Fiscal Year 2021
1st Quarter Report
July 1, 2020 – September 30, 2020

Note – VDDHH did not release a FY20 Q4 report due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Executive Management
Statewide Interagency Team (SIT) comprises of four agencies, the VDDHH, the Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) and the Valley Community Service Board. The SIT has been reviewing and coding comments from all of the town hall meetings and categorizing them into different priorities. The ultimate goal is to release an updated ‘needs assessment’ report. SIT monthly meetings are now virtual meetings via Zoom platform.

VDDHH Advisory Board – Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there was no May or August meeting of the 9-member advisory board. Kathi Mestayer of Williamsburg, VA representation on the Advisory Board has expired on June 30, serving two terms (eight years). On September 11, Governor Northam appointed Karen Englehardt of Fairfax, VA as a Deaf or Hard of Hearing representative and reappointed Susi Wilbur (deaf representative) as well as Timothy Patterson (parent representative) to second terms. The November meeting will be held as a virtual meeting via Zoom platform.

Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association (VHHA) “Patients Come First” Podcast – The VHHA requested VDDHH to participate in a podcast session. The 20 minute podcast interview with the Director focused generally on deaf and hard of hearing patients’ access to the healthcare system and the challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic. The episode is available on www.vhha.com and VDDHH Facebook page.

Virginia Relay
Manager - For the interim, Director Raff continue to perform the duties of the Virginia Relay manager. Last August, the annual Consumer Complaint log has been filed with the Federal Communication Commission and posted on its website.
COVID Impact - Due to COVID-19, many of the Hamilton Relay communication assistants has transitioned working from call centers to home. The relay call volume has increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and initially, many communication assistants were not coming to the call centers which impacted the speed of answer. The Federal Communication Commission has waived the requirement to answer 85% of incoming calls within 10 seconds for captioned telephone calls and extended this waiver through the fall.

National Association of State Relay Administrators (NASRA) and Telecommunication Equipment Distribution Program Administrators (TEDPA) Virtual Conferences – The annual conferences scheduled to be held in Indianapolis was changed to a virtual conference via Zoom. Director Raff and a staff attended the NASRA conference whereas Director Raff and the two Technology Assistance Program (TAP) staff attended the TEDPA conference. Majority of the agenda dealt with the business meeting of the two organizations however there were some discussions about the trends in the relay and equipment distribution industry as well as Federal Communication Commission (FCC) activities.

Technology Assistance Program
Contracts with Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) Regional Specialists
Last Spring, VDDHH suspended the contracts due to COVID-19 pandemic. Director Raff was working with DARS procurement to finalize a contract modification to make some changes to service delivery due to the COVID19. Such changes include the suspension of exhibits at events, transition of training from classrooms to online webinars, and an emphasis on appointments at offices including other COVID-19 best practices were incorporated. All service providers signed the contract modification and services resumed on August 1st.

Preparing for resumption of services - VDDHH ordered Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) items including face shields, table plexiglass partition, and alcohol wipes and researched on what products to be used for sanitizing TAP equipment. VDDHH ordered and received protective covering for all current telecommunication equipment phones and Personal FM Systems and tested for a proper fit. This will mitigate risks for COVID-19 contamination during client assessment and training when using the equipment.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) Regional Specialists Updates - Completed three day training of the new Deaf /Hard of Hearing Specialist for Region 3 (Staunton area) and for Region 1 (Southwest Virginia). There is no longer group training as training is now individualized and keeping with the social distance guidelines. The contracted specialist for Region 6, South Central Virginia, has resigned. The specialist was an employee of the nonprofit Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Center, Inc. (DHHSC) and had worked with VDDHH since 2007 for thirteen (13) years. DHHSC has been advertising two job vacancies to ensure service continuity.

Interpreter Services Program (ISP)
Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) Assessments Resume - The VQAS resumed administration of the Performance Assessment on a phased-in basis last August (three phases). To do this, the test rooms were reconfigured to ensure social distancing and brought the candidates immediately to the test room upon arrival to limit their time in the public spaces. The test administrator (a contractor) disinfects each test room between candidates. We have
also requested that candidates cancel if they have been experiencing any symptoms of COVID19 or have been in contact with someone who has been diagnosed. The full plan and protocols for the return to testing were posted on the VDDHH website and sent to candidates.

Phase 1 candidates are those who had registered or been scheduled prior to the suspension of testing on March 13, 2020. Phase 2 candidates are those whose current VQAS Levels expired or would expire between May 1, 2020 and August 31, 2020. Phase 3 candidates are those who current VQAS levels would expire before January 31, 2021. Any Candidate will have that level extended until 90 working days after they test if they register and complete the assessment within the Resumption Plan guidelines. The plan to return to Written Assessment registration and administration is underway as well.

**Shift from DVD to YouTube Rating**

Virginia Quality Assurance Screening (VQAS) rating has historically been handled via DVDs sent to raters through UPS and returned the same way. In an effort to handle the increased volume of testing over several months while improving the completion rates of results, VDDHH is using a non-searchable private YouTube Channel to submit materials to raters. This format was implemented when assessments began in August. Streamlining these processes saved postage costs and enabled a faster turnaround time.

**Department of Education (DOE) Grant Budget Submitted**

The ISP Manager and VQAS Coordinator reviewed the current DOE grant to identify those activities which will not be completed by October 1 due to COVID-19 and developed a baseline proposal for the FFY20-21 grant funding. The ISP Manager worked with DOE to amend the current grant to use funds intended for onsite training and materials development (both activities affected by COVID-19). Those funds were used for a contractor to administer the VQAS Performance Assessment.

**Community Services**

**Spanish Translation Services**

VDDHH is striving to be more accessible to Spanish-speaking populations who may be deaf or hard of hearing. Virginia Relay and Technology Assistance Program promotional materials are being translated whereas some applications and forms are under review. Some of the Information & Referral information packets are also being translated and also under review. In anticipation of incoming Spanish speaking contacts, we have opened an account with a state vendor to provide written and telephone translation services.

**I-CAN! Virginia Project** - VDDHH is a collaborative partner with VCU Partnership for People with Disabilities who have been promoting domestic violence awareness. The Ensuring Accessibility to All Survivors project released the video "Resources for Survivors who are d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing in Virginia" about abuse and the resources available for support in American Sign Language and captioning. Click on the link to view - [https://youtu.be/OM4LxKmzilg](https://youtu.be/OM4LxKmzilg)  VDDHH provided the backend support to edit the video clips, added captioning, and made corrections requested by the I-CAN! Virginia per their feedback.