

Caregiver's Corner Column (May 2010)

Caring for Someone with Hearing Loss

By Katie Prins, Executive Director

Grand Rapids Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services

What do I do if the person I'm caring for has a hearing loss?

Caregivers may come across a situation where they are caring for an older adult diagnosed with hearing loss and in need of assistance to improve their quality of life. It can be hard mentally, emotionally and socially for the older adult suffering from hearing loss. The caregiver should be empowered with resources. Knowing how and when to assist them makes the relationship better between the caregiver and the older adult.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services provides direct assistance and referrals for caregivers and the older adult or individual, made possible with a grant through the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan. Our two Hearing Assistance Outreach specialists have varying hearing losses themselves and assist with consultation, adaptive equipment, and hearing aid requests.

If you know someone needing adaptive equipment, contact Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services at 616-732-7358 to set up an initial meeting with one of our specialists. At this initial meeting our specialists will determine if they qualify under the grant to receive adaptive equipment to enhance their daily life. A variety of forms of adaptive equipment are available (a PockeTalker, doorbell flasher, alarm clock, neck loop) to improve their communication with people around them. If a hearing aid is needed, they can contact the same number above and get in touch with our other specialist to discuss if they qualify.

Qualifications include being over the age of 60, a resident of Kent County, and documentation of hearing loss along with income level. Funding is limited, and provided on a first come, first served basis. If the individual or couple does not qualify because they are above the income level criteria, we can refer them to Audient, a hearing aid manufacturer in Seattle, Washington, for up to a 50% discount on the cost of their required hearing aids. We can also direct them to a local audiologist for follow-up services, and/or our specialist can offer discounts on other forms of adaptive equipment.

Additional tips for the caregiver: Do not shout in the older adult's ear, rather talk in a quieter room or on the same level so the person can see your lips; involve the older adult as much as possible so he or she does not become depressed or isolated due to the hearing loss; and treat them the exact same way as you would treat another individual in the room.

Contact Grand Rapids Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services for additional information or assistance. They can be reached at 616-732-7358 or check us out on the web at www.deafhhs.org.

Caregiver's Corner is provided as a public service of the **Caregiver Resource Network**. The Caregiver Resource Network is a collaboration of West Michigan organizations dedicated to providing for the needs and welfare of family and professional caregivers within the community. Funded by the Area Agency on Aging of Western Michigan with Older American's Act Title III-E, Family Caregiver Support funds. For more information consult our website at www.CaregiverResource.net or call toll free at 1-888-456-5664.