take control of their lives again."

Participation in CLP costs \$1,300 plus travel, but many consumers are able to receive assistance in payment from their state vocational rehabilitation program or Independent Living for the Older Blind program. Paige also works with state organizations across the country to offer CLP "On the Road" to groups who cannot travel to New York.

According to Paige, the most important thing for seniors with hearing and vision loss to know is that even if they think their hearing or vision loss is minor, there may still be helpful resources available.

"We want to encourage our seniors, no matter how minor or significant their loss of vision or hearing may be, to always ask if there is help available, because there might be," she says. "Our goal is to empower the consumers to not give up, or push the 'pause button' on life because of vision and hearing loss later in life. Anytime we can do something to make it a little easier, a little better, a little more empowering for them, then we've done our job."

To find out more about HKNC's Senior Adult Services, please visit www.hknc.org or contact Paige Berry at paige.berry@hknc.org.



Haptics: Enhancing Communication with Touch

For people who are DeafBlind, one of the biggest challenges of communication is perceiving and interpreting another person's body language. Without this critical information, a DeafBlind person can feel left out of the conversation, especially when among a group of people. But Haptic Communication, or Haptics, is a new approach to communication that relies on the sense of touch, and makes interaction easier and more efficient for people who are DeafBlind and their families, friends, interpreters and others.

"Haptic communication gives the presenter who is DeafBlind total access to both the audience and the environment."

When using Haptics, a DeafBlind person receives real-time, spontaneous information about the environment around them. The interpreter relays this information through a series of non-verbal, tactile signs performed on the person's back, arm or leg. This touch gives better quality to discussions and interactions by helping the DeafBlind person better understand the other person's behavior, emotions, and other non-verbal cues.

Ann Olliff, vice president of the Virginia Association of the DeafBlind (VADB), explains that Haptics can be especially useful for a DeafBlind person who is participating in a workshop or presenting to an audience. The interpreter is able to create a "map" on the DeafBlind person's body to help explain the setup of the

room and where people are seated. When someone in the room has a question, the interpreter can quickly convey who is talking by pointing to them on the map. The DeafBlind person can also receive real-time feedback about the emotions and interest levels of people in the group, like when someone bursts into laughter, or yawns from boredom.

"Haptic communication gives the presenter who is DeafBlind total access to both the audience and the environment," Ann says.

Haptics can help anyone with combined hearing and vision loss to feel more confident in their environment and participate more actively in conversations. For more information, contact VADB at www.vadeafblind.org.



VRAC Member Ann Olliff (center) demonstrates Haptics at a recent event.

THANK YOU

To the staff of the Virginia Relay Center and the City of Norton:

For 24 years, Virginia Relay has partnered with AT&T and the city of Norton to provide quality telecommunications access for Virginians who are deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind, or have difficulty speaking through the Virginia Relay Center. Because of the professional expertise, compassion and commitment of the Relay Center's staff, Virginia has always been on the forefront of telecommunications technology and service for the local deaf and hard-of-hearing communities. The communications assistants at the Virginia Relay Center have provided a life-changing service for the people of Virginia, and been vital contributing members of the local community.

Virginia Relay extends our heart-felt thanks to AT&T, the employees of the Virginia Relay Center and the City of Norton for their years of dedication to our mission. You will always be a part of our legacy as Virginia continues to be a model for the rest of the country to follow in providing Relay users with the best features and the best quality services.



Improve Communication and Gain Independence with VDBVI DeafBlind Services

According to the Virginia Association of the DeafBlind, there are about 16,000 people living in Virginia with some degree of combined vision and hearing loss. Persons who are DeafBlind vary greatly in their background and experiences. For example, one individual may have lived his or her entire life blind or visually-impaired, and then begin to lose hearing later in life. Another individual may have lived his or her life deaf or hard-of-hearing, but now is losing vision due to glaucoma, macular degeneration, or another health condition. Other individuals may have had full hearing and vision for most of their lives, but are now experiencing some age-related loss of both. Each of these people will have different needs to communicate and live independently at home and/or in the workplace.

The Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VDBVI) provides services and resources which empower individuals who are blind, vision-impaired or DeafBlind to achieve their desired levels of employment, education and personal independence. Elizabeth Spiers is the program director for DeafBlind services at VDBVI and recently provided an overview of the agency's services for individuals living with combined vision and hearing loss. These services include:

Rehabilitation Training/Independent Living and Vocational Rehabilitation

Elizabeth and her colleague, Christine Day, work throughout Virginia to meet with people who are DeafBlind and help assess how their combined vision and hearing loss is impacting their lives, both at home and at work. They then make personalized recommendations and help connect each person with service providers and programs to obtain adaptive equipment, services and training that will help them to communicate more easily and live and work independently. VDBVI works closely with rehabilitation teachers, education service coordinators and/or vocational rehabilitation counselors to provide written results and recommendations and assist in providing services for customers who are DeafBlind. To receive rehabilitation teaching/independent living or vocational rehabilitation services, you must have an open case with VDBVI.

iCanConnect Virginia

iCanConnect is a national program that distributes no-cost telecommunications equipment to people who are DeafBlind and low income. In Virginia, VDBVI identifies and assesses applicants to make sure they are good candidates for the program and makes recommendations for the telecommunications equipment that is best suited for each person's needs. When the equipment is ordered, VDBVI helps install it in the consumer's home, and provides the necessary training and tutoring to make sure they understand how to use it. iCanConnect applicants do not need an open case with VDBVI to receive equipment. To apply, please visit www.icanconnectvirginia.org.

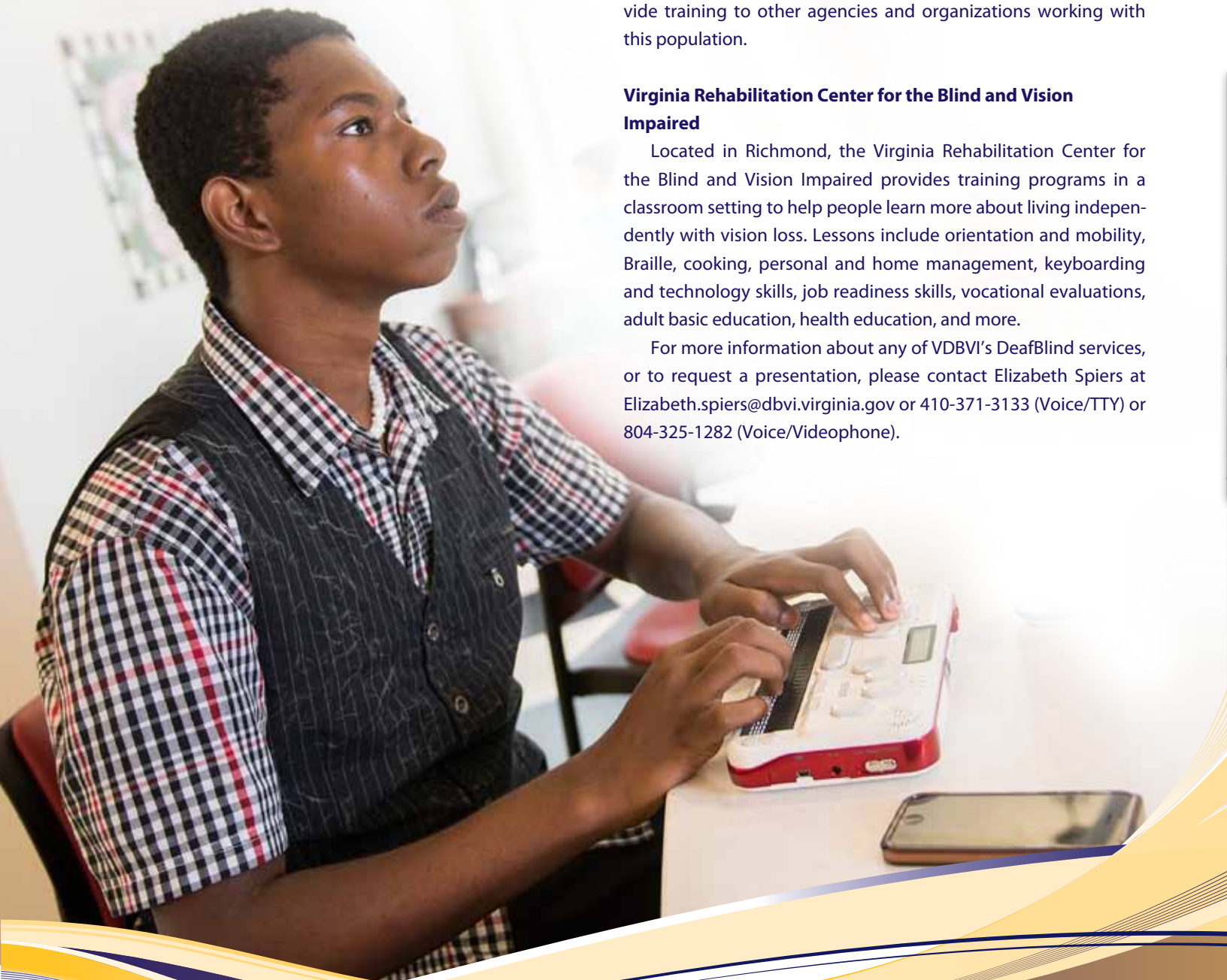
Community Outreach and Education

Elizabeth and Christine regularly offer presentations for people who would like to know more about DeafBlindness. They also provide training to other agencies and organizations working with this population.

Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired

Located in Richmond, the Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision Impaired provides training programs in a classroom setting to help people learn more about living independently with vision loss. Lessons include orientation and mobility, Braille, cooking, personal and home management, keyboarding and technology skills, job readiness skills, vocational evaluations, adult basic education, health education, and more.

For more information about any of VDBVI's DeafBlind services, or to request a presentation, please contact Elizabeth Spiers at Elizabeth.spiers@dbvi.virginia.gov or 410-371-3133 (Voice/TTY) or 804-325-1282 (Voice/Videophone).



Technology Connects Virginia Man to Family, Friends & the World

Technology is making all the difference in Sherrod's life. The 26 year old Virginia man relies on his email, Facebook and the Internet to keep connected.

"Technology really does make things possible for me to continue daily living."

Sherrod is deaf and has extremely low vision, a result of a genetic disorder of the nervous system that causes tumors or masses to grow. The condition first presented when Sherrod was a teenager. The condition keeps him close to home most of the time, but thanks to his new computer and Zoom Text magnification software, Sherrod is able to communicate with friends and family.

Sherrod received the equipment—and one-on-one training on how to operate it—through iCanConnect, the National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program, which provides a wide array of communications equipment, from braille readers to laptops to smartphones, at no cost to low-income people with significant hearing and vision loss.

Sherrod calls iCanConnect a "perfect start" for people who are DeafBlind. He has even been able to take correspondence courses from the Hadley School for the Blind.

"Having a computer and other equipment allows you to have access to the world and what it may provide," he says. "Doing things from my computer makes it a lot easier for me, rather than going through the frustration of writing things down by hand."

To learn more or to apply, visit www.icanconnectvirginia.org, call 1-800-552-7917 (v/tty) or email frontdsk@vddhh.virginia.gov.



An easy way to turn more calls into loyal customers.

Thousands of people with hearing or speech difficulties use Virginia Relay each day to make business calls. The trouble is, businesses that are unfamiliar with how Relay service works often mistakenly hang up on these callers. Don't miss another opportunity to turn your Relay callers into loyal customers. Join Virginia Relay Partner, the FREE Relay education program for Virginia businesses, today.

- Free training on how to make and receive Relay calls
- Free educational materials for staff
- Free online and print promotions to all Virginia Relay users

Call 1-800-552-7917 (voice/TTY) or visit www.varelay.org to sign up today.



Our Newest Relay Partners

Medical Care

Valley Home Care—Harrisonburg
540-434-1747

Home Improvement/Contractors

Atlantic Plumbing, Heating & Air Conditioning, Inc.—Hampton
atlanticphac.com
757-896-0655



iCanConnect
The National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program

iCanConnect: The National DeafBlind Equipment Distribution Program

iCanConnect Virginia provides no-cost communications technology, along with installation, training and support—training and support to Virginia residents who are DeafBlind and have a limited income. The program offers a wide range of communications tools—including screen enlargement software, screen readers, computers, signalers, Braille displays and mobile devices. iCanConnect is administered in-state as a collaboration between the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) and the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI).

To qualify, applicants must be verified as deaf-blind by a practicing vision- or hearing-related professional and be enrolled in a federal low-income program or have an income that does not exceed 400 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines.

To learn more or to apply, visit www.icanconnectvirginia.org, call 1-800-552-7917 (v/tty) or email frontdsk@vddhh.virginia.gov.



1602 Rolling Hills Drive, Suite 203
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Visit us at VaRelay.org

Virginia Relay Advisory Council (VRAC)

Consumer Members:

Carl Amos, Ed.D.

Representing Hearing Relay Users

Robbin Blankenship, VRAC Vice-Chair, 2015-2017

Representing Speech-to-Speech (STS) Relay Users

William Hess

Representing Voice Carry-Over Users

Betti Thompson, VRAC Chair, 2015 -2017

Representing Internet (IP) Relay Users

Ann Ollif

Representing Virginia Association of the DeafBlind (VADB)

Arva Priola

Representing Centers for Independent Living (CILs)

Helen Justice

Representing Virginia Association of the Deaf (VAD)

Valerie Luther

Representing Captioned Telephone Relay Users

Mani Aguilar, Au.D

Representing Association of Late Deafened Adults (ALDA)

Linda Wallace

Representing Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) Virginia Chapters

Barclay Shepard

Representing Hearing Relay Users

Lisa Harbour

Representing Speech and Hearing Association of Virginia (SHAV)

John Slone

Representing Video Relay Users

Non-Voting Members:

Gary W. Talley, VDDHH Outreach Manager

VDDHH Outreach Programs

Teresa Feeney, AT&T

Virginia Relay Center Manager

Brenda Neely, AT&T

Virginia Relay Center

Lauren Cramer, Hamilton Relay

Hamilton Relay Account Manager

Stephanie Ulmer, Hamilton Relay

Virginia CapTel Outreach Coordinator

Upcoming Events

Celebrate Communication 2015

May 16, 2015

10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Northern Virginia Community College
Annandale Campus | Annandale

2015 Disabled American Veterans Department of Virginia Annual Convention

June 4-7, 2015

Holiday Inn Tanglewood | Roanoke

Art of Aging Expo

June 10, 2015

Fredericksburg

VDOE Opening Doors Conference

June 23, 2015

Session for Parents and Students

June 24-25, 2015

Sessions for Professionals
Charlottesville

59th Biennial Virginia Association of the Deaf Conference

June 25-27, 2015

Holiday Inn Valley View | Roanoke

Camp Loud and Clear

July 10 - 11, 2015

Holiday Lake 4-H Center | Appomattox

Remote Area Medical Expedition (RAM)

July 17 – 18, 2015

Wise County

Challenge Discovery Projects Family Fun Day

August 15, 2015

Henrico

Fall 2015 Virginia Relay Advisory Council Meeting

October 8, 2015

Henrico



Find Us on Facebook!

Virginia Relay now has a Facebook page! Just enter "Virginia Relay" in Facebook's search field and click the "Like" button at the top of our page to get regular status updates of Virginia Relay news, events and more.

