

FACT SHEET

TELEPHONE ACCESS FOR PEOPLE WITH SPEECH DISABILITIES

by Bob Segalman, Ph.D.

Do you have a speech disability and live in the USA (including the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico)? If so, you can now use a free telephone service 24 hours a day. "Speech to Speech" (STS) provides communication assistants (CAs) for people with difficulty being understood by the public on a telephone. The Federal Communications Commission in Washington DC regulates STS, which is a form of relay service. STS is also available in Australia, New Zealand, and Sweden.

STS is provided through the TTY relay in each state. Unlike TTY, STS users communicate by voice through a CA because many people with speech disabilities have difficulty typing or may not have the capability to use a computer. Additionally, persons with hearing loss may use STS if they are unable to use the TTY relay, and can hear with an amplified telephone.

People with speech disabilities can dial toll free to reach a patient trained CA who is familiar with many speech patterns and has excellent language recognition skills. The CA makes telephone calls for a person who is unable to converse clearly, translates their dialog, and repeats their sentence exactly within a 3-way calling environment. Every month users make about 12,000 calls nationally. STS is the only way for many people to telephone others not accustomed to understanding their speech.

Many STS users have Parkinson's disease, cerebral palsy, ALS, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, or strokes affecting their speech. Other users stutter or have had a laryngectomy.

STS helps speech synthesizer users and users of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC). AAC users may ask the STS CA set up the call, negotiate the menu, introduce the call explaining AAC, and then go into the background. This enables AAC users to communicate independently once the other party is on the line.

Visit the STS website: www.speechoospeech.org where you will find the Speech-to-Speech 800 access numbers for individual states, or access STS by dialing 711 and asking for a Speech to Speech Communications Assistant (CA).

To report problems of STS or request information: Call 711, request STS and ask for me (Bob Segalman) at 916-362-0982. If the CA cannot place an STS call for you, please e-mail Bob (drsts@comcast.net).

I had cerebral palsy and developed the concept of STS. Now STS makes telephone use much easier for me. (Bob Segalman)