

DHHSC Annual Report for the Year of 2023

(prepared March 2024)

Accomplishments

Our primary funder, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), Office of Deaf Access, funds our seven core services, which include Communication Assistance, Counseling, Advocacy, Independent Living Skills Instruction, Job Development and Placement, Information and Referral, and Community Education. As part of our contract with CDSS, we set goals for each of the seven service categories regarding the number of clients we will serve. At the end of each fiscal year, we then provide CDSS with an End-of-Year Report. Our achieved percentages of the goals for the seven categories of services for the most recent year range from 35% to 153%. Our lowest score was for advocacy, which continues to be a less requested service.

Here are the highlights of our grant programs this year:

We were thrilled to continue our **Deaf Thrive** program for another year, funded by Fansler Foundation. This program includes at-home and virtual American Sign Language instruction (ROCK program), employment and college preparation for Deaf and Hard of Hearing high school students (YES! program), IFSP/IEP advocacy, and literacy development. We were also so touched that two parents shared during a parent panel at the Silent Garden conference on February 24, 2024 how our ROCK program has dramatically impacted their lives. They were sharing their experiences with other Spanish-speaking families, and their positive comments reminded us that our work truly does make a difference in the lives of people we serve.

In 2023, aside from our normal education on employment-related topics for YES! sessions, we had a special competition for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. This friendly competition involved students teaming up to create designs for Valley Deaf Festival. Our staff reviewed each entry and chose the winning team that we felt had the best concept based on several criteria. This was a fun way to incorporate the values of teamwork, creativity, and developing an employment mindset. The winning design was used on t-shirts, stickers, and magnets, which were sold at the event. Members of the winning team joined us at our DHHSC booth to sell their work. Note: we still have stickers and magnets with their design for sale, so if you would like to support their efforts and our YES! Program, please contact your local DHHSC office.

Overall, it was another successful year for the Deaf Thrive program, which was awarded new funding that began in October. The current grant year is well underway!

Thanks to support from the Employment Development Department, we were able to continue offering extensive **employment assistance services** to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in the Central Valley for another year. This contract funds one full-time Employment Specialist and one full-time Staff ASL Interpreter. They placed many clients in jobs during 2023 and we are excited to see more clients wanting employment.

Tech Time is a program based in the Central Coast Outreach office in Salinas, funded by Harden Foundation, which provides monthly workshops on topics regarding safe use of technology. Examples of workshop topics were Using Social Media and Protecting Your Identity, How to Get Uber/Lyft, and Video Game Issue: Side Effects & Stranger Danger.

This program ended in February 2024. Although the workshops were successfully implemented, we did find that desire for Zoom-based workshops has declined dramatically since the pandemic ended.

First 5 of Merced County funded our **ASL Friends** program, which provided American Sign Language instruction to children aged 0 to 5 in Merced County. This service was provided to not only Deaf and Hard of Hearing children, but also hearing children. Classes were offered at the Merced office as well as at other locations upon request.

As shared last year, we continued to have difficulty finding a lot of interest within the community for this service. Attendance was low, which led to our staff finding other ways to satisfy the intent of this program, such as participating in community events hosted by other organizations and teaching ASL at our booths. This program ended in June 2023.

First 5 of Merced County now funds a new program, for which our Merced staff offer presentations through Merced County to organizations, schools, parents, and places of public service. These presentations aim to teach participants how to serve (or parent) Deaf and Hard of Hearing children ages 0 to 5. This program is currently underway and will end in June 2024.

United Way of Tulare County funded us for a second year of a program called **Deaf Strong**. This program provides monthly webinars on financial topics to Deaf attendees and a monthly support group for parents with Deaf and Hard of Hearing children. Examples of topics included Learning to Budget Your Money, Discussion with Parents regarding Struggles and Achievements, The Pitfalls of Credit Debt, and How to Avoid Getting in Debt.

This program continues through the end of March 2024. Like our other Zoom-based program, interest in online webinars has waned, so we seized opportunities for in-person services whenever possible.

We completed our third year of **PRAISE KODAtime** program, funded by First 5 of Fresno County, which supported Deaf parents with KODAs, regardless of whether the children are Deaf or hearing. The sessions were intended to provide parents with more education and resources relevant to parenting and to provide children with opportunities for language development that will further support communication at home. The program ended in June 2023, and overall it was successful.

First 5 of Fresno County is currently funding us for a series of trainings provided by outside professionals, for staff, teachers, interpreters, parents of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children, and professionals who serve the D/HH. At this point, we have had fantastic attendance at each one, and excellent topics, which have included: “Whole Deaf Child,” “Empower Deaf Children Through Identity & Communication,” “Deaf Community Cultural Wealth,” and two presentations on suicide assessment and prevention. This program will end in June 2025 after a two-year period.

For our Central Coast Outreach Office, we also had funding awarded by Stevenson Philanthropy to fund a version of our **Deaf and Hard of Hearing Wellness (D-Well) program**. Although there has been interest in these topics, this too suffers from the impact of the growing weariness of using Zoom. As a result, we swiftly tweaked the grant approach to incorporate the information into in-person one-on-one sessions. This program will end in April 2024.

What else happened in 2023

Staff changes, including two new part-time Client Services Specialists for South Valley Outreach, new Communication Specialists, and one new Client Services Specialist for the Central Coast Outreach.

Our #GivingTuesday Campaign raised over \$7,308.34 for two of the four listed goals: funds for outreach events and remodeling the HQ’s kitchen to become ADA-accessible and replacing the HQ’s ceiling and lights. We deeply appreciate all the support our community has shown us!

Martha’s Vineyard in the Central Valley (MV) was our last one ever, marking 20 years of hosting this event. For 2024, we will have a Deaf History event that will encompass more periods of history, including different famous Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, and Late Deafened individuals.

As COVID fears lessened and more people wanting to return to in-person events, we saw a

gradual increase in attendance at our annual events, even though the numbers are not yet at pre-COVID levels. For example, at our Deaf Awareness Week (DAW) events, some of which were hosted in-person, we saw some people eager to come in person because of the need to socialize and make connections, which they felt was lacking with Zoom events. While the numbers were not as high as before 2020, we were pleased with the process of bringing people back. We had two DAW events on Zoom; one of which was a panel consisting of Deaf individuals from around the world. It was a successful event because of the topic (Deaf access in different countries), panelists from different countries, and we had people from outside our service region participating in the event.

In March, we hosted our 2nd Annual Love & Literacy: “Reading Over the Rainbow,” in conjunction with LEAD-K, and we used many of the same props from our 31st VDF, which saved us time and money. We had many families attend, and they especially enjoyed Wild Child Adventures, which consisted of balloon and bubble entertainment. At the event, we demonstrated to parents how to read stories in American Sign Language (ASL) to their children, provided free books, did different literacy-related activities, had Deaf-related/family-oriented resource booths, and served everyone with a free lunch. We had Spanish/ASL interpreters available so the event was accessible to all parents.

We had our annual ASL Summer Program in early August, and the theme was “Never Grow Up in Deafyland.” We had activities centering on Peter Pan and the Lost Kids (we wanted to be inclusive), and the families had a field trip to Sensory Rock and Superior Dairy in Hanford. We also had pirate-related activities, “Happy Thoughts” collage project, ASL storytelling, making cupcakes with a Peter Pan theme, and a Lego activity hosted by Bricks4Kids. Everything was entirely conducted in American Sign Language, which provided the families with Deaf and Hard of Hearing children an immersive experience so they could communicate and have fun with their children.

In November, we hosted our 32nd **Valley Deaf Festival**: “Deafyland, The Happiest Place in the Central Valley!” Although we had a lower than expected turnout, approximately 500 people, the event was still a success and enjoyed by all in attendance. Events are more expensive to host now, especially because costs relating to food, facility rental fees, decorations, entertainment, etc. have gone up, and our community is finding it increasingly difficult to afford ticket prices. While we had a record number of booths by Deaf-owned businesses, fun activities, raffle baskets, photos with Mickey & Minnie, food made by Sammy’s Tacos, and entertainment provided by Renca Dunn, our community has shared that they are not able to afford admission costs, plus food, raffle tickets, or being able to buy from vendors. Because of the increased costs and valuing our community's feedback, we are moving back to a smaller venue and plan to cut as many costs as possible to make the event more affordable for more people.

In December, each office hosted a holiday party for our community. The setting and format of each event varies, but generally include food and conversation, games and stuffed animals for the

children, and visits from Deaf Santa. We were thrilled with the turnout for Salinas and Visalia Holiday Parties, and it was great seeing everyone in festive spirits. The Merced Holiday Party was smaller than expected but hosted at the Merced Food Court where Hawaiian dancers were performing, but this was at the local community's request. For the Fresno Headquarters, because of the larger community and higher expectations for food, we partnered with Bridge Deaf Fellowship because we serve many of the same people. They provided most of the food and one of the church leaders signed "The Giving Tree" in ASL while DHHSC staff hosted "Minute to Win It" games and children's activities. We had more than 120 people for Fresno's Annual Holiday Luncheon and we were thrilled with the turnout.

Heartfelt Thanks

We express deep appreciation to our main supporter, the California Department of Social Services, Office of Deaf Access, for their ongoing dedication to sustaining our essential services. Without CDSS, our ability to offer such a breadth of services would be significantly limited.

We would also like to express our heartfelt gratitude to funders of our grant programs for 2023: Employment Development Department, Fansler Foundation, First Five of Fresno County, First Five of Merced County, Harden Foundation, Stevenson Philanthropy, and United Way of Tulare County. Our programs serving our Deaf and Hard of Hearing community members were made possible by your generous support!

Furthermore, we would like to thank CalViva/Health Net, Honda North, The Artist Tree, Educational Employees Credit Union, Heart Cruises, Sorenson, and Central California Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (CCRID) for their sponsorships of our 32nd Valley Deaf Festival: "Deafyland, The Happiest Place in the Central Valley." Some were new sponsors, and we were thrilled to have their support and partnership in hosting our biggest event of the year. We are also most appreciative of the support that our familiar sponsors continued to provide because they are an important part of our community. All the sponsors partnered with us in hosting a fun, family-friendly event, and we were honored to have Renca Dunn be our performer.

A big thank you to Bridge Deaf Fellowship for once again partnering with DHHSC's HQ in hosting our Holiday Luncheon. Their leadership team provided the food for our community and we are grateful for their support! Also, we appreciated Suzanne Conway for her continued donations of stuffed animals to the outreach offices' holiday parties, Fresno HQ's Holiday Luncheon, and Valley Deaf Festival. The children were thrilled with their "stuffed friends," and we want DHHSC to feel like a second home to our community.

We extend our gratitude to our Board of Directors for their service. Their commitment to DHHSC shows through their involvement in fundraising initiatives, such as the Panda Express fundraiser, competing with our staff teams for #GivingTuesday, and coordinating food sales at Valley Deaf Festival, with each hour they devote being invaluable. Additionally, their financial support as board members helps cover certain expenses of DHHSC that cannot be billed to CDSS.

To all who generously volunteered or contributed to DHHSC throughout 2023, including the #GivingTuesday donors who supported our efforts to raise funds to update our HQ's kitchen and replace our ceiling and lights, we extend our heartfelt gratitude. Every moment of volunteer service and every dollar donated plays a vital role in supporting DHHSC's array of services and programs. Your invaluable support, whether through time, effort, or financial contributions, empowers us to continue serving the community with dedication and impact.

Your continued support is needed

We deeply appreciate your support for DHHSC and the meaningful work we undertake. It is a privilege to serve our Central California community, and we are fully dedicated to delivering the highest quality services. Our goal is to positively impact the lives of those we serve, and we hold our community dear. Every individual within the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, and Late Deafened spectrum, along with our compassionate supporters, remains invaluable to us!

Your support is welcome, whether it is a donation of your time or money. If you would like to donate your time in volunteering, please visit your local DHHSC office today and ask how you can contribute.

If you would like to donate money online for DHHSC's services, you can easily do so at this link:

<https://www.dhhsc.org/donations/>

We also welcome donations in person at any of our four offices, and of course, your donations are tax-deductible!