

DHHSC Annual Report for the year of 2021
(prepared January 2022)

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 44% to 244%. Our lowest score was due to a significant drop in requests for that service, which was advocacy.

As can be expected, COVID-19 impacted every service and program as we had to provide remote services for part of the year, but with the partial return to our offices on July 1st and then full return on December 1st, we saw a steady increase in requests for services, especially from clients who either does not have access to remote services or prefer in person contact. Our staff worked hard to address challenges as they arose and to adjust delivery of services based on each individual's needs.

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.

Due to the continuing pandemic, we hosted a virtual Family Day and two separate YES! Game On! Part I and II Zoom events in lieu of in-person events. The student panel that was part of Family Day provided parents with insights into how Deaf and Hard of Hearing teenagers and young adults experienced home and school life without full communication and language access; they shared how they were affected by isolation, lower expectations from parents and teachers, and differential treatment from hearing peers. Because of the valuable information they shared, the panel became a separate video that can be used for educational purposes. The Game On! sessions were popular with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing teenagers, and they enjoyed learning about work-related expectations in a game format. Additionally, we continued with online YES!

sessions and ROCK appointments while some became in-person as staff returned to their offices. We are fortunate that technology has aided us in ensuring that we could still meet our goals, but many were glad when in-person services resumed as clients and families missed the face-to-face interactions.

While we met our goals for ROCK and Literacy services, we fell a bit short for YES! Many of the schools continued with distance learning and did not want outside instruction as they had limited time. This meant we had to provide virtual YES! sessions during after school hours, which worked for some students. We tried to accommodate as many students as possible, but we have discovered that our YES! Program is most successful when implemented during school hours. We were thrilled to return to many school campuses in the fall of 2021, but the grant ended on October 31st, which did not give us much time to catch up for “lost months.”

We completed another successful 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. One of our partners, GAP, also gave us a grant with the goal of improving access for their Deaf and Hard of Hearing employees by requesting that we provide training to their personnel and interpreting services as needed. Our EDD staff worked hard to prepare Deaf and Hard of Hearing clients for employment, and some were quickly placed in jobs. Our EDD staff assisted them with orientation and the training process once they were 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 fifth time by Harden Foundation, providing systems advocacy for our community. We focused 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. While COVID-19 had minimal impact on this program because most services and trainings were provided online, losing Wayne Johnson, our Salinas Coordinator of Client Services, struck a huge blow to us because he was one of our biggest advocates. Thankfully, our Salinas Client Services Specialist was able to complete the remaining grant responsibilities while we searched for another staff for the office. In June, we did rehire one of our former employees (who used to work in our Visalia office) and she has been a huge asset to our Salinas office.

We successfully met our goals with this program.

First 5 of Merced County funded our **Parenting Video Series**, which started in November 2020 and ended in December 2021. This program focused on creating weekly parenting-related videos in ASL with English captions and voiceover in Spanish. The videos had two educational purposes: One was to focus on hearing parents with raising a Deaf or Hard of Hearing child and the other for Deaf parents raising a hearing child. We were thrilled with how the videos turned out and hope that these videos benefit many. We were thrilled when we saw that one of our ASL Storytelling videos, one about Day of the Dead, was used for instructional purposes by a Deaf program in the Southeast (as posted on Instagram).

United Way of Merced County, through a special Rise United campaign, funded online **Independent Living Skills assistance services** to Merced area clients, and we were able to upgrade our Merced Client Services Specialists' devices so they could provide virtual services. The grant ended in July 2021. We were fortunate to get this special funding. Our community members were very appreciate of the services we were able to offer through this funding. Challenges did arise with community members not having strong internet connections, which remains an issue, but the program was successful.

We successfully met our goals with this program.

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, different kinds of vaccines, importance of booster shots, and updates on public announcements.

The DEP grant ended on December 31, 2021, but this partnership led to another grant called Together Towards Health, which also focuses on COVID outreach and vaccine clinics. We continue to provide ASL interpreting services as needed.

Our **Communication Access Program (CAP)** was again funded by Monterey Peninsula Foundation. The program focused on providing 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 successfully met 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. We had an in-person Family Fun Event in June, which was a huge success. We hosted the event on DHHSC Headquarters' sidewalk and front parking lot (blocked off from traffic) and provided an art activity, scavenger hunt, relay races (without physical contact), bubble games, and snacks. The families were thrilled as this was the first in-person contact in more than a year and they had fun interacting with staff and other participants.

This program is now in its second year 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 2021

We successfully navigated 2021 with the continuing pandemic and made necessary changes in order for us to continue providing services to our Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community. While we were able to provide remote services, we were thrilled to start returning to our offices in July. We missed the in-person interactions with staff and community and working in the office helped to restore some sense of normalcy. While clients who could come into our offices had to have an appointment first, it was wonderful to see their faces again and remind them that we are actually still here. In December, we decided to return to our offices full-time, while maintaining health and safety procedures. This allowed clients the option of coming for an in-person appointment or continuing with remote services. We are proud of the many community members who learned how to use Zoom and/or video-conferencing on our videophones. This encouraged them to keep up with technology and engage in virtual events, not just those hosted by DHHSC but also elsewhere. We increased DHHSC's visibility with our virtual events and also with our social media platforms.

Deaf Awareness Week (DAW), normally celebrated with a series of in-person events in our respective areas, was all online again this year. Our staff, regardless of which office, collaborated on different events and engaged our local communities' interest on Zoom, Youtube, or both. We continued to see a good number of participants in our virtual events, and it was a bonus that people outside our service region could also participate in our DAW activities. We also worked to cater to ASL and interpreting students' interests and educational needs by hosting ASL

Storytelling and Deaf-related events so that they could get the school credit they needed while supporting our Community Education service category (under CDSS).

We were again unable to host Valley Deaf Festival in 2021 but instead focused our energy on making our #GivingTuesday fundraiser successful. We had staff form teams of four members each and compete to see which group raised the most money, and Mama Bears, consisting of Lisa Painter, Shelley Stout, Eloise Rivera, and Catherine Murphy, won (second to the management team, the Grand Poobahs). The Mama Bears did a great job and received recognition and prizes from the management team. It was a fun competition, which ultimately benefited DHHSC, because each team worked to win the competition while raising funds for DHHSC as a whole. Because of 2021's success, we plan to increase our goal to \$10,000 in 2022, using the same idea while building our network base.

Our #GivingTuesday fundraiser was very successful. The goal was to raise \$5,000 but we raised over \$8,000! The focus was to raise monies to cover expenses relating to in-person events that we plan to host in 2022, such as for materials, performers, building rentals, food, etc.

In December, we hosted our first Holiday Car Parade at the Fresno Headquarters, and we were pleased to serve 43 adults and 46 children. We are grateful for the generous donations made by Mountain Bear Fan Club, Me N Eds, Trader Joe's, and SVRS. Our Deaf Santa and Miss City of Fresno, Ashlyn Cruise, greeted those in each car as our staff served them boxed meals. It was a joy to see many of our community members' happy faces as we worked to spread holiday cheer.

Our outreach offices hosted a virtual holiday event, also in December, and they shared about different holiday traditions, such as Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, and Chinese New Year. One Deaf guest speaker even joined from China! It was morning for her while it was evening for us, and we enjoyed learning about how she and her family celebrated Christmas and Chinese New Year.

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 2021: Employment Development Department, Fansler Foundation, United Way of Merced County, First Five of Merced County, Monterey Peninsula Foundation, Harden Foundation, Rise United Merced County, 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 Barnett Family and friends who donated to DHHSC in honor of Paul Barnett, who passed away in December 2020. Our Fresno Headquarters' lobby is now named after him: Paul B. Barnett: Service with a Smile. Paul was especially known for his gentle smile and outstanding customer service, so it was only fitting to name our lobby after him. At the family's request, we hosted a beautiful memorial service for Paul in October 2021, which would have been Paul's 64th birthday. The service was held at the amphitheatre in Woodward Park, and we had people share stories about Paul and a beautiful slideshow containing pictures of Paul with his family, friends, and coworkers over the course of his lifetime. Dr. Rosemary Wanis signed a song that Paul especially loved, "What a Wonderful World." The loss of Paul continues to be felt by our staff and community, and losing Wayne added to that sorrow as they were two longtime staff of DHHSC.

Furthermore, we would like to thank Sorenson Communications for their sponsorship of our Holiday Car Parade. 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 2021, 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 and Spooky Fest, supported our ROCK program. 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 campaign. Your efforts and financial support make it 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 Wayne Johnson, Salinas Coordinator of Client Services, who worked for DHHSC for 26 years and was a fierce advocate

for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Community. He passed away in April 2021 and will be deeply missed by both our staff and our community.

Since Paul Barnett passed in December 2020, we are grateful for Gary Pigg's assistance as he handles our accounting needs and payroll. With Mr. Pigg's Valley Business Consulting and Training and more than 20 years of experience in bookkeeping, we know we are in very capable hands. He updated our accounting system and is continuing to find ways to improve our billing and payment methods and tracking our contracts and grants.

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!