

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jill Van Calster, President and CEO

Email: JVanCalster@hearwi.org

Office: (414) 604-7201

Mobile: (262) 617-3581 (please do not publish this phone number)



Nonprofit Adapts to Provide Essential Services during COVID-19

HEAR Wisconsin Offers TeleIntervention, TeleHealth, and Critical Appointments

WEST ALLIS, WI, April 2020 – Our community is facing unprecedented times and asking the question, “What is essential?” No question, food, shelter, financial assistance during layoffs/furloughs, and access to healthcare are essential. But, what about access to hearing healthcare?

The ability to hear is a sense that many of us take for granted. We can readily communicate with family, friends, and physicians in person or over the phone. We do not require interpreters to be present during these potentially personal and private moments. We don’t have to worry about our hearing aid malfunctioning or batteries dying. We can hear our alarm clocks go off in the morning or a fire alarm sounding to alert us we need to exit a building.

For people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability, HEAR Wisconsin, a statewide organization, provides audiology services, an assistive technology store, speech-language therapy, and American Sign Language and Spanish interpreters to ensure all have independent, safe, and full lives.

HEAR Wisconsin, like many local nonprofits, has adapted their practices to ensure essential services continue during this pandemic.

With 13 years of TeleIntervention experience and as the nation’s first TeleIntervention provider, HEAR Wisconsin’s Kellogg Child & Family Program transitioned all auditory-verbal therapy sessions to TeleIntervention. Although TeleIntervention experience was originally intended for families in rural areas with limited access to therapists, HEAR Wisconsin therapists

are now staying in touch via TeleIntervention with local families to make sure their children stay on track for language, communication and cognitive development so they can be on par with hearing peers as they enter kindergarten. Language learning kits to help facilitate language development are provided to some families from low-income households that may not have appropriate toys and books for the sessions. As one mom said about TeleIntervention, “it equipped me, my child’s number one therapist, with the tools and strategies to work on my child’s auditory and listening skills in our daily lives all week long.”

Client families are not the only ones counting on HEAR Wisconsin. Three weeks ago, a patient arrived at HEAR Wisconsin two hours early for his emergency audiology appointment. When the patient was asked why, he stated he had to take several buses to make sure there was no issue getting to HEAR Wisconsin. He was thankful that that the facility remained open for emergencies. His broken hearing aid was his only access to hearing and communicating with family and friends during the “Safer at Home” order.

HEAR Wisconsin’s Kay Eckstein Speech and Hearing Center is providing integrated hearing healthcare for clients needing audiology services and/or consultation services for assistive technology equipment to be used in the home, work, or other environments. The team includes a doctor of audiology and three technology consultants. They work together to determine what works best for the clients based on their hearing loss and communication needs. The assistive technology store continues to help people apply for TEPP Vouchers to purchase an iPad, iPhone, Android, amplified/captioned phone, or other devices at a reduced cost so they remain in contact with family, friends, and physicians, during the pandemic.

HEAR Wisconsin’s Community Access for Deaf Program team supports adults who are deaf and have developmental disabilities and/or medical issues. The Program Coordinator, fluent in American Sign Language, works with clients in areas of daily living skills, literacy, communication skills and job coaching. HEAR Wisconsin’s program, in existence for 14 years, is

the only one in the state that specifically works with this population. For many clients, HEAR Wisconsin staff is their only advocate and resource during this pandemic.

If you are in need of hearing healthcare support during COVID-19, please contact HEAR Wisconsin at 414-604-2200. For technology consultations and TEPP Voucher questions, please contact Laurie Flores at LFlores@hearwi.org or 414-604-2200. If you require Sign Language or Spanish interpreters, please contact CommLink, a division of HEAR Wisconsin, at 414-604-7231 or info@commlinkasl.com

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HEAR Wisconsin is the most comprehensive nonprofit hearing healthcare provider in the state. For 94 years, this statewide organization has been providing vital services to an underserved, under-resourced population – babies, families, the young, and the young at heart who are deaf or hard of hearing or have speech disability. HEAR Wisconsin has been an agency partner with United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County for 74 years.