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The Ventura County edition of *Prevention File* is published in cooperation with the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department, Alcohol and Drug Programs, Prevention, Intervention, and Training Division. Please address all comments to Kathy Staples, Prevention, Intervention, and Training Division, 300 N. Hillmont, Ventura, CA 93003 or call 805/652-3341. E-mail: Kathleen.Staples@mail.co.ventura.ca.us

# FOCUS

## On Neighborhoods and Communities

**PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG USE** are a plague on modern society and a threat to young people everywhere. What can be done to reduce those problems?

Ventura County is showing that the answers lie close to home.

The County's approach is outlined in a Strategic Plan for prevention adopted by the County's Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs in 1996. The plan called for a significant change in emphasis in prevention policy and a new focus on neighborhoods and local communities as the arena for reducing alcohol and other drug problems.

Instead of trying to change an individual's decisions about drinking or using illegal drugs, the Strategic Plan seeks to change the environment in which those decisions are made. Kathy Staples, supervisor of Alcohol and Drug Programs, can see the roots of the new strategy in her own experience.

"I was originally hired by the County to go to 7th grade classrooms and warn the kids about the dangers of alcohol and drugs," she says. "I spent my first year with the Department doing this, and never considered the environment in which these kids lived. Then I began to realize you can give kids all the information in the world and it doesn't help much if they walk home from school past five liquor stores willing to sell to them,

if they're always seeing billboards advertising Miller Lite or glamorizing some other beer, and if they live in a society that looks at underage drinking as some kind of innocent rite of passage."

The Strategic Plan is based on the public health model of controlling health problems. Many years ago doctors learned that they could control yellow fever by attacking the mosquitoes that carry it by draining the swamps and ponds where they lived. Where alcohol and drug problems are concerned, the focus is on changing environmental conditions that create and sustain those problems.

A significant part of the new strategy is to attack problems at the neighborhood level. "A lot of people know what's wrong in their neighborhood but have never considered the possibility of making changes," says Staples. "We find the neighborhood/community leaders that are interested in reducing the alcohol- and drug-related community problems. Then we provide them with training and technical assistance to assess their environment and implement strategies to address those problems by making changes in their neighborhoods and communities."

Since 1996 the County has been implementing a strategy that has helped people in a dozen community coalitions identify their most serious problems involving alcohol and drugs and decide what changes in public policy can bring about change.





A major part of the County's role is providing technical assistance and training and funding to those working toward prevention goals—training in such skills as gathering information useful in making the case for change, and getting the news media to help the public understand a problem and what can be done to solve it.

One group that has received help from the County is the Westside Neighborhood Coalition in an older section of the city of Ventura called "the Avenue." Sharon Troll, coordinator of the Coalition, says learning the principles and techniques of environmental prevention opened new avenues in her group's effort to reduce underage drinking.

"We didn't know what environmental prevention meant until Kathy came down and met with us," Troll says. "We had 13 liquor stores in our little geographic area and it was easy for kids to get their hands on alcohol. We applied for a grant from the County that gave us the tools to monitor these outlets and collect the kind of data that could be used to insist that they shape up."

Working with local police and the state Alcoholic Beverage Control department, the coalition helped persuade alcohol licensees to be stricter in complying with the law against sale to minors. Two bars notorious for serving underage drinkers were shut down.

Members of the Coalition also pressured local merchants to remove alcoholic beverage advertising that had an obvious appeal to young people.

"It's the local people who have to make the contacts," Troll explains. "If someone from across town tried to tell us how to do business over here, we wouldn't listen to them. If your message comes from

people who live here and work here and are raising their families here, then you have credibility."

Marilyn Miller, coordinator for another community coalition called Community Partners for Safer Neighborhoods, says help from the County's grant program has played a significant role in one of her group's main objectives—getting the city government in Ventura to take a more active role in controlling the density of alcohol outlets.

"With help from the County we were able to collect data showing that 50 percent of all crime and violence in the city of Ventura is

alcohol-related," Miller explains. "When you couple that with the fact that the city has six times the state average in the ratio of alcohol outlets to population, then you can understand the problem. The city has no policy or formula for challenging new alcohol license applications. If you want one, you get one."

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Her coalition hopes Ventura will take a leaf from the city of Oxnard, which uses money from an application fee to pay for an investigation of the background of potential licensees and what impact an additional alcohol outlet might have on the neighborhood. "As it is, our coalition had to do all the homework," Miller says. "It takes a trained person to collect the necessary information. We monitored over 30 license applications in the past year, and without our grant from the County we couldn't have done it."

Staples points out that when such steps are taken by community coalitions it can pay off dramatically in reducing crime and violence associated with alcohol consumption, trafficking in illegal drugs, and gang activity. An area called *La Colonia* once ranked as the most crime-ridden neighborhood in Oxnard. Thanks to the work of its Coalition for Community Development, *La Colonia* is considered one of Oxnard's safest districts where crime is concerned despite some recent incidents. It's no coincidence that the number of alcohol outlets in the neighborhood has been reduced from 15 to 7 (see page 4).

Staples emphasizes that the Ventura County Prevention Strategy leaves it to local people to identify their neighborhood problems and develop a plan to attack them. The County's Training Institute provides the know-how that can turn a local group of volunteers into a force to be reckoned with in efforts to improve the quality of life in their communities.

"I'm amazed at their energy, enthusiasm, commitment, and ability to make significant changes in their communities," says Staples. "I've been working for the County's Alcohol and Drug Program for more than 17 years, have been supervisor of those efforts for more than 14 years, and never in my history here have I seen this level of significant, positive change occur."

One of the coalitions supported in the County program takes its inspiration from the anthropologist Margaret Mead, who said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." □

## Thanks to the work of its Coalition for Community Development, *La Colonia* is considered one of Oxnard's safest districts where crime is concerned . . .

### VENTURA COUNTY'S TRAINING INSTITUTE

Environmental Prevention 101 . . . Public Policy 101 . . . Media Advocacy 101 . . .

As readers of college catalogues would recognize, the designation "101" indicates that a course deals with the basics. So it is with the "101" workshops offered by the Training Institute of the Prevention, Intervention, and Training Division of Ventura County Alcohol Coalition and Drug Programs.

The workshops are designed to familiarize Coalition members and others with the principles behind various prevention strategies and how they can be implemented at the community level with activities based on research proving their effectiveness.

A new round of trainings began last September and will continue through the spring of 2001. Thirty or more workshops are typically held each year, dealing with a variety of issues that are the concern of Ventura County's Behavioral Health Department. Besides neighborhood coalition leaders, social workers, and other professionals and volunteers associated with human service agencies, Experts brought in from outside the county conduct many of the workshops.

In the 2000-2001 period, Rob Adsit, a senior preventionist with the Institute for Public Strategies based in San Diego, is scheduled to lead "101" workshops on environmental prevention, on how public policy can be influenced to reduce alcohol and drug problems, and how local coalitions can use media advocacy to publicize their efforts and gain public support for community change.

Marian Novak, director of the San Diego County Responsible Hospitality Coalition, leads workshops on how community activists can identify bars, liquor stores, and other alcohol outlets that are contributing to neighborhood problems, and how they can best approach the managers and owners to seek changes in their business practices.

Other workshops deal with alcohol and drug prevention and treatment issues involving special populations. A full schedule of Training Institute events can be obtained by calling Ruby Manor, the Alcohol and Drug Prevention, Intervention and Training Division program assistant at 805/652-3341.



Vicky Gonzales, (right), at a market in La Colonia Park.

# RESIDENT ACTIVISTS

## IN LA COLONIA

A REPUTATION AS THE "WORST NEIGHBORHOOD" IN THE CITY OF OXNARD did not sit well with a number of residents of *La Colonia*.

This heavily Latino community had seen its neighborhood parks cease to be family gathering places. Crime rates soared, as did alcohol and other drug-related problems. Local bars were notorious places for drug sales and the use of "bar girls" to draw in customers.

However, a small group of residents, including Vicky Gonzales, executive director of the Coalition for Community Development, were fed up. Under the guidance of the Coalition for Community Development, a nonprofit organization established in 1997 and funded by the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department Alcohol and Drug Prevention Programs, community residents hit the streets and the airwaves to change environmental conditions around alcohol and other drug problems in *La Colonia*.

In its early stages the Coalition organized community members by involving them in neighborhood clean-ups. One of the most blighted and crime-ridden areas was the handball courts in *La Colonia* Park. Residents feared going to the park because the handball courts were a popular spot for drug dealers,

public drunks, and gang members. For years community resident complained to city officials and police, asking for help to address the problems. But when they didn't get the response they wanted from the city, *La Colonia* residents took matters into their own hands and knocked down the courts themselves.

This dramatic act of community activism had an immediate impact. In the month prior to knocking down the handball courts, police reported 114 calls for service at the park. In the month following the demolition, there were only three calls for police services.

"Community members want a better quality of life so they have decided to focus on changing the environments that contribute to problems," said Gonzales. "After several community clean-ups and knocking down the handball courts, residents became empowered to tackle other issues, including alcohol and other drug-related problems and environmental justice issues."

One issue that concerned *La Colonia* residents was the number of alcohol outlets in the area. Since 1997, residents have closed down two problem bars, have prevented two other bars from establishing themselves in the community, and have imposed strict conditions on other alcohol licenses.

According to Gonzales, the community rallied around closing two bars known as La Michoacana 1 and 2. Problems at the locations included shootings, stabbings, fights, drug sales, and the illegal practice of hiring "B girls" or women who encourage men to buy beer at two or three times the regular price and who split the profits with the bar owner.

To attract the attention of city officials and California Alcoholic Beverage Control staff, residents gathered petitions and held a protest in front of the bars. That action also got the attention of local media channels. After the protest, ABC officers conducted undercover operations and soon suspended the bar's alcohol license for illegal activities. The bar eventually closed down. When the bar owner applied to reopen his bar, residents converged on the Oxnard Planning Commission in protest. Through the Coalition's efforts, the City of Oxnard denied the bar owner's request. Now a chiropractor's office occupies the space.

The Coalition's proactive stance on alcohol outlets has prevented other alcohol licenses from being approved by the Oxnard Planning Commission. When an applicant applies for a license, Coalition volunteers canvass the neighborhood, inform residents of the application, get petitions signed, and attend Planning Commission hearings to voice their opinion.

"We want good economic development in our neighborhood and most residents don't see a bar or liquor store as something good for the community. We already have too many bars and stores selling liquor in *La Colonia*," said Gonzales.

When residents began complaining of problems, such as vandalism, beer runs, and loitering at a local Circle K convenience store, *La Colonia* residents immediately addressed the problem by working with local police officers and Circle K management. In a meeting with the store's manager, residents asked that no-loitering signs be posted on the store's exterior, that all employees be trained in responsible beverage service practices, and that beer "mountain" displays be moved to the rear of the store. Other conditions requested included changing the layout of the store so that clerks would be able to more easily monitor alcohol coolers and increasing the number of security cameras from three to nine.

When Circle K management hesitated on implementing the community's recommendations, Coalition

members invited a *Los Angeles Times* reporter to visit the area and interview residents living near the store. After articles appeared in the paper Circle K management made all the changes, with the exception of the increase in security cameras. Calls for police service to the store decreased by 36 percent over a 12-month period.

Gonzales attributes the Coalition's success in reducing alcohol and other drug-related problems over the last several years to several factors, including active community participation, effective use of the media, and the unique relationship established between *La Colonia* residents and the Oxnard Police Department.

At neighborhood councils, tenant associations, and community network meetings, residents raise issues of concern and inform each other of projects occurring in the neighborhood, which results in the ability of the Coalition for Community Development to mobilize dozens of residents to respond to almost any situation that arises in *La Colonia*.

"The Coalition for Community Development also brings in outside experts to provide trainings to our volunteers. Trainings include sessions on media advocacy, where volunteers learn how to use the media to advocate for change. We have also held workshops on board development and community mobilization," said Gonzales.

The Coalition widely uses the media to advocate for change in the community. At each protest or planning hearing, Coalition volunteers invite the local press to be there to hear their concerns. As in the case of Circle K, the Coalition effectively uses the media to nudge businesses to change their practices.

The Coalition also participates in a weekly interview program on KOXR 910 AM, a local radio station, as a way to inform residents of current projects and point out emerging problems. Coalition members say that the radio program gives *La Colonia* a voice to publicly air their concerns about the neighborhood.

Oxnard Police Department's *La Colonia* Storefront has been a welcome addition to the community. Police officers assigned to the storefront say that the Coalition's projects in the community—where citizens are encouraged to work with police officers—have lead to a trusting relationship between residents of *La Colonia* and the police department. And police officers are quick to respond to community concerns and work with *La Colonia* volunteers.

The activism of the Coalition for Community Development and the partnerships established

between the Coalition, Oxnard Police, Oxnard City officials, and the ABC has improved conditions in *La Colonia*.

"Over the past few years the change in the neighborhood has been remarkable, with the quality of life improving dramatically," said Officer Gino Rodriguez.

In the last three years, total crime has decreased 31.5 percent. Until some recent incidents, according to police reports, *La Colonia* was the safest residential neighborhood in the city of Oxnard for the past year.


Gonzales says that the community's response to changing environmental conditions has been positive. Parks are now filled with families and friends holding birthday parties and barbecues. More and more volunteers participate in frequent community clean-ups.

But the Coalition is not resting on its laurels. Gonzales and community volunteers continue to push for further improvements in the community and are constantly prepared to confront any problems that arise in *La Colonia*.

The Coalition for Community Development is located at 211 Grant Ave., Oxnard, CA 93030. Tel: 805/385-7977. E-mail: [Coloniacoalition@msn.com](mailto:Coloniacoalition@msn.com). 

**Community members want a better quality of life so they have decided to focus on changing the environments that contribute to problems.**

# PREVENTION

 A DECIDEDLY GRASSROOTS EFFORT IN THE COUNTY'S CONEJO VALLEY is scoring big dividends in a community-wide program to curb availability of alcohol and other drugs to youth. As its kick-off project to gain public attention, the program tackled a field with tremendous local interest: high school football.

"It really has been inspiring and eye-opening to see how simple solutions can be once people put their minds to it," said Kathy Olsen, coordinator of Community Action Network, a coalition centered in Newbury Park. "You don't always have to have ordinances and a lot of red tape to get things done."

She said CAN grew out of a small meeting of parents whose children attend Newbury Park High School, where enrollment numbers close to

1,700 in grades 9 through 12. Parents were alarmed that the kids were increasingly being exposed to alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Parents also expressed concern that they were losing touch with their kids and did not really know who their children's friends were.

That casual meeting in a coalition founder's home in 1996 soon led to a public meeting, with more than 100 parents attending.

"At the first big meeting there were a lot of gripes and finger-

pointing, and we realized that was not going to be productive," Olsen said. "So we just decided we had to do things differently and to do things positively."

The result was CAN, which received \$50,000 in funding in January 1997 from the Ventura County Behavioral Health Department Alcohol and Drug Prevention Programs. The grant was for a three-year program aimed at fostering environmental changes that allow youths to make safer, healthier choices regarding alcohol and drug use.

For community-wide impact, CAN developed specific programs for four environments—school, home, retail, and civic areas.

Olsen said the group realized from the start that it was important to obtain quick visibility and to achieve credibility for CAN. One of its initial programs was thus chosen to encompass a community focal point—the football stadium at Newbury Park High School, home of the mighty Panthers.

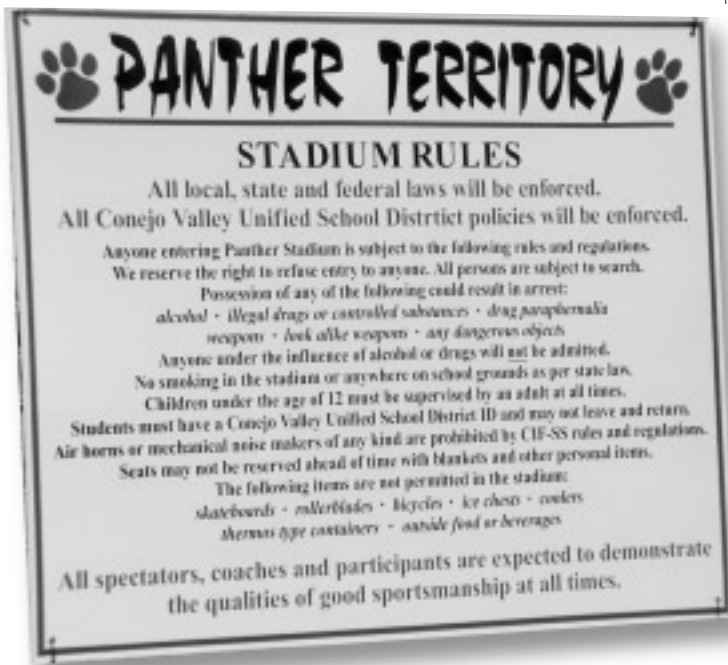
The choice, Olsen said, was almost obvious. She explained that the city of Newbury Park has a close-knit, almost small-town character, where the entire community celebrates high school football.

Also, near the time that CAN began, a publicized incident occurred in which a 15-year-old female student at Newbury Park High had been found sick from alcohol intoxication in a stadium restroom during a football game, and had to be transported by ambulance to a hospital.

"This really had a lot of parents scared," Olsen said. She added that there was awareness that kids were coming to games with McDonald's soft-drink cups that were actually filled with vodka. And it was not uncommon for parents attending games to wear backpacks that contained six-packs of beer.

"It's sometimes been more disappointing regarding the adults' behavior than the kids'," Olsen said. "It's mind-boggling to me that some of these adults just think they can flaunt the rules."

Working with school administrators and coaches, CAN developed and publicized new stadium rules for "Panther Territory." The regula-



# KICK-OFF

tions—which reiterated the enforcement of all state and local laws—also spelled out that outside food and beverages would not be allowed inside the stadium, no coolers or Thermoses were allowed, children under 12 were to be supervised at all times by an adult, no one on campus was to smoke (including parents and security guards who would often sneak a cigarette behind the bleachers), and persons leaving the stadium would not be readmitted for any reason.

"At first, a lot of people seemed upset, especially because of the ban on outside food and beverages," Olsen said. "Some of the kids were also snickering that the rules were 'lame.' But by and large, I'm impressed with the way the kids have taken to it."

Since the new rules have been in effect, Olsen said problems at football games have diminished.

"Things have calmed down considerably," she said. "There's less fighting between kids, more school administrators are patrolling the stadium, and no ambulances have had to be called."

Richard Intelkofer, a counselor at Newbury Park High School, said a key to the football program's success has been the clear statement of what behavior will not be tolerated.

"If students know the expectations set out for them, they're usually pretty good at following through," he said. "There is nothing unreasonable about the rules, so there really is no reason to complain."

Like Olsen, Intelkofer said some of the bigger problems have been with adults in the stadium and on campus. "For some of them it's almost an attitude

that, 'I'm not a kid, so I can do what I want.'"

CAN is addressing this area through pledges signed by students, athletes, coaches, and parents. For young people, the pledges state their promises not to use alcohol, tobacco, or drugs, to show respect, to take responsibility, and to practice good sportsmanship.

The parent pledge goes beyond the school campus, stating, "I take the responsibility to ensure that all social events in my home involving kids

will be chaperoned as well as alcohol-, drug-, and tobacco-free. I will also provide information to parents or guardians who request confirmation of social arrangements involving their kids. I pledge to keep myself and my kids informed about the dangers of alcohol, drug, and tobacco use."

By the end of the last school year, more than 750 parents had committed to this pledge, Olsen said.

One of those parents is Joe Joyce, whose daughter is a senior at Newbury Park High and whose son graduated from there in 1999. He also is a coach of the girls' softball team.

"I'm an ambassador for this program," he said of CAN.

Joyce became involved after attending a CAN meeting and

realizing "that when our kids are little, we know all about who their friends are . . . and then when they get older, we let them pick their own friends without knowing much about it."

He said the pressures on kids today, both academically and athletically, are so strong "that parents have to have an attitude change. They have to say, 'I need to be more involved with my kids' activities.'"

**It's sometimes been more disappointing regarding the adults' behavior than the kids' . . . it's mind-boggling to me that some of these adults just think they can flaunt the rules.**



Regarding the new stadium rules, Joyce believes they need to be more enforceable, "but all in all, I've seen a big improvement."

The stadium policies as well as other CAN programs are especially important at this time, Joyce said, because the community of Newbury Park is still relatively geographically contained.

He noted that new houses are being built at a fast clip, including a soon-to-open development of 2,300 homes.

"I think it's important that the (alcohol and drug) programs are being put in place while the area is smaller," Joyce said, adding that the programs will have an established track record as Newbury Park grows.

With CAN, he said, "We've stepped up to the plate to make a difference in our community and it is only going to help."

Olsen also is confident that CAN is helping to make changes for the better. As the program wraps up its first grant, the organization has 20 active members, about 100 others with a particular expertise who are called in for specific projects, and more than 4,000 parents who actively support it."

Community Action Network is located at 107 N. Reino Rd., PMB #333, Newbury Park, CA 91320. Tel: 805/376-2628.

# Getting Messages Out To The Deaf Community

**THE CONNECTIONS PROJECT,** TRI-COUNTY GLAD is unique in Ventura County because it serves a special group of people. It is the only agency in the County that provides prevention and education services about alcohol and other drug problems to the deaf community.

As part of the Tri-County Greater Los Angeles Council on Deafness (GLAD), Connections works in Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo counties. The organization has been in existence since 1995 and gets its funding from the county of Ventura and the state of California.

"Communication access is the key," says Carla Cook, an outreach worker at Connections. "Many people have never even met a deaf person and are unaware of the barriers."

One important aspect of communicating with the deaf community is understanding the deaf culture.

"We are a unique group, compared with other disabilities," says Heidi Kleiger, regional director for Tri-County GLAD and a member of the deaf community. "Deaf people do not consider themselves as disabled. We have our own way, which is a communication barrier from the hearing society."

Connections has several dimensions that attempt to increase understanding of the deaf community and to overcome the barriers to communication.

It also presents workshops to service providers, law enforcement personnel, and health care personnel who work in the prevention field. The workshops provide sensitivity training and education about the barriers that deaf people face. Members of the deaf community give them because they are uniquely qualified to discuss the issues that affect their lives.

Connections also prepares culturally and linguistically appropriate prevention materials for distribution to the deaf community.

"The average reading level is third to fourth grade," says Cook, "and the visual nature of sign language—which is a first language—means that the written materials need a visual component. They also need to be in understandable language."

The Connections materials avoid abstract concepts and try to be as direct as possible. They also contain the word "deaf." According to Kleiger, that "gets their attention."

For Kleiger, videotapes are important tools in prevention of alcohol and other drug problems. But most of the available videotapes do not have captioning for the deaf.

"We make efforts to get them captioned for accessibility," says Kleiger. "The number-one preference—we produce tapes that have deaf actors and actresses using sign language. These are the best for deaf audiences to watch as they use their own language and own people."

Connections provides referrals for those in need of prevention services to certified sign language interpreters. The interpreters are certified to be competent and accurate, and, unlike family members or friends who often help with communication, the interpreters are trained to mention conceptual accuracy.

Of all the Connections activities, one of the most critical, according to Kleiger, is the youth project.

"Deaf go to mainstream schools in this area," she says. "They do not have the leadership, nor the deaf adults for role models. They have not played important roles within the school, such as student council. And they have not participated in sports. [After school] they go home."

So Connections sponsors a youth council that brings together deaf young people from various



schools. The council empowers the youths and develops their leadership skills. In addition, the youth program holds sober events, such as holiday parties for deaf youths. And for the last two summers, Connections has presented a teen leadership conference, which included workshops on self-esteem, communication skills, and alcohol and other drug use.

But, it is not only youths that need empowerment. Deaf adults need it too.

"Hearing people should not make decisions about what deaf people want," says Cook.

Kleiger agrees.

"Ask what the deaf want, how can we help," she says. "Eye-to-eye contact is very critical. And take time. Hearing people need to be friendly and patient. The deaf person may want to write back and forth. Some may be able to speak. If they want an interpreter, then that's their right."

"People need to be aware of this special population."

Connections/Tri-County GLAD is located at 132 South A St., Suite B, Oxnard, CA 93030. TTY/V: 805/487-4523.

FAX: 805/487-4954. Tri-County Glad's Website is at [www.gladinc.org](http://www.gladinc.org).

## OVERCOMING COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

Barriers to communication between deaf individuals and hearing individuals are many. But the telephone is not one of them. In fact, thanks to the California Relay Service (CRS), communication is possible any time of the day or night. All that is needed is for the deaf person to have access to a TTY (text teletype device) that allows communication by typing.

A phone call to CRS by either the deaf person or the hearing person puts the caller in touch with a communications assistant, who acts as both operator and translator. The CA places the call and then facilitates the conversation—reading the typed words to the hearing person and typing the spoken words to the deaf person.

The CRS was mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 and is funded by a small surcharge that appears on Californians' telephone bills. The charges to the users are the same as the charges for regular phone calls.

"If you get a good relay operator [CA], everything is great and wonderful," says Carla Cook of Connections.

To use the California Relay Service call toll free 800/735-2929 if you have a TTY. If you do not have a TTY call 800/735-2922.