



HANDS & VOICES COMMUNICATOR

Hands & Voices™

“What works for your child is what makes the choice right.”™

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Lisa Kovacs (front row, 4th from left) with H&V's Guide by Your Side Program Coordinators at the 2024 H&V Leadership Conference

Empowering Families in EHDI

The Impact of the Family Leadership in Language & Learning (FL3) Center (2017–to present)

By Lisa Kovacs, H&V Headquarters

Introduction: Families at the Heart of EHDI Systems

Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) programs were established to ensure newborns are screened for hearing loss by 1 month, diagnosed by 3 months, and enrolled in early intervention by 6 months of age. Over time, it has become increasingly clear that EHDI's

ultimate purpose is not just about tests and timelines—it exists to improve the well-being of babies and their families. In fact, engaged and informed families are now recognized as central to the success of EHDI programs and to the optimal outcomes of children who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH). This means that beyond the medical and

technical aspects of screening and diagnosis, the human element—parents, caregivers, and family support—play a pivotal role in how children with hearing differences grow and thrive.

Public health data reinforces this point. For example, a 2018 CDC report noted that about 1 in 4 infants who do

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not pass their newborn hearing screen are “lost to follow-up” – meaning they don’t receive timely diagnostic testing. Often, this gap is not due to a lack of technology or expert clinicians but rather challenges in connecting with and supporting families. When families feel overwhelmed, uninformed, or unsupported after a newborn refers on a hearing screen, critical time can slip by. Conversely, when families are actively engaged and receive timely support (reliable information and parent-to-parent support), they are far more likely to follow through with next steps and access early intervention. Research consistently confirms that parental involvement is one of the most reliable predictors of a child’s developmental success, including language, social-emotional, and academic outcomes. In short, *EHDI* is a team effort, and families are the cornerstone of that team.

Family Leadership and Support: Key to Child Outcomes

Recognizing the family’s role, EHDI systems have increasingly embraced family-centered practices and family leadership. The Joint Committee on Infant Hearing (JCIH) – a leading body that sets EHDI guidelines – explicitly includes family engagement in its principles. JCIH’s Early Intervention guidelines emphasize that *“equitable partnerships between families and early intervention programs and systems are critical to the success of EHDI programs and the achievement of optimal outcomes for children.”* In other words, families must be viewed as partners in every sense: in decision-making, in program design, and in service delivery. When families and professionals work with each other (rather than professionals doing



things to or for the family), better results follow. This philosophy is echoed across healthcare and education. A joint policy statement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Department of Education asserts that *“strong family engagement in early childhood systems and programs is central – not supplemental – to promoting children’s healthy development.”*

But what does family leadership look like in practice? At its core, it operates on multiple levels. Hands & Voices (H&V) – a nationwide parent-driven organization supporting families of DHH children – describes family engagement as a three-tiered model: supporting one’s own child, supporting others (parent-to-parent), and engaging in the system through advocacy and leadership (systems leadership).

At the individual level, empowered parents actively participate in early intervention sessions, communicate with providers, and make informed choices for their child’s communication, language, and education. This involvement has a direct positive impact on child outcomes – studies have linked it to stronger language development and social-emotional growth in DHH children. At the parent-to-parent level, connecting families with others who have “been there” provides emotional support and practical knowledge that

professionals alone cannot offer. Many states/territories facilitate this via family support programs (often in partnership with organizations like Hands & Voices, Family Voices, or other parent-to-parent networks), pairing new parents with veteran parents who have received training to provide support to other families. This kind of support mechanism isn’t just a feel-good addition; it’s required as part of EHDI programs HRSA funding requirements, underscoring how essential it is considered. In addition to providing direct support to families, at the systems level, family leaders serve on EHDI advisory committees, help design parent resources, train providers in family-centered care, and provide vital input from the family perspective to the EHDI system. The bottom line is that when parents and family members take on leadership roles, the entire system becomes more responsive and effective. Family leadership is not an afterthought; it is intentionally interwoven into high-quality EHDI systems.

The FL3 Center: Building a National Family Support System

By 2017, the momentum for family engagement in EHDI had led to the creation of a dedicated national center to coordinate and strengthen these efforts. The result was the Family Leadership in Language and Learning (FL3) Center, launched in April 2017. Hands & Voices was selected to lead this center through a cooperative agreement with the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), reflecting H&V’s stature as a leader in parent-to-parent support. The purpose of the FL3 Center was straightforward: “to increase family engagement and lead-

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Hands & Voices is dedicated to supporting families with children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing without a bias around communication modes or methodology. We're a parent-driven, non-profit organization providing families with the resources, networks, and information they need to improve communication access and educational outcomes for their children. Our outreach activities, parent/professional collaboration and advocacy efforts are focused on enabling Deaf and Hard of Hearing children to reach their highest potential.

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Please send comments or questions to:

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Welcome, New Readers!

If you are a first time reader, welcome! Our goal at *The Communicator* is to inspire, provoke, and nourish your path as a parent of a child who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing or as a professional who works with families, in keeping with our motto: "What works for your child is what makes the choice right."™ You'll find perspectives on current research alongside the insights of Deaf or Hard of Hearing adults; you'll find articles from children themselves next to calls for action in the world of deaf education. We also publish abbreviated news from our Chapters (see your Chapter for more information), upcoming events, and paid advertisements for programs, products and services.

If any of our articles spoke to you, we'd love to hear from you at editor@handsandvoices.org.

If you have a story to share, see the editorial guidelines, including the "sniff test," at: www.handsandvoices.org/resources/communicator.htm



Empowering Families in EHDI

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ership and strengthen family support in EHDI systems of care to enable families to optimize the language, literacy, and social-emotional development of their children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.”

FL3 Round One (2017–2020)

Round One laid the groundwork for this national family support system. In its first three years, the FL3 Center focused on building infrastructure and gathering data to inform the work ahead. Some key accomplishments during this period included:

- **Establishing the Center’s Infrastructure:** FL3 set up a national technical assistance (TA) team and online presence. A new website and communication plan were developed, and three advisory groups were formed to guide the work – an FL3 Parent and Professional Advisory, a Deaf/Hard-of-Hearing Adult Advisory, and a Language & Literacy Expert group. These groups ensured diverse perspectives.
- **Needs Assessment & Data Collection:** In collaboration with the National Center for Hearing Assessment and Management (NCHAM), FL3 conducted a comprehensive national needs assessment of families and professionals in EHDI. The assessment was designed to take an in-depth look at the needs of families, Family-Based Organizations, and U.S. state/territory EHDI programs. This data-driven approach provided a strong foundation for targeted improvements.
- **Resource Development:** Leveraging experts in language, literacy, and

child development, FL3 summarized the latest research and created a user-friendly guide to understanding research for families. For example, they compiled recommended developmental milestones for D/HH infants and toddlers and published “tip sheets” to help parents encourage language and social-emotional growth. Such resources translated academic knowledge into actionable steps parents could use at home.

- **Established recommended Guidelines:** The FL3 Center developed two sets of Guidelines for establishing and maintaining Family-to-Family Support programs and DHH Mentor/Guide/Role Model programs. The Guidelines are designed as a resource for those interested in the implementation of high quality, sustainable programming for parents who have children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing (DHH).
- **Parent Leadership Training:** Even in the early phase, FL3 prioritized empowering parents as leaders. The team developed training programs and workshops to build family advocacy and leadership skills within EHDI. Parents began to receive coaching on how to serve on advisory boards, how to partner with providers as equal stakeholders, and how to support other families. To date, Hands & Voices has 20 recorded Leadership webinars in their Webinars and Trainings electronic library.
- **Strengthening Family Support Networks:** FL3 worked hand-in-hand with Hands & Voices chapters and other Family-Based Organizations in many states/territories, expanding the reach of programs

like H&V’s Guide by Your Side (GBYS) (which matches trained parent guides with new families). By the end of round one, more families of D/HH children were connected to supportive communities than ever before. FL3’s efforts were enhancing family leadership in EHDI state/territory systems, meaning more parents were taking active roles alongside professionals.

- **Elevated D/HH Adult Involvement:** FL3 continued to emphasize that families benefit not only from fellow parents but also from Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing adults. In training and materials, the center promoted D/HH adult involvement as a key component of family support (sometimes called DHH-to-family support). Guidelines were created and an online course was developed to help state/territory EHDI programs with considerations for implementing this additional family support. By collaborating with Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing leaders, this invaluable perspective of adults who have grown up DHH – often changes families’ perceptions from uncertainty to hope.

By March 2020, these accomplishments demonstrated tangible progress. 97% of state/territory EHDI systems had established partnerships with family-based organizations, with an increase of 75% of families receiving parent-to-parent support. The conclusion of FL3’s initial phase highlighted improved family engagement and support within the EHDI community and an expanded focus on parent leadership development by 77%.

In just three years, the FL3 Center had become a hub of knowledge and networking, seeding family engagement efforts in EHDI programs across

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Can I Borrow the Car? DHH Teens and Driving

By Lori Chapman, Mississippi H&V

As my son approached driving age, I experienced a whole host of worries. What if he forgot to turn the car off with the fob? How will my teen learn to drive safely in a hearing world of driving instruction and testing? What if he is pulled over in an accident or traffic stop and misunderstands what the police officer says? (For kids using technology, which can be expected to go flying in a car accident, and then the teen is disoriented and panicked as well as alarmed.)

In Mississippi during COVID, the state started to allow parents to sign a waiver noting that their child had driven with them for a certain amount of supervised driving time. This replaced the actual driving with an instructor as part of the licensure process. To me, this is placing inexperienced teens behind the wheel with a license but without the safety of a long period of supervised driving, with or without hearing.

It is a big step when our teens get a driver's license, but driving can present unique challenges for teens who are deaf or hard of hearing. Believing that my best course of action was lots of role playing, reflection, and supervised driving time, we set out to teach our son Levi what to do in an emergency and how to respond so it became part of his muscle memory.

Emily Burke discusses the issue of engines that run quietly and keyless fobs in her article (see page 12). How many times have you forgotten your purse, wallet, or another needed item in your car? As parents of a teenager, it can feel like the words "I forgot" are a part of our conversations regularly, whether discussing mowing the lawn, homework assignments, or taking out the trash and everything in between. When talking about keyless cars and quiet-running engines, those two words, "I forgot," can be deadly. Not having a key to engage



Levi Chapman takes the wheel.

It is a big step when our teens get a driver's license, but driving can present unique challenges for teens who are deaf or hard of hearing.

and quiet engines have been the culprit of many accidents for D/HH drivers. One such accident occurs when a driver exits the car while it is still quietly running and in gear. When the driver removes their foot from the brake, the car in gear will move forward, possibly dragging the driver or hitting another vehicle or the garage/home.

In addition, something that happens for all of today's teens occurs because of rules about sitting in the back of the car until age 13. Without the front seat experience and view, and especially if they don't have experience riding bikes or go-karts, kids often center them-

selves in the car lane vs. centering the car itself, not leaving enough of a space cushion for their car in the lane. This takes a lot of feedback and practice to learn.

Regarding driver's education and testing, one can ask for accommodations for both. Given that the DMV (Department of Motor Vehicles) is a state function, they do have to provide reasonable accommodations based on an individual's preference. A student driver can request ASL interpreters for the permit testing and the licensure test. Yes, your particular local office may require some additional advocacy skills, but according to the ADA, Title II, state, and government agencies are prohibited from discriminating against people with disabilities and must provide effective communication, reasonable modifications, and equal opportunities to participate in programs. Private driver's education companies fall under Title III but still need to provide reasonable accommodations within the limitations of their budget.

Experienced driving instructors who

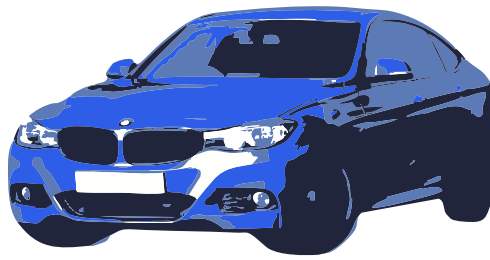
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Can I borrow the Car?

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have worked with deaf/hard of hearing kids note that a few simple accommodations help to level the playing field. Conar Burkholder, a Masterdrive instructor in Colorado Springs who has a Deaf sister, notes that Instructors can share the driving route ahead of time with a map or draw it out on paper if necessary, and highlight important skills in writing that they will be working on with the student. Allowing for ride-alongs to observe other students and discuss afterwards is an important tool. When driving in the community, the instructor can clarify that the driver should proceed forward unless signed/told/indicated otherwise. Plan ahead how the instructor will indicate “accelerate, left, right, slow, stop, lane change,” or how the driver should take notice of a vehicle or obstacle coming up. Schools for the Deaf often offer driver’s education. Ask among your networks where other teens with hearing differences learned to drive. (Parents are an important part of this learning.)

As for interacting with the police, roleplaying, and learning from Deaf/Hard of hearing adults can help. In an



accident, hearing aids, glasses, and more may go flying on impact, and your teen’s usual way of communicating may need some support. Consider a driver’s visor card (see image of a Colorado Hands & Voices downloadable card as one example, modeled after Rochester, New York’s visor card near the National Technical Institute of the Deaf at RIT.) These visual tools can identify that your teen has a hearing difference and help them communicate in an emergency. Actor Marlee Matlin produced a video instructing deaf drivers about how they should best interact with the police as a Deaf individual.

Long before your teen borrows the car for the first time, you can utilize “commentary driving”; asking your teen passenger what they see on the road, what they should be paying attention to, what might happen next, and what

they should avoid. Using news stories to illustrate contributing factors to crashes can be a good learning experience. Setting some rules for car use is the parents’ prerogative. Many states do not allow other teens to be in the car with the new driver for some time, for example.

Driving is a rite of passage; it is a privilege and a responsibility, and not something your child is entitled to do. If parents can impress upon kids that each time they drive, they need to assess their abilities given their current status, they will be much safer drivers. (Have I slept well? Is my windshield clean? Am I upset, or do I need to take a few breaths? Have I walked around the car to ensure nothing, and no one is behind me if I live with kids and pets?) Cars are tickets to freedom, yes, but they are also potentially dangerous machines whose power needs to be respected. ~

Resources:

- Marlee Matlin Video/ACLU: [Watch Youtube Video](#)
- [Download CO Driver Visor Card COHV](#)



I am Deaf or Hard of Hearing










Insurance Card

Registration

I communicate using these method(s):

- American Sign Language
- Cued English
- Spoken language and sign language
- Writing/texting
- Lipreading

To communicate better with me:

- Please face me when speaking
- Do not cover your mouth with hand or paper
- Do not shine a flashlight in my face
- Speak in a typical tone - don't shout
- Try to eliminate background noise

COHV Driver’s Visor Card

Safety Habits for DHH Teen Drivers

By Emily Burke, DHH Infusion Co-Coordinator, H&V Headquarters

My husband, who is Deaf, sometimes forgets to shut down the engine. Fortunately for us, we live in Texas, where everyone parks outside on their driveways and uses their garage space to watch the Cowboys, if not for storage. We are also blessed with wonderful neighbors who text us to let us know. (Relationships are important--get to know your neighbors.) There are no "official" resources, only lived experiences around safety for Deaf/hard of hearing (DHH) drivers. If your state School for the Deaf offers driver's ed (like here in

Texas), it may be a good idea to contact them and see what they offer on this topic.

Carbon monoxide poisoning causes 400 preventable deaths per year. Within both the hearing and the DHH community, tragic events involving carbon monoxide occur. We have a strong spirit of advocacy for full accessibility and safety within our DHH populations, I anticipate that the recent death of legendary Deaf advocates and mentors Frank and Marlene Turk and their dog related to the vehicle parked in their

I've
left my
engine running
accidentally
more than
once

garage with the ignition on overnight may help us push for further action for vehicle safety for all, and especially the DHH community. I hope this

Keyless Fob Safety Tips

1. Park outside if possible.
2. If your garage stands alone from your home, that is helpful.
3. If your garage has a window, keep it open a crack.
4. Get to know your neighbors.
5. Set a reminder on your phone to check vehicles each night.
6. Keep your keys visible at all times. Keep the keys out of your bag to help you remember.
7. Develop a HABIT where you check your vehicles
8. Find a Carbon Monoxide detector with a strobe light alert. Contact the fire department if they offer this for free.
9. Put a fob around your arm to make this habit a bit "annoying" to help remember to turn off car. (Do not hook it on your belt loop, buried deep in a bag, or somewhere you can easily forget.)
10. For some vehicles, if the doors don't lock, that may indicate the engine is still running. Check for locked doors before departing your vehicle.
11. Keep up post-it note reminders to check the vehicle.
12. Monitor your distractions when getting out of the vehicle (*i.e. STAY OFF THE PHONE!!!*)
13. We have a mental checklist for starting a vehicle (check mirrors, etc). We need a checklist for exiting a vehicle. Consider printing one out for your teen.
14. Determine if your vehicle can be exited while the car is still running and in gear. This would allow the car to potentially move forward, possibly dragging the person or hitting another object, home or vehicle, and take the above steps to ensure a car is always in park and turned off before exiting.
15. Establish a routine, keeping your keys in a set place with a bold note above asking "Is Your Vehicle Engine Off?" This routine and home for your keys helps establish good habits.

DHH Teen Drivers

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will promote more conversations on social media within the DHH community regarding this topic, including the introduction of legislation with car manufacturers about the risks of keyless ignition. How many of us have not been certain that we turned off the ignition when the new engines are so quiet and don't necessarily vibrate? Higher driving safety for teens will require a lot of conversation, alertness, and the use of teaching moments before, during, and after driving.

Elizabeth Shuler-Krause, who shares the role of DHH Infusion Co-Director at Hands & Voices with me, shared: "Even as a type A individual, I have left my engine running accidentally more than once. One day, I parked my vehicle in a busy shopping district while I worked a short day shift. I only learned that it was running when I returned to the car five hours later and found it was running! I am so lucky that no one took off with the

car or that it was not parked in a garage emitting carbon monoxide fumes. One thing that helped: I changed the settings so that my car doors do not automatically lock when I leave the vehicle with the fob. For some reason, it is much easier for me to remember to lock the car versus turn it off (brains are weird!). When I attempt to lock it while the engine is running, the headlights will flash three times to indicate that it cannot be locked while the engine is running. Check to see if the vehicle your teen will drive has settings that can be adjusted. Some could turn the engine off when the fob leaves the vehicle."

Elizabeth also notes how important it is to know your vehicle and its features. Some vehicles will not lock if the engine is still running and we are walking away

with the key fob. Make it a habit to lock your vehicle even if parked outside or in the garage. DHH people check their vehicles often, glancing back to make sure a vehicle is locked by eyeing the blinking rear lights as they walk away.

Honestly, the takeaway of this article, for me, is a reminder of how important good habits are. Even with good habits and routine, sometimes we do forget. I will be instilling these habits in my Deaf daughter who is learning to drive, modeling how I check the vehicles every night, and following the routine to leave my keys in a visible place. Active awareness is an important skill to have while driving. Thankfully, we have a great DHH community with lived experiences that can help shape our safe driving experiences. ~

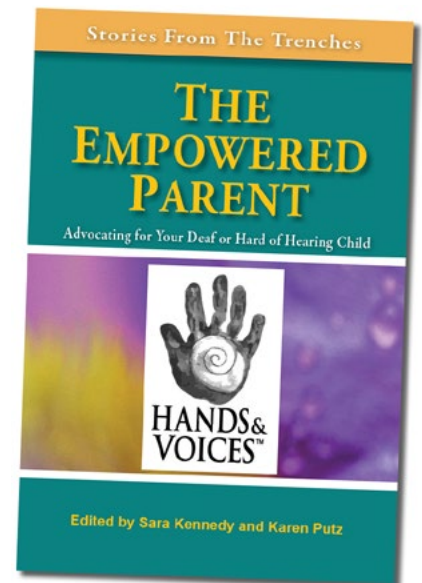


The Empowered Parent Stories from the Trenches

Advocating for Your Deaf or Hard of Hearing Child

Our motto at Hands & Voices is simple but profound. Finding out what works for your individual child and teaching them to be their own best advocate is key. Advocacy starts with informed parents whether in or out of a classroom. Inside this book, we hope you will find the inspiration and perspective you need to have the courage to advocate.

The Empowered Parent is available in print and can be ordered on the Hands & Voices web site.



<https://handsandvoices.org/resources/products.htm>

EHDI

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the country. This early success set the stage for the next phase of growth.

The FL3 Center: Expansion and Innovation in Family Engagement and Family Support

Unbeknownst to anyone, FL3's second phase would coincide with an era of unprecedented challenges (most notably a global pandemic) – but it also saw innovation and expansion in family support.

FL3 Round Two (April 2020–March 2024)

Round Two built upon the foundation and took family support, engagement and leadership to new heights, even as the world changed. Some key accomplishments during this period included:

- **Enhanced Technical Assistance**

Delivery: To efficiently support all states and territories, FL3 launched an online TA Request Portal in July 2020. This portal became a one-stop shop for EHDI programs and family organizations to request help, training, or resources from the FL3 team. Over the four-year period, 1,560 TA encounters were provided (averaging ~390 per year), ranging from assisting a state/territory with starting a new family support program, engaging and training new family leaders in the EHDI system, including parents and caregivers from underserved populations who participated in leadership training opportunities. This high volume of TA reflects a strong demand from the field and FL3's capacity to respond.

- **Implemented Evaluation and Quality Improvement:** In 2022, FL3 developed a standard evaluation tool to gather feedback after training and



educational events. By March 2024, 914 respondents (including parents and professionals) had submitted evaluations. The data showed overwhelming positive impact – attendees reported gaining knowledge and confidence to apply what they learned. Notably, 95% “strongly agreed” that “I learned new information as a result of attending this session,” and 94% “got ideas to take back to my organization.” Equally important, 90% “strongly agreed” that the session “will assist me with improving my skills to serve as a family leader in EHDI.” These metrics demonstrate that FL3 training was not just theoretical, but empowered participants (especially parent leaders) with practical skills to improve EHDI in their own communities.

- **Created New Tools and Resources:** Innovation in family support continued, with FL3 producing a variety of evidence/promising practice-based tools. For example, a Family Support Activities Guide was developed, complete with a training video and tip sheet on how to use the guide effectively. Additionally, a Parent Event Guide was developed. This guide helps Family-based Organizations and EHDI programs plan events and outreach that truly

engage families (from support groups, to playdates, to parent panels). Off to a Great Start, a web-based product, focused on resources for optimizing the early decisions of families and child outcomes. There are linkable badges and technical assistance offerings for utilization at the state/territory level. The FL3 Center promoted this information to all EHDI programs, Family Leaders, Family-Based Organizations, and national partners to disseminate and post on their own platforms. FL3 also published Advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Guidelines for family support programs – ensuring that outreach and services are culturally responsive. Another novel resource was Working Scripts for Inviting Families to Consider Early Intervention, giving providers gentle, scripted ways to encourage hesitant families to try EI services. Collectively, these tools addressed timely needs identified by the community.

- **Pivoted During the COVID-19 Pandemic:** The COVID pandemic in 2020 posed a huge challenge to EHDI and family support (as in-person appointments and support groups were disrupted). FL3 responded swiftly by creating

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EHDI

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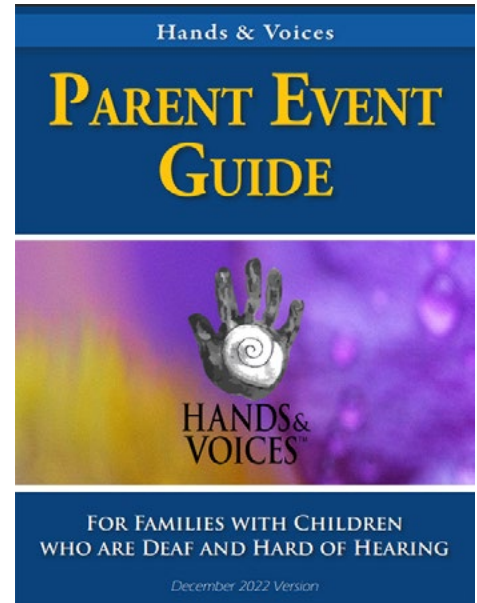
a Virtual Waiting Room – an online hub of COVID-specific resources for families. They also guided local family organizations on transitioning to virtual formats, so that parents could continue to receive support remotely. By rapidly adjusting to the crisis, FL3 ensured that families remained connected and informed despite lockdowns. This flexibility worked to keep the family support community strong during these challenging times.

- **Strengthened Collaborative Leadership:** A hallmark of Round Two was partnership. FL3 hosted an Annual Partnership Summit that brought together not only Hands & Voices leadership but also other parent and deaf-led organizations (such as AG Bell, American Society for Deaf Children, Family Voices, Hearing First, the National

Cued Speech Association, and the National Center for Deaf-Blind). One tangible outcome was the joint development of a Community Code of Kindness position statement – a set of guiding principles promoting respectful, supportive interactions among professionals, parents, and D/HH adults in the EHDI system. Such unified messaging across organizations fosters a more welcoming and inclusive environment for families receiving services.

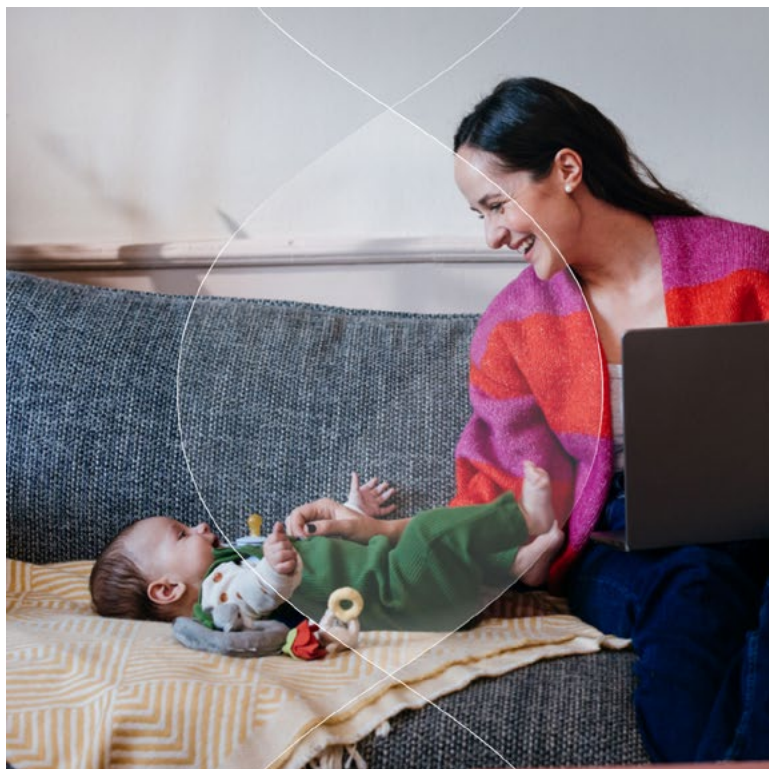
By the end of this second funding cycle, the impact of FL3’s work was evident by a 35% increase of stakeholders receiving technical assistance and training. Family engagement was no longer a peripheral topic in EHDI; it was front and center. Outcomes included a 47% increase in parents attending training opportunities, with an 18% increase from underrepresented populations.

All these developments underscore



a paradigm shift: families are no longer passive recipients of services; they are active shapers of EHDI systems. Their involvement has led to more culturally competent services, and programs that truly center the child *and* family. Importantly, this approach benefits professionals too—providers report that working with informed, engaged parents

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 Sano

Children with hearing loss

Learn more about no-cost access to genetic testing and study opportunities.

[Learn more](#)

EHDI

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leads to stronger professional/family partnerships and better carryover at home. It's truly a win-win.

The FL3 Center: Advancing EHDI Systems of Services Nationwide/A Blueprint for Change

The trajectory of family support and leadership in EHDI continues its upward climb. The FL3 Center has entered Round Three (2024–2029). The overall project goal in this phase is to *“increase state/territory capacity for family-to-family support, develop family leadership skills, and engage DHH Leaders as mentors to families across EHDI programs and other system stakeholders.”* The FL3 Center utilized the Children with Special Healthcare Needs Blueprint for Change, a national agenda to ensure that every child gets the services he/she needs to play, go to school, and grow up to become a healthy adult, to develop their workplan and center activities so that no matter where a family lives, they can access a strong network for family support.

FL3 Round Three (April 2024–March 2029)

In year one, the FL3 Center has leveraged existing products and resources to maximize efficiency and effectiveness as well as continued its commitment to innovation and the expansion of support to EHDI programs, Family Leaders, and Family-Based Organizations. Some key accomplishments during this period included:

- **Enhanced Technical Assistance**

Data Collection: To begin to measure impact of the TA provided, the FL3 Center updated their data-



base to now collect additional information leading to more details from the results of the TA.

- **Broadened the Community of Family Leaders:** Every state/territory EHDI program must designate a Family Engagement Liaison (FEL) as the State/Territory EHDI program's lead for support and engagement activities. These individuals will also coordinate and communicate with the FL3 Center about State/Territory needs. FL3 surveyed all EHDI programs and followed up to collect contact information for each designated FEL. The first in-person meeting of this FEL community took place at the EHDI Conference in March 2025 with 40 state/territory EHDI FELs attending. This cadre of Family Leaders is a direct result of the emphasis on parent leadership development. They are articulate, knowledgeable, confident, and very competent in their role of engaging and leading in the EHDI system. Evaluations from this meeting showed 100% of participants found the content of this session valuable in meeting their program objectives.
- **Expanded TA to Provide Timely Support to New EHDI Coordinators and FELs:** The FL3 Center created an Onboarding Checklist to guide their first interactions with new EHDI Coordinators and FELs. Within a month of being notified of a new EHDI Coordinator or FEL, the FL3 Center TA team reaches out to schedule an FL3 Center onboarding meeting. 13 one-on-one onboarding sessions happened during this first year period. In addition to these onboarding TA sessions, 496 additional TA encounters occurred during this time. 55% were completed with a Family-Based Organization or Family Leader and 18% with EHDI Program Staff as the top two roles requesting TA support.
- **Continued Virtual Training and Education Offerings:** The FL3 Center hosts several virtual training and education sessions throughout the year, some of these include quarterly Office Hours and Leadership Webinars. 1252 registrations were documented with 671 evaluations completed. The FL3 Center utilizes a standard evaluation survey for all their offerings. From this evaluation, 94.43% strongly agreed/agreed that they learned new information as a result of attending the session and 91.26% strongly agreed/agreed that the information from the session will assist them/their organization in achieving program/organizational objectives.
- **Expanded Family Support Tools and Resources:** The FL3 Center added a training video and tipsheet as tools to assist with utilizing the Family Support Activities Guide. In addition, an evaluation tool was created for DHH Leader-to-Family Support to assist family-based organizations and EHDI programs with assessing their DHH Leader to Family Support programming. (Similarly, a new tool will be developed in year two to assess family-to-family support programming).
- **Strengthen Timely Support to EHDI Coordinators –** In response to EHDI programs requirement to develop an Infrastructure Plan by August 2025,

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EHDI

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The FL3 Center created an EHDI Grantee Phase 1/ Year One Planning Tools Guide for Family-to-Family Support, Family Engagement/Leadership, and DHH-to-Family Support.

- **Provided Experienced Leadership in the Development of the new EHDI National Network:** The ENN is comprised of three National EHDI TA Centers providing coordinated support to State/Territory EHDI Programs to advance EHDI systems of services nationwide so that Deaf and Hard of Hearing newborns, infants, and young children up to age 3 receive appropriate support and timely services to improve language outcomes. The three centers are the Implementation and Change Center (ICC) led by Gallaudet University/ Beacon Center, the Provider Education Center (PEC) led by American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Family Leadership in Language in Learning (FL3) led by Hands & Voices. In year one, the EHDI National Network (ENN) as a new entity, required an intentional and thoughtful approach to establishing processes related to ENN administration and partnership building among ENN technical assistance/training (TA/T) centers.

Future Outlook for Family Leadership in EHDI

The FL3 Center, led by Hands & Voices, has been a driving force in real-world impacts of Family Leaders shaping programs and policies. The growth of family leadership within EHDI isn't just visible in reports and new programs—it's reflected in real families' lives and in the fabric of EHDI systems nationwide. Family leaders have increasingly taken on influen-

American Academy
of Pediatrics



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tial roles, ensuring that policies and programs truly meet families' needs. As we reflect on the FL3 Center's impact, the growth of Hands & Voices and the FL3 Center can be measured not only in numbers and outputs, but in a cultural shift across the country. Family engagement is now expected in EHDI programs. States/Territories detail in their workplans how they will involve families, and professionals routinely seek parent input and invite parents as advisors to their programs. Crucially, more families of newly identified babies are met with a comprehensive system of support: timely information, connections to other parents and Deaf/HH adults, and opportunities to shape their journey rather than be a bystander. This is the legacy of the past several years of work of Hands & Voices and the FL3 Center.

In conclusion, the creation of the FL3 Center and Hands & Voices' ability to lead has shown what's possible when families are empowered in Early Hearing Detection and Intervention systems. We have seen a shift from family engagement being a buzzword to it being a built-in expectation, supported by robust programs and evidence. Family engagement in the EHDI system has not just seen an increase over time as shown in this article through the FL3 Center's work but is also serving as a model of authentic family engagement in other health and education systems of care within other federally funded projects. The FL3 Center and Hands & Voices have been at the forefront of this change, growing in tandem with the vision that families and professionals are partners in ensuring every DHH child reaches their full potential. As we look to the future, the trajectory is clear: families will continue to lead, side by side with professionals, in evolving EHDI

to meet the needs of all children. The value of family engagement is no longer questioned; it is celebrated and continually reinforced by outcomes and stories of success. A guiding principle widely embraced in this community: "Family engagement is not a program or activity, but rather a philosophy that is woven into all aspects of the system." With that philosophy in place, the EHDI system is poised to reach new levels of excellence, where no family walks alone, and every child who is deaf or hard of hearing is given the earliest possible opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive. ~

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O.U.R. Children's Safety Project

'Just in Time' Resources from the O.U.R Project

By Janet DesGeorges, H&V Headquarters

Information overload is a thing. The amount of knowledge and experts available on any given topic available at your fingertips in today's digital world is something no one could have imagined one hundred years ago. But along with access to information, often a 'fog' descends when you are a part of a learning community where you may think to yourself, "I don't really have time or the need for all this right now." The idea of a 'just in time' approach gives parents the right support at the right moment.

For those of us on the H&V *Observing, Understanding, and Responding to Child Abuse and Neglect* (O.U.R.) committee, we have learned a lot over the years. We seek to be a conduit for parents when they need this information. For parents of deaf/hard of hearing children, this means receiving clear, timely information—like how to spot or respond to abuse—when it's most needed, not all at once. It helps reduce stress and makes it easier to take action with confidence. And most importantly of all, we focus on how to prevent child abuse in the first place.

When I first became a part of the O.U.R. Project, I have to admit, the information shared sometimes felt pretty theoretical to me. Of course, I wanted to play my part in ensuring the safety of our children, but I wasn't quite sure how I could apply this knowledge in our work here at H&V. This understanding grew over time as our committee began

Kidpower Put Safety First Commitment™

"I WILL put the safety and well-being of young people ahead of anyone's embarrassment, inconvenience, or offense!"

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a tradition at the end of every meeting to say to one another, "This month I will..." We have committed to applying that knowledge to some aspects of our work after every session.

But it wasn't until a fateful moment in my own living room when one of our daughters came forward and disclosed that she was a victim of abuse that the theoretical context of this information flew out the window. Instead, some things I have learned in all the years of this project became my guiding light. Here are a few lessons I was able to apply in a real-time real-world situation.

The moment of disclosure is important.

I knew from what I had learned in the O.U.R. Children's Safety Project was how victims are treated when they disclose abuse is essential to their recovery. I knew what to say when our daughter began to tell her story.

Most abuse happens by people you know.

We were shocked to learn that the person abusing our daughter was a trusted friend, a spiritual authority figure

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For parents of deaf/hard of hearing children, this means receiving clear, timely information—like how to spot or respond to abuse—when it's most needed, not all at once. It helps reduce stress and makes it easier to take action with confidence. And most importantly of all, we focus on how to prevent child abuse in the first place.

Current Resources from the National Center on Deafblindness (NCDB)

By Janet DesGeorges, H&V Headquarters

Partnerships are an essential element of our organizational values here at Hands & Voices.

We are proud to partner with the NCDB on various projects. We know that families who have children who are Deafblind are an important part of our H&V community, and also are able to find specific supports for their child's unique needs. A part of our partnership is sharing resources. Below are some wonderful resources from the NCDB for families. Check them out!

Family Resources

New Practice Guide: Supporting Communication Development The new [Supporting Communication Development practice guide](#) from the National Center on Deafblindness

details the essential components of instructional practices commonly used to expand and support a child's communication, including foundational strategies to plan for and engage in meaningful interactions. Please share this important new resource with practitioners and other adults who work with children who are deafblind. You can also find previous guides on our [Practice Guides](#) page.

Updated: Recreation and Leisure Factsheet

For children who are Deafblind, recreation and leisure activities can reduce isolation and encourage independence. A newly updated factsheet, [Recreation and Leisure](#), describes a number of activities to explore, strategies to plan



National Center on Deafblindness

for learning new ones, and ways to promote successful participation. Originally published in 2008, the revised factsheet has been updated and redesigned.

Teaching Children Who Are Deafblind: Professional Development for Educators

Each module in the [Teaching Children Who Are Deafblind](#) series is designed for educators who want to improve their knowledge of deafblindness and gain practical skills they can put to use right away. Visit the National Center on Deafblindness website to learn about this free series and how it can be easily incorporated into your professional development program. ~

O.U.R. Project

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in her life from our church, and someone we had 'let into our family.' That shock was only overcome by the knowledge I had at the moment that I needed to believe this. I had learned through the O.U.R. Project that in general, 'stranger danger' isn't the most probable scenario.

There is a community that can help and is willing to 'talk about it'

I had some resources and people I could call immediately. I called 1-800-4-a-child at Childhelp that we had learned about in the O.U.R. Project that I knew I could get good advice from. I called an O.U.R. committee colleague who helped us navigate the decisions about legal action. The biggest lesson to date I have learned in this community is that 'silence is not an option.' I often refer to the motto at [Kidpower](#), a wonder-

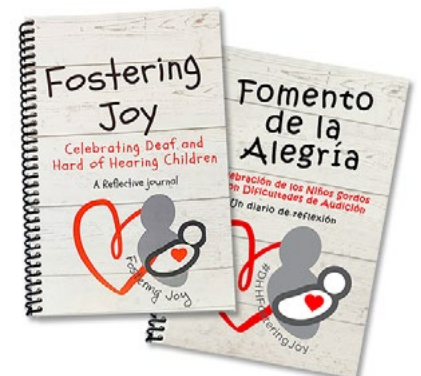
ful organization that supports families, professionals and kids, "I will put the safety and well-being of young people ahead of anyone's embarrassment, inconvenience, or offense."



OUR resources can help YOU in your time of need...just in time!

At the O.U.R. Project, we want you to know that we are here for you: for your questions, for resources needed, how to navigate tough situations. We may not be experts in this area, but we can get you to the help you need! We invite you to be a part of our [monthly gathering](#) as we, together, ensure the safety and well-being of all our children. ~

Fostering Joy



Celebrating Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children
A Reflective journal

handsandvoices.org/resources/products.htm

D/HH Plus**Survive or Thrive? A Choice in the Face of Trials***By Myra Cullum, California H&V*

"It's okay to cry." These were the words of the audiologist who had just performed the hearing test on my infant daughter. My baby presented as severely-profoundly deaf in both ears. But this was not news to me. I already knew something was different with this baby. She did not respond to my soothing lullabies like our first child. She did not quiet to my voice when she cried at night. I had to touch the crib or her before she quieted. She did not even awaken in her bouncy seat when my husband accidentally dropped a mixing bowl, and it shattered on the kitchen floor a few feet from her. Oh, I knew. But there was no time to cry.

Years would pass before I took time to cry. I was in survival mode.

Baby Katherine added another sweet girl to our growing family, but she came with a host of difficult news. At her birth, the doctors and nurses were visibly shaken when they saw our child and recognized that she had Down Syndrome. We did not know prior to her birth, and we did not care. We were determined to love the children that God chose to give us. But the hospital staff looked very disturbed. Maybe they knew we were in for harder times than we could imagine and did not know how to tell us.

One doctor tried. With tears, he said, "She may never be able to tie her shoes or brush her teeth. She may have severe mental retardation." Was he trying to encourage us or scare us? We stared back at him undeterred. We took our precious baby home and began to love her.

What followed were years of hearing tests, hearing aid fittings, surgeries, doctor visits, therapists, and then many, many, many IEP meetings year after year. So much to juggle, so many emotional moments. It was survival mode for a long time.

But, in the midst of it all, we saw in



The Cullum Family

Katherine a determination and tenacity for life that was inspiring. She did not give up. She would try a new challenge until she mastered it, whether it was balancing on a curb while walking along like her sister or tying her shoes.

When people would find out that Katherine was Deaf, they would say, "Oh, I'm sorry!" But we saw a courageous child who gave us nothing to be sorry about.

Her big sister, just 15 months older, had the best comeback to curious children seeing her toddler sister at a local playground. When the other children could not get Katherine to respond and they started to get mean, Elizabeth retorted, "She's Deaf, and I'm glad that she cannot hear you because you are being rude!"

Thankfully, about that time, someone invited us to a California H&V playdate at a park. We were nervous with our novice level of signing to go to a playdate with other families of Deaf children, but we soon learned the H&V motto: "*What works for your child is what makes the choice right.*" Some folks were signing with their children exclusively, others spoke, and some were doing both. During those early years, we bonded with friends whom we still see at Deaf events.

CA H&V Family camps, Christmas socials, and DHH playdates equipped our family with tools and a deeper understanding of how to raise our child with a sense of community and belonging in a challenging world where she would

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One Family's Story

Controlling the Uncontrollable

By Gine' Baker, Kentucky H&V

As a busy high school student who was having a "hard day," I'll never forget the words a coach told me as I complained about the complexities of my life. He said, "Gine, control the controllables." I was taken aback and had to ask what he meant. He very plainly told me there are things in life you have no control over, so just worry about what you can control.

Two-three in every 1000 babies are diagnosed with hearing loss at birth, and my son happened to be one of them. As a brand-new mom with a beautiful baby boy, I was at a loss when we were told he did not pass his newborn hearing screening. Everything I had planned for this baby no longer really mattered, but I knew communication was key. The first thing I could control was taking what I thought was a baby step—following up with the pediatric audiologist. When my husband and I arrived at the doctor's office, it didn't take long to realize this was, in fact, a huge step. With looks of confusion, we said "thank you. We were told that this was important, so we went."

The next few months were a blur of doctors and appointments. In July 2017, Gabriel received his first set of hearing



Gabriel wins a class award.

aids. At three months old, we started speech therapy. These were all things I could control—taking him to doctors' appointments, talking to him, signing to him, putting his hearing aids on again and again, and loving him. He was my baby, and I was going to do everything in my power to ensure he could communicate.

Almost eight years later, which included countless hours of therapy, frustration, modeling and correcting words, learning vocabulary, IEP meetings, and stressing about my child in all the ways a parent worries, I have never

been prouder. While recently attending the national EHD (Early Hearing Detection & Intervention) Conference, I received a call from school. Gabriel will be recognized for "Student of the Month." Little did I know that the focus for the month was communication. As I listened to the kind words from his teacher, my eyes started to sting with tears.

I'm not perfect as a parent, and looking back on our journey, there are so many things I know now that I didn't know then. But I cannot control those things, just like I cannot control the diagnosis for my baby eight years ago. I can control supporting my son in all of his endeavors and his development and cheering him on in his accomplishments. ~

Survive or Thrive?

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mostly be isolated. Katherine opened our world to a whole new way of seeing things and experiencing life.

She has been a beautiful part of our family, bringing joy, smiles, and hugs.

Despite that first doctor's grim prediction, Katherine has not only survived, she has thrived. When she was young, she learned to tie her shoes, brush her teeth, get dressed, and even swim! When she graduated from high school, she was asked to sign the national anthem at graduation. There stood our daughter, who started life with so many obstacles to leap, on the field in front of thousands of people, proudly signing The Star-Spangled Banner representing our country, the Deaf community, herself, and all those who helped set her up for success in life. ~

THE H&V APP

FOR FAMILIES WITH DEAF & HARD OF HEARING CHILDREN



Four Key components of support every day for 90 days:

- Wisdom from a parent
- Wisdom from a Deaf/Hard of hearing Adult
- One article to read
- One new Website/resource to explore





Family Leadership Award

Kim Reimann, Wyoming H&V

By Sara Kennedy, H&V Headquarters

Since 2017, the Family Leadership Award given at the annual national EHDI Conference has recognized the contribution of parent leaders in local EHDI systems. 2025 stellar nominees included Valerie James Abbott, Anita Dowd, Michelle John, Miranda Nerland, Natasha Rich, Traci Penland, and Leah Williamson, along with Kim Reimann. Ultimately, Kim was awarded this honor.

Reimann's colleagues nominated her, noting Reimann's tremendous impact on enhancing services and support available for children who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH) and their families in Wyoming. Kim and her family have been actively involved with Wyoming Families for Hands & Voices every step of the way, from spending countless hours fundraising and organizing fun runs to contacting lawmakers and supporting families. Her tenacity, passion, and strong spirit are obvious in both her family life and her work to improve systems.

Reimann is the proud mother of three grown children, two of whom have hearing differences. The oldest, Gabrielle, was identified with hearing loss shortly after birth and later progressed to profound deafness; Natalie was diagnosed in her twenties with late-onset hearing loss; and Curtis has typical hearing. From fun runs to fundraisers, educating lawmakers and supporting new and established families, her tenacity, passion, and authenticity are evident in her work.



Kim Reimann, Family Leadership Award 2025

Hearing Aid Funding and Legislative Work

Sarah Fitzgerald, Program Co-Coordinator of the Newborn Hearing Screening and Follow up System through the Wyoming Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Program notes that Kim knew she could not see DHH children in Wyoming go without timely hearing aid fittings due to costs and thus fall behind. Her perseverance, enthusiasm, and hard work paid off as she rallied parents to persuade Wyoming lawmakers that this was unacceptable. As a direct result of

these efforts, the Wyoming Children's Hearing Aid Program (WYCHAP) was established in 2012 to provide prompt access to amplification for children from birth through high school who lack insurance coverage for hearing aids.

In 2024, Kim took the lead again. Parent involvement was essential to the passage of legislation supporting appropriate early intervention services for children birth to three in Wyoming, Reimann educated and enlisted other parents in a successful campaign to convince the Wyoming Legislature to fund additional positions to support children who are D/HH.

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Family Leadership Award

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Clinic-based Family Support

One of Reimann's most important and cherished roles has been the Family Educator, from the early days of the Wyoming Pediatric Audiology Specialty Clinic, which operated every six weeks for a period of ten years. The clinic expanded to become CDC+ Audiology, the state's only full-time pediatric audiology clinic since 2019. Kim meets parents on these emotion-filled days before, during, and after audiology appointments. Families leave CDC+ Audiology knowing Reimann is a phone call away. Fitzgerald notes that the Wyoming EHDI system has been so fortunate to have Kim's involvement for many years, leading to such a tremendous impact on improving services and supports for families. Her authenticity, warmth, and kindness shine through her interactions with families and professionals.

Wendy Hewitt, Director of Wyoming Chapter (recently retired), notes: "Just three years after helping to launch Wyoming Families for Hands & Voices, I had the opportunity to meet Kim Reimann, who was quiet and reserved. She might have thought I was crazy. I recruited Kim to be a CO-Assistant Director. Because she lived in the more populous area of Casper and I lived four hours away, many duties fell naturally to her. We made a good team. We are lucky to have her at the clinic meeting families. I treasure the lifelong friendship we developed. She is truly caring, detailed, and dedicated; and sets a high example for others."

Reimann's roles and other contributions have been numerous. These include:

- Wyoming Families for Hands & Voices Assistant Director: 2011 – 2015, 2018 to Present

- Guide By Your Side Program Coordinator for Wyoming H&V (current)
- Family Educator at CDC+ Audiology (as mentioned above)
- Wyoming EHDI Advisory Board Member
- Wyoming Early Intervention Initiative (WEII) for Families with Children who are D/HH
- Completed the Hands & Voices L2L Mentorship Program, 2022-2023
- Developed materials for the Wyoming Family Resource Manual

Unfortunately, Kim could not attend the 2025 EHDI Conference in Pittsburgh due to sickness. Reimann recently reflected on her career thus far. "Twenty-six years ago, when my daughter was diagnosed with hearing loss at 7 1/2 months of age, I had so many questions. She was the first person I'd ever met with a hearing difference. How would she communicate? Would she have friends? Where will she go to school? It was so overwhelming. Little did I know her diagnosis would allow me to use my degree in Elementary Education in a different way, one I had not envisioned. I found my passion—working with and supporting families and children who are DHH, alongside professionals in my state. I have come to understand the

importance of family to family support in this journey. I found a village of people who supported my daughter: her early interventionist and speech language pathologist, the Wyoming Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Program; the Wyoming Department of Education Outreach for the D/HH and eventually, the parents with Wyoming Families for Hands & Voices (founded when my daughter was six years old). The support and information bolstered our confidence. That foundation is one of the many reasons I have been able to support families. In turn, what I learned from my village was so helpful for us when my middle daughter began to lose her hearing at age 21. We never know how experiences will shape, help and benefit us in the future. Now at 26, my daughter will be starting medical school this July and I couldn't be prouder. She has overcome so much to get to "now". I would be remiss in thinking that we did it alone. I am sending out gratitude to everyone who supported my daughter, our family, and me, and those who continue to make it possible for me to serve families. It is such an honor and a pleasure."

Thank you, Kim, for sharing your gifts with Wyoming families, systems, and the network as a whole. ~



Powerhouse Visits Elementary School

By Janette O'Brien, Colorado H&V

Advocacy is a powerful tool, and Tyler Odum, a Legacy High School sophomore, is using it to inspire and empower others.

On April 3, 2025, during his spring break, Odum paid an all-day visit to Lansing Elementary Community School in Aurora, Colorado. Tyler, born to a mother who happened to be an educational sign language interpreter, was born with a hearing loss that went undetected until first grade. Tyler grew up with two siblings, both with typical hearing. His family is well-versed in knowing choices available to people with hearing needs, and they watched Tyler expertly navigate accommodations available to him both in the community and at school.

Tyler came prepared with a detailed slideshow to share with kindergarten through fifth-grade students during their bi-weekly meeting. He is currently on a 504 plan, and regularly advocates for his hearing needs, which differ from setting to setting.

Tyler has a 40-decibel hearing loss in both ears, which is educationally significant. He wears hearing aids but does not like using the FM amplification system; for him it makes sounds too loud. He identifies as Deaf/Hard of Hearing, and his best friend is a CoDA (Child of Deaf Adults).

Tyler attended Mountain View Elementary, Westlake Middle, and now Legacy High School, all cluster-based DHH programs in another county. He grew up with students who have hearing differences and use sign language interpreters in the classroom alongside hearing students.

While presenting, Tyler held everyone's rapt attention. He was personable, knowledgeable, and--being a young adult--a perfect role model for the students in our program. He shared that he runs his own meetings and has done so since the 8th grade. He advocates



Tyler Odum presents at Lansing Elementary

His story about securing not one, but two interpreters for his trip to Ireland with the elite marching band sparked excitement and curiosity among the students.

for interpreters, notetakers, and preferential seating outside of school, such as a doctor's office, hospitals, during Scout meetings/events, in restaurants, at community activities, and for captioning when watching movies.

The students were particularly captivated by Tyler's anecdotes about advocating for himself in various settings from classrooms to community events. His story about securing not one, but two interpreters for his trip to Ireland with the elite marching band sparked excitement and curiosity among the students. His story demonstrated to them that hearing differences should never limit their ambitions or opportunities. Tyler's marching band performed in Dublin for Saint Patrick's

Day, and he didn't miss a beat.

After the presentation, students asked good questions and were extra motivated to share about how they use their own accommodations throughout the day. The 3rd-5th graders are working to make individual PowerPoints explaining their hearing levels, needs, strengths, family backgrounds, interests, and preferences. Tyler's visit could not have come at a better time. He helped them launch their own slides to support them in explaining their needs to next year's teachers, their community, and beyond.

Tyler's visit left a lasting impression on students and staff. His ability to connect with younger students, many of whom share similar experiences, was both inspiring and empowering. As he shared his journey, Tyler's confidence and self-advocacy skills resonated deeply with students, showing them what is possible when they take charge of their individual needs. Learning more about Tyler's life not only inspired students to embrace their unique needs but also empowered them to advocate for themselves in all areas of life. His story is a testament to the power of self-advocacy and the difference one person can make. ~

Growing Book by Book

Beth Jones, Nevada H&V



We believe group events through our nonprofit give families the important opportunity to connect with other families who have children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH). Providing opportunities for these connections where families can engage with other parents/caregivers, family members, and DHH Adults to exchange experiences while learning information can be helpful to their child's development and be affirming and empowering.



During 2020 when we (along with the rest of the world) had to halt our typical in-person events, our leadership team quickly adapted to providing virtual events to help with socialization and education. When the hiatus on in-person events was still in place during Nevada Reading Week in the Spring of 2021, NVHV felt it necessary to come up with a more long-term plan for connecting families state-wide, and our idea of a *Growing Book by Book* monthly literacy event quickly gained momentum.

During the school year, our H&V *Guide by Your Side* Program offers a virtual state-wide story time for children who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing and their families. Each year the book themes differ, ranging from 'staff's childhood favorites' to books featured in the American Society for Deaf Children's ASL Stories Directory, to books with diverse DHH characters, as well



Natalie, then and now with Deaf authors' books

as books recommended by Hands & Voices' O.U.R. Children's Safety Project and Circle of Change. The guest reader of the book, and with that the communication mode of reading, varies each month as well. Our readers alternate between GBYS Parent Guides, DHH Guides, and most excitingly, we have hosted seven authors who are either Deaf/Hard of Hearing themselves or the parent of a DHH child as special guests to read from their books.

Thanks to our funders, NVHV is able to provide our featured book to the first ten families who register each month, as well as a grand prize "wheel spin" where one lucky attendee gets a prize corresponding to our monthly theme. Along with the discussions during the event,

our Guide by Your Side Program staff is also able to share additional resources with families about literacy, language and social development, DHH involvement, and other relevant community resources. For the parents, it's an opportunity to learn more about how to support their child through family-to-family support. For the kids, it's a chance to connect with new friends each month, potentially see themselves represented in a book, and interact with Deaf/Hard of Hearing role models present.

"Growing Book by Book is really fun and is inclusive for all deaf and hard of hearing people. My favorite part is when NVHV spins the wheel!", says Natalie Dressler, a monthly GBBB attendee since 2022. ~

One Family's Journey Overcoming The Odds: Deaf Can

By Amber Withum, Texas and Colorado H&V

A determined 12-year-old, my daughter Layla proudly made the Junior High Cheer Team in Fulshear, TX, proving that being profoundly deaf in a hearing world does not limit one's potential. In an environment that can often feel isolating for those with hearing differences, Layla stood out among 52 candidates, securing one of the 25 spots on the team, showcasing her resilience and talent.

Layla's journey began at a mere three months old when she was diagnosed with unilateral sensorineural hearing loss in her left ear. By the time she was five and a half, her hearing loss had progressed to profound on both sides. Our family approached her diagnosis with strength and determination. With the assistance of hearing aids, cochlear implants, and an FM system-- a remote microphone that enhances sound clarity at a distance from the user--Layla could access the linguistic and social world around her. Understanding the importance of communication, we also introduced sign language at home, which became a fundamental mode of expression and understanding within our family.

As Layla grew, so did her passion for cheerleading. It all began in first grade during a local high school cheer camp in Falcon, Colorado. Since then, she has participated in various cheer camps, passionately pursuing her love for the sport. An important part of her growth has been learning to advocate for herself. She now adeptly requests her coaches to use her microphone during practice and ensures they face her while speaking, which is crucial to her understanding of verbal instructions, especially during gymnastics and tumbling sessions.

After the family relocated to Texas in 2021, Layla faced both new opportunities and fresh challenges. Layla sought a supportive environment to continue to

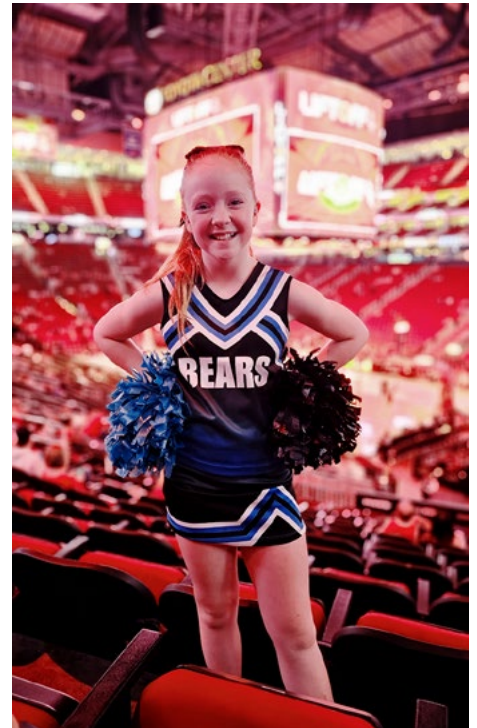
improve her tumbling skills. In 2022, she found a welcoming cheer gym, KGSP/ Poss Cheer, in Katy, TX. Her hard work and dedication paid off as she earned a spot on the performance squad. She was appointed team captain in 2024, even performing during halftime for the local NBA team, the Houston Rockets.

Struggles and Strategies

Despite her achievements, Layla faces ongoing challenges. She occasionally misses verbal cues and struggles to follow multiple voices and music, especially in environments with poor acoustics. (Think: almost any gymnasium.) Conversations can be difficult; people often speak too quickly. Additionally, her processors can sometimes fall off, batteries may die, and, like any technology, cochlear implants aren't always reliable.

She navigates these obstacles with effective use of her technology and studiously using dance counts. She asks coaches and teammates to make sure she is facing them when talking and asking for repetition when needed. As a visual and kinesthetic learner, Layla quickly observes and picks up movements. Two of her coaches know basic sign language and provide visual counts or cues to signal when she should begin dancing. To keep her processors securely in place, Layla uses wig tap and a method of placing magnets under her hair.

At times, she requests the assistance of a sign language interpreter or signed support for clarification. However, technology isn't the only challenge. She can face stare downs from peers, as if she were an exhibit in the zoo. Some have bluntly asked, "You're deaf?" or "Oh, you're 'death'?" A hard of hearing child once asked her, "What are you doing with your hands?" while Layla was communicating with an interpreter.



Layla Withum cheering at the Houston Rockets game

Others have made insensitive remarks about her deafness, such as, "Well, at least I'm not deaf," or have grumbled when she asked to keep the noise down, saying, "Why should I? She's deaf; it doesn't matter." Despite these negative comments, Layla discusses her feelings with her parents and maintains a positive outlook. When considering what to bring to tryouts, she decided against bringing her microphone, stating, "No, I don't want them to think differently of me because I am deaf." Nevertheless, her interpreter accompanied her during the tryouts to ensure she had access.

Layla is not just a participant in cheerleading; she is also an inspiration to her peers and a voice for those who share similar experiences. She encourages others to embrace their unique identities and speak up for themselves. Her mantra is simple yet powerful:

Continued on Next Page

Deaf Can

Continued from pg. 22

“Show people who you are. Have confidence. It can be hard, but remember you have people by your side. Don’t be afraid to speak up for yourself.” These words resonate deeply, offering encouragement not just to those who are deaf or hard of hearing but to anyone facing their own struggles. Confidence, after all, is crucial in advocating for one’s needs and desires. As parents, we can take for granted what confidence it takes for a child to stand up to authority figures who may not be familiar with hearing differences for one’s access needs.

Layla’s journey has been bolstered by a network of supportive individuals and agencies that helped ensure she received the resources necessary for her success. With guidance from the Colorado Home Inclusion Program (CHIP) facilitator, CHIP Coordinator, her audiologists, Hands & Voices Colorado and Texas, and her dedicated Teacher of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing from Colorado, we gained essential advocacy skills and knowledge to secure appropriate access to language and communication.

The importance of self-advocacy cannot be understated in Layla’s narrative. As her parents, through a partnership with these supportive entities, we realized early on how crucial it was to gather resources and information to navigate a system that can often be overwhelming for families of children with disabilities. We learned how to collaborate effectively with schools, medical professionals, and therapists, creating an environment where Layla could thrive. This advocacy journey is central to empowering children with disabilities, allowing them to stand up, be heard, and seek the accommodations they deserve.

In reflecting on her role models, Layla often references the high school cheerleaders from the numerous cheer camps. She specifically mentions

Lauren from the local high school, whom she has admired for the last two years. Lauren’s confidence and spirit have inspired Layla to push her limits, proving that no dream is too big when combined with hard work and perseverance. In her eyes, Lauren embodies what it means to be a leader on and off the sidelines, a sentiment that motivates Layla to further her skills and strive for excellence.

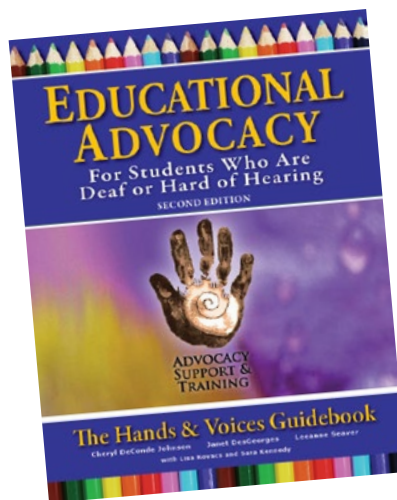
As Layla grows in cheerleading, she is not only breaking barriers for herself but also paving the way for others in the deaf/hard-of-hearing community. She stands as a symbol of what can be achieved with dedication, advocacy, and the right support. With every cheer, every tumble, and every moment spent on the mat or sidelines, Layla is not just proving that “deaf can,” she is demonstrating that they can excel, inspire, and lead with confidence. Her tale is a



“Show people who you are. Have confidence. It can be hard, but remember you have people by your side. Don’t be afraid to speak up for yourself.” – Layla Withum

reminder that barriers can be broken, and dreams realized when one is bold enough to take the leap and advocate for themselves. The world is watching, and Layla is ready to show them all that a deaf cheerleader can achieve. Her story is just beginning. ~

Be Prepared for Your Next School Meeting!



Timely, practical, specific information for parents and professionals supporting students who are deaf or hard of hearing. From an introduction to Special Education Law to Assessments and Evaluations, learn how to leap “Hurdle Talk” in meetings from early intervention through transition from high school.

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0-15% discount available for volume orders. 2nd Edition now on sale!

Questions? email parentadvocate@handsandvoices.org

Creando Recuerdos Duraderos Sin Costo

Por Maira Nava, Illinois H&V

¿Sabías que nuestros niños son elegibles para el Pase De Acceso de America Beautiful? Este pase brinda acceso gratuito a parques nacionales y tierras recreativas federales. Es un pase de por vida disponible para ciudadanos estadounidenses o residentes permanentes a quienes se les haya determinado médicamente que tienen una discapacidad permanente. No es necesario que sea una discapacidad del 100 %; puede incluir impedimentos físicos, mentales o sensoriales que limitan gravemente una o más actividades importantes de la vida, como cuidarse a sí mismo, realizar tareas manuales, caminar, ver, oír, hablar, respirar, aprender y trabajar.

¡Nos encantan los viajes por carretera! En diciembre de 2022, hicimos una parada para explorar el Castillo de San Marcos en San Agustín de camino a Orlando, Florida. Para nuestra sorpresa, el guardaparque de la taquilla se dio cuenta del implante coclear de Enrique y le preguntó si era sordo. Confirmé que lo era y le pregunté por qué quería saberlo. Luego, el guardaparque me explicó el

pase de acceso y me preguntó si quería registrarme. Como estábamos en una instalación del lugar, pudieron emitir su tarjeta ese mismo día.

Gracias a su tarjeta de acceso, hemos disfrutado visitar muchos parques y monumentos nacionales. Recientemente, exploramos The Gateway Arch en St. Louis, Missouri, y el Parque Nacional White Sands en Alamogordo, Nuevo México, durante nuestra visita familiar durante las vacaciones de diciembre de 2024. Es importante llevar la tarjeta física contigo, ya que otorga acceso a estos sitios. Recomiendo llevar la tarjeta en cualquier viaje que planees, por si acaso estás cerca de un parque o monumento nacional, lo que te permitirá explorar y disfrutar de la belleza de la naturaleza, participar en actividades educativas y crear recuerdos duraderos sin ningún costo.

Consigue El Tuyo Ahora

Para obtener un pase de acceso,

Para nuestra sorpresa, el guardaparque de la taquilla se dio cuenta del implante coclear de Enrique y le preguntó si era sordo. Confirmé que lo era y le pregunté por qué quería saberlo. Luego, el guardaparque me explicó el pase de acceso y me preguntó si quería registrarme.

visite store.usgs.gov/access-pass. Deberá cargar un documento de identidad (como una licencia de conducir, pasaporte, tarjeta verde o certificado de nacimiento) y un comprobante de discapacidad permanente, junto con una tarifa de procesamiento de \$10. El documento de identidad debe estar a nombre del solicitante.

También puede obtener un pase de acceso en persona en un sitio de recreación federal participante. Para obtener una lista de estos sitios, visite: <https://www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/pickup-pass-locations.htm>.

Si realiza la solicitud por correo, presente una solicitud completa, comprobante de residencia, documentación de discapacidad permanente y la tarifa de \$10. Después de la verificación, se emitirá un pase con el nombre del propietario impreso en él.

Para localizar un parque o monumento cerca de usted, utilice este sitio web: <https://www.nps.gov/findapark/index.htm> ~

Nota del editor: Este artículo, escrito por la vicepresidenta de ILHV y guía para padres de Un guía a tu lado, Maira Nava, fue publicado en el boletín Illinois Hands & Voices en inglés y español y se reimprime con permiso.



Monumento Nacional del Castillo de San Marcos

Making Lasting Family Memories at No Cost

By Maira Nava, Illinois H&V

(This is the English version of the article *Explorando La belleza De La Naturaleza Y Creando Recuerdos Duraderos Sin Costo* on page 24)

Did you know that our children are eligible for the *America the Beautiful Access Pass*? This pass provides free access to national parks and federal recreational lands. It is a lifetime pass available to U.S. citizens or permanent residents medically determined to have a permanent disability. This does not need to be a 100% disability; it can include physical, mental, or sensory impairments that severely limit one or more major life activities, such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, and working.

We love road trips! In December 2022, we stopped to explore Castillo de San Marcos in St. Augustine on our way to Orlando, Florida. To our surprise, the park ranger at the ticket booth noticed Enrique's cochlear implant and asked if he was deaf. I confirmed that he was and inquired why he wanted to know. The ranger then explained the Access Pass and asked if I wanted to sign up. Since we were at an onsite facility, they were able to issue his card that same day.

Thanks to his access card, we have enjoyed visiting many national parks and monuments. Recently, we explored The Gateway Arch in St. Louis, Missouri, and White Sands National Park in Alamogordo, New Mexico, during our family visit over the December holidays in 2024. It's important to carry the physical card with you, as it grants access to these sites. I recommend taking the card on any trip you plan, just in case you're



White Sands National Park

near a national park or monument, allowing you to explore and enjoy the beauty of nature, participate in educational activities, and create lasting memories without any cost.

[gov/planyourvisit/pickup-pass-locations.htm](https://www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/pickup-pass-locations.htm).

If applying by mail, submit a completed application, proof of residency, documentation of permanent disability, and the \$10 fee. After verification, a pass with the owner's name printed on it will be issued.

To locate a park or monument near you, please use this website: <https://www.nps.gov/findapark/index.htm> ~

Editor's note: This article, written by ILHV Vice President & GBYS Senior Parent Guide Maira Nava was published in the Illinois Hands & Voices newsletter in English and Spanish and is reprinted with permission.

Get Yours Now

To obtain an Access Pass, visit store.usgs.gov/access-pass. You will need to upload an ID (such as a driver's license, passport, green card or birth certificate, and proof of permanent disability, along with a \$10 processing fee. The ID must be in the applicant's name.

You can also get an Access Pass in person at a participating federal recreation site. For a list of these sites, see: <https://www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/pickup-pass-locations.htm>.

To our surprise, the park ranger at the ticket booth noticed Enrique's cochlear implant and asked if he was deaf. I confirmed that he was and inquired why he wanted to know. The ranger then explained the Access Pass and asked if I wanted to sign up.

TIDBITS

AG Bell Celebrates National Speech-Language-Hearing Month (NSLHM)

Check out the resources AG Bell has put together to celebrate **NSLHM!** Early Intervention resources; Evidence-based resources for professionals; and upcoming AG Bell Symposium Highlights! <https://agbell.org/2025/05/07/national-speech-language-hearing-month/>

The Hands & Voices Virtual Waiting Room

Check out the Hands & Voices HQ **Virtual Waiting Room**. This site was created for you, families with children who have been referred to or are in the care of an audiologist, whether in person and/or receiving those services through

technology or “telehealth.” Please spend some time, look around, grab a cup of coffee or tea and explore all that is possible for your child and family.

SignOn with ASDC: Practice ASL online in real time with Deaf adults

What is SignOn?

SignOn is a virtual immersion program that lets you practice your ASL live with a Deaf adult from the comfort of your own computer.

- Get one-on-one practice and personalized feedback
- Choose your own topics, personalized to your needs and skill
- Enjoy flexible scheduling – sessions

available 7 days a week

- Watch your video sessions again any time to review
- Start right away with an easy-to-use platform

Check out this resource today at deaf-children.com

Hearing First Resources Abound!

First LSL Lessons – a NEW tool Step-By-Step Guide to Helping Your Child with Hearing Loss Learn to Listen and Talk

A go-to resource for the support, guidance, and information you need to move forward with confidence. The tips you’ll gain from these lessons easily fit into your daily routines, helping you build your baby’s listening and talking skills every day.

Visit First LSL Lessons for Families - Hearing First (Link)

What You Will Find:

- A video about the importance of next steps when your child is referred for more testing after a screening
- A guidebook for parents about audiology and telehealth
- Information about tele-audiology options
- Questions to ask your audiologist, understanding your child’s audiogram, help making decisions with communication and more
- Connections to family-to-family support from trained parent leaders
- Explanations of help offered by a variety of professionals in addition to your child’s audiologist

DeafEd.net

Post a job or resumé to

Some of the current jobs available now at Deafed.net

Job Location	Employer	Job Title
California-Oakland/East Bay	Alameda Unified	Teacher for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing - Special Ed
Colorado-Denver	Rocky Mountain Deaf School	ELEMENTARY TEACHER
Washington	Northwest School for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children	S.E.E. Interpreter/Paraeducator
Washington	Northwest School for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children	Teacher of the Deaf
Kansas	Kansas School for the Deaf	Secondary Special Education Teacher
Washington-Central/Yakima	Pasco School District (Pasco, WA)	Listening and Spoken Language Specialist
Washington	Pasco School District (Pasco, WA)	Teacher of the Deaf

Go To Deafed.net to see more jobs

Minnesota Says Yes to Partner Events

By Brenda Hommerding, Minnesota H&V

MN H&V had a record number of referrals to start off the 2025 calendar year! Thus, more in-person visits are happening as well. Between engaging families with phone calls and visits, our staff continue to participate in events, whether in person or online, develop articles for our state’s quarterly newsletter (the FOCUS), and serve on various working committees within the state. Many are gearing up to participate in creating goals for the Minnesota Commission of the Deaf/ Deafblind and Hard of Hearing 5-year plan.

The EHD Conference: Two of our cultural parent guides teamed up with staff from the Minnesota Department of Health to present on “Language Matters” at the March 2025 EHD Conference in Pittsburgh. This project, presentation, and tip sheet were designed to help providers understand what hearing differences can mean within their cultures. In addition, the MN EHD team has asked for our participation in updating the EHD Guidelines for primary care, local public health, and ENT providers. This allows us to ensure providers are prompted to connect families with us for support and resources.

Resource Fairs and Gatherings: Several community stakeholders have



(l to r) Darcia Dearing (MDH), Elena Miranda (MNH&V), Lee Vang (MNH&V) and Bridget Walde (MDH).

invited our organization to participate in resource fairs, community engagements, and family gatherings. So far there have been at least 10 requests, and we are attending most. Why do we say yes to these? Here are a couple of stories to explain our reasoning:

1. MNH&V was at a recent Family Resources Fair at a school district. A mom stopped by and asked what we did. When we described our

program, she said, “I think you called me a few years ago! I wasn’t ready to talk; too much else going on.” We offered to reconnect, and she shared, “That would be awesome! I am ready now!” We were able to quickly reconnect her with her (new) Parent Guide.

2. Another family at that same event that stopped by was a Spanish-only speaking family with a three-year-old who is not talking at all. The child has not had their hearing tested and didn’t know about Help Me Grow (Part C). I gave them the contact information for our Spanish speaking Parent Guide and encouraged them to call her and learn more about hearing screening and early intervention. They were excited to see that support was available from someone with shared experience!

Last but not least, our team training committee are working on ways to be sure our staff focuses on their own self-care. Looking forward to this work together. ~

TIDBITS

Continued from pg. 26

- Resources to promote health and well-being for you and your child
- A form to complete to connect with a Hands & Voices trained parent who can answer your questions and direct you to additional resources

Check it out today! Share with other families you know! Share this link with your Audiologist!

Technology is Changing the World

Check out this article with technology news from Wired Magazine. This Startup Has Created AI-Powered Signing Avatars for the Deaf. New technology from British startup Silence Speaks enables an AI-generated sign language avatar to effectively give the deaf and hard of hearing an interpreter in their pocket.

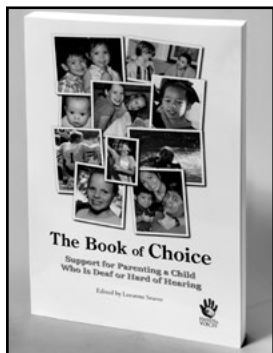
See the story on [WIRED.com](https://www.wired.com) ~

The Book of Choice

Support for Parenting a Child Who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Now Available in Spanish

The Book of Choice is written for families by families with the deft and unbiased touch of Hands & Voices. Perfect for EHDI systems, Part C programs, Guide By Your Side and any agency or service provider that supports families with newly identified babies. Here are thoughtful family stories from seasoned parents sharing insight about what they wish they'd known from the beginning about raising a child with hearing loss. Order *The Book of Choice* at www.handsandvoices.org.



CAN YOUR OLD CAR ADVOCATE AT AN IEP? IT CAN IF YOU DONATE IT TO HANDS & VOICES



Do you have an old car just sitting out in front of the house? Are you dreading going through the process of putting an ad in the paper and then haggling your way to a sale?

Well, with one easy call you can:

- Donate your used car to Hands & Voices
- Receive a charitable tax deduction
- Have it towed away (if necessary) at no charge
- Provide support to Hands & Voices Programs

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HANDS & VOICES:

Get cutting edge news from around the country!

We're a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting families of children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing with info & resources so they can make the best choices for their child. We are non-biased about communication modes or methodologies, and believe that given good information and support, families

can make the choice that is right for their child. We also open our organization to professionals who are interested in a family/child-focused approach to service delivery.

As a non-profit organization, we are dependent upon subscriptions to our newsletter, registration fees at our sponsored events, grants

and other donations in order to function. Therefore, we invite all our membership to donate a nominal, tax-deductible donation of \$25.00 a year/parent, \$40.00 a year/professional, to receive our mailings and newsletters, support the cost of our events, and to ensure that a non-biased voice remains available to

families. Anyone who cannot afford the annual membership dues but wishes to receive our mailings may check the box marked "Scholarship" on the registration form below. If you're not current in our database, please take a few moments to fill this out and send it in.

Name _____

Telephone # (_____)

Address _____

School Dist/BOCES _____

Children (deaf/hh & siblings, ages) _____

Email: _____

Your 2025 contribution will go directly to your local Chapter if there is a H&V Chapter in your state/province.

Circle one: Parent Professional Other

Membership donation enclosed (circle one): \$25.00/parent \$40.00/professional Scholarship

To Pay by credit card: Visa MC Credit Card # _____ Exp. Date _____ Amount _____

Printed Name on Card _____ Signature _____

Mail this form to: Hands & Voices, PO Box 3093, Boulder CO 80307 or to the H&V Chapter in your State/Province (see www.handsandvoices.org for a complete listing)