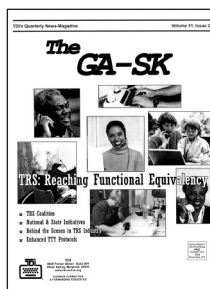


Executive Director's Message

Claude L. Stout

*"... TRS users
are the key
to change TRS
for the better."*



On the Cover

The Relay Operator is the hub of all TRS calls, no matter who places or receives the call.

Photo Credits: TDI is grateful to Telecommunications Access of Maryland, headed by Gil Becker, who provided most of the photos (except for the photo of the wheelchair user provided by Ameriphone) on the cover and in the article

TRS: The Case for Reaching Functional Equivalency.

Call to Arms!!! Let's Unite and Work Together toward TRS Functional Equivalency

This GA-SK issue theme is Functional Equivalency in Telecommunications Relay Services. Since fall 1999, leaders from national organizations/special interest groups representing the interests of 29 million individuals who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, late-deafened, speech-disabled and deaf-blind work together as the TRS Coalition to review the current status of TRS, examine benefits and obstacles with TRS, identify areas in current TRS regulations that need updating, and make proposals that would improve TRS substantially toward functional equivalency. We also represent a larger group that does not use special equipment and are on the other half of all relay conversations. They are our family members, friends, our contacts in government agencies, educational institutions, and businesses.

TRS users, whether they need special equipment or not, want to be able to make a TRS call AND benefit from ALL the technological and human features that persons without any special equipment enjoy during a similar call at the same time. We fully expect to experience the same rate of speed, no less clarity, full banter, and the latest in technology to enjoy "real-time conversation" via any mode of TRS as those who engage in voice-to-voice calls at the same cost.

Under the chairmanship of William E. Kennard, the Federal Communications Commission has immersed itself into active, productive dialogue with consumers, state-level regulators and industry to produce initiatives that move TRS toward functional equivalency or "real time conversation". We heartily salute the FCC for its extensive efforts with formal proceedings and actions on this specific topic in the last few years. However, much more work needs to be done and the FCC cannot achieve all this alone.

Some state relay administrators and TRS providers were asked to give us information on their efforts to bring TRS closer to functional equivalency. State relay administrators from California, North Carolina, Texas and Wisconsin share their efforts on implementing their constituencies' desire to make relay calls more like a regular voice-to-voice call. AT&T, Hamilton, Sprint and VISTA IT reveal their corporate initiatives and strategies toward TRS functional equivalency.

Last but not least, without TTYs and other adaptive telecommunications equipment, TRS would not have a purpose. Last

Call to Arms
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Call to Arms*Continued from page 2*

year at the 13th Biennial TDI International Conference in Seattle, Ultratec and Sprint announced a trial called FASTRAN. Ultratec provides us with an update on their FASTRAN project while Ameriphone and Krown Manufacturing detail their innovative technologies that would assist TRS in reaching functional equivalency.

The TRS Coalition fully expects that TRS reaches its potential as a functionally equivalent telecommunications service as soon as possible. It needs to remain as a viable tool for communication at home, in the workplace, and in the community. The success of TRS will depend on substantial corporate investment, active monitoring and support from the government, and strong consumer involvement in outreach and policy development processes at the local, state, and national levels.

Speaking of consumer involvement, we cannot deny that TRS users are the key to change TRS for the better. If a problem arises during a TRS call, ask the CA to transfer you to a relay supervisor

and discuss what recently occurred. If you are not satisfied with the results, speak with the relay customer service representative or account manager. If a TRS provider still doesn't satisfy you with some answers for a problem, contact the state relay administrator. If you are still not satisfied at the state level, contact the FCC.

If you want to work toward better TRS services in general, become a volunteer! Feel free to ask your state relay administrator or a TRS account manager about serving on your statewide TRS advisory council. Work with your state commission and your associations to advocate ways to make your TRS more functionally equivalent. If you know of a group, club or a business that needs to know more about TRS, ask your TRS provider to send someone who can give a presentation, set up a booth during a community event, or even be interviewed for the newspaper, television or radio.

It is crucial that we bear arms in areas of outreach, assessment, and policy development throughout America to help TRS reach its full potential. As a result, we will then experience higher standards of living and be fully included in society. Onward TRS users, let's march toward functional equivalency!!! **SK**

TRS: Defining Functional Equivalency*Continued from page 5*

some snag that could be attributable to several factors – including how a relay call is made. Several people have told me that a relay call averages three times the length of a similar call without TRS so if the relay call took fifteen minutes, it would have been a five minute voice-to-voice call. Even my parents purchased a TTY just so I would not have to use the relay.

When you boil it down for a TRS consumer, “functional equivalency” means that they want to be able to make a TRS call independently with confidence AND benefit from ALL the technological and human features that persons without any special equipment can enjoy during a similar call at the same time. TRS consumers are people with and without special equipment that make telephone calls through TRS and those who receive such calls. They include individuals from teenagers to family and friends, from senior citizens to support services or emergency help, from entrepreneurs to customers and suppliers, from clients to doctors and other professionals, just about anyone can be a TRS consumer. For individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, late deafened or deaf-blind, “functional equivalency” means the ability to converse in the language of their choice, whether English or sign language, with anyone.

One half of nearly every relay call involves a hearing person. Another scenario illustrates the other end of the call... (HP=Hearing Person; CA=Communications Asst. TTY=TTY caller)

(HP) Tell him I am going to come down to Brooklyn next Wednesday for a few days and would like to stop by and see if we can have lunch at the Café Francais...

(CA) WAIT COFFEE WHAT? SPELL THAT

PLEASE AND SLOW DOWN

(HP) Café Francais c-a-f-e new word f-r-a-n French restaurant OK?

(CA After long pause) YOU NEED TO SAY GO AHEAD

(HP) I hate this relay Go ahead

(TTY) (long pause) I KNOW THIS RELAY IS NOT THE PERFECT SOLUTION BUT IT'S THE ONLY WAY I CAN KEEP IN TOUCH WITH PEOPLE LIKE YOU GO AHEAD

(HP) Who am I talking to? I want to speak with a supervisor ...

Confusing right? Our expectation for effective TRS is no different from those who enjoy voice-to-voice calls. They measure the effectiveness of TRS by features they enjoy in voice-to-voice calls such as speed, clarity, and transmission of the message. The normal exchange of conversation without any third party is considered “real-time” as if you were talking face-to-face. The old saying goes “It is not just what you say, but how you say it too.” The entire message including the tone (emotional content) goes through as intended and is received by the other party without any misunderstandings. When the message goes through a third party, some things indeed “get lost in the translation”.

How can we make TRS more effective? Listen to voice of the consumers and work together to establish goals that enhance any telephone call, regardless of each party's capabilities and bring this vital service closer to “functional equivalency”. It is time to meet up with the consumer's definition of and expectations for “functional equivalency” – also known as independence! **SK**