

Hello,

My name is Andrew Fitzenrider and I live with a speech disorder-stuttering. I tend to stutter more frequently, and experience longer speech "blockages" when speaking with strangers on the telephone. I believe this is because I never know how a stranger will react to my stuttering. This results in my experiencing more anxiety before and during this particular speaking situation. In addition, not being able to see my listener and use "non-verbal" communication methods adds to my anxiety and frustration-all I have when using the telephone is my voice.

I have experienced many telephone "hang ups" from listeners, either because they are not familiar with my stuttering or believe I am making a "prank" telephone call.

I was thrilled when I discovered Speech to Speech (STS), because the Communication Assistant (CA) can inform the listener that I stutter, am not a prank caller, and can ask for a little extra patience.

As a person with a speech disorder, it can be difficult for me to advocate for myself. The telephone is used to get needs met and tasks accomplished-it is a device which promotes independence. Like the relay services for the deaf, STS provides a bridge to the "fluent population" for people with speech disorders. I have discovered when the listener is informed that I stutter, he/she becomes more patient.

The speaking situation then becomes "stutterable, " which actually reduces my anxiety and promotes more fluent-sounding speech. STS provides me with "peace of mind" in knowing that I can complete telephone calls to strangers independently. This provides a sense of dignity to myself and many potential STS users.

For STS to benefit people who stutter on the telephone, I believe the following issues and ideas must be considered:

Many stutterers experience "silent" blocks lasting several seconds or more. Communication Assistants and listeners must be careful not to terminate a call when there is prolonged silence. I recommend that the CA remain on the phone for at least 60-120 seconds for a stutterer to get a word out.

I believe an outreach program for STS should be separate from relay services for the deaf and hard of hearing. The deaf and speech-impaired are different populations and require different services.

I think being a registered STS user could help many people who stutter. It is difficult for some

stutterers to provide information each time they use STS.

A national outreach program makes more sense than having each state provide outreach. If states continue to provide their own outreach, standards and guidelines must be universal.