



Washington State
Department of Social
& Health Services

News *Release*

www.dshs.wa.gov

Feb. 1, 2007

NO. 007-004

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Eric Raff, Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, 360-902-8000

Karen Lee, Media Relations, 360-902-7892

“Don’t Hang Up” the Phone on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

OLYMPIA – Calls from strangers make most people want to hang up the phone but the deaf and hard of hearing in Washington would like you to listen for a few seconds before saying goodbye. A 30 second public service announcement is now airing on local television stations in Western Washington that shows an operator calling a business using a system called the “Washington Relay.” That means a person or business is about to hear from someone with a hearing loss and the operator is connecting the two parties. When you hear “Washington Relay” it is NOT a sales pitch.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is launching a public service announcement campaign in Western Washington to inform individuals and businesses that Washington Relay Service calls means a person with a hearing loss is trying to get in touch and to stay on the line.

“Our message is **Don’t Hang Up on Relay**,” said Eric Raff, director of the DSHS Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH). “It could be a call from a Relay user to a doctor’s office to make a medical appointment or it could be an ordinary activity that hearing people take for granted like ordering a pizza to go.”

He explained Washington Relay Service operators connect hearing people to deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind and speech-disabled people through specialized communications equipment distributed by ODHH or purchased by their owners. Washington Relay callers use such equipment as teletypewriters, including those with Braille, to type text messages to the operators who read the messages to friends, business associates and others and type text-based responses to the callers in return.

Raff said there are approximately 15,000 people relying on Washington Relay who make approximately 80,000 relay calls per month in the state.

ODHH is partnering with Sprint to run a series of televised public service announcements that underline the “Don’t Hang Up” message.

The announcement features workers at a catering business receiving a call from a Relay operator who announces it is “Washington Relay”. A worker at the catering business almost hangs up, thinking the call is a telemarketer. In fact, it is a call from a client who wants the caterer to feed a 200-person party. To view the public service announcement visit the ODHH website <http://odhh.dshs.wa.gov> (The PSA will be posted on Tuesday Jan 29 at the website).

To interview deaf or hard of hearing individuals who use the Washington Relay and to interview and observe a demonstration, we have arranged a contact, Ariele Belo, at the Hearing, Speech and Deafness Center in Seattle. Here's Belo's contact information:

Ariele Belo, who is deaf and the best way to reach her would be through TTY or through the Washington Relay Services by dialing 711 or 9,711 if you are dialing through a PBX system.

Voice: 206-323-5770

TTY: 206-388-1275

Toll-free: 1-800-761-2821 V/TTY

Hearing, Speech and Deafness Center in Seattle

Artz Communication Center

1625 19th Avenue

Email: AB@hsrc.org.

Website: www.hsrc.org

###