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Variety St. Louis Gives Children a Voice

*Critical Technology Now Available to Those Who Need Assistance to Express
Their Wants, Needs and Feelings Every Day.*

Imagine being unable to let your loved ones know that you are hungry, in pain, or that you love them. A new, innovative program from Variety St. Louis eases such concerns and literally gives children a voice.

Variety's new initiative addresses the frustration, isolation, and helplessness felt by children who are unable to communicate verbally. While some children can use communication devices at school or during speech therapy, they do not own them, leaving many voiceless in the evenings, on weekends, and during the summer. Costly communication devices and even communications apps designed for tablets are unaffordable for many families.

Variety's *My Voice*[®] program provides communication devices to local children who do not have consistent access to this critical technology. By providing the tools for expression and self-advocacy at no cost to families, Variety empowers children and teens with independence at home, school, and in our community.

"Every child deserves to be heard," explains Variety St. Louis Executive Director, Brian Roy. "Communication connects us all, and Variety is thrilled to launch the *My Voice*[®] program so kids and teens in our community can express their needs, their thoughts, and their feelings."

With *My Voice*[®], Variety provides eligible participants with the device, the prescribed communication app, a protective case and any necessary accessories (wheelchair mount and more), and a two-year warranty. Variety works with the child's speech-language pathologist to determine which specific tools will meet the child's needs and to help integrate the device into the child's everyday life. *My Voice*[®] is currently available to children ages three to 20 years old in St. Louis City and St. Charles County.

Variety envisions a world where abilities are redefined, and possibilities are reimagined for kids with special needs. In pursuit of this vision, Variety empowers children with physical and developmental disabilities by giving access to critical medical equipment and therapies, along with innovative Camp and Performing Arts programs, which provide opportunities for recreation, socialization, and artistic expression. Variety programs help children gain independence, boost socialization among their friends and family, demonstrate belief in themselves, and increase skills they need to engage their world as fully as possible. www.varietystl.org

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