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“Important Message”

I want to share my story about when I was a young teenager. I grew up without receiving information from television because I did not have a closed-caption decoder box, which is a piece of equipment that provides a text version of dialogue on the bottom of a television screen to enable deaf/hard of hearing and the elderly to understand what is being said on television programs. Many TVs now have the decoder built into the TV, but most of the educational commercials and/or public service announcements (PSAs) are currently still not closed-captioned.

I remember a commercial I saw when I was a teenager that could have provided valuable information, but whose message I missed because it was not captioned. In the commercial, a woman was talking and cooking fried eggs. I assumed that this woman was trying to sell eggs. I thought the eggs looked good and it made me hungry (again remember I did not have the closed-caption decoder box and I cannot hear). However, many years later I realized that this commercial was not about selling eggs. In fact, this commercial was trying to educate the community that these frying eggs are like cooking your brain when you are using drugs. I was very upset about the missed valuable lesson that I could have learned. If I had understood the commercial, I could have asked my parents for more information about what drugs are. I ended up using drugs in college for a few years.

Today, I look back and wonder: if this commercial was closed-captioned, would this message have prevented me from using drugs or caused me to seek more information about drugs from my parents? There are so many ifs and what ifs...

I want to educate our deaf and hard of hearing, non-English speaking and elderly, to stop and prevent alcohol and drug abuse. We need to start advocating for more captions on commercials, public service announcements and live streaming through the internet to help prevent people from using alcohol and/or drugs in our community.

For more information about closed-captioning, visit: <http://www.fcc.gov/guides/closed-captioning>