

DHHSC Annual Report for the Year of 2025

(prepared February 2026)

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 regarding the number of clients we will serve for all our service categories. At the end of each fiscal year, we then provide CDSS with an End-of-Year Report. Our total percentage for all categories combined was 102.69%.

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 now funds one full-time Employment Specialist and one full-time Employment Specialist/Interpreter. Many clients were placed in jobs, both temporary and permanent, in 2025.

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 and is wrapping up its second year of funding. The highlight of the year was the holiday party, where our attendees had a great social time and the kids enjoyed seeing Deaf Santa!

We completed our second year of **DHHSC TRAINING SERIES** program, funded by First 5 of Fresno County. We are currently in the third 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: “Building Our Own Superhero,” “5 Language-Building Activities for D/HH Toddlers,” “Rooted From The Start,” and more. This

program will end in June 2026 after a three-year period, since it was extended an extra year in July 2025.

For our Central Coast Outreach Office, we also had funding awarded by Stevenson Philanthropy to fund **INTERPRETING SUPPORT**, for interpreting needs for our Deaf and Hard of Hearing staff, including during events. 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 2026.

The Fansler Foundation has generously committed to supporting our initiative by providing funding for eight community events throughout the year. This support will directly enhance accessibility by covering the costs of professional interpreters, ensuring that Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals can fully participate in all activities. By funding interpretation services, the foundation not only removes communication barriers but also fosters inclusivity, allowing attendees to engage, socialize, and connect with one another in a meaningful way.

This partnership reflects the Fansler Foundation's commitment to promoting equity and accessibility in community programming, helping to create spaces where everyone, regardless of hearing ability, can be active participants. Their contribution is vital to the success of our events, ensuring that communication access is not a barrier but a bridge to connection and community engagement.

United Way of Tulare County provided funding for our **Deaf Connect - Tulare County** program, which is very similar to what we offer in the Central Coast Outreach. This program funds 12 Deaf events in Tulare County, to provide social opportunities that reduce isolation and improve mental well-being.

It has been a successful year and we've truly appreciated United Way's support.

What else happened in 2025

There were several staff changes throughout the year. First, two new staff members were hired: one as an Employment Specialist and the other as an Employment Specialist/Interpreter. Both are funded through a grant from the Employment Development Department. Second, at our Fresno headquarters, we hired a new Client Services Specialist and a Communication Specialist. In addition, three staff members transitioned into new roles: Coordinator of Client Services, Supervisor of Interpreting Services, and Administrative Assistant. Lastly, a new Executive Director, Viridiana Alvarez, was hired in June. Michelle Bronson, our previous Executive

Director who led DHHSC for over 16 years, decided to pursue a new chapter in her career, for which we wish her the best.

In March, we hosted our **4th Annual Love and Literacy** event: “The True Magic is Reading,” and 13 families attended. While the turnout was smaller than last year’s, the families shared they had a wonderful time. The event was Harry Potter-themed, and we had family-oriented booths, ASL storytelling, ASL storysigning, face-painting, arts & crafts, wand making, scavenger hunt involving posters of Harry Potter and other characters, and other fun activities that promote literacy. We suspect the turnout was lower than expected because it was the first sunny day after raining every day for a week, and some families had other kids’ sporting events to attend. Nonetheless, the feedback was very positive, and the families shared that they felt validated and got some great resources from both DHHSC and the community.

In April, we hosted our second “**A Walk Through Deaf History**” event to spotlight important Deaf figures and advancements made during different eras. We were able to reuse trivia games, posters, and visual boards created for the first year, as well as adding in new elements. Everyone enjoyed learning more about Deaf history and the people who have brought Deaf culture, American Sign Language, and Deaf rights to the forefront. Each staffperson and some volunteers acted as famous Deaf individuals from our history. 102 people participated, and it was a great event!

In June, This past summer, we once again collaborated with the Rochester Institute of Technology/National Technical Institute of Technology (RIT/NTID) to provide a week-long **Summer Camp** that is primarily focused on careers in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) field, as well as including our Create Your Future (CYF) program. The camp was gratefully hosted at California State University, Fresno, where a total of 13 high school students were assessed upon arrival on Sunday evening. The purpose of their assessments is to discover their likes/dislikes, skills, interests, strengths, and weaknesses. Three co-leaders also assisted in providing communication access to students who needed extra support. In total, there were a total of 9 staff from DHHSC working together for our CYF portion of the camp. We had a tour on Wednesday to provide students with general insights into which career(s) involve STEM skills – we toured IdeaWorks with 4 different areas, including textiles, ceramics, metalwork, and woodwork, and the second place we visited was the GAP Pacific Distribution Center.

Also in June, we hosted a **Farewell Celebration for Michelle L. Bronson**, focusing on our former Executive Director and thanking her for her many years of service and contributions to DHHSC. Members of the community, former staff, and friends joined us to celebrate her with cake, heartfelt speeches, and shared memories.

In August, the **ASL Summer Program** had 10 families participating. The theme revolved around monsters, so they watched Monsters Inc. one day and had monster cookies and ASL

storytelling another day. They also went to Oro Lake Park for fun games, bubble activities, and a social time. Parents had the opportunity to connect with each other. One day they did art together, and on the last day they went to a place called Kids empire, a trampoline park.

In September, we hosted **Deaf Awareness Week (DAW)** from September 12th to 18th, with DHHSC staff organizing seven events for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. Highlights included returning favorites like the Deaf Panel and 3rd Annual Merced Picnic, plus new additions such as A Night with DeafBlind, learning the basics of DeafBlind etiquette and much more. 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: DHHSC Live Show!, Game Social, Deaf Social Night, 3rd Annual DHHSC Merced Picnic, A Night with DeafBlind, Ice Cream Social, and DHHSC ArtHop.

In November, we hosted our Valley Deaf Festival. This year's theme was **Lights...Camera...ASL!** This was a movie-oriented theme with an emphasis on older movies, so the event was a lot of fun for all who attended. We had 560 attendees this year! While this is not anywhere near our highest, we had really been impacted by the COVID pandemic and we're still coming back from that. This event also featured an ASL Storytelling Competition, which was a great opportunity for community members to participate, with the winners selected by the audience. The event was successful largely because attendees enjoyed the booth vendors, delicious food, fun stage games, and children's activities. In addition to the annual activities, we held a live auction featuring some of the biggest prizes, giving attendees the opportunity to place bids.

In December, we partnered with local schools in bringing back our **34th Silent Sleigh**. Mr. and Mrs. Santa Claus 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).

In December, all four offices had our annual **Holiday Parties** with various names but generally similar format of fun, food, games, and Deaf Santa visiting with the kids! Our staff also collaborated with the local school districts in the Fresno/Clovis area and beyond for the Silent Sleigh event they lead. This was an excellent opportunity for families with Deaf children to come out and have a memorable day, and for our staff to be there to support this fun.

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 the funders of our grant programs for 2025: Employment Development Department, First Five of Fresno County, Fansler Foundation, Harden Foundation, Stevenson Philanthropy, and United Way of Tulare. Our programs serving our Deaf and Hard of Hearing community members were made possible by your generous support!

In addition, we would like to thank CalViva Health, Sorenson, EECU, The Artist Tree, CCRID, and Fansler Foundation for their sponsorships of our 34th Valley Deaf Festival. One of them was a new sponsor, 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 our family sponsors continue to provide, as 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 ASL Storytelling competition.

A big thank you to the generous companies who donated to support our Holiday Dinner! Their contributions helped make the event special and accessible for our community. We also want to recognize 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 thanks to support from the Fansler Foundation, DHHSC remains a welcoming and joyful space for our community.

Thank you as well to our Board of Directors for their dedicated service! We truly appreciate their hard work in the kitchen at the Valley Deaf Festival, helping ensure the event ran smoothly and attendees were well cared for. Time spent serving in volunteer roles is a contribution that is just as valuable as financial support. Additionally, their commitment as board members helps meet DHHSC's ongoing needs, such as providing new Square devices for use at events and at the Fresno HQ's front desk for 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 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 wide range of services and programs.

We are especially thankful to PGE for their generous donation, which will support various events, programs, supplies, equipment, and services throughout the year. Contributions like this make a meaningful difference, helping us provide accessible, high-quality experiences for the community we serve.

Your invaluable support, through time, effort, or financial contributions, empowers us to continue serving the Central California community with dedication and impact. Every member of our community, along with our compassionate supporters, is important to us, and together we ensure DHHSC remains a welcoming and enriching place for all.

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!