Georgia Commission on Hearing Impaired and Deaf Persons Tuesday, August 12, 2014

1:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Auditory Verbal Center 1901 Century Blvd NE #20

Atlanta, GA 30345 Meeting Minutes

# Members present: Dr. Helena Solodar, Mr. Comer Yates, Ms. Mary Reed, Ms. Lee Ann Meadows Members absent: Mr. Chuck Leavell, Ms. Laura Sarsfield

**Staff present: Jacqueline Tate (on behalf of Katherine Cadena)**

Dr. Solodar welcomed Commission members and guests to the meeting. Members and guests were introduced.

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Solodar at 1:50 p.m. Dr. Solodar explained schedule conflicts required her to cancel the last meeting and reschedule this one. She announced the Commission is looking for new members to move forward with current and new initiatives, and plans, to inform and educate the people of Georgia on the Commission’s goals.

A motion was made to approve the minutes from the February 11, 2014 meeting. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Dr. Solodar asked for names of candidates who may want to serve on the committee to submit to the Governor for consideration – a parent, a hard of hearing individual, and an influential business partner. She requested that members e-mail her the names of individuals whom they would recommend.

Dr. Solodar announced the next meeting will be held on November 18, 2014 at the Atlanta Speech School and asked members to place it on their calendars. She asked to be informed in advance if there is a known conflict so the date can be posted on the website.

Dr. Solodar informed everyone the website has been updated with the current Commission objectives and initiatives but solicited new ideas. She also requested that members who had not provided bios and pictures for the website to do so expeditiously and encouraged them to direct individuals that may be good candidates for the Commission to review the website.

Diana Centofanti of CAPTEL gave a presentation on telephones and technology that is available for the hard of hearing. Ms. Centofanti informed members the internet based telephones and the service are free for any hard of hearing individual that has a letter from an audiologist. It is also possible for low-income individual that do not have the internet to receive a telephone through GACHI, others can buy the telephones for $75 through CAPTEL and also online. However, the service is still free through the Georgia relay telecommunications service. There is also equipment that can be purchased to make cell phones compatible. Ms. Centofanti asked the Commission to help publicize the telephones’ availability to those who are having hearing and sight issues. Last year, just a few hundred telephones were given out in Georgia which is just a drop in the bucket for the hard of hearing population in Georgia. It was suggested that she connect with the Georgia Association of the Deaf and also give a presentation to the Georgia

Academy of Audiology. Dr. Solodar stated there were 49,436 hearing aids sold in Georgia in 2013 with some individuals having two, which would leave a minimum of 25k people wearing hearing aids, and probably 10% using telephones. It was also suggested that she come up with a proposal that the Commission could help her with.

Dr. Tammy Uehlin provided the quarterly update on the *Georgia Department of Public Health’s Universal Newborn Hearing Screening and Intervention* (UNHSI) provided an update on the program. She announced the program received $250,000.00 in funding for the next three years through the Health Resources and Services Administration grant. She cautioned the amount could change from year to year. She stated one of UNHSI’s objectives is to increase access to pediatric audiologists which is a bigger problem in the northern and southern part of the state. The program is working with directors of audiology to develop a curriculum, training and mentoring activities for audiologists that may be interested in working with the pediatric population.

Dr. Uehlin also provided an update on the national *Hands and Voices Lost to Follow-up* video. She advised that it is being piloted in a hospital in South Georgia and will be played for families with children that are referred. Data will be kept to determine if it will help in improving the number of babies lost to follow-up. It will begin in November. She also stated the video is available on the website and they are working on getting the video played in health departments and other areas. The *Hands and Voices Guide by Your Side Program* is also being implemented through the *100 Babies Project* in Georgia. “Guide by Your Side” is a program that trains parents to work with other families with children that are referred to hearing screening or diagnosed. Terry Patterson is the coordinator and it is funded through the Department of Education. It is not required that families be in the *100 Babies Project* to participate.

Dr. Uehlin reported that Georgia’s *100 Babies Project* had 24 families that have signed up for the project. One baby has since been diagnosed with normal hearing after an audio, and one family has not participated since signing up. Dr. Uehlin stated *Guide by Your Side* could be used to reach out when this happens. She confirmed 24 families have been diagnosed and are in intervention; however, 60 having been referred and diagnosed since January 1st. Dr. Solodar expressed concern that over half of the families have not committed to participate in the project. However, Dr. Uehlin clarified that it did not mean the children were lost to follow-up and may still be in intervention. The children that are considered lost to follow-up are those that do not pass the rescreen or never have follow-up as well as those that get lost along each section. She advised that even with their hard work, the lost to follow-up rate has been about 40% since 2012. However, she believes the number looked lower in prior years because of the way the data was kept. When utilizing the CDC’s recommendation for tracking the data as they do now, the data is very similar.

Dr. Solodar inquired how Georgia compares with other states that claim to have top notch programs in lost to follow-up and asked if there is a state that does well that Georgia could use as a benchmark? North Carolina reports a fractional rate but not sure how the data is collected. Dr. Uehlin responded that some states report between 10 and 20 percent, however Oklahoma is a state that Georgia has worked closely with. Oklahoma has seen their percentage improve since adding the hearing screening to the blood spot card and panel. Effective July 2015, Georgia’s rules and regulations will mandate hearing screening with all impairments documented before discharge. They are currently working out the details of how hospitals will comply with this.

Dr. Uehlin states the *100 Babies Project* is looking at their process to determine where there are issues in lost to follow-up. They have found when there is a system in place and an immediate appointment made, for parents when children are referred, it reduces the chance for a child being lost in follow-up - also, in

areas where there is a high number of pediatric audiologists. Dr. Solodar would like to see the state hire more contract audiologists, if possible The UNHSI has one district where they contract with an audiologist that comes to the health department or district and performs diagnostics which is very helpful. Of 491 licensed audiologists in the state, there are about 100 audiologists that service the pediatric population– about 20%, but not all provide full services. Many are busy in their own practices or work for ENTS. Some areas like South Georgia can’t even find a contract audiologist to work with them. About 200 babies are diagnosed each year in Georgia with about 5000 that are referred. Tele-audiology was suggested and Dr. Uehlin said that DPH’s commissioner, and Jill and Lisa are all very interested, but it still requires an audiologist. However, it is on their radar as an option.

Mr. Yates commended Dr. Uehlin on the job she has been doing with the sequence and timing of transactions for the families and children. He reiterated the purpose of the 100 Babies Project is to have every child on grade level reading by the third grade. He stated how important it is to start with a birth to literacy plan documenting the child’s hearing loss or hearing ability and detailing how quality transactions will occur timely to get them to grade level reading. Dr. Uehlin stated they are currently following the transactions of the first babies in the 100 Babies Program to get an idea of what needs to occur, intervening with recommendations when necessary to guide these babies progress. The oldest baby will be 8 months in September and will have the first language assessment which will be an indicator. They determined it is critical for the child to have an audiologist appointment and to have the audiologist direct the parents on communicating with the child in their home language (sign or spoken) instead of waiting on an appointment with Georgia Pines. Instead of providing therapy, Georgia Pines should be arming the parents with the ability to communicate with their child 25 to 35 hours per week. The child does not have a chance to meet the goal of reading on grade level by third grade if time is lost and the parents don’t start immediately communicating with the child. The quality of the transaction is critical so there must be a very aggressive approach to this. Each of the 24 children should be having this experience.

The UNHSI program and Commissioner Fitzgerald are focusing on having a health system that makes parents attuned prior to birth of the primacy of language. Susan and Amy’s study showed 16% of children are in intervention by six months. However, there is a conflict with what we are actually seeing in state numbers. A lot of the intervention is lost to documentation. They reached out and are now getting more documentation on intervention to ensure that not only are the babies signed up but have start dates for intervention. However, sometimes the families do not follow-up with diagnostic and the babies don’t come back into the system until age 2 or 3 and are not talking. Mr. Yates stated we must have a system in place to make the transactions happen with quality and timeliness to get the babies on track with their birth to literacy plan.

Dr. Solodar suggested we place audiologists in the counties that have the highest numbers for lost to follow-up and carry out the transactions on each plan then compare it to the county with the lowest number to create a model. Dr. Uehlin stated there are states with that type of system in place, but stated Georgia cannot mandate where the parents go, parents must have options. However, she agreed there needs to be established services available to facilitate follow-up.

Mr. Yates asked to hear from Debbie in regard to the progress the Marcus Autism Center has seen since their therapy has been focused on empowering the parents instead of just supporting the parents with therapy. Debbie agreed the first point of contact with the parents needs to be really strong. She said they

will be providing training to Georgia Pines and suggested that Guide by Your Side can help. Mr. Yates reiterated that language acquisition in whatever modality is critical. Dr. Solodar suggested that all OB- GYNs be armed with this information for all parents. Dr. Uehlin responded the *Talk with Me Baby* project focuses on educating expectant parents of the need for language.

Kevin Henderson presented information on *Hope House*. He is a director and case manager for the “hard of hearing” and deaf clients at Hope House which helps transition clients from addiction to independent living. Hope House is supported by DBHDD and provides 6 months of free residential treatment services to individuals with substance abuse issues. He also stated that after the 6 months, they can apply for a waiver for the extended stay in the transitional program to allow them time to save money for housing and find a better job. The program is free; clients must be homeless and/or unable to afford housing and other bills. He stated he has two clients but they have up to 12 beds in the program for men only. The building is located across from the Capitol and blends in with the community. The program provides counseling on everything and has staff that includes 2 interpreters and other therapist/ staff that can sign. All staff have their MSWs. Hope House also serves the hearing population whether they speak or not. He asked the Commission to help him with referrals and to get the word out about the progr**a**m. He also asked if they would add information on the program to their website. Mr. Henderson left flyers and his business cards welcoming suggestions and referrals. He can be reached by email. Mr. Yates mentioned that Mr.

Henderson has also been helpful with the *Pathway* project.

Dr. Solodar announced the GAA has new leadership effective July 1 and is getting reorganized so the Adopt-A-Band program is really going to take off again. The Commission does not have anyone working with GAA but the GAA is aware of the Commission’s involvement with starting the program. The Commission continues encouraging everyone to educate high schools and parent groups about the need for hearing protection. Dr. Solodar is hopeful to provide an update for the Adopt-A-Band program at the next commission meeting.

Ms. Mary Reed provided an update on *Project Equity* they brought up improving the job market for those with hearing loss. She stated that Becky Sills with GA Vocational Rehabilitation attended and volunteered to lend her support. Also at the end of the first meeting, they were leaning toward an employer seminar to encourage employers to extend equal opportunity to those with hearing loss. They are planning to take small steps toward a big job fair in the future. Ms. Reed stated she was not able to attend the meeting in May so she asked Becky if she would provide an update from that meeting. Becky added that they had not made a lot of progress. They have identified Georgia Perimeter College as the location for the employer seminar which was postponed from September to a later date to allow more planning. They have included community members and vocational rehabilitation counselors in the group and hope to have a meeting soon. Vocational Rehabilitation is undergoing a major change that will become effective Monday. She is hopeful to get back on the project and get the seminar scheduled once everything settles. They have ideas about contacting employers who have hired the hard of hearing in the past. They would also like to set up technology booths like CAPTEL to teach employers how easy it is to communicate with people with hearing loss. She hopes to have more information by the next meeting. Dr. Solodar complimented their effort. Ms. Reed asked the Commission if they had ideas on companies to invite and Dr. Solodar asked Becky if they had a list of employers who have traditionally hired the hard of hearing. Becky responded Vocational Rehabilitation places many of their clients in various jobs around the state. Some of the companies that hire their clients are Walgreens, Lowes, Home Depot, Chromoloid

in Newnan, Walmart and other professional jobs also. She stated they could pull a list together when they get closer to a date. They also want to include employers that already hire those with hearing loss to come and share what great employees they are.

Laura Sarsfield communicated by email to Dr. Solodar that there is no updated information for the Looping project. She shared they have not had a meeting recently but they intend to so. Dr. Sololar is hopeful to receive an update from Laura at the next meeting.

Mr. Yates provided an update on Georgia Pathway to Language and Literacy Project which is an alliance of organizations focused on grade level reading for all children who are deaf or hard of hearing in Georgia. The 100 Babies Project is a part of Georgia Pathway. He announced they just received funding to hire a project manager that will work for Dr. Uehlin on the 100 Babies Project. He also shared the project is now under a broader effort with a 2020 trajectory goal for grade level reading lead by the Annie

E. Casey Foundation. Dr. Fitzgerald and other state agency leaders serve on the steering committee.

Dr. Solodar stated that terms were ending for commission members and she reiterated that she needed recommendations for new members. She also reminded members who had not already submitted bios and pictures for the website to submit them, as well as any new initiatives or projects they would like to see the Commission take on, emphasizing adult initiatives.

Dr. Solodar advised she was inviting representatives of the Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation, Anna Knippel and their new executive director, Roberta Green to the next Commission meeting. She stated that Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation received funding from the Public Service Commission to fit hearing devices. She wants the Commission to hear more information on this, the companies that they have brought on board to help and how they can now serve children on a sliding scale fee.

Dr. Solodar solicited final comments from members and there were none. The meeting was adjourned.