

New Information for Disability Specialists Added to LDS.org

By **Melissa Merrill**
Church News and Events

Julie Brink of Indiana, USA, raised a daughter who is Deaf and served for years as an American Sign Language interpreter in her stake. Elaine Allison of Arizona, USA, had a long career as a public school teacher, where she had both direct and indirect interaction with students with disabilities. She also has a nephew with Down syndrome and close friends who have suffered from multiple

sclerosis and ALS, or Lou Gehrig's disease.

Neither Sister Brink nor Sister Allison consider themselves "experts" in the realm of disabilities, yet both of them serve as stake disability specialists, a calling for which new information has been added to the Serving in the Church section of LDS.org in 10 languages. (The calling may actually exist at a stake or ward level or, where the need merits it, both.)

Although the calling of ward or stake disability specialist is mentioned briefly in *Handbook 2: Administering the Church*, some leaders are left wondering what that calling might entail.

"There are situations where ward leaders may not recognize a need or know what to do in response to a particular need when they do recognize

it," said Christopher Phillips, manager of Disability Services for the Church. "There are many situations where a disability specialist might be helpful, but not everyone even realizes this calling exists.

"This new online section of Serving in the Church doesn't describe in detail everything a person in this calling should do," he continued, "but it does give ideas and resources so that a person serving in this position can help leaders, teachers, and families with disability-related issues."

The information posted on LDS.org focuses on how specialists can help ward and stake leaders:

- Identify and get to know individuals with disabilities and their families within the ward or stake.
- Include members with disabilities in meetings and activities.
- Respond to disability-related questions and concerns from parents, leaders, and other individuals.
- Identify meaningful opportunities for members with disabilities to serve.
- Identify specific needs of families (including caregiving needs) and, where appropriate, identify community, ward, and stake resources available to assist with those needs.

It's important to note that the disability specialist isn't the only one doing these things. Rather, his or her role is to help other leaders better understand and serve those with disabilities. In addition, the disability specialist also "helps individuals and parents affected by disabilities share information with ward members and leaders in a helpful way." ■

To read more of this article about disability specialists, visit news.lds.org.



New information on LDS.org in 10 languages helps those who are called as stake disability specialists strengthen Church members with disabilities.