Systems Advocate & IL Deaf Services Specialist Attend NAD Conference

The National Association for the Deaf (NAD) hosted their 52th biennial conference in Atlanta, Georgia from July 1-5th, 2014. NAD is the nation’s premier civil rights organization of, by and for, deaf and hard of hearing individuals in the United States. There were 1,250 attendees of all ages, from across the country. Dean DeRusso, Systems Advocate, and Catherine Stutzman, IL Deaf Services Specialist, were in attendance to learn more about the organization and how we can improve our services and advocacy.

Dean and Catherine attended various workshops, gaining insight and knowledge about the structure of NAD and how things are run. Dean’s focus was relating workshops he attended to his advocacy work for the Deaf community, regulations of the American with Disability Act (ADA), improving educational rights for the Deaf, and more. Catherine gained beneficial knowledge to help improve Deaf Services at RCIL. She was able to relate to others in attendance regarding her work and needs in the local Deaf community. They were also able to speak one-on-one with presenters of some of the workshops attended.

NAD focuses on accessibility and the rights of Deaf individuals. During the conference, each state association made proposals in regards to various concerns of human rights, focused primarily around the ADA. The task was then to prioritize what is important to focus and work on over the next
Dear Friends:

*Independent Times* provides our readers valuable information about RCIL programs and ongoing advocacy efforts – ensuring that people with disabilities can be independent and integrated in the community.

Our feature story this fall is written by our Deaf Systems Advocate and IL Deaf Services Specialist who traveled to Atlanta, Georgia in early July to participate in the National Association for the Deaf’s (NAD) national conference, and had plenty to share with our readers about their experience! Fall is right around the corner and that means Accessible “Trick-or-Treat” planning is well underway. Stay tuned for more details!

RCIL assists people of all ages and disabilities. Please contact us to learn how you can get involved!

Sincerely,

Bruce E. Darling
President/CEO

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**Highlight A Staff Member: Dean DeRusso**

Dean DeRusso has been a member of the RCIL family for 7 years. In that time he has been a tireless advocate for the Deaf community. There is no meeting, issue or protest that Dean is not willing to jump into the middle of. He is also the unofficial liaison between the Deaf community and Rochester ADAPT, creating multimedia that not only chronicles the work of ADAPT but explains complicated issues in easy to understand sign language. And speaking of sign language, Dean has placed himself in the position of being RCIL’s de facto American Sign Language ambassador, working with hearing staff throughout the agency on sign language skills. This helps all of us be the best advocates we can be in helping everyone who comes through our doors.

As our **Deaf Systems Advocate**, Dean works to change systematic barriers that the Deaf community faces. With that, Dean advocates on State and National levels to create change. Along with working with other statewide advocates on issues related to interpreters and employment, Dean also assists within organizations such as National Association of the Deaf (NAD) and the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL). He is currently a co-chair of the group that put together Rochester Deaf Awareness Week, a series of events in September, to promote Deaf culture to the Rochester hearing community.

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**YO! - Youth Own on the Big Screen!**

RCIL’s YO! - Youth Own group produced a video, **YO! - Youth Own - The Movie** this past Spring! We held our video premiere at our ADA event, Slam Poetry, Music & Arts Fest on July 15th at Boulder Coffee and the movie was shown on the big screen at the Cinema Theater on July 21st at our Film Festival! You can check out the video at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbHJ5yu6pYQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbHJ5yu6pYQ). Visit us on Facebook - [www.facebook.com/YouthOwn](http://www.facebook.com/YouthOwn) - to see pictures from the event and learn how you can get involved or join YO!
two years. This task sparked Dean’s interest in getting more involved in the Empire State Association for the Deaf, an organization for the protection of interests of the Deaf. He met advocates from all over who share similar experiences in working to improve Deaf services. Dean also took interest in the Council of Representatives (COR) that contains State Associations (SA) delegates who review the top 20 proposed priorities of NAD. The delegates then vote on the top five official priorities, of the 20 proposals received. This year the top five priorities selected were Education, Mental Health, FCC Regulations, Emergency Preparedness and Communication between NAD with the State Associations (SA). Overall the conference was a beneficial learning opportunity for both Dean and Catherine. Below is a quote from both Dean and Catherine regarding their takeaway from this experience.

“NAD conference was a great benefit for RCIL’s system advocacy department by bringing some new networks, resources and advocacy ideas. I am definitely looking forward to the next two years of how these NAD priorities will help our local deaf and hard of hearing community.”

--Dean DeRusso, Deaf Systems Advocate

“Meeting a variety of Deaf individuals was very rewarding and inspiring, a reminder that our work is extremely important in this community. I returned home with a better understanding of the need to be accountable for the Deaf community. After attending this conference, I have a greater knowledge of how I can make a difference and how to use this knowledge to better serve our RCIL community.”

--Catherine Stutzman, Deaf Services Specialist

**Important News and Info:**

**Upcoming RCIL Board Meeting:** Thursday, August 21, 2-4 pm, 497 State Street

Members are encouraged to attend! *Not a member? Wish to speak with the board?*

Contact Linda Taylor at (585) 442 - 6470 for assistance.

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