

My name is Keri Darling, I was born, raised and will be buried in Vermont. ☺
I was mainstreamed all my life and it was a constant struggle, no one really understanding where I was coming from, it is hard when people assume because I can talk that I can hear, I faked a lot growing up, people thinking I was understanding everything when really I wasn't.... this is so true for all kids who are HOH in mainstream settings right now, they are NOT getting everything even though they like you to believe that. Back when I was first diagnosed, I wish my parents had someone who could tell them what their choices are and I wish my parents could have chosen a deaf school. There is a need for services for 0-3 of giving ALL options to parents not biased opinions. Nine East employees do not give all the options and do not do it in unbiased way, so this is unfair to the children and their parents seeking answers and help, there is no communication or collaborating with the deaf professionals who often have been where those kids are now and know what it feels like and know how it can be better. How are they (nine east) really helping these deaf children.

I attended RIT for college because they had a good program for providing different accommodations etc... What an eye opening experience that was. It was there I learned sign language, I started using interpreters, I learned about Deaf culture and realized how much I missed out on growing up. I feel bad for the kids in mainstream settings going through what I went through and not knowing there is something better out there, an identity, friends who understand you, a beautiful language, confidence in who they are and acceptance of who they are too.

There is a need for oversight of interpreters in Vermont, there is a general need for more interpreters but also for those who are interpreting now in education setting, are they really skilled to do what they are doing, how do schools know what is best for the Deaf children if they cannot communicate with them and they often put the interpreters in dual roles which is a conflict! There is no system set up for screening interpreters and figuring out their skill level nothing that makes them improve their skills and the deaf children are suffering because of that... they aren't accessing everything like other children are which takes away their rights. Ideally if there are any children in the school system that use sign language they should be in a deaf program or deaf school.

I have been providing advocacy services for the whole state of Vermont since 1997. Since 2000 I have been focused on more systems advocacy in the criminal justice system and individual advocacy on victims who are abused.... I don't know if you realize this but Deaf victims will stay in an abusive relationship because they have communication and are understood, that is why I built DVAS, I know Deaf will not go to hearing providers for help, they will not be understood and I wanted to stop the cycle of violence. There is a need for training and education for judges, courts, police, EMT, and anyone else who comes in contact with Deaf. Because there are not a lot of services for deaf people in Vermont, people tend to come to me for general advocacy issues (for example the most common problem in Vermont related to advocacy and access – hearing providers whether it is schools, police, court,

whoever don't hire interpreters which they are responsible to do according to the ADA federal law...., abuse victims are my priority but I will help others because there is nothing else available to them... I can't keep doing this, I can't do it alone. There is a strong need for casemanagement services for the many Deaf individuals and Deaf who have other disabilities called Deaf Plus who live in Vermont.... I find myself doing case management with my clients because there is nothing available right now for them and because the hearing service providers don't know what to do or don't know about deaf culture and deaf needs and barriers. There are some hearing service providers who say they are serving the deaf community, but are they really? They aren't asking deaf professionals to be on their committees or asking us for our expertise. We know there are some obvious gaps such as not enough interpreters and not enough qualified interpreters, not enough close caption access at movies, not enough counselors who can communicate with deaf people without interpreters, No AA accessible services, not enough advocacy, on individual or systems level, not enough accessible information, this means written or typed materials like newspapers, brochures, magazines, etc... all of this information really should be at a 5th grade level of understanding for reading and comprehension, these are just a few gaps or barriers, there are many many more.

There is a need for centralized location... a "one stop shop" ... If there could be a committee that will investigate and decide what different services such as interpreter services, case management, training and outreach, independent living skills... this would help close the gaps and barriers that face Deaf Vermonters. The biggest need right now is to have a committee developed... they will be able to do assessments and focus groups and surveys to find out what is needed in Vermont for the deaf community... This could mean there are opportunities of grants that might fit those particular needs and help pay for staffing in the future, especially if we can prove there is a need.

41 other states have commission for deaf and hard of hearing in their states and why don't you look at the fact that Vermont is a small state which often is a leader in current events and issues and there are other states that are smaller and they have a commission...but Vermont doesn't.

Please research the other states that have commissions and see the success they have and how it helps the community.

Can you find it in your heart to say "Yes the deaf children and community needs something more", why don't we start with the bill of rights for deaf children and this committee and go from there... thank you for your time and energy on this issue.