



Newsletter Fall 2006

Independently Merging
Parent Associations
of California

Together for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children

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www.deafkids.org

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IMPACT Newsletter
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SAVE THESE DATES!

The 2007 CAL-ED/IMPACT Conference
April 20 - 22, 2007

EXPLORE. DREAM. DISCOVER.
Our Journey to Successful Deaf Education
Burbank Hotel and Convention Center - Burbank, CA

Join us on our journey as we explore, dream and discover ways to bring successful deaf education to our deaf and hard of hearing children!

A wonderful program is currently being planned, including keynote Carl J. Kirchner presenting: "EVERY DEAF CHILD A STAR: Deciphering the DNA of Deaf Education."

The children's program committee is planning lots of fun for different age groups with older groups a trip to Universal Studios and younger groups to the fire station and much more.

A pre-conference workshop will offered again this year. After the very positive responses we received from last year we have arranged for one this year as well. *Reading to Deaf Children Learning from Deaf Adults* is based on the 15 principles for reading to deaf and hard of hearing children. These principles were developed from research studying effective communication strategies deaf adults use when reading to deaf and hard of hearing children. The workshop is offered in a three hour format and consists of an introduction to the 15 principles, video clips of deaf adults reading to deaf and hard of hearing children, and related activities.

More detailed information is already on the IMPACT website, and look for registration information coming soon.

Children's Art Exhibition!

We had great fun admiring drawings, paintings, collages, small sculptures and photographs by deaf and hard of hearing children at last year's conference. Please encourage children to send in their creations again this year! Artwork will be on display in the main hallway and prizes awarded in each age group and category. Check the website or contact Cora Shahid (rabianay@deafkids.org).

IMPACT Board

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IMPACT Mission Statement

We as parents, professionals and members of the deaf and hard of hearing community are rising up as a single voice. Regardless of communication modalities, we stand united in the task of getting the very best for our children. We will take no less than quality education for our children, support and early intervention for our families, information and education for our parents.

Letter from the President:

I'm proud to be part of IMPACT, an organization that is here to stay and is widely recognized in California for its impact on deaf education and support of families. IMPACT reached its 20th anniversary this year, and with over 400 members is recognized as the only statewide parent organization representing all deaf and hard of hearing children.

IMPACT's goal is help parents get connected not only with each other, but to the assistance and information they need. Two ways we hope to reach more parents are through our website and the Area Rep program. We've had many compliments on our website but there's always room for improvement. Over the next few months you'll see it website evolve into an even more valuable resource center, including more links to topics like research on literacy, IEP checklists and tips, and how to deal with those daily issues at school and home.

Parents have a unique perspective on the needs deaf/hard of hearing children, and we can learn so much from their experiences. This past year IMPACT developed an Area Rep Program so that families have easier access to an IMPACT parent in their region who has "been through the ropes." Look for more information in the next newsletter showing who our area reps are and contact information. (A map showing the regions and contacts is coming to our website.) These volunteers are available to help connect you with other parents or direct you to services or agencies.

My association with IMPACT has benefited my entire family and my hope is for others to experience that, too. IMPACT is here for every deaf/hard of hearing child -- we do not endorse one mode of communication over another. Finding each other creates community and allows us to learn from one another. Working together on our common goals is what gives parents power to create change to have impact.

Marcos Ramirez
President
IMPACT

Cassia: A Family's Story

My daughter, Cassia, did not pass her newborn hearing screening. I understand that many parents see this as a great loss, but that was not my experience. Other parents hold out hope that the ABR will come back with results that the screening was a false positive, but I was fine with whatever the test showed. After Cassia's result showed that she has a bilateral severe to profound hearing loss I could tell that the audiologist was trying to comfort me. I told him that I didn't need to be comforted because I had taken ASL as my foreign language in college. I knew about Deaf Culture, and I already knew that deaf people can do anything, except hear.



The decision to use ASL with my Deaf daughter was an easy one, especially since we started signing with her before we knew she was Deaf. While I was pregnant with my twins I bought a video and book about using ASL with babies. We only watched it once because it was, well, kind of boring—informative, but boring. I have found this to be true of most video programs for teaching ASL. My husband and I have tried watching videos to specifically learn parenting techniques for deaf children, but the videos literally put us to sleep. There is one exception, that I know of, to the idea of ASL educational videos being boring, and that is Signing Time! When I first learned that Cassia was deaf I hopped onto Amazon.com and searched for ASL programs. I love Amazon because it lets you read reviews from people who have the product. Many of the other programs seem to either not be ASL or be suffering from the boring video syndrome—or both. The only somewhat negative comment listed about Signing Time! was from a grandmother, who was frustrated that her two-year-old granddaughter could now ask for a cookie by name. (The rest of her review was positive.) One of the creators of Signing Time! has a deaf child, and she and her sister created Signing Time! as a way to help their family learn to communicate with this little girl. They are from a family of professional musicians, and I believe that it is easier to teach an entertainer ASL than it is to teach an ASL educator to be entertaining. These DVDs made learning ASL so easy that my whole family is learning. My nieces and nephews are learning ASL as a second, and sometimes third, language. Both of my parents, my sister, and my husband have all taken ASL classes at local community

colleges. Cassia and her twin, Alexandria, are both learning ASL. Cassia, at age two, uses up to five signs in a sentence. Her first five sign sentence was “I WANT WATCH SIGNING TIME.” It is rare for a two-year-old to spontaneously use five words in a sentence, but it is incredible for the deaf child of hearing parents to do so.

Alexandria can hear my husband and I speaking back and forth to each other in fluent English, but our ASL skills are not at a fluent level. We want Cassia to be exposed to fluent signing as often as possible, and so we go to Deaf activities. We plan on moving to Fremont to be closer to the California School for the Deaf, but it has proven difficult to find affordable housing there with its proximity to Silicon Valley. In the mean time we travel down to Fremont to attend Deaf events. We enjoy ASL story time at Barnes and Noble, and we had so much fun at the Deaf Expo. We have been to a Deaf church, and we even bring Cassia to more adult activities, like lectures given in ASL, to give her more exposure to her native language. I am so grateful that I knew from the start that one of the greatest gifts I could give to my Deaf child was to be a part of the Deaf Community.

The Appreciation of Understanding

by Lori Steed, Immediate Past President, IMPACT

A Review of the Live Theater production of "Silent Salzburg", performed at California School for the Deaf's Little Theatre in Fremont, California, September 22, 23rd and 24th, 2006.

Admission for Two, \$20.00

Food while on the road, \$12.46

Fuel for the round trip at \$2.59 a gallon, \$45.00

One night's lodging, \$72.43

Sitting in the audience with my deaf son experiencing a play about multiple deaf social and cultural issues, PRICELESS.

My son Daniel, age 15, and I, left Santa Maria, where he goes to school, at about 1:00 in the afternoon and arrived San Jose at rush hour, but still got to Fremont in time to grab dinner before arriving at CSDF. We were advised not to sit in the first few rows, as the line of sight for the interpreters would be blocked at times. We chose seats in about the 7th row of the theatre. We had Deaf in front of us and hearing behind us. Beyond that, there was a mix of hearing and Deaf throughout; young and old and in between.

The last time I took my son to live theater was last year for a PCPA (in Santa Maria) production of *Beauty and the Beast*. It was an interpreted performance where they put the interpreters on stools in about row 15 off to the side (next to the wall) with the seats for those wishing to utilize interpreters in the 3 rows behind them. You had a completely different focus (near vs. far) and simply could not possibly watch the interpreter **and** the performance, so you had to choose to look at one or the other. There was a lot of singing and music. He knew the story. He was not impressed. I dragged him there, simply to support the fact that PCPA had hired interpreters for a performance.

"Silent Salzburg" at CSD was a **completely** different experience. The whole of the experience was a ten out of ten. The writing was amazing. The performance of the actors was moving, the goal of providing a meaningful experience to hearing and Deaf audience members was handled with sensitivity and grace.

As an example, there is one scene where hearing sister Lisa and Deaf brother Hans are signing to one another. The three hearing college students behind us started whispering to one another.

"What are they talking about?"

"Why aren't they interpreting this?"

"Are you getting any of this?"

"I'm catching a couple of the signs, but..."

"Why did they stop interpreting?"

Up to that point, there had been a signing interpreter for all voiced lines and a voice interpreter for all signed lines. The themes of the play had been developed in the previous acts so at this point it was obvious there was a theme around communication, access to information. There were family members who did not sign and family members who did not hear, and this created tension within the family. And Rich-



ard (the playwright), in a stroke of genius, puts the hearing audience smack in the shoes of the family members who don't sign. That right there, Richard, took you from an A to an A+.

Daniel and I socialized with audience members and cast members after the performance. When Daniel was asked what he thought of the play, he remarked, "Great! Great suspense throughout! I was completely enthralled in the story to the very end."

Daniel has attended the Leadership Academic Summit for high school students at Gallaudet University in Washington D.C. the last two summers. The first year he attended they toured the Holocaust Museum, which is part of the Smithsonian Institution. He was very moved by his visit and what he learned there, and my souvenir from him that year was related to that experience.

I've also been to the Holocaust Museum, and it's a very visual and experiential depiction of the events and programs that were undertaken by the German Reich under Hitler in the effort to cleanse and purify the race, with the obvious attitude that there is one definition of perfect; it's all about the physical aspects, and it's passed on genetically. Once again, I saw Richard Medugno's genius in using the parallel between the Holocaust victims and the struggle of the Deaf culture to make the world understand that each of us is perfect as we are. "Stop trying to make us somebody else's perfect and see the beauty in us just as we are. We all have value, and we are all unique." There is a parallel message and he merged themes brilliantly in this story by depicting a family with a Deaf son caught up in the ethnic cleansing; fleeing Klottmeier, Austria to avoid a program for sterilizing all Deaf citizens so they could not have children. This then creates the situation where the whole family becomes silent while in hiding in Salzburg and the opportunities for learning sign immerge.

Using the contrast of the dark control of human citizens in the World War II German invasion and quest for control of the world, the play sheds an even brighter light on the importance of communication between father and son, mother and daughter, and sister and brother; the importance of the family bond, overcoming the things that divide us, and ultimately the importance of understanding and being understood.

Bravo, Richard. Kudos Megg Davis (director).

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1996 the State Superintendent of Public Instruction established the California Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education Advisory Task Force that found “this state’s educational programs for deaf and hard of hearing children are, to a significant degree, ineffective.”

This “blue ribbon” task force stated that the problem is not one of individual failure but, rather, of basic systemic inadequacies; many school districts do not have an understanding of the unique communication needs of deaf and hard of hearing children or the resources to meet those needs. The Task Force explained that to continue along this same path is to perpetuate the isolation of deaf and hard of hearing children and to accept unacceptable education failure rates. To maintain the educational status quo was to set limits on deaf and hard of hearing children rather than to set them free to become healthy and productive citizens.

The recommendations made 10 years ago are:

1. California should implement a coordinated, statewide, regional education delivery stem for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.
 - A. California should enact legislation to mandate regionalized programs.
 - B. The county superintendent of schools should develop the regionalization plan.
 - C. The California Department of Education must provide leadership, technical assistance and support by qualified, knowledgeable, professional staff.
 - D. The California State Board of Education should adopt a policy emphasizing the central role of communication in the development and education of deaf and hard-of-hearing children.
 - E. An interagency, multidisciplinary task force should be established immediately to address the lack of services and programs serving deaf and hard-of-hearing students who have multiple handicaps.
 - F. An early identification and referral system should be established.
2. Criteria for Quality deaf and hard-of-hearing programs should be implemented.
3. Programs serving deaf and hard-of-hearing children should have standards, assessment, and accountability for student achievement.
4. The California Department of Education, institutions of higher education, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, and other agencies should collaborate to recruit and train staff.
 - A. CDE should have a central role in ensuring appropri-

ate professional training for new and current staff.

B. Institutions of higher education and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing should implement courses related to educating hard-of-hearing students.

5. A system of parent and community education and involvement should be established.
6. The current funding system should be modified and provide sufficient resources for a quality education for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.
 - A. The new delivery system should be fully funded.
 - B. Appropriate technology should be a part of all programs for deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

It is suspected that a large number of parents and perhaps even teachers don’t even know this report exists. And, most people in deaf education, parents/teachers/students, probably are not aware if any or how much progress has been made since the report was issued. I suggest we ask the California Department of Education for an update on the progress that has been made since the final report was issued in 1999.

Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, we would like to hear from you! What do you see now? Are our deaf and hard-of-hearing children, all of them, being given a quality education? What practices should be encouraged and what should be discouraged? Where are the high points in California? Is anyone suffering? What are your reactions to the “The Report of the California Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Education Advisory Task Force” from 1999 (it can be found in it’s entirety at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/ss/dh/documents/deafhrpt.pdf> or by contacting Nancy Sager at nsager@cde.ca.gov | 916-327-3868).

In future articles, we’ll share your stories – with your permission. We’ll also talk about ideas that various people across the state have for improving education for all segments of children who are deaf and hard-of-hearing. And, hopefully, we’ll have a full report from Department of Education on the status of these recommendations. To respond to our questions, please write or email to editor, Impact Newsletter.

**CAL-ED IMPACT Conference
A Shared Experience....**

My name is Lorena Rodriguez. My husband Juan and I have a son who was born hard of hearing. At the beginning it was devastating for us. We were very sad and didn't know what to do. Thank God that we were referred to the Early Start program.

Last year when I was invited to the IMPACT and Cal-Ed Conference in Fresno, I said yes right away. I wanted to go. That conference was an excellent experience because when I saw many people with the same needs as my son I felt much more confident and relaxed. I was also able to understand many things; one of them was that my son was not the only one that had this need. Now, I feel so fortunate and I give thanks to God for giving me John as my son.

At last year's conference people who presented the workshops gave a lot of information and support. They also shared their own experiences, positive and even the negative, which had happened in their lives. When I heard all those stories, I was able to cope and I felt encouraged to persevere for a better life for my son.

P.S. Last year's conference was so helpful to me.

Sincerely,
Lorena Rodriguez

Mi nombre es Lorena Rodríguez. Mi esposo Juan y yo tenemos un hijo que nació con sordera profunda. Al principio fue muy devastado para nosotros, estábamos muy tristes, no sabíamos que hacer. Gracias a Dios que nos refirieron al programa Early Start. Allí recibimos mucho apoyo por parte de los maestros y personas que trabajan con el programa.

Cuando me invitaron a la conferencia de IMPACT en Fresno, dije, si quiero ir. Fue una experiencia muy Buena, porque al ver mucha gente con la misma perdida que mi hijo, en ese momento me sentí mas tranquila y comprendí muchas cosas como saber que mi hijo no era el único. Ahora me siento muy dichosa y le doy Gracias a Dios por darme un hijo como John.

En la conferencia las personas que dieron sus discursos dieron mucha informacion y consejos. Por que allí hablaron sobre sus vidas como las buenas y las malas experiencias y yo al escuchar todas esas historias me llene de fuerzas para sacar a mi hijo adelante
p.s. A mí en lo personal me ayudo mucho la conferencia.

Sinceramente
Lorena Rodríguez



It is during the first year of life that the foundations are laid for the child's development of cognition, communication, and language. These skills are essential for the later development of literacy, and academic, social, and vocational success. Parents of newly identified infants who are deaf or hard of hearing need the support of highly qualified early interventionists, who are knowledgeable of the unique needs of children with hearing loss, and who can guide them in learning the skills they need to be able to nurture their child's development during these critical first years.

To help ensure that families of infants with hearing loss in California receive appropriate services, the California Department of Education established the California Deaf and Hard of Hearing Early Start Workgroup. The Workgroup was charged with the task of developing "Best Practices for Early Start for Infants and Toddlers who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing." The purpose of the Best Practices is to provide guidance to Early Start providers, parents, and others in the appropriate provision of early intervention services to these children and their families.

The "Best Practices for Early Start for Infants and Toddlers who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing" are posted on the IMPACT web site www.deafkids.org

Legislative Update

AB 2651

On September 19, 2006 Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law a bill that will mandate hearing screening for all newborns in California. AB 2651 was authored by Assembly member Dave Jones and sponsored by the March of Dimes. The bill was also supported by several groups in the deaf community, hospitals, parents and the American Academy of Pediatrics. California will now screen an additional 170,000 newborns every year for hearing loss in this expansion that will begin by January 1, 2008. An estimated 300-400 more babies will be identified with hearing loss through this program and have better opportunities to develop language skills that will help them succeed in school. Thanks to everyone who worked so hard to make this new law a reality.



SB 267

On September 29, 2006, Governor Schwarzenegger signed Senate Bill (SB) 267, which enacted Education Code Section 60852.4 and provides a one-year exemption of the requirement to pass the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) for certain students with disabilities in the class of 2007. This bill is very similar to SB 517, which provided a similar exemption of the CAHSEE requirement to students in the class of 2006.

There are a few differences between the two bills, so I encourage you to review the full text of this bill which is available online at: <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html>. Below is a summary of the conditions that must exist for a student to be eligible for the SB 267 one-year exemption:

- ◆ The pupil has an operative individualized education program (IEP) adopted pursuant to the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or a plan adopted pursuant to Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
- ◆ The IEP or Section 504 plan of the pupil, which is dated on or before July 1, 2006, indicates that the pupil has an anticipated graduation date, and is scheduled to receive a high school diploma on or before December 31, 2007.
- ◆ The school district or state special school certifies that the pupil has satisfied or will satisfy all other state and local requirements for the receipt of a high school diploma on or before December 31, 2007.
- ◆ The pupil has attempted to pass the CAHSEE sections not yet passed at least twice after grade 10, including at least once during the current grade 12 year of the pupil, with the accommodations or modifications, if any, specified in the IEP or the Section 504 plan of the pupil.
- ◆ Either (i) the pupil received remedial or supplemental instruction focused on the CAHSEE sections not yet passed from his or her school, private tutoring, or another source, or (ii) the school district or state special school failed to provide the pupil with the opportunity to receive that remedial or supplemental instruction.
- ◆ If the pupil received remedial or supplemental instruction as described in item 5; the pupil has taken the CAHSEE sections not yet passed at least once following the receipt of that remedial or supplemental instruction.
- ◆ No later than 30 days prior to the receipt of a diploma in 2007, the pupil, or the parent or legal guardian of the pupil if the pupil is a minor, has been notified in writing that the pupil is entitled to receive free appropriate public education up to and including the academic year during which the pupil reaches the maximum age pursuant to subdivision (c) of Section 56026, or until the pupil receives a high school diploma, whichever event occurs first.

This new law, which takes effect January 1, 2007, also requires school districts to report to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction information pertaining to the exemptions provided.



Company C Contemporary Ballet

Company C Contemporary Ballet, a thirteen member repertory ballet company based in the San Francisco Bay Area, will be holding a Gala Benefit for the Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing on Friday, January 26, 2007 at the Dean Leshner Regional Center in Walnut Creek, CA. A percentage of the ticket proceeds will go directly to California AG Bell to support programs for deaf and hard of hearing children. Sign language interpreters will be available at the performance.

The benefit will include a special performance by deaf and hard of hearing children living in the Bay Area. If you know a child who would like to perform, please contact Angela Evans of Company C Contemporary Ballet at angela@companycballet.org or (925) 708-0752. All communication modalities are welcome. Children will meet with members of the troop in San Francisco for rehearsal in December.

Company C Contemporary Ballet decided to dedicate a portion of the ticket proceeds to the Alexander Graham Bell Association because of ties with the deaf community – a current dancer who is partially deaf and a former dancer whose mother has taught deaf children at elementary schools in the Walnut Creek area. In addition to Company C’s personal connections, the Company sees a natural fit between the art of dance – communication through movement – and the art of communication practiced by individuals with hearing loss.

For tickets and information on the benefit performance, please access www.drlca.org, (925) 943-SHOW or www.companycballet.org. Tickets from \$20.

Pass gives families with deaf kids free access to US Parks, Monuments, Historical sites, Recreation areas, and National Wildlife refuges

The Federal Government offers citizens who are permanently disabled - deafness qualifies, a free pass to national parks, Monuments, historical sites, recreation areas and national wildlife refuges that charge and entrance fee. The Gold Access Passport is a lifetime entrance pass providing admission to the pass holder and everyone in a vehicle (if the park offers a per vehicle entrance fee.) The passport also gives a 50% discount of fees charge for facilities and services such as camping, swimming, parking, boating and tours. It also works for sites managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service the Bureau of Land Management, and the Army Corps of Engineers.

The pass must be obtained in person with proof (such as an audiogram) of the disability. The card is available at most national parks, federal recreation areas and Army Corps campgrounds. For more information [www.Golden Access Passport - US-Parks.com](http://www.GoldenAccessPassport-US-Parks.com)

Nominate Someone for an Award!

Every year the IMPACT Board of Directors presents the Annual Recognition Awards to Individuals for their outstanding contributions in the field of education for deaf and hard of hearing students. Their efforts “Above and Beyond” the call of duty are an example to everyone that an individual can make a difference in educating our children. IMPACT would like to take this opportunity to thank these individuals for their efforts that make the difference for our children.

Send your nominations for the following awards (deadline 1/15/07) which will be presented at the 2007 Cal-Ed / IMPACT Conference:

- Public Service Award
- Professional Of The Year
- Teacher Of The Year
- Administrator Of The Year
- Outstanding Contributor
- George Attletweed Award

Visit our website for more information at www.deafkids.org on the about us page. Send nominations or contact Lori Steed for more information at awards@deafkids.org

My Children's Magical Vacation

Written by Brenda Call

I would like to share my family's wonderful experience with those families who have deaf or hard-of-hearing children. It was in the year of 2000 when my husband and I decided to book a Disney Cruise going to the lovely island of Bahamas. It was the most memorable family vacation we ever had in our lives. You see, we are Deaf parents of two Deaf children and we were rather concerned about the lack of communication access. We made arrangements in January 2000 and that allowed the company six months to make all the necessary arrangements to provide certified sign language interpreters! The company indeed kept their word.

Before taking the four-day cruise, we spent three days on land. We decided to go to Disney World. While studying the amusement park's map guide and event schedule, we noticed that few of the events were marked as sign language interpreted. We decided to see the Sword in the Stone which was near the carousel and of course, we had no idea what was in store for us. People started to gather as the time arrived closely just in time for the famous Merlin to come hobbling down to stand behind the stone facing the crowd. When Merlin started to speak, there was an interpreter standing next to him that was signing away. That was so awesome! Merlin chose a hunky adult and challenged him to pull the famous sword out of the stone. Of course, we all knew that he was going to fail. Then Merlin was looking for a young child and he chose our son. Our son (was 6 ½ years old) hesitated at first as he was probably worried about the communication part. Merlin had no idea that our son was deaf in the first place and kept talking to him. The interpreter continued to stand and sign next to Merlin wherever he walked and spoke. He immediately recognized that our son was deaf. Our son was quite proud when he pulled out the sword!

When we boarded the gorgeous and gigantic ship, there was a certain time when all passengers are required to wear life jackets and report to the assigned deck area. We started to worry as we would have no idea what the ship crew would be communicating about – we knew it had something to do with emergency evacuation should the ship start to sink. The yellow lifeboats were hanging just before us. The interpreter was right there when the crew started to speak! We had the same communication access as



the hearing passengers did when it came to receiving instructions. What a sign of relief!

The cruise had nightly Disney entertainment and the two interpreters were right there. We sat in the front row. Our daughter at that time was 3 ½ years old and adored the Disney princesses that were the main characters. The interpreters were professionals. They rehearsed with the Disney cast members during the day time and performed with them during the evenings. They signed with facial expressions and true emotions of each Disney character.

They had a children's program and it was awesome. Some of the workers were from different parts of the world. Few of them had some sign language skills. The end product was especially exciting because the children got to show off their skills to their families by performing on the stage where the nightly Disney shows took place. They sang different songs and one of the songs was done in sign language. That brought happy tears to my face.

We were honored to learn that we were the first Deaf family to experience this type of cruise with provided interpreters. When you are planning to attend a certain amusement park or something, be sure to check with its guest relations or services to see what they have to offer such as sign language interpreting or captioning in advance.

Sign Language Use for Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Hearing Babies: The Evidence Supports It

Drawing from a large body of research, there is a clear argument favoring the use of sign language with all children, regardless of their hearing status. This argument is based on three basic points:

- Early language learning experiences affect other areas of development and are critical to children's future success.
- Sign language provides the earliest possible mode through which children can learn expressive language skills.
- All children can benefit from the use of sign language, with no risk to other language skills.

This includes:

- Hearing children
- Deaf children
- Hard of hearing children
- Any children benefiting from technological auditory assistance

Early language learning experiences affect other areas of development and are critical to children's future success. Language is necessary to many other aspects of development, including cognitive, social and psychological development. A lack of language skills can have devastating effects. Poor language skills are often linked to academic difficulty, behavioral problems, poor self-esteem, and social immaturity. Researchers have long known that poor communication abilities can be linked to high levels of delinquency, violence, and incarceration. Even the "terrible twos" stage of child development is thought to be caused by children's frustration at being unable to communicate with their caregivers. On the other hand, study after study has shown that early development of language skills brings many advantages. For instance, those who learn their first language early have an easier time acquiring skills in a second language. Also, children with strong language skills consistently outperform their peers on tests of intelligence and other measures of success. All this is true regardless of which language a child learns first—It can be English or other another spoken language, or it can be sign language, and the research tells us the results will be the same: The earlier a child learns his first language, the greater his suc-

cess will be in acquiring language skills and meeting other important developmental goals.

Sign language provides the earliest possible mode through which children can learn expressive language skills. Use of sign language with young children (of any hearing status) is known to promote early communication. The reason for this is that children begin to learn language long before they are physically capable of reproducing speech. While the organs of speech are still maturing, children struggle to find ways of expressing themselves. Given exposure to a visual language of signs, children are able to master language at an earlier stage. Signing children can communicate, while their peers are still in frustrated fits over the inability to tell caregivers what they need/want.

All children can benefit from the use of sign language, with no risk to other language skills. There have been concerns about exposing young children to sign language, but research has now proven there is no need for hesitation. Sign language offers great benefits to all children, with no risk of impeding their progress in developing other (especially spoken) languages. For babies with normal hearing, sign language can prevent the tantrums that are caused by poor verbal communication skills. It gives a head start in language learning, and can lead to higher achievement in measures of intelligence and academic and social development. The hearing children of deaf parents (who learn sign as their first language, and frequently receive little or no spoken language input at home) suffer no ill effects when they later learn spoken language, and are very often have--not just average--but better than average language skills. Used in classrooms with hearing children, sign language has even been shown to help in reducing the achievement gap between underprivileged classes and their peers.

For deaf infants, sign language exposure is a critical first step to communication, and the key to eventual development of literacy and spoken language skills. It provides the only accessible venue for natural language learning in the early years, and it serves to prevent deaf children from falling prey to the stag-

gering language delays and other negative outcomes often associated with deafness. Deaf children who learn sign early as their first language generally learn to read and to write better than those who are exposed only to spoken language, and we know that expressive language ability (in any mode) is often a good predictor of better speech ability later. Beyond the enormous advantages to deaf children's language, social and cognitive development, children's knowledge of sign language opens the door for them to begin communications with a strong and supportive community of other deaf individuals.

Hard of hearing babies and their parents often fall through the cracks of the systems that should be helping them. Even hearing losses so minimal that they fall within "normal" limits have been proven to have significant impacts on children. Sadly, the smaller the loss a child has, the smaller his chances are of having the loss identified early. After a hearing loss is identified, no amount of technological assistance or added speech training can fully compensate for a permanent inability to fully access spoken language. For these children, sign language provides the only bridge to full language access. It also serves to supplement educational experiences by providing access to incidental learning, which many deaf children do not have.

Technology, for all its usefulness, is flawed. Maintenance issues render nearly half of all children's hearing aids inoperable, programming and adjustment to sound cause problems for children wearing cochlear implants, and there are restrictions on when and where various technologies can be conveniently--and safely--used. Children can generally learn some language skills despite these difficulties. But is it fair to ask children to put forth more effort--and to get lesser results than their peers get--when there is another option available? Sign language is a viable solution to the problem. Sign language can be taught even before most audiological supports can be properly fitted and/or programmed for children. After children have developed spoken language skills, use of signs can be continued to supplement spoken language--especially when the need for communication is immediate, and spoken language becomes inadequate due to difficulties with the technology, or due to poor acoustics in the environment.

Is sign language the right choice for every child? Only the child's family can make that decision. The intent of this paper is to provide the information and research that will facilitate families (and the professionals who assist them) in making the best choice possible for each individual child, based on the families' own goals and values, and on the circumstances of each child.

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IMPACT Newsletter Needs YOU !!!

IMPACT believes language is the critical factor for success that must be developed for children to connect with the people in their world. IMPACT respects the family's choice of language, modes of communication, and education for their deaf children." In our newsletters we share stories of families and their choices.

We would like to hear from you! Parents, Grandparents, Siblings, Students and Professionals a like!

Please submit articles or other tidbits of information to newsletter@deafkids.org

- ◆ Your Families Experiences
- ◆ Upcoming events in your area. (Ongoing and Annual events)
- ◆ Websites & Books to recommend
- ◆ Kid Quotes, Drawings, Poems, Teen Stories
- ◆ Ideas on how to make Learning Language/ Math Fun for kids!
- ◆ Legislation News
- ◆ Etc. If you feel it is important, send it in!

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