

# PHONE CONNECTIVITY WORKSHOP

**Presenter: Ester Kelly**

ESTHER KELLY: I was hearing until 35 years of age. I started with a mild hearing loss but in 1988, over about 8 months I lost most of my hearing. That was a difficult time, because I had two sons in college who were always phoning home. The telephone was my biggest problem. At that time I was also fired from my job because I could not use the phone.

If you think about it, when you first lose your hearing, one of the biggest problems is communicating on the telephone. Fortunately by 1990, I learned about relay service, got a VCO phone, and pulled myself together. I found a job working for the government calling businesses and troubleshooting problem. I did this very effectively and even received proficiency awards for my work.

Today, working for Deaf Action Center in Dallas as Coordinator of Hard of Hearing Programs, a big part of my day is helping people communicate on the phone. I might have someone who just has a mild hearing loss, and needs a little boost in amplification from a simple quality in-line amplifier. This is a simple device but it helps many people.

There are also phones, which boost sound up to 50db's. These phones can be used with a neck loop or headphone and are hearing aid compatible.

Sometimes there are multiple problems. Someone might have a hearing loss and also memory loss. There are phones for memory problems where you can program in numbers with a photograph of person to call, push the picture and the number is dialed.

Ameriphone has a new phone - Dialogue ER (Emergency Response Telephone - this model is amplified and allows you to press a remote control from anywhere in the house and it automatically dials emergency help.

There is another phone with jumbo-sized buttons with Braille characters to help people with vision problem. This phone calls out the numbers you dial so you can hear what you pressed. It is also amplified for people with both hearing loss and vision problems.

I helped a man who said he kept dialing the wrong numbers but could hear well. It turned out that he knew he had vision problems but did not realize he had a hearing loss. This phone was perfect for him.

Many people are not ready to admit that they have a serious hearing problem. When working with a person we try many different types of equipment to see what might help starting with amplified equipment and then trying a VCO phone or TTY.

I want to talk a little about cell phones. I use a Nokia phone and it has wonderful volume. I hold it up to my cochlear implant microphone. It has enough volume that I can even talk while driving my car with the background noise. Nokia is working to develop a cochlear implant patch cord. They already have a neckloop to use with hearing aids that have a T-Coil. Motorola has a cell phone and cochlear implant adapter. Several other corporations are working to develop hearing aid and cochlear implant compatible cell phones

In my job from 1990 to 1996, I used a VCO phone. VCO stands for Voice Carry Over, and that means that you can use your own voice when making calls rather than typing on a TTY. The Relay Telephone operator types on to you on your VCO equipment what the caller is saying but allows you to talk directly to the person you called.

There are various types of equipment to use as VCO phones. There are models with out a keyboard. This is helpful since many senior citizens are not comfortable using new or different equipment. This VCO phone looks like the phone they have always used except that it has a small screen to read what people are saying. There is a new VCO phone that has a Large Visual Display for people that may need larger letters with their low vision. Both Ultratec and Ameriphone have VCO with LVD equipment. The speed at which the writing scrolls by can be varied for individual comfort - from very fast to a slower read out.

Another phone that can be used for VCO can also be used as a TTY. The Q90 made by Ameriphone can be portable and battery operated. It can be used with a Cell phone in a car or anywhere. This equipment has a mic built in so that someone that wants to use Voice Carry Over and talk for themselves instead of the keyboard to type and have the Relay operator talk for them can do so.

The newest VCO device is the Pocket VCO (PVCO). This battery-operated device is the size of a pager but you put it on the telephone receiver at the top where you would normally hold it to your ear. You call the Relay number and the telephone operator types to you on the small screen. You talk directly into the receiver as you always did. The PVCO costs \$250.00. If your state has a voucher program to help you acquire telephone equipment it may cover the PVCO.

To see if your state has a Telephone Device Assistance Program you can log on to [www.TEDPA](http://www.TEDPA) and click on your state.

Many TTY's have memory capability. they can save both names and numbers as well as messages. You can also put a pre-programmed message as you would in an answering machine.

I want to say a couple of things about 711. 711 is going to be the national number through which the Relay Center in every state can be reached. It is being phased in right now will be available in all states by summer of 2001. I picture this to be the greatest help for the hearing population calling the hard of hearing and deaf population or even people with speech difficulty that use a TTY as a Hearing Carry Over (HCO) phone.

All of the toll free phone numbers used now will still be in place but, they are hard for people to remember when they only use them occasionally. Now you can say to your doctor or hearing friends, dial 711 and tell them my phone number.

There are other features for VCO telephone users. VCO to VCO - two people who both have VCO phones can contact the Relay operator and they will type to both VCO users what they are saying to each other.

Two-line VCO is a technique where you need 2 lines - one with a regular phone and one with a VCO, TTY or computer connection. This allows Hard of Hearing to both hear and read what the caller is saying. When a person calls you - after you answer you may say hold please - you dial the Relay number and when they answer you hit the flash button on your phone. Now you have your VCO or TTY phone on and you are holding the receiver of the other phone to your ear so you can both hear and read what is said. The relay operator does not interact and the caller cannot hear the tapping sound of the Relay operator typing. These calls go much faster since you can interact as you would on a normal phone and do not have to wait for the operator to finish typing to have your turn to talk.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I am on the relay service advisory committee of my home state and I can tell you that there is lag time when you use two-line VCO. I have experienced this myself. And, the reality is that if you come clean about it at the beginning of the call, it will be to your benefit. It will help the person who is talking with you to understand the lag time. Two-line VCO is about the closest we can get to right now to functional equivalency, and I think that it is important to understand that we cannot fool anyone. To say that a person at the other end of the line is not going to know that the call is a relay call, even though the hearing person cannot hear the relay operator, is misleading.

ESTHER KELLY: There are also video relay systems where conferencing capability combined with video equipment is used and it is beneficial not only for people who use sign language but people who want to lip-read. Not all states relay services offer this yet, but some like Texas and North Carolina do, plus they include this equipment in their equipment distribution program.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The only way you are going to get real clarity is if you have a high-speed phone line. If you just use a regular, standard phone line, you are not going to be able to get the clarity that you need. You have to have a DSL line or an ISDN line, or something like that.

ESTHER KELLY: I would like to talk about equipment distribution. Some states -- I would say about 20 of them now -- have some form of equipment distribution. I'm well aware of the one in Texas, because I am funded to promote that program called "Specialized Telecommunication Assistance Program." In our state, everyone must pay an application fee of \$35.00 along with proof that they live in Texas and have a phone line. The state will provide whatever equipment they need to have equal access to the telephone. This is not just for hearing loss but any disability such as mobility etc. In Texas, when the equipment is received it is theirs to keep and they can get a new device every 7 years.

Some states have loaner programs so that if you move you must return the equipment. Other states will only provide TTY's. There are states, which have minimum income requirements to obtain equipment. It is best to check with your state to see what their program is. You can do this by going to the Internet under TEDPA and it will bring up this information.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I would like to say, if your state does not have a distribution program, find out whom to speak to in order to start one. I think many of the states don't feel there is enough call for these things, and if they knew there were requests they would be inspired to begin such a program.

ESTHER KELLY: Yes, go to your congressmen, or senator and say, I want this, look at all these states that are helping people. That is what gets programs like this started.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You mentioned that FCC has issued new rules regarding the relay service. One of the new rules will allow states to be reimbursed for video relay service. So, there's no longer any excuse not to offer video relay service. I really encourage anyone to contact the person who is administrator of your state's relay service, and demand video relay service.