



JULY/AUGUST 2006

# The Family Support Connection FOCUS

—for families with kids who are deaf or hard of hearing—

## Overcoming the unheard shout

By Audrey Alwell

The first time my daughter ran into the street as a toddler I realized the true challenge of parenting a child with hearing loss: you can't shout a warning. What initially seemed an insurmountable problem has become a source of creative ideas over the years to get our daughter's attention and keep her safe.

Scooping up my toddler, legs still kicking from her dash into the street, I told my husband we should install an Invisible Fence like for dogs to contain her. We both laughed at the idea. But later, out of breath from yet another sprint to rescue my girl from harm's way, I decided to call the manufacturer to see if they made a product that might help. I had a bit of trouble trying to explain that I wanted something for a child, not a dog. When the sales rep finally understood, he said, "If it shocked her, wouldn't she just pull the collar off?" Oops, I'd forgotten she has opposable thumbs.

Of course, we could have put up a normal fence around the yard, but, it wasn't just at home that I was forced to run my daughter down to protect her. Once, after I had dashed across a playground to catch her before a swing would have flattened her, another mom said with awe, "Wow, you have to be in really good shape to take care of her, don't you?"

Not interested in being an Olympic sprinter, I continued to search for a product that would signal my girl to stop and look at me for direction. We tried using a two-part alarm that beeped when she moved too far from me. It helped me know when to start sprinting, but it didn't alert her to any danger. So, we got one that vibrated to signal her, but the device was so big it nearly pulled off her pants when she wore it. There must be something better now, but, 13 years ago, we were out of luck.

At home now, we rely on aim rather than speed to get our daughter's attention — when switching the lights won't work, we toss things in her field of vision. I'm constantly weighing the value of some nearby object in relation to my need to get her attention. We also have alerting devices connected to lamps and a vibrating bed alarm. We keep the doorbell transmitter for the alerting devices in the kitchen and press that to call her to dinner or chores. Even still, we're trying to come up with creative methods to replace the unheard shout.

## Extra safety issues face child with hearing loss

By Audrey Alwell, FOCUS Editor

No parent wants to contemplate all the dangers that could befall a child. But the reality is that parents need to be aware in order to arm their kids to face an often dangerous world — one that can be even more risky for a child who has hearing loss. While most safety resources (like McGruff), apply equally to hearing or deaf kids, extra safety concerns arise when a child can't hear.

According to statistics from the Minnesota Department of Health, children who have disabilities are 2 to 4 times more likely to be maltreated than their non-disabled peers. One reason cited is that perpetrators view this group as unable to communicate.

So the first rule of safety is to teach your child how to communicate so he or she can tell you if something happens. According to Gavin DeBecker, author of "Protecting the Gift," kids need to be able to name their body parts if they're going to be able to talk about them.

In his book, DeBecker also gives tips for keeping a child safe in a crowd, such as a mall or amusement park. His suggestions: dress them in bright, easily described clothes, and, plan a meeting place in case you become separated. To that, I'd add consider using a leash (one made for kids, not dogs). We had one with velcro on the ends to loop to clothes or wrists so our daughter wouldn't worry about getting lost, which can happen in a blink.

Bicycle safety is another area that can be more challenging for a child with hearing loss. Installing a mirror on the bike's handlebars helps the child know when cars approach from behind.

The Internet, web cams and instant messaging have brought a new level of safety concern to parents everywhere. Since children and teens with hearing loss often use these tools more than their hearing peers, they are especially vulnerable to the dangers. The Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf is teaching Internet safety to students there using a curriculum called "i-Safe." The school's strategy is featured in the current issue of the American Society for Deaf Children's newsletter *Endeavor*. The i-Safe program is described at [www.isafe.org](http://www.isafe.org).

### Helpful resources for teaching about safety

In addition to the materials Robin mentions in *Off the Shelf* (Page 6), these resources can help you teach your child strategies for staying safe.

Captioned Media Program ([www.cfv.org](http://www.cfv.org)) has many videos, some viewable on the Internet, about safety issues ranging from first aid to kids home alone. Like most titles, "Bike Safety with Bill Nye the Science Guy" teaches kids safety recommendations in a fun format. To find titles on the website, click on "Search CMP Catalog" from the column on the left side of the page.

PACER has a booklet for \$6, "Beyond Sticks and Stones," that offers practical information especially for kids with disabilities on how to prevent bullying. Their new website, [www.pacerkidsagainstabullying.org](http://www.pacerkidsagainstabullying.org), uses animation, games, and more to help 2nd through 6th graders learn about bullying, how to respond to it, and how to prevent it.

HiP Publishing in the late '90s produced brightly colored booklets on safety issues specifically for kids with hearing loss. The booklets now are available through Harris Communications, [www.harriscomm.com](http://www.harriscomm.com), or 800-825-6758(v), -9187(tty).

McGruff, the leading child safety program in the US, has loads of materials on safety issues at the website [www.mcgruff.org](http://www.mcgruff.org) or through your local police station.

## What's Happening Around Town

- Sunday, Aug. 6** An ASL-interpreted tour of "The Surreal Calder" begins at 2 p.m. in the lobby of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. This exhibit (special fee charged) traces the work and inspiration of Alexander Calder, the modernist famous for his "mobiles." For details, call Visitor and Member Services at 612-870-3131 (v) or -3132 (tty) or e-mail [dhegstro@artsmia.org](mailto:dhegstro@artsmia.org).
- Aug. 8 & Aug. 15** The free Summer Reading Program is ASL-interpreted at 2 p.m. Tuesdays at Merriam Park Library, 1831 Marshall Ave. in St. Paul (across from Thompson Hall Deaf Club).  
August 8—The Banjo Dancers  
August 15—Brodini Comedy Magic Show
- Thursday, Aug. 10** Make friends at our Annual Family Picnic at Como Park Pavilion from 5 to 8:30 p.m. We provide dinner at 5:30 p.m. as well as face painting, games and activities. See the story on Page 3 plus the attached flyer for details.
- Aug. 11-13** Camp & Cue at Lebanon Hills in Eagan. Camp with your family or just come for the Saturday night party around the campfire with s'mores. For information about reserving a campsite, contact Mary Stadelman at [mstadelman@earthlink.net](mailto:mstadelman@earthlink.net).
- Tuesday, Aug. 15** Practice Cue Clutch meets from 6:30 to 8 p.m. at Java Jacks, 818 W. 46th St. in Minneapolis. Meet CSAM Board members and others for directed activities to increase cueing fluency. For more information, contact Katherine Burns-Christenson at 952-929-3965 or e-mail [kbc29@aol.com](mailto:kbc29@aol.com).
- Saturday, Aug. 19** Deaf Day at Valleyfair in Shakopee goes from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Cost is \$21, \$10 for those under 48" tall, or free for ages 2 and under. Purchase tickets that day at Valleyfair's group sales window or avoid lines at Valleyfair by buying tickets in advance at CSD of Minnesota, 2055 Rice St. in St. Paul during business hours. For more information, contact Jessalyn Frank at 651-487-8872 TTY or e-mail [jfrank@c-s-d.org](mailto:jfrank@c-s-d.org).
- Aug. 22-24** Basketball Camp for kids ages 6 to 14 who are deaf or hard of hearing plus their hearing siblings takes place from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at Linwood Recreation Center in St. Paul. Cost is \$35 and includes T-shirt. Sponsored by CSD and St. Paul Parks and Recreation. Register by Aug. 16 with Mary Livingston at 651-266-6366 (v), 651-266-6378 (tty), or e-mail [Mary.Livingston@ci.stpaul.mn.us](mailto:Mary.Livingston@ci.stpaul.mn.us).
- Saturday, Aug. 25** Play & Cue for kids and parents to practice cueing while socializing meets from 10 a.m. to noon at Staring Lake Park in Eden Prairie. In case of rain, meet at McDonald's Playland, 598 Prairie Center Drive. For more information, contact Katherine Burns-Christenson at 952-929-3965 or e-mail [kbc29@aol.com](mailto:kbc29@aol.com).
- Sept. 18-20** "Deaf and Hard of Hearing Adolescents: Leaving No One Behind," a conference co-sponsored by Gallaudet University, takes place in Memphis. For information, see [www.flagler.edu/about\\_f/gallaudet.html](http://www.flagler.edu/about_f/gallaudet.html).
- Sept. 30** Carolyn Anderson of PACER discusses changes to IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) that affect children who are deaf or hard of hearing in a free workshop from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Lifetrack Resources.



## ASL-Interpreted Performances

### **The Wizard of Oz**

Saturday, Aug. 5, 7:30 p.m.  
Tickets are \$8; \$6 students & seniors  
North High School Auditorium, 2416 East 11th Ave., North St. Paul.  
For more information, leave a message with the Theatre Performance Hotline at 651-748-6090 and your call will be returned.

### **Minnesota Fringe Festival: Honk! Junior**

Tuesday, Aug. 8, 7 p.m.  
Tickets: 651-209-6799 or [www.uptowntix.com](http://www.uptowntix.com)  
Rarig Center Proscenium Theatre, University of Minnesota, 330 S. 21st Ave.; [www.fringefestival.org](http://www.fringefestival.org)

### **The Great Gatsby**

Fridays, Aug. 18 & 24: 7:30 p.m.  
Tickets: Reduced to \$16; 612-377-2224, 612-377-6626 (tty)  
Guthrie Theater, Minneapolis; [www.guthrietheater.org](http://www.guthrietheater.org)

### **Minnesota State Fair**

Aug. 24 - Sept. 4  
Request ASL interpreters for State Fair Grandstand Shows two weeks in advance: 651-642-2262 or 651-642-2442 (tty) or e-mail [tickets@mnstatefair.org](mailto:tickets@mnstatefair.org).  
ASL roving interpreters are available to assist guests from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily, and a number of events will be interpreted daily. See the schedule at [www.mnstatefair.org](http://www.mnstatefair.org).

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[www.familysupportconnection.org](http://www.familysupportconnection.org)

Our mission is to build better lives for children who are deaf or hard of hearing by providing parent-to-parent support.

Newsletter Editor: Audrey Alwell

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## In Your Corner

By Candace Lindow-Davies, Family Support Coordinator

Summer is in full swing now. The kids are busy with activities, maybe you have a vacation planned or have had a nice break already. Either way, I hope you have found a way to keep cool, keep the hearing aids or cochlear implants out of the pool and sand, and are enjoying all that this time of year brings.

Here at the Family Support Connection, we have been busy. It seems like we have had more referrals this summer than ever before. (So much for our "slow" season!) But that's all right. We are always eager to reach out to new families and connect them with resources and other families.

We are so pleased to be able to bring back wonderful information from the National Hands & Voices Leadership Conference that took place July 20 - 22 near Estes Park, Colorado. Last year, 30 representatives came to the conference. This year, we had over 60 participants. What is even more exciting is that 30 states are in some stage of developing a Hands & Voices Chapter! (There are 16 established chapters at this time.)

We've been working with the national organization from the ground floor, and were honored to be asked to co-present two of the breakout sessions this year, "Supporting Families Without Bias" and "Parent Leadership." More states are planning to develop a "Guide By Your Side" program like the one we have created here in Minnesota.

Speakers, such as Christine Yoshinago-Itano, Cheryl DeConde Johnson and Mary Koch, brought us current on issues and research, while we made valuable connections with other state chapters. There is so much benefit from sharing support strategies across the country and unifying our effort to ensure families have access to the full range of choices for their child who is deaf or hard of hearing. There was not a dry eye in the room as we closed the conference with a heart-felt emotional call to action by Leanne Seaver and Janet DesGeorges, our national leaders. This is such great work to be doing and such an incredible time to be doing it.

We hope you plan to come to our Family Picnic on Thursday, August 10 at Como Park. It's a perfect opportunity to connect with other parents and children who are traveling a similar life path. We have some new activities planned: Miss Deaf Minnesota coming to present and mingle with the kids, and we have GREAT door prizes. How about 4 tickets to a Saints game? Or an autographed picture from a Vikings player? Free meal at a local restaurant? Please let us know by Aug. 7 if you'll be there, so we can order the right amount of food.

Enjoy the rest of your summer. And, as always, let us know if we can help you in any way.

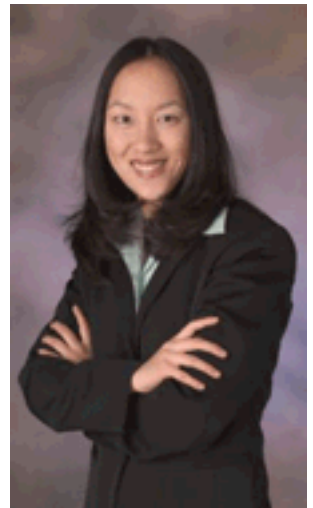


## Miss Deaf Minnesota among friends invited to our annual Family Picnic Aug. 10

Taiya Getman, Miss Deaf Minnesota 2005-2007, will join us at our annual Family Picnic Aug. 10.

Taiya recently competed in the Miss Deaf America pageant during the 2006 National Association of the Deaf conference in Palm Desert, California. Her platform is helping deaf citizens in third-world countries.

Taiya is the daughter of Tim and Mary Getman of Cannon Falls. She is a 2002 graduate of Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf. She received an Associate of Arts degree from Rochester Community and Technical College this year, and plans to attend Metropolitan State University this fall, majoring in ASL Education and Ethic Studies.



Taiya has a history of volunteerism that includes sharing her ASL skills with new signers at Barnes and Noble in Rochester and with student-interpreters at the Deaf Culture Immersion Camp.

Our Family Picnic for families with children who are deaf or hard of hearing takes place from 5 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 10 at Como Park Pavilion in St. Paul. A map is included with the attached flyer.

**This year's Family Picnic will feature some amazing door prizes.** Along with tickets to a Saints baseball game, we have dozens of free offers from restaurants, salons and more. Thanks to these generous donors: Arby's, Big Apple Bagels, Kids Hair, Kwik-Trip, Nails 1st, Noodles and Company, Perkins, Pizza Hut, Rainbow Foods, Saints Baseball Team, Taco Bell, Valspar, Video Update, and Von Hanson's Meats.

## Council seeks parent participation

The Governor's Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) is looking for a parent of a child with hearing loss to make a difference by serving on the council.

"What you have to offer is the truth about what is happening in your life: confusion, frustration, joy, loss and everything in between," explained Dawn Bly, ICC Chair. "Please consider sharing these truths to make a difference for all special needs children in Minnesota."

The council's duties include recommending policies to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated interagency system of early intervention services for children with disabilities under age five and their families. The council currently is involved in fact-finding regarding state agencies, functions, and resources for early intervention. Additional information regarding the ICC is available at [www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/stats/125A/28.html](http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/stats/125A/28.html).

Members of the ICC get a per diem of \$55 plus travel expenses and child care cost. For more about how to become a member of the ICC, e-mail [Barbara.Osullivan@state.mn.us](mailto:Barbara.Osullivan@state.mn.us) or complete an application at [www.yourlink.org/2006\\_spring/pdf/Open\\_Appointments\\_Application.pdf](http://www.yourlink.org/2006_spring/pdf/Open_Appointments_Application.pdf).



## The View from Here

The Morrison County Record recently featured a story about Brenda Hommerding's new job as a Parent Guide for the Family Support Connection. The story explains Brenda's background —she and her daughters all have hearing loss. It also does a great job of describing the role of our Parent Guides. You can read the news article at [www.mcrecord.com](http://www.mcrecord.com) (type Lifetrack in the search box).

### Retreat offered in Central Minnesota

Topics specific to hearing loss are on the agenda for the 2006 Reason For Hope Retreat, Nov. 10-11 at the Holiday Inn in St. Cloud.

The weekend retreat is for parents and caregivers of children who have any disability, however, Brenda Hommerding, East/West Central Parent Guide, points out there's also a hearing loss focus. Diane Leonard of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services in St. Cloud and a teacher of the deaf are among the presenters.

For details, see [www.reasonforhoperetreat.org](http://www.reasonforhoperetreat.org).

## Study to help kids from Spanish-speaking homes

Children up to age 6 who have cochlear implants and come from Spanish-speaking families are needed for a study by the University of Minnesota Department of Speech-Language-Hearing Sciences.

The principle investigators are Kathryn Kohnert, PhD, Associate Professor, and Kristina Blaiser, doctoral student and speech-language pathologist. They are researching how group therapy affects auditory and vocalization skills in children with cochlear implants in bilingual homes.

Study participants will have eight weeks of group therapy. Children and parents will be asked to interact in free play and small group activities. Group leaders are nationally certified speech-language pathologists with specialization in hearing loss and/or fluency in Spanish. Children will be given small prizes (such as stickers) as reinforcers. Free parking is available at the clinic.

If you know of a Spanish-speaking family that can participate in this research opportunity, call 612-626-4733.

**Arizona State University has received a \$200,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to develop a microscale digital hearing aid that will be more comfortable and have better sound quality and battery life.**

## Parent advocates for hearing aid coverage

By Candace Lindow-Davies, Family Support Coordinator

Nicole and David Mathes of St. Paul know all too well how much hearing aids cost. They have two young children with hearing loss. The bill for two sets of aids: \$12,000.

The Mathes were fortunate enough to have primary coverage from David's employer while Nicole's employer was a secondary insurer. At the time of the initial diagnosis, Nicole was working for another employer, not the huge Minnesota-based electronics company, Best Buy, where she works now. David's insurance coverage was 80/20 for hearing aids, which still meant the family had to contribute \$2,000 towards the expense...times 2 boys...every three years.

At first, the family just came up with the \$2,000 for their oldest son, not knowing that there was any other way to get help or to question the coverage. They didn't realize they had the right to appeal the company's decision. And, at that time, Minnesota had not yet passed the Hearing Aid Legislation that requires non-self-insured employers to cover children under the age of 18 who have congenital (from birth) hearing loss.

When time came to file a claim for their younger son, the boys' audiologist warned Nicole that Medica might refuse paying because they tended not to cover specific brands of hearing aids. And her sons needed high-end digital aids. They submitted their claim with Medica under Nicole's new employer, Best Buy, and later received a denial.

Nicole did not take "no" for an answer this time. She went to Minnesota Commission Serving Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals (MCDHH) and sought the guidance of the director, Mary Hartnett. Mary led them to the hearing aid appeals information packet created by Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHHS).

Nicole drafted a letter. Mary reviewed it, and Nicole sent it to her insurer along with all the supporting documentation she could: the boy's audiograms, Nicole's testimony on behalf of mandating Newborn Hearing Screening in the state, Nicole's "Parent Welcome Letter" to newly diagnosed families through a project at the Family Support Connection, recommendations from their ENT...in all, 30 pages of supporting materials. She sent it in this past February.

In May, Nicole and David heard back—their boys' hearing aids would be covered. Not only that, all four Best Buy health plans would start covering hearing aids for children in 2007. This means that 105,000 Best Buy workers, both retail and corporate, will have coverage for their children.

"Never give up," Nicole advises other parents. "You can always appeal the insurance company's decision, appeal again, and go different channels. I wasn't going to stop until we had coverage."

Nicole is not alone. Audrey Alwell, our newsletter editor, had a similar experience five years ago when her daughter received a cochlear implant which wasn't covered. Audrey petitioned the family's insurer, and ended up getting the policy changed for all beneficiaries. Amy Deneen, our Southeast Parent Guide, also appealed her employer's health plan coverage and won. This just shows how we can harness the power of parents to make incredible changes for our youth who are deaf and hard of hearing.

As for Nicole, she has not stopped advocating for new issues. The Family Support Connection is proud to have her serving as a member of our Parent/Professional Advisory Committee. After all, she's already moved mountains.

## Oticon set to honor deaf

Nominations are being taken now through Sept. 15 for the ninth annual Oticon Focus on People Awards.

Winners receive a \$1,000 award and a \$1,000 donation by Oticon to the not-for-profit cause of their choice. Nominees must be people with a hearing loss who serve as role models through accomplishments and contributions. Categories are students ages 6-21, adults, advocates for hearing loss, and practitioners (the only category that does not need to be an individual who has hearing loss).

Three winners in each category will be announced at the Oticon Human Link Conference in the Fall. Awards will be \$1,000, \$500 and \$250 for first, second and third places.

For nomination forms, see [www.oticonus.com](http://www.oticonus.com).

## Deaf pastor runs for office

Rev. Emory Dively has announced he's running for the State House of Representatives this fall.

Dively will challenge Rep. Michael Paymar, DFL-St. Paul, who was first elected a decade ago. Dively opposes tax increases and supports light-rail transit for St. Paul and better services for the deaf. He is the Republican-endorsed Candidate for the House of Representatives for District 64B (Highland Park and Macalester/Groveland).

Dively is the pastor of Twin Cities Deaf Assemblies of God and actively involved in local politics and the community. Born deaf, he attended Michigan's state school for the deaf and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in Rochester, New York, where he earned his Bachelor's Degree in Social Working. He went on to be the first deaf person to graduate with a Master's Degree from the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary in Springfield, Mo. Learn more at [www.emorydively.com](http://www.emorydively.com).

## Clerc center seeks input

The Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center at Gallaudet University will hold "Stakeholder Input Meetings" to help chart the future of education for deaf and hard of hearing students. The first will be Nov. 6-7 in Washington, D.C. For a complete schedule and more details, see <http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/newsandnotables/stakeholder.html>.



## A Little Grin

By Melissa McNamer

From very early on, my hard-of-hearing son has been very aware of his surroundings and interested in the mechanics of how things work—much more than his older hearing sister ever was. For that reason, we started focusing on safety in our home at a very early age with him, covering electrical outlets and locking cabinets.

But, while doing a home improvement project where an area was stripped down to the 2x4s with exposed wiring, we found it challenging to keep the kids out of the area. We'd specifically pointed out the exposed electrical wires and told both of them to stay away. Still, the inevitable happened. Our backs were turned for two quick seconds. Our 2-year-old son touched a wire and started crying. I checked him over and he was okay. When I asked him if it went "bzzzzz" on his finger, he nodded.

From then on, whenever he noticed that particular box he'd point and say "bzzzzz." And, he's stayed away from all the outlets ever since.

## Students' book wins Reading Rainbow award

Four second-grade students from Holmen, Wisc. have won an award in the Reading Rainbow contest for writing "The Hard of Hearing Book."

Their 10-page book explains what it is, how they sign or read lips and how they can do some things like everyone else, and others they might do differently because of their hearing loss. The book won a Judge's Award in the Second Grade category in the Wisconsin Public Television's Reading Rainbow Young Writers and Illustrators contest. It was chosen from among 420 entries in the state.

## Lawsuit pushes captions for DVD bonus features

Everyone who's ever watched a DVD and felt cheated because the bonus materials weren't captioned has cause to celebrate the results of a class-action lawsuit over the non-captioning of DVD "extras."

"Boltz v. Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Inc. et al." alleged that movie distributors misled the public by stating on packaging that DVDs were captioned when in reality only the main feature was captioned. The lawsuit targeted 10 of Hollywood's biggest studios, which have denied liability but agreed to settle the suit to avoid litigation.

Under settlement terms, which awaits final approval in August, the companies agree to caption bonus material on DVDs over the next five years and pay \$275,000 to non-profits serving the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. To review the ruling, see [www.dvdclabelingclasssettlement.com](http://www.dvdclabelingclasssettlement.com).

## Deaf driver enters TV race

A Sioux Falls resident who is deaf is one of 50 stock racing drivers competing for a chance to be on Racin' for a Livin,' a new TV reality show.

Greg Gunderson is the only deaf driver participating. He is a third-generation driver with 14 years of experience. Greg's website is [gundersonracing.com](http://gundersonracing.com).

The show's website, [www.racinaforalivin.com](http://www.racinaforalivin.com), details the show's format and lists potential drivers. The final 12 will be selected July 31, based on Internet votes. Wildcard slots can be voted on until Aug. 15.

The show, which is in network negotiations, will feature top broadcasters, drivers, and crew chiefs as the judges when the driving competition begins with the top twelve rookies in fall 2006. One driver will be eliminated in each episode. Internet voters will decide who stays and who goes.

The entire series will be broadcast on [RacinforaLivin.com](http://RacinforaLivin.com) using the latest Internet Television technology.

## Youth group goes to camp

DeafTeen Quest youth group is offering transportation for teens interested in attending the Midwest Deaf Camp Aug. 18-23 at Spencer Lake Christian Center in Wisc. Camp costs \$120. For registration information, e-mail [COHDeafOutreach@aol.com](mailto:COHDeafOutreach@aol.com) by Aug. 5.



## Off the Shelf

By Robin Coninx, FSC Specialist

For families with younger children, our library has a couple of resources that can help them learn about safety.

The first one is a video/activity book combination: "Be cool, play it safe!" Host Michael Mish and his canine assistant, Gracie, show kids how cool it is to be safe. Together they address the issues of bicycle & pedestrian safety, dog bite prevention and more. The video is done in ASL and voice.

The second video is "Saying No to Strangers." This video is in ASL with voice-over and talks about basic safety issues including walking home from school.

Feel free to contact us at: [fsc@lifetrackresources.org](mailto:fsc@lifetrackresources.org) or toll-free at: 866-dhohkid (v) for these or other library resources you may want to check out.

## Software makes it easy to build vocabulary

News is coming out of some schools for the deaf in eastern states that their students are becoming better readers by playing around with a new software program called the Visual Thesaurus.

The Visual Thesaurus is an interactive dictionary and thesaurus that helps users find more precise word choices. Type in a word and a web of related words and their meanings pops up. Teachers have been using the software to build students' vocabularies. The software also has an auditory component that provides correct word pronunciation.

Visual Thesaurus is available as a software package for about \$40. The online version, which is \$20 a year, comes with a subscription to an online magazine about writing, plus access to five other language versions. To try or buy the program, see [www.visualthesaurus.com](http://www.visualthesaurus.com).

## Implant center gets grant to continue advances

The University of Iowa's Cochlear Implant Clinical Research Center recently picked up a \$10 million federal grant to continue research on improvements for cochlear implants.

With this grant, the center's funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) totals \$38 million over 25 years. This funding has allowed researchers to reach several goals, including the development of the "hybrid" cochlear implant that helps people with partial hearing hear better in loud environments.

The hybrid implant uses electrical perception of high-frequency sounds while preserving a person's residual hearing of low-frequency sounds. The hybrid implant is so small, it does not destroy the inner ear. So recipients could take advantage of regeneration of hair cells if that becomes available.

NIH funding also has helped the center's researchers develop technology that allows measurement of auditory nerve response and improves music perception for implant users. In addition, the center has become a leader in bilateral implantation, which helps recipients hear more naturally, helping both with locating a sound's source and in understanding conversations in a group.

To learn more about Iowa's Cochlear Implant Clinical Research Center, see [www.uihealthcare.com/depts/med/otolaryngology/index.html](http://www.uihealthcare.com/depts/med/otolaryngology/index.html).

## New communication tool lets users' fingers do the talking

A father and son have created a new communication tool to make conversing easier for the pair, one who is hearing and one who is deaf. The new tool, UbiDuo, is making it possible for hearing and deaf everywhere to communicate in real time through text.

"Ubi" stands for ubiquitous, meaning everywhere, and "Duo" refers to two people talking face-to-face. The device consists of two laptop, wireless computers that transmit users' typed conversations, much like portable instant messaging. Unlike phones like the Sidekick, UbiDuo has a full-size keyboard so it's easy for anyone to pick up and use.

The developers are David Curry and his son, Jason, who was one of the first deaf students to graduate from Central Missouri State University in 1993. The idea for UbiDuo came up when the two became frustrated with David's signing skills when trying to sign a complex, technical conversation. They co-founded sComm Inc. to develop UbiDuo. It took them five years to bring the device to the marketplace. They received two grants from the National Institutes of Health to collaborate and work with technology engineers.

UbiDuo should be available by late August, according to the company's website, [www.scommonline.com](http://www.scommonline.com). The devices are sold in pairs, each with a screen and full keyboard, and cost \$1,875. The two UbiDuos fold together to form a case. A split-screen mode allows each person to see simultaneously what the other is writing. An instant messaging option is available. UbiDuo also can be plugged into a phone line or wireless device, such as a cell phone or Blackberry, to "talk" to another UbiDuo in real time. The device has a wireless range of 4,000 feet. Another feature allows anyone with a UbiDuo to see if other users are in the area.

More than 300 people in Missouri, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta tested the six prototypes. Nearly 99 percent said they preferred UbiDuo over communicating through an interpreter, pen and paper or reading lips. The testers have used the device in classrooms, workplaces, hospitals and shopping malls. According to website testimonials, UbiDuo has given deaf users them the freedom of communication they have been looking for.



Make friends at the **Family Support Connection's**

# Family Picnic!



For families with children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

**Thursday, August 10<sup>th</sup>**

**5-8:30 P.M.** (Rain or Shine!)

**Como Park Midway Pavilion South**

(Midway Parkway and Horton Avenue in St. Paul)

## Free for the family:

- Meet Miss Deaf Minnesota
- Dinner at 5:30
- Face Painting & Games
- Temporary Tattoos
- Door Prizes!

## Also at Como Park:

- Zoo and Conservatory  
(open 10-6)
- Cafesjian Carousel  
(open 11-4)
- Amusement Rides  
(open 10-8)
- Mini Golf  
(open 12-6)

For more information about Como Park, Zoo or Conservatory call 651/487-8200 or visit [www.comozooconservatory.org](http://www.comozooconservatory.org)



## Please RSVP!

Call before Monday August 7<sup>th</sup> to let us know how many from your family will attend



**Lifetrack**  
Resources

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1-866-DHOHKID (toll-free) • 1-866-857-2379 (toll-free TTY)  
[www.familysupportconnection.org](http://www.familysupportconnection.org)

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