Finally Home: Angela’s Story

By: Erin Phillips

Last August I received a referral from Monroe County Adult Protection Services about a deaf, elderly woman who was staying at Alternatives for Battered Women (ABW) and needed assistance with housing. For her protection, I will call her Angela.

Before Angela moved to Monroe County, she was living in Oswego County with a mean, alcoholic boyfriend. At age 60, she made a decision to leave for good.

This was not the first time; she had lived in isolation and fear her entire life. She does not remember going to school nor where she grew up. She has no idea why her abusive husband kicked her out of their home and forced her to leave four children behind. She describes herself as a doll that was pushed around, ignored, and belittled.

At the ABW shelter, Angela was struggling to get along with her roommates and other residents due to communication barriers. Even though one of their staff could use sign language, Angela was still finding it difficult to find a common method of communication between the two.

During her stay at ABW, she sought help with Advocacy Services for Abused Deaf Victim (ASADV) and the Deaf Wellness Center (DWC) to help her heal and recover after decades of domestic abuse. I visited her frequently to assist her with searching for housing and to teach her independent living skills so she could live on her own.

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An office building late on a Friday evening is probably one the last places anyone wants to be. Except when there’s a room echoing with the sounds of bombs blasting from Call of Duty, balls bouncing from Wii tennis, an eight foot wide screen, surround sound—and it’s filled with your friends, and plenty of pizza.

This was exactly the scene Friday, June 3rd and Saturday, June 11th when the boardroom was taken over by energetic, caffeinated gamers for the inaugural “Gamers Wanted” event. In total, thirteen gamers showed up for the two days. “It was a great turn out for such a brand new event,” said Dawn Jeffords, Manager of Youth Services at RCIL.

The reason for the event—which featured a variety of video games with surround sound on a Play-station 3, board games, cards, pizza and brownies—was simple. “We want to do more for young people with disabilities,” Chris Hilderbrant, Chief Operating Office explained.

The gaming events, which are open to individuals with disabilities and friends, age 18-35, are meant to be a casual and friendly environment for people to have fun and simply “hang out.” It appears they found the right arena.

“Aside from all the entertainment and competitiveness, I enjoyed meeting other young adults with disabilities,” said Jensen Caraballo, a young man who attended one of the game nights. “I definitely had fun kicking butt in Mortal Kombat and also getting annihilated in Mario Kart!”

While the first gaming events were successes, there is always room for improvement. RCIL is aiming to eventually expand game nights to other activities, such as outings to local sports games. And as their following grows, they are also looking to provide separate events for different age groups—teens and even individuals over 35—to meet their specific needs better, with more age-appropriate games and settings.

RCIL is also working towards gaming accommodations for physical disabilities, those who have trouble using traditional gaming devices, such as joy sticks or the Wii controller. “If they ever wanted to play but were afraid to try…we’ll help find a way to make it possible,” Hilderbrant stated. So what better a way for young people to bond than over video games and good food? While it’s obviously an opportunity for similar individuals to get together to have fun and play games, it’s more than making friends. RCIL is trying to provide a safe, nonjudgmental setting, where ultimately “you get to just be you,” says Hilderbrant.

Interested? Join us! The next gaming sessions will be held: June 24th, 5pm-10pm and July 9th, 1pm-5pm at 497 State Street, Rochester, NY 14608. For more information, call Dawn Jeffords at (585) 442-6470 or email her at djeffords@rcil.org.
On Tuesday, June 14, 2011 the Regional Center for Independent Living (RCIL), along with the Center for Disability Rights (CDR) and All About You Home Care (AAY) celebrated the five year anniversary of the new location at 497 State Street--the building which houses all three organizations.

Staff celebrated the building’s birthday with a picnic, while reflecting on all the changes that have occurred since RCIL made the transition in 2006 from its old office on the corner of Park Avenue and East Avenue to the new on State Street.

Much has changed in five years, and RCIL continues to develop new, and grow pre-existing services that are available to individuals with disabilities in the community.

RCIL offers a variety of services, including the recently developed Ready to Achieve Mentoring Program (RAMP) in the Wayne County area, which focuses on working with students with disabilities who are either connected or may become connected with the Juvenile Justice System.

Another recent initiative is RCIL’s establishment of a new Veterans Peer Outreach position—targeting any Veteran with a disability to receive peer support, independent living resources and guidance to work towards community based goals.

In addition to the mentioned programs, RCIL also provides assistance and support for individuals who are wishing to transition out of a nursing facility or need assistance to avoid going into a nursing facility. RCIL’s environmental modification staff help aid the process of living in one’s own home. They do this by providing information on how to modify the home to make it accessible for the individual, such as building a ramp or widening doorways.

Not only does RCIL provide multiple services, but also products and items for consumers to use as well. Did you know that RCIL has a computer technology room open to the public right in the lobby at 497 State Street? The room’s purpose is to provide computer access for people to check emails or apply for employment.

RCIL also has a Technology and Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities (TRAID) program, more commonly known as the loan closet, which provides free loan of medical and adaptive equipment for adults, children and Early Intervention.

Looking back on the number of RCIL consumers, it’s apparent there has been steady growth. Reporting 495 consumers in 2002, the amount has increased to 1,134 in 2010. But this is just one of the many changes that have occurred in the five year span.

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Reflections on Deaf Day and New Technology
By: Dean DeRusso

With the 21st anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) coming up, RCIL/CDR have agreed to host their second Deaf Day on July 28, 2011. As technology is constantly evolving nowadays, it’s a time to reflect on the progress that has been made to help the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community communicate efficiently and effectively. Looking back on the past, it’s hard to believe there has been such improvement in such little time.

I remember when I was a small child, my family had only one TTY (text telephone) that was almost four feet tall and two feet wide; it may have weighed 200 pounds. My family had three or four phones in the house and they could talk on them from any room. But when my parents got a TTY call for me, I had to run all the way upstairs to “talk” on the phone. This really was a pain depending on where I was in the house, and I wanted a TTY in every room. I remember asking a friend, why are deaf products not upgraded as quickly as hearing products?

I remember also being frustrated that my mom had to be my personal secretary as she would have to interpret all calls I received from hearing people. I wanted to make calls without my mom interpreting for me. When the first Traditional Relay Service was established, it was only open from 9 am to 8 pm. The people working were volunteering their time and seeking donations to just cover the cost of the service.

The ADA’s Title IV, Telecommunication Act came up with a new solution that required the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) to cover the cost of Relay services so that deaf and hard of hearing individuals could have equal access to the same phone services as hearing people.

Various businesses took advantage of this by developing different ways to help the deaf and hard of hearing have better access to telephones. Today, deaf people use Video Relay Services (VRS) and Traditional Relay Services (TRS) to make calls.

Carrying with the theme of reflection, I recently reviewed some old notes of mine from the first Deaf Day. On July 22, 2008, RCIL decided to host their first Deaf Day during CDR’s ADA week. The goal was to show different technologies that were available to the deaf and hard of hearing community since the signing of the ADA.

In my notes I was amazed to see how many products were brand new or up and coming then. For example, wireless video phones were new and everyone wanted one. Most of the people who attended the conference came to see the newest product by Hands-On Video Relay Service (HOVRS) known as the MVP, a portable wireless video phone.
During this time, the hard of hearing community was struggling to accept Sprint’s newly released Captioned Telephone (CapTel) and free WebCapTel phones that helped those who depended on spoken language. Many of these individuals felt that they were satisfied with using TTY’s or having a friend call for them. This device was similar to Video Relay Services, however it was a phone that had captioned text messages on it.

The most interesting issue related to the first Deaf Day was that the most controversial products were sCom’s UbiDuo and Interpreter. Many deaf people were uncomfortable with these products because they feared that they would replace interpreters. They haven’t; interpreters are still essential.

Compared to 2008, many vendors don’t even have the same names anymore. For example, HOVRS is now known as Purple VRS. Remember CSDVRS? It is now known as ZVRS. It seems now that these products are practically obsolete. Purple VRS has replaced the MVP with Purple P3 software that can be downloaded to any PC or MAC computer with a web cam.

Additionally, cell phones have become the major technology for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, as people now have the ability to make VRS calls through an interpreter in sign language.

Much has changed from the days when I grew up. Now technology for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing is improving constantly.

Join us for our second Deaf Day on July 28, as we explore what has changed, and learn how technology has improved to provide effective communication for over 28 million deaf and hard of hearing Americans.

See what’s happening online!

Go to http://www.rcil.org for more information on our services and advocacy or go to one of our social media pages below

http://www.facebook.com/rcilnys

http://www.youtube.com/rcilvideo
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In April of 2011, Angela found an apartment. Words cannot describe the emotions she felt; tears and joy completely overwhelmed her when she saw the apartment for the first time. This was not just a nice apartment. This was a place she could call her home. Thanks to Rochester Housing Authority, Heading Home, and ABW, Angela was able to move in less than a month.

Angela’s journey did not stop there. She had no furniture, no cookware, and no friends. With the help of Safe Journey, she got furniture and everything else she needed. HCR, a health care provider located in her complex, has been providing in-house assistance and making sure she has the support services she needs. Angela is now safer and happier in her new home. She still continues to use RCIL services.

Cap-Tel Products: Keeping Communication Easy

Although the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community is currently brimming with new technology to help them effectively communicate, the need for a simple telephone is still essential.

Captioned telephones, or Cap-Tel for short, are devices that allow people to read word-to-word messages on the telephone. Very similar to captioning on television, with Cap-Tel a user can listen and talk to another party while reading a live caption of their conversation. This product will benefit those who prefer to hear and speak with other callers while still reading and catching the words they miss.

For more information about Cap-Tel products, check out their website at http://www.captel.com/. If you prefer to use your cell phone to make phone calls, check out their web-based program at https://www.sprintcaptel.com/index.asp.

Not sure how to use Cap-Tel products? Do you have a used Cap-Tel product that you do not need anymore? If so, please call RCIL at (585) 442-6470 for assistance. RCIL always accepts donations of old technology, such as Cap-Tel products, for its TRAID closet.
Celebrating 5 Years  Continued from page 3
It’s easy to see that the change in location both literally and figuratively brought the two organizations, RCIL and CDR, together (AAY didn’t join the building until later, in 2008).

Not only did the move make communication and collaboration between the two logistically easier and more efficient, but Chris Hilderbrant, the Chief Operating Office at CDR, notes that it reinforced what’s really important: a relationship between the two organizations to work with each other to better serve the community together.

If you would like additional information about any of the services RCIL provides, call (585) 442-6470 to speak with an Independent Living Specialist.

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Questions? Contact Jenny Phillips at jphillips@cdrnys.org or (585) 546-7510
Select submissions will be featured and celebrated at the ADA Gala
Minimum contribution $10 per year.  
Membership year is November 1 – October 31.

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