

Presenter Biographies

Sharon Behun was appointed director of Pennsylvania's Office for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (ODHH) on Sept. 21, 2006. As Director of ODHH, Behun oversees the advocacy, information and referral services the commonwealth provides to all Pennsylvanians. In addition, Behun has oversight of the registry of registered sign language interpreters. During her tenure as director, she has overseen several projects to increase the level of advocacy with initiatives such as equipping ODHH with videophones for better communication with constituents, partnering with the Unemployment Compensation to provide services to their claimants who use American Sign Language via a videophone, and collaborating with the Department of Public Welfare's Office of Children Youth and Families (OCYF) to improve its services to families who have a member who is deaf or hard of hearing. Currently, ODHH is writing a "Best Practice" guide to assist Pennsylvanians in securing accommodations, such as CART (Computer Assisted Real-Time Transcription), interpreters, or to locate resources. In addition, Behun has made ODHH more visible to the public by hosting a hearing loss expo in 2007 and in 2010. The expos were avenues to provide information and showcase the services offered to Pennsylvanians who are deaf and hard of hearing. Behun holds a Bachelor of Science degree in sign language interpreting from Bloomsburg University, and is certified in transliterating and interpreting by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID). Whether as a participant in a stakeholder group advising on how to improve accessibility to Pennsylvanians with a hearing loss, providing legislation analysis, or providing technical assistance, or trainings Behun has advocated with Pennsylvania's who are deaf and hard of hearing for over 15 years.

Denise M. Brown is proud to serve deaf and hard-of-hearing Pennsylvanians as the Office for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing's (ODHH) Representative since 1997. Whether she's advocating for the needs of people with hearing loss, informing the general public about ODHH services, or referring clients to organizations that can help improve the deaf and hard-of-hearing communities, Denise believes in giving back to the community, and feels honored to have the opportunity to do that as an ODHH representative. In addition to this job, Denise currently teaches American Sign Language (ASL) at Lehigh Carbon Community College. She also serves as a board member of Lehigh Valley Center for Independent Living and she actively participates as a member in Partnership for a Disability Friendly Community in Lehigh Valley. Prior to joining ODHH in 1997, Denise served as coordinator of residential education for the Maryland School for the Deaf; as acting coordinator of Sign Languages Studies and Interpreter Education, and as an American Sign Language instructor for the Community College of Philadelphia; and as a case manager and counselor for the deaf at Philadelphia Elwyn, Inc. Also, Denise had been actively involved with the Pennsylvania Society for the Advancement of the Deaf's leadership training program. From 1989 – 1991, Denise also taught deaf students in St. Lucia, Eastern Caribbean, as a U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer. A native of Allentown, Pennsylvania, Denise graduated magna cum laude with a B.A. in Social Work from Gallaudet University in 1987, and a Master of Arts in Deafness Rehabilitation from New York University in 1989.

Noah Buchholz is a Deaf performing artist. His performances include Deaf cultural folktales, original fiction stories and poems, improv, stand-up comedy, and some works that are translated from English into American Sign Language. He grew up in a cross-cultural home: his father is

hearing, his mother is Deaf, and all his six of his brothers and sisters are either Deaf or hard-of-hearing. He holds a BA from Wheaton College. Now, he is pursuing an MDiv at Princeton Theological Seminary. He is also the Executive Director of Deaf International and a teaching pastor at Deaf International Community Church in Olathe, Kansas.

Bridget Klein grew up in Wisconsin and moved to New York to enroll in the Keuka College baccalaureate degree program. After receiving her degree, she moved on to attend Gallaudet University in Washington, DC to earn her master's degree in Sign Language Teaching and Culture Studies. Bridget taught language and culture at Bloomsburg University's Interpreter Training Program for two years. Currently Bridget is working in Maryland, Virginia and Washington, DC. Also Bridget Klein is a current PhD candidate in Anthropology at American University in Washington, DC.

Brian T. McHale, CI/CT is a native of Tamaqua, Pennsylvania, located in the heart of the Anthracite Coal Region. He is a native signer and grew up with a Deaf older brother. He graduated from Tamaqua High School and attended Wilkes University on a football scholarship; all before transferring to Bloomsburg University's Interpreter Training Program. Brian studied at Gallaudet University during his junior year in the HUGS (hearing under graduate students) program. He has worked as an educational interpreter for five years at Carbon-Lehigh IU #21 and now works as a freelance interpreter. He is state registered and AOPC certified.

Keven Poore, a CDI, is the owner of Positive Actions in Communication & Therapy (P.A.C.T.). P.A.C.T. is a newly developing multi-service company aimed at improving/increasing access to communication. He also is licensed as a professional counselor in Pennsylvania. He received his Masters in Mental Health Counseling from Gallaudet University and has provided mental health and chemical dependency services to deaf and hard of hearing individuals for 20 years. He has provided trainings on substance abuse and mental health nationwide and in Canada. Keven has held management positions in mental health or substance abuse programs in New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.

Maryjean (Mj) Shahen is currently employed as an American Sign Language instructor at the University of Pittsburgh and is an adjunct instructor/member of the interpreting team as a mentor at the Community College of Allegheny County. She holds a Professional level certification from the American Sign Language Teacher Association. Mj was a Special Education teacher/Counselor with deaf children with disabilities such as deafblindness, autism and special needs in the Peace Corps program in Kenya through Kenyan Sign Language. She also worked in the field in New York and Pennsylvania. Mj has a Bachelor of Science degree in recreation/leisure counseling from Gallaudet University and a Master of Science degree from Hofstra University with a specialty as Education / Rehabilitation counselor/therapist.

Jackie Stutts is a Trainer with the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence (PCADV) where she does curriculum development and coordinates and implements training initiatives focused on the diverse experiences and needs of victims of domestic violence, including interventions for maximizing safety. Her training responsibilities extend to state agencies and organizations, other service providers, education and medical disciplines and community-based groups. Jackie is a diversity trainer for the Coalition and staff liaison to the PCADV Diversity

and Training committees. She has conducted statewide training on “Domestic Violence: When It Comes to Work” and “Domestic Violence in Later Life” for state level agencies. Jackie is co-chair of the Cross Systems Advocacy Coalition and was co-presenter in the statewide training of state hospitals on trauma related to sexual and domestic violence. Jackie was PCADV’s lead staff in the partnership with PCAR and the Disability Rights Network for the 2007 OVW Disabilities Collaboration Grant.

Karla Vierthaler is Outreach Coordinator for the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR). She began her work at PCAR addressing the needs of elder sexual abuse through curriculum development, training elder care and victim service professionals. She currently works on issues of sexual violence in the disability community as well as diversity initiatives. Karla is co-chair of the Cross-Systems Advocacy Coalition, a statewide initiative addressing violence against people with disabilities. She participated in the statewide training of the state hospitals on trauma related to sexual and domestic violence, and is a member of Project Illumination, a statewide campaign to bring awareness to sexual violence against people with disabilities. Karla was PCAR’s lead staff in a partnership with PCADV and the Disability Rights Network for the 2007 OVW Disabilities Collaboration Grant.

Dr. Rodney Smith has a distinguished 25-year career guiding global teams in the implementation of large-scale, innovative technology and business solutions to align technology with business objectives. He has been recognized for business presentations and contract negotiations; establishing solid stakeholder relationships across multiple organizational levels; and for effectively managing teams in Bangalore, India for ten years implementing and managing blended offshore / onshore development models to reduce costs, maximize profits and increase productivity. Dr. Smith earned his Doctorate of Business Administration (Information Systems) degree from Argosy University; Master of Business Administration (Accounting) and Bachelor of Science in Accounting degrees from The University of Akron. Dr. Smith has passed the National Interpreter Certification (NIC) Knowledge Examination and is currently studying for the NIC Performance Examination.