Hearing and Speech Agency in Baltimore gets Google grant
By: Lizzy McLellan Daily Record Business Writer July 9, 2014

Google has chosen five nonprofits for its Giving through Glass grant, and one of them is a Baltimore-based organization.

The Hearing and Speech Agency will receive a pair of Google Glass, a $25,000 grant, a trip to Google in San Francisco for training and access to Glass developers. The organization is planning to use these resources to improve communication for people with speech language challenges, hearing loss and autism.

Glass is a hands-free computer that users wear on the face like glasses. But instead of lenses, it has an optical display in front of one eye.

HASA and the other five winners were selected from more than 1,300 proposals.

Susan Glasgow, executive director of HASA, said that the organization will be developing more specific plans for the grant when its leaders attend the Google Glass Base Camp beginning next week in San Francisco.

“We’re very excited about being one of the organizations selected,” she said.

Members of the hearing-impaired community have given Google Glass mixed reviews, as some of the features are only helpful to people with certain hearing disorders, and the device may not fit well with all hearing aids.

But HASA is planning to provide Glass for teachers and staff members, not clients, said Tammy Black, director of communications.

Erin Medley, a teacher of the deaf at HASA, spearheaded the proposal to Google. One of her ideas was that teachers could use Glass to collect data about students more efficiently to record their progress. It could make data collection easier, and the data itself more visual, she said.

She has other ideas as well.
“I got stuck on the idea of imagining what it would be like to take your teacher home,” she said. “What would it be like to see the world through the eyes of someone who has autism?”

HASA has already begun working with Google developers remotely, and Medley will represent the organization next week for the California training.

The other winners are Classroom Champions, in Florida; 3,000 Miles to a Cure, based in North Carolina; the Mark Morris Dance Group, of New York; and Women’s Audio Mission, in San Francisco.

The Hearing and Speech Agency’s history extends back to 1926, when it was founded as the Speech Readers’ League of Baltimore. It provides audiology, education, interpreting and speech-language services to people with a wide variety of communication disabilities.