**Georgia Commission on Hearing Impaired and Deaf Persons**

**Tuesday, September 29, 2015**

**1:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.**

**Atlanta Speech School**

**3160 Northside Parkway, NW**

 **Atlanta, GA 30327**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Members Present: Dr. Jiovanne Hughart, Mr. Jim Lynch, Ms. Mary Reed, Ms. Laura Sarsfield, Dr. Helena Solodar., Mr. Comer Yates**

**Members Absent: Mr. Chuck Leavell, Ms. Cathy Torie**

**Staff Present: Ms. Katherine Cadena**

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Solodar at 1:33 p.m.

A motion was made to approve the minutes from the last meeting. The motion was seconded. All members voted to approve the minutes from the March meeting.

Each member introduced himself/herself and discussed his/her work on the Commission. Staff and guests also introduced themselves.

Dr. Solodar discussed the background and history of the Commission. The first few meetings focused on having guests from other agencies and non-profits discuss their current focus area related to the Commission. From there, the Commission focused its efforts on:

* Attracting a university to offer a doctoral clinical and research program for audiology to Georgia;
* Early intervention, including the data around identification and screening of newborn babies at 1-3-6 month intervals (universal newborn hearing screening program) for hearing loss, and timely referral, diagnostic follow-up, and intervention;
* Hearing loss prevention through partnership with other agencies such as the Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation and the Georgia Academy of Audiology, by hosting an “Adopt-a-Band” program for high school marching bands in Georgia as well as any middle school, high school or college band; and
* Accessibility through “Loop Georgia”, a partnership between other agencies such as the Hearing Loss Association of Georgia and Sertoma Clubs, to promote better hearing access to any and all hard of hearing individuals through a loop system allowing people to hear sound directly from the sound source in any venue, such as places of worship, theaters, and arenas with the use of T-coil in hearing aids, cochlear implants and other products that have access to an active T-coil.

Dr. Kelly Hermanns presented on the former Universal Newborn Hearing Screening and Intervention program now called the Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) program. It is mandatory that all babies are screened for hearing loss at birth in Georgia. Babies should be screened before one month, diagnosed by three months, and then seen by an audiologist by six months for intervention. In 2012, 64 percent of babies who were identified at birth as having a hearing loss were identified by three months. In 2013, 71 percent of babies identified at birth as having a hearing loss were identified by three months. Data is not yet available for 2014 babies born with hearing loss, however it was noted that there should continue to be an increase. 140 babies have been enrolled and tracked since the inception of the 100 Babies Project that started in January 2014. More babies will continue to be included in the project. Infanthearing.org is a resource website and includes scripts for communicating with parents. Mr. Yates and Dr. Solodar both asked Dr. Hermanns questions about how the Commission can support her efforts to ensure language nutrition happens for babies born with hearing loss. Dr. Hermanns identified gaps in the system, including missed opportunities before the Early Hearing Orientation Visit (EHOV) by Georgia PINES (Parent Infant Network for Educations Services). Georgia PINES remains the program to initially see and provide the parents and families with their introduction packet. It was noted that science indicates parents need to speak to their children 25-35 hours per week to be on track for literacy.

Ms. Reed discussed the employer seminar held in March and the job fair for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing in April. She stated there is another seminar for employers on October 2 from 8:30 until Noon. It will be held at the Georgia Department of Labor at 221 S. Ashley Street in Valdosta, 31601. There will be a job fair at the same location on October 16 from 9:00-Noon. Dr. Solodar asked Mary Reed to contact Rebecca Cowan-Story, Statewide Deaf-Blind Coordinator with the Georgia Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to determine if the Commission can provide any additional support with this project.

Laura Sarsfield gave her report on Looping. As an explanation and clarification, looping can assist the most number of hard of hearing individuals at the lowest cost, as alternative methods for individuals are more costly and even cost prohibitive for many. Nick Hobbs is a qualified loop installer and is accessible and responsive for those wanting to install loops. Mr. Peterson, guest, stated that he was in discussions with representatives of the Atlanta Falcons and looping the under-construction arena was being considered. He was asked to encourage discussions with the Commission. Mr. Lynch volunteered to take over the role of Commission member for Georgia in the Loop from outgoing member Laura Sarsfield. Ms. Sarsfield passed around an informative handout on looping.

Dr. Solodar discussed the Adopt-a-Band initiative. This was an initiative led by former Commission member Robin Ferst. Dr. Hughart volunteered to take responsibility for the Commission’s role in this initiative. Mr. Yates will reach out to the Georgia Independent Schools Association to discuss the importance of hearing protection for band members. The video starring Chuck Leavell can be found at the link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DLcUacYjVmE>.

Mr. Yates discussed the Georgia Pathway 2020 project. He stated that only 20 percent of all children from a low income will become proficient readers. There are thirty organizations involved with Georgia Pathway. A child needs to hear eleven million words annually over the first three years of life to have language nutrition and television doesn’t count because it doesn’t activate reading pathways in the brain. Parents need to begin talking to their child in the last trimester of pregnancy. Parents must talk to their children between 25-35 hours per week. Children must be exposed to twenty thousand words by age five and must learn four to eight thousand words per year.

**Dr. Solodar asked all members to forward ideas for new initiatives to her prior to the December meeting. The Commission members will discuss the ideas and determine if they are viable.**

It was determined that Let Georgia Hear and Georgia Lions Lighthouse Foundation should be invited to the next Commission meeting.

Dr. Solodar will leave the Commission once someone has been appointed in her place. Voting for a chairperson and vice chairperson will take place at the next meeting, as will dates for meetings in 2016. Dr. Solodar thanked Laura Sarsfield for her efforts on the Commission. Ms. Sarsfield stated she would remain involved in the Commission’s efforts although she is no longer on the Commission.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:29 p.m.

**The next meeting will take place at the Atlanta Speech School on December 15 from 1:30 until 4:30.**