



# UTAH COMMUNICATION ACCESS NETWORK

## **History**

History of the Popcorn Coalition and Utah-CAN  
Updated November 2012

## **Coming Together**

In 2001, the Utah Association for the Deaf (UAD) Board set a priority on contacting the organizations for hard of hearing and late-deafened people; UAD President Ron Nelson took it on. During the same year, Sue Ordonez (the Hard of Hearing Specialist at the Utah Community Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing) was encouraging SHHH (Self-Help for Hard of Hearing People) president, Katherine (Kathy) Evans to get to know Ron to see what they had in common. A meeting was set, UCCDHH provided the interpreters and on January 15, 2002, UAD and SHHH sat at the same table as Ron and Kathy explored what they could accomplish together. They chose as their first project to bring more captioned movies to Utah's theaters.

Two months later, Ron and Kathy were joined by Linda Lewis of the Association of Late-Deafened Adults (ALDA). The following year, Alexander Graham Bell Association of Utah (AGB) accepted their invitation and Ann Lovell joined them. It was the very end of 2003 before Emilie Burrows came to their meetings representing Cued Language Network of America (CLNA). They explored the possibility of having Deaf-Blind people represented, but the Utah Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, who receive funding for this population, wanted to send a staff member rather than a deaf-blind person and an interpreter. That was contrary to their vision of who they were and how they represented the people in their groups, but there had been no other offer of representation of deaf-blind people. Each of their groups was made up of people who lived with communication problems day in and day out: they were the consumers.

Government agencies were not represented on the Popcorn Coalition, though they often worked with those agencies.

For several years, they worked with just 5 members, then decided to try to double the representation from their organizations. When they changed their name from the Popcorn Coalition to Utah Communication Access Network, Utah-CAN, they expanded their board to include members of action committees, in addition to the representatives of their organizations.

As of 2012, Ann Lovell (AGB) and Kathy Evans (HLAA & ALDA) co-chair the group. With active members, Joshua Jackson (AGB), Marilee Hart (HLAA), Linda Lewis (ALDA), Philippe Montalette (UAD), Eli McCowan (UAD), Mike Shelton (Sports Venues Chair) and Kasey Byrd (Comcast Project chair, completed). Comments and advice were given on their internet discussions by Ron Nelson (UAD) and Emilie Mulholland (CLNA) and Robb Kerr (UAD) as time and circumstance permit.

Historically, their organizations – these groups of people – had not tried to find a single voice. Communication methods seemed to have been more important than what could be gained from each other or from working together – sometimes there had even been animosity between the groups. Meeting together and forming a coalition had been an eye-opening and heart-bonding experience for each of them. Of course, they had a communication barrier, but the Sanderson Community Center of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (formerly the Utah Community Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing) had been committed to helping them succeed and had provided the interpreters and transliterators, assistive listening devices and/or CART for their meetings. Without their help, these groups would still not be working together. Over time, and with regular meetings, successful advocacy work happened because they could tell people that they represented all the D/deaf and hard of hearing people in the state of Utah. They found that their contacts sat up and paid attention then because they were united in what they were asking. Because of their makeup, they can advocate and push for accessibility, not just educate, and that gave them a strong presence.

## **What's in a name?**

Ron always brought popcorn to the meetings – just as a snack for all of them to enjoy. They referred to themselves as the popcorn group, and they knew what they meant. Then, when they talked about promoting the open captioned movies, they thought about a party before the showing of a much-anticipated movie and wondered if anyone would come, Ron said, “Just give them popcorn; if there’s popcorn, everybody will come.” But they were trying to find a serious name, maybe an acronym that would identify what they stood for. One of the guests to their meeting stayed while they discussed their name and commented, “Please don’t have another string of initials to remember. I get them all mixed up. But I can remember Popcorn Coalition; please don’t change your name.” They saw her point and the joke that had been their name became official.

But there was always the “serious” side to what they were doing. When they were advocating with a business or agency they wanted to have a more serious name. When John Waldo organized WASH-CAP and started making progress with captions for movies, theatres and transit, they found their model and mentor and changed their name to Utah Communication Access Network, or Utah-CAN.

## **Their Work**

They looked into many different kinds of projects and found that the five organizations shared many common needs for access. But they were spreading themselves too thin, and needed a way to cut back and focus more. They developed a Mission Statement and a Vision Statement to help them stay on track.

- Mission Statement: Improve access to services and information for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing, regardless of communication methodology in Utah.
- Vision Statement: Strengthen advocacy and community relationships as a means of improving and increasing services and support for individuals who are D/deaf and hard of hearing.

The Popcorn Coalition’s first and main project has been to bring more captioned movies to Utah. They analyzed the obstacles that were in their way and solved them one by one.

### What they were seeing in 2012:

- Megaplex theater chain offered open and closed captioned movies each week in all their theaters. Thanksgiving point even had an open caption showing on Saturday afternoon, and it was always one of the best movies released that week.
- Cinemark theaters have started using a CaptiView device which allows captioning in all their auditoriums with digital projectors. About 80% of movies were captioned by the studios, so every showing of those movies were shown with closed captions.
- Theatre managers were eager to extend their services to D/deaf and hard of hearing people. The Popcorn Coalition/Utah-CAN representatives had to meet with all of them – which were a time problem for a small group of volunteers.
- The theaters were doing a better job of announcing the captioned movies on their own websites, including changes necessitated by problems.
- CMoviesUtah list members sometimes contacted them for information or with problems. They served as a go-between, helping both the D/HH patrons and the theatre managers.
- The Capitol Theatre had a captioned matinee for each of its Broadway Across America shows in the fall season.
- Sports venues were starting to respond to their requests for access. With equipment upgrades, they were able to provide some good compliance in this area.
- The Popcorn Coalition/Utah-CAN representatives planned to work more closely with Tuacahn and the Shakespeare Festival in southern Utah to make more people aware of other good accessibility advocacy that is paying off so all D/deaf and hard of hearing people can take advantage of these opportunities.
- A brochure was being prepared to help them get information into the hands of people who care about access, with the goal of building a membership in Utah-CAN that will suggest and implement more communication advocacy projects in the state of Utah.

Today, the Popcorn Coalition/Utah-CAN representatives have learned that they are not alone! There is a national-level coalition of their groups (and others) working to improve access to movies. Each of their organizations has found leader Internet groups that discuss these issues. Insight Cinema was helpful in problem solving, but they have now changed their focus.

The Popcorn Coalition/Utah-CAN has met with several different agencies to improve their access to their services and to brainstorm with them about ways to better meet their needs.

Among them are:

- Utah Department of Health
- Sanderson Center's Outreach Specialist
- Sanderson Center's Adult Education Director
- Public Service Commission
- Salt Lake County's ADA Compliance specialist
- Salt Lake County's Patron Services Manager
- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' Disabled Services Director,

- PBS KUED Director of Broadcasting and Director of Creative Services,
- Western Region Outreach Center and Consortia's Outreach Coordinator,
- State Emergency Agency
- HUD office in Utah
- Department of Public Safety Communications Bureau
- Homeland Security Council special needs advisory committee
- They held a town hall meeting with local TV Stations regarding captioning of emergency and disaster broadcasts.
- They asked Senator Goodfellow to introduce legislation to allow the Public Service Commission (PSC) to distribute pagers and other equipment as technology changes, which legislation passed and has been implemented.
- They asked the PSC and Senator Goodfellow to introduce legislation to raise the poverty limit that allows people to qualify for the Telecommunications Equipment Distribution Program, operated by the PSC. In preparing this they learned that the PSC funds for this program were running out because of the cost of the interpreter training program that had been implemented a couple of years before, as well as the number of homes and businesses that were switching from landlines to mobile phones. So they asked the Senator to sponsor legislation to place the surcharge on cell phones as well as land lines to protect that fund. He advised them to handle these two issues one at a time. The surcharge on cell phones passed in 2011. The poverty level qualification needs to be addressed again.
- They worked to see that the transition to digital television would not leave them without captions. This involved developing contacts with the stations and with the cable and satellite companies, doing some troubleshooting and keeping their people informed to help them prepare for the transition.
- They met with KSL television to help them implement captioning that would better meet their needs. They discussed emergency situations and the problems encountered in getting captions on the air, and agreed on some ways that could be handled to still get information to them and to let them know captions are coming. They also were able to get captions reinstated on some local programs where it had been eliminated.

## **Connections beyond Utah**

They have good ties to their national organizations: NAD, HLAA, AGBell and ALDA. They help them keep on top of emerging problems and projects. Some are best handled at the national level, but others they find need some implementation at their level, too.

- They became an affiliate member of the national Coalition of Organizations for Accessible Technology (COAT) which has succeeded in the passage of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act. This should assure that as technology evolves, people with disabilities will not be left behind. For example, anything that has been shown on television with captions (which is almost everything now) must include captions when it is shown on the internet beginning in January 2012.
- They connected with John Waldo, an attorney of Hearing Loss Law in Washington state – now in Oregon. He founded Washington Communication Access Project, or Wash-

CAP, and has been a major force in turning the tide for captioned movies, theatre and transit. They chose to pattern their organization after Wash-CAP with not only a name change from Popcorn Coalition to Utah Communication Access Network – Utah-CAN – but also becoming a membership organization with a board directing its efforts.

- They signed on to the comments prepared by John Waldo for the Department of Justice concerning captioned movies.

## **Conclusion**

The experiment to work together has been very successful. The attitudes developed by the members of the Popcorn Coalition/Utah-CAN are flowing into the membership of their respective organizations. Their collective need for communication access is powerful both in bringing them together and making changes happen . . . all because the UAD Board of Directors decided to reach out and the rest of the organizations accepted the invitation.

Credit given to Katherine (Kathy) Evans – 2012.