

# DHHSC Annual Report for the Year of 2024

*(prepared January 2025)*

## 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 94% to 208%.

Here are the highlights of our grant programs this year:

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 2024 and we are excited to see more clients wanting employment.

**DEAF CONNECT** is a program based in the Central Coast Outreach office in Salinas, funded by Harden Foundation, which provides monthly social opportunities for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, intended to reduce isolation and improve well-being through community-based activities.

This program has been very successful in its first year, and currently is in its second year of funding. The highlight of the year was a special visit to the Monterey Zoo, where our attendees enjoyed an ASL-interpreted tour, enjoying all the animals!

First 5 of Merced County funded our **DHHSC Merced Program Support**, which funds various needs for services to children aged 0 to 5 in Merced County and their families. These needs include interpreting, supplies, and equipment used to teach ASL in ROCK sessions. Services are provided to not only Deaf and Hard of Hearing children, but also hearing KODA children.

We completed our first year of **DHHSC TRAINING SERIES** program, funded by First 5 of Fresno County. We are currently in the second year. This is 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: “These Roots Run Deep,” “The

Importance of Language Assessments and the IFSP/IEP process,” “Black Deaf Kids Matter,” 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 **PROGRAM SUPPORT**, primarily interpreting needs for our Deaf and Hard of Hearing staff to provide core services. Having this funding has been a fantastic support, since the cost of interpreting adds up quickly, and we have many events, as well as in-home services, that we want to keep accessible for parents of Deaf and Hard of Hearing kids. This funding will end in April 2025.

For the Calendar year 2024, we had funding from the City of Visalia to support **Events for Deaf Youth**, including a tour at Imagine-U Children’s Museum, Adventure Park, Deaf Awareness Week’s game social, Halloween Party, and our annual Holiday Party. The much-needed funding supported both interpreting costs and supplies for the events.

### **What else happened in 2024**

Staff changes, including two new Client Services Specialists for Central Coast Outreach, one full-time and one part-time. We had a temporary Client Services Specialist for that office to support our community during these times of change, which we truly appreciated!

One of our South Valley Outreach Client Services Specialists was made full-time, increasing service availability for our community.

Our **#GivingTuesday Campaign** raised almost \$15,000! Our four goals were: To pay off Fresno HQ renovations (ceiling and lights), Update Fresno HQ bathrooms (toilets are old and clog easily), Raise funds for outreach offices’ socials as requested by community members, and Raise funds for DHHSC’s annual events, such as Valley Deaf Festival, Deaf History, Holiday parties, etc. Our staff divided into six teams for a friendly competition, and the Golden Quad was the winning staff team. The management team, They Who Shall Not Be Named, brought in the most funds but we wanted to recognize and reward the staff team that brought in the most donations. We deeply appreciate all the support our community has shown us!

In April, we hosted our first “**A Walk Through Deaf History**” and we had a nice turnout. We had different stations consisting of significant Deaf figures and historical milestones, including the 1880 Milan Conference, Deaf President Now, Carol Padden, Andrew Foster, George Veditz, Chuck Baird, among others. Different staff dressed up as their chosen Deaf figure and explained different facts about that person. We incorporated PowerPoints, trivia games, video clips, Hall of Fame with pictures and facts about different famous or important Deaf people (and Hall of Shame with Shaheem Sanchez), and skits on the stage reenacting important historical events. This event particularly benefited the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community and their families and students majoring in Deaf Education, Deaf Studies, and Interpreting.

In March, we hosted our 3rd Annual **Love & Literacy**: “Magic Happens With Reading,” in conjunction with LEAD-K, and we used many of the same props from our 32nd VDF, which saved us time and money. The theme was Disney and we had different stations, one of which

was the Mad Hatter's Tea Party. At that station, we taught about Dinner Table Syndrome and showed parents how to include their Deaf and Hard of Hearing children in conversations during mealtimes. We had many families attend, and they especially enjoyed the Tim Mannix Comedy Magic Show. 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.

In June, we partnered with National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) to bring back a weeklong summer camp program after not hosting for several years due to the COVID pandemic. The **Create Your Future** camp focused on providing Deaf and Hard of Hearing high school students with enriching vocational experiences while meeting other students throughout different parts of California. NTID staff focused on various topics related to specific careers of interest/STEM education while our staff provided a variety of activities and workshops centering on preparing for the world of work. Activities and workshops included:

- Understanding Roles within Employment
- Self-Advocacy Skills
- Activities related to STEM education/careers
- Introduction to State/Local Services
- Deaf/Hard of Hearing Panel: Learning from the success of employed Deaf and Hard of Hearing community members
- Three field trips to employment sites with Deaf and Hard of Hearing workers: Gap Distribution Center, Amazon warehouse, and Starbucks. These businesses are where many Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees have been placed by our EDD staff in recent years.

In June, one of the larger events we hosted this year was actually our **40th Anniversary Gala**. We celebrated at Evanelle Vineyards in Madera, marking four decades of service to the community. The event was a near sell-out, with a goal of 200 attendees, and we were incredibly thankful for the overwhelming support from everyone who joined us. Many past DHHSC staff, board members, and executive directors were in attendance. The evening featured a special guest speaker, Rachel Burton, along with flamenco dancers for entertainment, a photo booth, and dessert/silent auctions. It was wonderful to see our community come together for a fun and meaningful evening, reconnecting with friends.

We had our annual **ASL Summer Program** in early August, and the theme was "DeafWarts Summer Camp." Because the Fresno HQ building was still undergoing renovations at the time, our staff hosted three field trips for families with Deaf and Hard of Hearing children and CODAs (Children of Deaf Adults). They went to the Fresno Chaffee Zoo to learn about birds and reptiles (same animals as shown in Harry Potter movies), Abigail Candy Shop where they did a scavenger hunt with Harry Potter candies, and No Surrender where kids could freely expend their energy to their parents' relief. 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 September, we hosted **Deaf Awareness Week (DAW)** from September 13th to 22nd, with DHHSC staff organizing nine events for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. Highlights included returning favorites like the Deaf Panel and 2nd Annual Merced Picnic, plus new additions such as the DHHSC Art Hop, which showcased local Deaf artists. We had many family-friendly events designed to support communication between Deaf parents and hearing children, as well as hearing parents and Deaf and Hard of Hearing kids.

These events included: "Are the Deaf Cursed?" Panel; Family Skate; Ice Cream Social; HP Trivia & Movie Night; DHHSC Art Hop; DeafBlind & the Community; Games and Pizza Social; 2nd Annual Merced Picnic; and Family Day at the Park.

Our LGBTQIA+ program had the opportunity to host Bob LoParo to do two workshops that focused on the LGBTQIA+ spectrum, its accompanying signs in ASL, and provided wonderful and beneficial information on HIV/AIDS awareness, current treatments, and prevention. The participants enjoyed the discussions; they also expressed that they learned something and hoped to continue the conversation in discussing more taboo topics such as sexual/gender identity, expression, and so forth.

In November, we hosted our 33rd Annual Valley Deaf Festival. This year's theme was inspired by the Harry Potter books and movies. This year's title for Valley Deaf Festival was **Center of Deaf Wizardry: Chamber of Quadwizards**. Although attendance is still not what it was from pre-pandemic levels, we did have a great turnout with 465 people. The event was successful largely due to attendees enjoying the booth vendors, delicious food, fun stage games, and children's activities. This year we did not have a Deaf performer due to the cost and wanting to see if that made a difference in attendance. We did, however, have an ASL-fluent magician who incorporated Harry Potter themes into his performance.

In December, we partnered with local schools in bringing back Silent Sleigh. We had not had Silent Sleigh since before the COVID pandemic, and we were excited to host it again, which was our 33rd Silent Sleigh. Michelle Bronson, DHHSC's Executive Director, and her husband, Jimmy Bronson, played Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus and spent the entire morning greeting and taking photos with each of the 200 Deaf and Hard of Hearing children. Our Silent Sleigh committee also hosted a parade consisting of different marching bands, emergency personnel vehicles, mascots, ASL clubs, DHHSC's staff, and the base's decorated floats, in addition to planning games for the children, distributing goodie bags, and coordinating skits with the Fresno Air National Guard. A free lunch was also provided for the event participants and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (and their teachers and parents) were thrilled to see the return of the annual event as it was sorely missed for four years.

Also 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. The Visalia office had a catered Mexican meal, which was a big hit for the local community. Merced and Salinas' parties were also successful, and local community members requested that the timeframe be longer because they

had so much fun. 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 “Love You Forever” in ASL while DHHSC staff hosted children’s activities and a Harry Potter trivia game. We changed the event from Holiday Luncheon to Holiday Dinner because of all the kids still being in school. We did not want the children to miss out on the holiday festivities, especially to see Deaf Santa, so we moved the event to 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm. This schedule change worked well, and we had more than 120 people in attendance.

## **Heartfelt Thanks**

Please join us in saying thank you to our supporter, the California Department of Social Services, Office of Deaf Access, for their ongoing support of everything we have the privilege to provide our community! Without CDSS, we would not be able to provide the services that we do!

We would also like to express our heartfelt gratitude to funders of our grant programs for 2024: Employment Development Department, First Five of Fresno County, First Five of Merced County, Harden Foundation, Stevenson Philanthropy, and City of Visalia. Our programs serving our Deaf and Hard of Hearing community members were made possible by your generous support!

Furthermore, we would like to thank Educational Employees Credit Union, Sierra HR Partners, Fishman, Larsen & Callister, The Artist Tree, Sorenson, and Gap Inc. for sponsoring our 40th Gala. Their support made it possible for us to host a memorable celebration of DHHSC’s 40 years of service. Some are our business partners and others are employers of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals, and we are grateful for each of our sponsors coming alongside us to commemorate our individual and agency accomplishments.

In addition, we would like to thank California Association of the Deaf (CAD), The Artist Tree, Sorenson, Central California Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (CCRID), and Haro Entertainment for their sponsorships of our 33rd Valley Deaf Festival. 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 had a fun magic show performed by Spencer Murrish of Murrish Theatrics.

A big thank you to Bridge Deaf Fellowship for once again partnering with DHHSC’s HQ in hosting our Holiday Dinner. 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 Dinner, and Silent Sleigh. The children were thrilled with their “stuffed friends,” and we want DHHSC to feel like a second home to our community.

Thank you as well to our Board of Directors for their service! We truly appreciate their involvement in fundraising initiatives, such as the Panda Express fundraiser and being on the kitchen team at Valley Deaf Festival. Time, while serving in volunteer roles, is a donation that is always needed and is just as important as financial contributions. Additionally, their monetary support as board members cover some of DHHSC's needs, such as new Square devices that can be used at events and also at the Fresno HQ's front desk for use of food and snack sales.

To all who generously volunteered or contributed to DHHSC throughout 2024, including the #GivingTuesday donors who supported our efforts to raise funds for the needs of the Fresno HQ and outreach offices, we are deeply grateful! 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.

### **Please Keep On Supporting Our Work!**

We are grateful for all support that is given to DHHSC for the work we are privileged to do. We are truly happy to serve our Central California community! We strive to make sure that the highest quality services are provided every day. Every member of the community we serve, along with our compassionate supporters, is important to us!

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*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/donate>**

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