

DHHSC Annual Report for the year of 2020
(prepared January 2021)

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 61% to 148%.

As can be expected, COVID-19 impacted every service and program, forcing staff to adapt as needed, primarily through a shift toward more virtual services through platforms, such as Zoom. It has been a challenging year for both staff and community, but we feel confident that we rose to the challenge.

Here are the highlights of our grant programs this year:

Our **Deaf Thrive** program, funded by Fansler Foundation, included at-home and virtual American Sign Language instruction (ROCK program), employment preparation for Deaf and Hard of Hearing high school students (YES! program), IFSP/IEP advocacy, and literacy development.

Unfortunately, our planned annual Job Awareness Fair and Family Day events both had to be cancelled due to COVID-19. However, our staff worked together to create special videos to be shared with local students online for educational purposes so we could still honor both the purpose of the grant and the spirit of those two canceled events. Additionally, we added online YES! sessions and many online ROCK appointments. We are fortunate that technology has aided us in ensuring that we could still meet our goals, even if the format changed.

We fell a little short of our goals with this program due to a reduction in numbers because not all students and families could participate online due to various reasons. Some families had to share a laptop, either did not have internet or sufficient speed, struggled to access Zoom or other communication devices, and/or had scheduling conflicts. Some parents had a hard time

participating in virtual events with children at home. Fortunately, we still received continued funding for another year, for which we are most appreciative.

We completed another contract year with Employment Development Department that allows us to offer **employment assistance services** to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at an EDD location in Fresno. This contract funds one full-time Employment Specialist and one full-time Staff ASL Interpreter. It was another successful year overall, in spite of COVID-19. While some individuals were hesitant to search for a new job during the pandemic, others were being quickly placed in jobs to fill vacancies. Our EDD staff worked hard to prepare them for employment and assist them with the orientation and training process once hired. We also appreciated our Staff ASL Interpreter being willing to interpret at all hours, even the early morning hours, so that new hires could be settled into their jobs.

We successfully met our goals with this program.

Deaf Access was a program based in the Central Coast Outreach office in Salinas, funded for the fourth time by Harden Foundation, providing systems advocacy for our community. Our focus was on improving accessibility for Deaf and Hard of Hearing community members at various organizations and businesses, such as hospitals, law centers, police departments, and more. In addition to systems advocacy, we provided a self-advocacy workshop. COVID-19 had minimal impact on this program because most services and trainings were provided online.

We successfully met our goals with this program.

We completed our third year of the **ASL 4 Kids program** in Merced County, funded by First 5 of Merced County. This program provided ASL instruction to children between the ages of 0 and 5, regardless if they were Deaf or hearing. Priority was given to families with Deaf and Hard of Hearing children, but the program was also open to hearing kids with the goal of teaching them about ASL and their Deaf peers to reduce communication and cultural barriers. Providing these children with a positive perspective on their Deaf peers and exposure to another culture and language was another way to benefit our community at large.

We fell short of our goals with this program due to the fact that the program relied on our staff being able to go into preschools to teach kids ASL. Since the schools closed, we were forced to strategize on how we could still honor the intent of this program. What we decided to do was create a series of ASL storytelling videos and an online ASL class for our target audience. While these two projects were worthwhile, the number of kids reached was lower than what we would have achieved if we were able to teach in the preschools. First 5 of Merced County, however, has been very understanding of COVID-19's impact on our program.

We are continuing the ASL 4 Kids program for the 4th year, with the videos and the online class as our continued approach until schools reopen safely.

Central California Women's Conference again awarded us funding for our **deSIGN Artists United** program, which provided an art-oriented workshop series for women and children within Fresno's Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community. Unlike other local classes, our deSIGN Artists United workshops were facilitated in American Sign Language, providing our community members with a very accessible environment for creating art. As with other services and programs, the art sessions became virtual, which was successful in that more people, including entire families, from surrounding areas were also able to participate. Our Educational Services Director who coordinated the program would also purchase and deliver all needed materials for each workshop to each participant.

We successfully met our goals with this program.

First 5 of Merced County funded our **Parenting Video Series**, which just started in November 2020 and will continue until June 2021. This program focuses on creating weekly parenting-related videos in ASL with English captions and voiceover in Spanish. The videos have two educational purposes: One is to focus on hearing parents with raising a Deaf or Hard of Hearing child and the other is for Deaf parents raising a hearing child. We are already thrilled with how the videos are turning out and expect this to be a successful program.

United Way of Merced County, through a special Rise United campaign, funded us for additional **Independent Living Skills assistance services** to be provided online for Merced area clients. This funding allowed us to upgrade our technology for Merced staff so that the services could be provided without old equipment holding our staff back. We were fortunate to get this special funding. Services are ongoing and well-utilized!

United Way of Tulare funded a new series of **D-WELL workshops** for our South Valley Outreach office. As part of the grant focus during the COVID pandemic, we are providing online health-related workshops. Each month has a different topic and is open to anyone wanting to join via Zoom. We are thrilled for this opportunity to bring these topics to our community again. The program is ongoing, and we expect to finish successfully. We are now reapplying for a second year.

San Joaquin Valley Health Fund granted us funding to participate in a collaborative effort with many agencies to educate our communities about the **Census 2020**, such as how to fill out the Census form accurately and why the Census was important. This was an interesting opportunity

for our agency because we saw that not enough prior education about the Census had been provided to the general public and had to work with our community's resistance with participating in the Census.

We finished this grant successfully, having assisted a fair number of local community members with filling out the Census, though the interest was lower than expected. We did not achieve our desired number but learned that this was also the norm for other collaborating agencies because the Census was designed to be completed through in-person interactions. For example, we were to have staff in the lobby ready to assist. COVID-19 changed all that for everyone.

Another unique funding opportunity this year was through CERV of Monterey Peninsula, to provide education through an **Emergency Preparedness** program with Monterey County residents as our target audience. We were allowed to include clients from other areas as well, so that flexibility was appreciated. When we began the grant, no one expected a pandemic. COVID-19 caught many organizations off guard, even with emergency preparedness on our minds. Understandably, COVID-19 became a major focus of this grant program, not just for us but for other participating agencies. We switched to educating clients online, both through group workshops on Zoom and through one-on-one videophone sessions. Initially, the level of interest from our community turned out to be lower than expected but gained steam during the month of December due to the dramatic spike in COVID cases from holiday gatherings.

This program is being extended by a few months and we will be glad to report more next year.

Stevenson High School in Monterey County has a unique program in which a group of students will review grant applications and decide on which organizations to fund. We applied in 2020 and were fortunate to be chosen for funding, which was used for **ROCK services** in Monterey County. It was inspiring to see this new generation of motivated youth making a difference at the community level. We truly appreciated their support.

This program is still ongoing, and so far the families utilizing the services are very appreciative!

Students4Giving, a program of the Humanics Department at Fresno State University, also awarded us funding in 2020 to use for **interpreting services** for both the needs of our EDD clients and our Deaf staff providing services to hearing family members with Deaf and Hard of Hearing children. This was a huge blessing for our staff and community. These interpreting services lasted for four months and were greatly appreciated.

We partnered with a number of local community benefit organizations (CBOs) in Fresno for a **Disability Equity Project** that focused on COVID-related education, outreach, and support for

persons with disabilities and their families. Participating agencies would each focus on their particular segment of the population to ensure each group received accessible services, with DHHSC serving the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Our staff offered sessions with clients to share about COVID-19, how it is transmitted, tips on reducing risks, and updates on public announcements. We arranged for a series of videos to be produced with latent interpreting, through a collaboration with Latent Interpreting Media, as part of this program.

The DEP was to be funded until December 30, 2020 but funding has been extended for several more months. However, for 2021, we made the decision to reduce our participation after noting our community's lack of interest in the sessions. Despite advertising the services to our community, very few wanted follow-up sessions, so we changed our grant participation to be by client request only or a referral from the Disability Equity Project leaders. However, we are still interpreting services as needed, including having latent interpreting provided for videos.

Our **Communication Access Program (CAP)** has again been funded by Monterey Peninsula Foundation. This program funds both interpreting services for our Client Services Specialist in the Central Coast Outreach office and also Communication Assistance services to our local Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community.

We have consistently been meeting our goals with this program.

First 5 of Fresno County generously funded us for two years of a **PRAISE KODAtime** program that we created in 2020 to support Deaf parents with KODA kids, regardless of whether the children are Deaf or Hearing. The format of this program was originally intended to be in-person sessions hosted at the Fresno Headquarters, but we adapted the parent support group and children's activities to become online through Zoom. The sessions are 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.

This program is ongoing and we are currently seeking participating families, who reside within Fresno County, with parents who are Deaf, and have kids ages 0 to 5. We encourage anyone who fits this criteria to contact us for more information about the program.

Other examples of our success in 2020

While the rise of COVID-19 and the ensuing pandemic was a shock to so many of us worldwide, we were able to adapt as an agency. Years of using videophones, no doubt, assisted our staff and community with adjusting to online services through videoconferencing. However, even for regular videophone users, very few had previously used videoconferencing software, such as

Zoom, let alone attended virtual workshops or webinars. We worked to educate our community on how to use technology for their benefit as we switched to remote services. In-person services, when necessary, were provided with safety in mind. Social distancing and masks were always required by our staff and encouraged with our clients.

Deaf Awareness Week (DAW), normally celebrated with a series of in-person events in our respective areas, was all online this year. Each office planned different and interesting events to engage our community's interest, hosted on Zoom, Youtube, or both. Participation in these events was actually quite high and comparable to early DAW years, so we considered DAW week a definite success. It was a bonus that people outside our service region could also participate in our DAW activities, made possible by virtual access. Technological difficulties did arise but we dealt with them in a stride.

The cancellation of Valley Deaf Festival (VDF) in November was a huge disappointment to both staff and community, but we did not want to risk exposing our community to COVID-19. In lieu of VDF, we decided to host Harold Foxx Live! Show on Zoom for ticketbuyers. This was a one-hour comedy show in ASL that had a lot of our attendees laughing, their spirits lifted for the night. Thank you, Harold, for your presence!

We had two very successful fundraisers in 2020, #GivingTuesdayNow and #GivingTuesday, raising over \$1,500 and \$3,000, respectively. The focus of these two fundraisers were to raise funds to replace aging or broken laptops with new ones for staff, purchase gently used laptops to loan to community members or families needing services, and provide Zoom Pro accounts to staff who provide virtual services and online classes. We are still accepting donations for these purposes.

Heartfelt Thanks

As always, we are grateful to our primary funder, California Department of Social Services, Office of Deaf Access, for their continued support of our core services. Without CDSS, we would not be able to provide as many services as we do.

We would also like to express our heartfelt gratitude to funders of our grant programs for 2020: Employment Development Department, Fansler Foundation, United Way of Merced County, First Five of Merced County, Monterey Peninsula Foundation, Harden Foundation, Central California Women's Conference, United Way of Tulare County, Students4Giving at Fresno State University, San Joaquin Valley Health Fund, CERV of Monterey Peninsula, Rise United Merced County, Stevenson Philanthropy, and Fresno County's CARES Act for our DEP grant. Your

support of our programs have positively impacted the lives of our Deaf and Hard of Hearing community members!

We were also blessed to receive continued support from United Way Combined Federal Campaign and Our Promise, which paid for materials, supplies, and curriculum for staff to use for DHHSC's many events and programs. We are fortunate to receive such support from all of you!

A big thank you to the Eberwein Family who decided to honor John Eberwein's legacy by having donations made to DHHSC because John was an involved community member, former board member, and part of Valley Deaf Seniors who met on a weekly basis at DHHSC (he passed away in December 2019). While a specific purpose for the donations has yet to be decided by the family, we are appreciative that David, Adele, and Judy Eberwein chose DHHSC as John's lasting tribute to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community.

Furthermore, we would like to thank Sorenson Communications for their sponsorship of our Harold Foxx Live! Show. They are among our biggest sponsors, and we are most appreciative of their ongoing support and partnership.

Finally, we want to acknowledge each of you who volunteered or donated to DHHSC in 2020, including Fresno State University students who made fundraising for DHHSC as part of their Service Learning Projects. Some of the fundraisers that they hosted, including yoga, Disney Trivia, and t-shirt/soap sales, supported our ROCK and YES! programs. We are so appreciative of every hour of volunteer work you do for us and for every donated dollar that supports DHHSC's services and programs, such as our #GivingTuesday campaigns. Your efforts and financial support make possible for us to achieve as many goals as we can for the community we so passionately serve.

As always, we express our deep gratitude for our Board of Directors for their time serving on the board. We are thankful to have every hour of support they offer through DHHSC's fundraising efforts and events. Their financial contributions as board members also cover some of DHHSC's expenses that are not billable to CDSS.

We would like to also express both our appreciation and grief for Paul Barnett, our Accountant, who passed away on Christmas Day in 2020. Paul had worked for DHHSC for 30 years and was such a kind soul who was always ready with a friendly word and smile. He will be deeply missed, both by our staff and by our community.

With Paul's passing, we are grateful for Jaribu Nelson's assistance as he works with us during this difficult transition. As a certified public accountant (CPA) and one who has been involved with DHHSC's annual audits in the past, we know we are in good hands, especially because he was handpicked by Paul to assist DHHSC during his illness. Thank you, Jaribu!

Your continued support is needed

Every day, each DHHSC service provider shows commitment to providing quality services to our community. We believe in providing the best services possible, and we know that our efforts do make a difference. We deeply care about the community we serve, including each Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, and Late-Deafened individual, and caring supporters, like you, who well understand the vast needs of our community.

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:

<http://www.dhhsc.org/donations-page>

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