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Deaf Alumnus Advocates for and Inspires the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community

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ALUMNI

Deaf Alumnus Advocates for and Inspires the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON SEPTEMBER 14, 2020



Kyle Kiser, '06, Teaches American Sign Language and Owns Interpreting Agency

When he was 5 years old, Kyle Kiser, a 2006 alumnus of Gardner-Webb University, taught a few basic signs in American Sign Language (ASL) to friends and members of his church. He didn't realize it then, but those early days were shaping his future as an educator.

Kiser was 2 years old when his parents found out about his hearing loss, and the whole family started learning sign language. "My parents hired a sign language tutor to come to our home and teach signs," Kiser shared. "Everyone in my family and extended family was involved every week at our home learning signs to communicate with me. This went on for two years. I think in a sense I've always been a teacher at heart. Being raised in a family filled with educators, I learned some things about teaching and how to keep students engaged. I've always enjoyed teaching my first language to those who want to learn it. In so many ways, this brings down a few communication barriers for us when we interact with the hearing community."

As a student in the ASL program at Gardner-Webb, Kiser built a strong network with local organizations that greatly helped him with his career. "What I loved most about GWU," Kiser noted, "was meeting and making more Deaf/Hard of Hearing friends. We shared a lot of the same growing up experiences, backgrounds, education, religion, struggles, etc. I also loved all of my professors and the Noel Center for Disability Resources' staff/faculty, because they all showed their care for our success and ensured all of our accommodation needs were met."



Kyle Kiser

Kiser is the lead interpreting/ASL instructor in the two-year interpreter training program at Blue Ridge Community College in Flat Rock, N.C. Two GWU alumna, Rose Fichera-Lening and Kimberly Hendrix, also teach at the college. Kiser has 15 years of experience teaching ASL and has taught at Blue Ridge since 2016. For the past two years, Kiser has coordinated the college's efforts to offer ASL courses at four high schools in Henderson County, N.C. He teaches ASL to high school students enrolled in the Blue Ridge Career and College Promise (CCP) program. When schools closed in March because of the coronavirus, Kiser relied on his previous online teaching experiences to transition his courses to a virtual format.

Additionally, Kiser also owns an interpreting agency, Clarity Language Access, LLC, which he operates in his hometown, Shelby, N.C. He decided to open the business after speaking with his friends about what the Deaf/Hard of Hearing community in Shelby needed. "We had a big discussion

about what we wished we had in Shelby to provide support and resources to the Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, and Deaf-Blind community," he explained. "Not only for our community but for the hearing community as well."

After that discussion, Kiser rolled up his sleeves and got to work. He started in 2015 with a team of two employees and two sub-contracted ASL interpreters. "Now, Clarity Language Access, LLC has a team of five employees and over 100 sub-contracted language interpreters who offer interpreting and translating services in different languages," Kiser said.

"God gave our world variety for a reason and with a purpose to learn about each other's differences and abilities."

Kyle Kiser

During the pandemic, the agency moved quickly to provide access to customers and clients. "Clarity Language Access, LLC provides interpreting services to public schools in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Texas," Kiser informed. "We were able to continue to provide our services virtually using ZOOM or under a virtual platform the school had set up for their Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing students. For other services we provide, such as a medical, legal, etc., our language interpreters followed the business protocols and the policies being enforced in the states where the services were provided."

In the midst of coping with these changes, Kiser plans to expand the business on Oct. 1. The agency will begin offering language services in 200 spoken languages nationwide. "It's been challenging but great," Kiser affirmed. "Everyone involved, our employees and sub-contractors, maintains excellent relationships with our customers and clients. Word-of-mouth and ASL are powerful tools in the business world. Clarity Language Access, LLC wouldn't be where it is today without these amazing people. Our customers and clients are the reason why we're still here today."

During Deaf Awareness Month, celebrated in September, Kiser will continue advocating for and inspiring the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. He likes to share a quote from I. King Jordan, the first deaf president of Gallaudet University, the world's only university with all programs and services designed specifically for students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. "Jordan said, 'Deaf people can do anything hearing people can do, except hear,'" Kiser said. "I repeat this quote to those who are interested in learning about Deaf/Hard of Hearing people and who want to become a part of our community. We're all human beings—just born differently. God gave our world variety for a reason and with a purpose to learn about each other's differences and abilities." He continued, "Anyone can learn how to sign. ASL is the third most common language in our country today. There is a demand for ASL courses across the country, but we need more teachers. Hopefully, one day we will be able to have more Deaf/Hard of Hearing teachers in our public and private schools to offer this language and introduce our children earlier to the Deaf/Hard of Hearing community rather than later."



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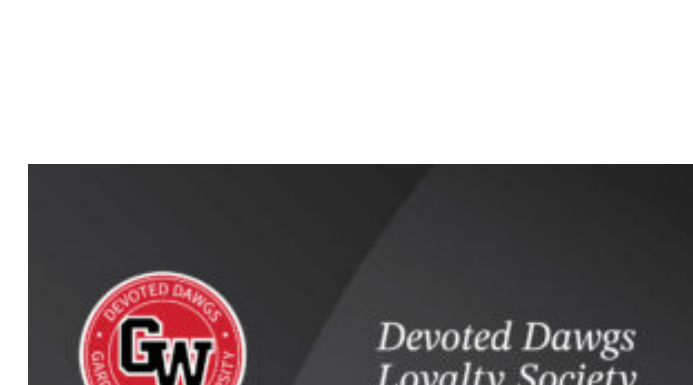
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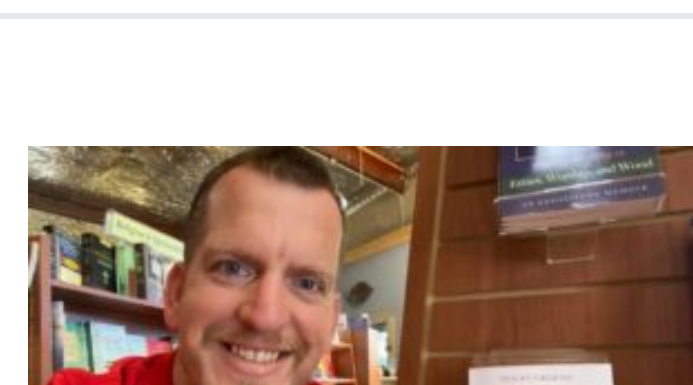


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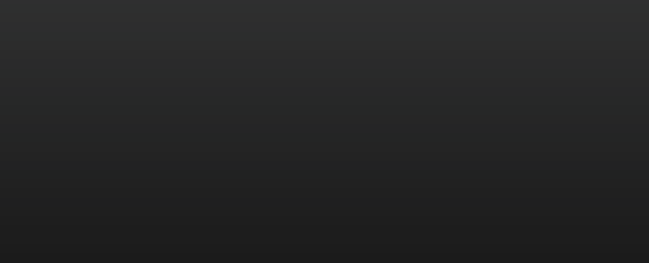
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