

VTRS NEWSLETTER

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STAY HOME. STAY SAFE. STAY CONNECTED.

In these uncertain times, finding ways to connect to each other from a safe distance is becoming more and more essential. Our society will be navigating new waters for the foreseeable future, which will include more distance communication, learning, and even virtual parties. How do we make sure that our friends and family with disabilities are able to have equal access?

First and foremost, everyone needs to have the right equipment to connect. Please read the Telecommunication Equipment Choices article in this newsletter to review options if you or your loved one needs new equipment. It is an understatement to say that technology is constantly changing, and telecommunications technology is hard to keep up with. Equipment that you currently own might not be the best fit for your needs, either because new technology has improved your options or because your disability has changed. Make sure you and your loved ones can stay connected! There are many

options for little or no cost, so don't let the worry of finances stop you from checking out new options.

One of the rising trends in ways to connect during social distancing times is through conference calls with Zoom, WebEx, Adobe Connect, YouTube Live, and other platforms. For people with hearing loss who are joining a conference call where spoken language is used, Vermont's Relay Conference Captioning (RCC) is a great option to provide captions at no cost. Most people are familiar with closed captioning on television, and RCC is a very similar concept. RCC provides live, real time captions for your conversations, and also allows the person with hearing loss to participate in the conversation by typing for the captioner to voice. (Speaking on their own is always an option as well!)

For Zoom, the participant with hearing loss would need to have a separate window open on their device to read the captions. For WebEx, Adobe Connect, and YouTube Live, RCC can be embedded on the same screen as the conference call/webinar. There is

WE WANT YOUR FEEDBACK!

We want to hear about your experience using VTRS. What you like, what you don't like and how we can improve. To share your feedback on Vermont Relay, there are several options to choose from. To send your feedback directly to DPS Consumer Affairs & Public Information (CAPI) Division call 800-734-8390 (TTY), 800-622-4496 (Voice) or email Consumer@state.vt.us. You can also call the Vermont Relay customer service hotline 800-676-3777 (TTY/Voice)

detailed information on our website about how to use RCC for embedded captioning. Please visit

<https://www.vermontrelay.com/embedded-rcc> for more information.

TELECOMMUNICATION EQUIPMENT CHOICES

Depending on your particular abilities, the “right equipment” means something different for different people. In the past, most people with hearing loss used a TTY. With the advent of texting and video phones, technology has drastically changed the way Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind and those with a Speech Disability communicate from a distance. There are still a few people with hearing loss who use TTYs, but the TTY has now found a new home for those with voice loss. Read on to decipher what equipment might be appropriate for your situation.

For starters, Vermont has a great resource that provides free telecommunications equipment to Vermont residents (income limits apply). The VT Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program (VTEDP) will distribute amplified phones, computers, tablets, special computer or tablet software, captioned phones, TTYs, and voice activated equipment. This should be one of your first stops to determine if you qualify, and to pick their brains about what equipment would work for you (whether or not you qualify). <http://www.vcil.org/services/vermont-equipment-distribution-program>, or 1-800-639-1522 (Voice/TTY).

THE FUTURE FOR DISTANT WORK OPTIONS

As difficult as this period is in our world history, there are some possible silver linings for all, and preliminary research is showing that people with disabilities might especially benefit. Working from home has become an essential option for many employees, and companies are discovering something that many of them resisted in the past is actually effective and can provide benefits to both the company and the employee. For people with many types of disabilities, this is an exciting trend as it eliminates some obstacles for working that they have encountered in the past.

Telework obviously demands a good system for communicating long distance on a regular basis with co-workers and supervisors, and Vermont Relay is here for the long haul to provide many ways for employees and employers to connect.

Happy Autumn!



Michelle Vicino
Vermont Relay Customer Relations Manager
michelle.vicino@t-mobile.com

CONTACT US!

711
800 253-0191 TTY
800 253-0195 Voice
800 253-8260 VCO
800 253-2823 CapTel
800 253-0191 HCO
877 253-0446 STS

Customer Service
866 931-9028 TTY/Voice