



MINNESOTA
HANDS &
VOICES™

FOCUS

Supporting families with children who are deaf & hard of hearing

Consider Making an Investment in Our Minnesota Hands & Voice Community

"Thank you for taking the time to write me such a touching email. It put my mind at ease today knowing that there are others out there who will be standing with us ... Thank you again for your kind email, it gave me peace tonight."

Support

Minnesota Hands & Voices (MNH&V) Parent Guides often receive responses much like this one after reaching out to a parent of a child who has been newly identified as deaf or hard of hearing (dhh). All MNH&V Parent Guides are also parents of a child who is dhh and are specially trained to be an impartial resource to families. New parents are very often appreciative to connect with someone who understands their situation first-hand and who can provide them with necessary information for their new parenting journey.

We serve families throughout the state of Minnesota with Parent Guides living in each of the 7 regions so they are close to the families they serve and understand the unique needs of their area. Culturally Specific Parent Guides, serving families across the state, specialize in the language and customs of families who are immigrants from Southeast Asia, Northeast Africa, and Spanish-Speaking countries. MNH&V is inclusive of all families with a child who is dhh, from the initial contact with parents to the reliable support needed throughout the years.

"This was our first time attending this event and my son has been recently

diagnosed as hard of hearing so it was great to be surrounded by others he could relate to. We will definitely attend a future event," wrote a mother new to MNH&V about one recent MNH&V event.

Connect

Every year MNH&V provides social/educational opportunities for children who are dhh while parents gather for a professional presentation on relevant topics to families with children who are dhh. Children who are dhh can meet other children and adult role models who are dhh just like them. In addition, the adult role models are available for parents to find out more about their life experiences growing up and living as an individual who is dhh. We understand the critical role adults who are dhh can have in developing a strong self-identity for children who are dhh and help families gain perspective and confidence their child's future.

A parent of an older child who is dhh originally contacted our MNH&V Parent Guide for information about Individual Education Plans (IEP) and how to advocate for their child. The Parent Guide attended an IEP meeting with the family and they kept in contact, "I have wanted to get in touch with you regarding my child's second IEP meeting ... First the attitude was totally different at the second meeting ... It definitely helped having you there for the first meeting ... Thanks again for everything and we will be in touch."

Advocate

MNH&V families and staff receive direct support from Hands & Voices Headquarters (H&V HQ). H&V HQ has chapters throughout the US and Canada, as well as several chapters overseas. They provide training and support, along with a wide network of families, professionals, state and federal resources, educational institutions, service providers, and adults who are dhh. The ASTra Educational Advocacy Program is a program that helps parents gain advocacy skills and the confidence needed to work collaboratively with their child's educational team. Visit the MNH&V website to access worksheets, links, and videos of ASTra Educational Advocacy Training. <https://www.mnhandsandvoices.org/resourcesinformation/astra-educational-advocacy.aspx>. Additional information on the ASTra Educational Advocacy Program can be found at <http://www.handsandvoices.org/astra/index.html>

MNH&V is a not-for-profit program of Lifetrack funded through the Minnesota State Legislature, grants and donations from local businesses and private donations. Families with children who are dhh and the professionals who serve them are the soul of our MNH&V community. Thank you for your continued financial support of Lifetrack in support of MNH&V. Please donate at <https://lifetrackmn.networkforgood.com/projects/19951-support-minnesota-hands-voices>

Newly Published

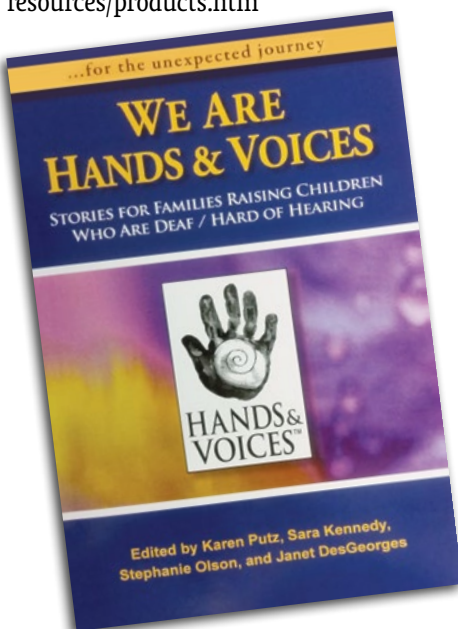
We Are Hands & Voices

Stories for Families Raising Children Who Are Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Hands & Voices (H&V) new book, *We Are Hands & Voices: Stories for Families Raising Children Who Are Deaf/Hard of Hearing*, published April 2017, is a collection of stories featuring the challenges and joys of parenting a child who is dhh. Authored by Karen Putz, Sara Kennedy, Stephanie Olson, and Janet DesGeorges.

“What works for your child is what makes the choice right,” is the Hands & Voices motto.

If you are a new parent or a long-time parent looking back, you’ll find this collection of stories moving. The book features many different perspectives of the parenting journey along with the ups and downs. This book hopes to provide some guidance on your own parenting journey. To order this book go to <http://www.handsandvoices.org/resources/products.htm>



2017 MNH&V High Five Award Recipient



2017 High Five Award recipient Hawley Mathieson, center, was presented her award by MNH&V staff, Robin and Anne, left along with the nominating family, the Christopherson's, right.

Hawley Mathieson

The Christopherson family nominated Hawley Mathieson to acknowledge her dedication to her students and parents alike. As IEP manager for their daughter, Hawley leads IEP team meetings and goes above and beyond to organize teleconferences, attend classroom parent-teacher conferences, and recently she partnered with the school audiologist to troubleshoot equipment challenges.

“Every single interaction and communication with Hawley has exceeded our expectations and we can say with certainty that she has made the difference not just in the course of our daughter’s educational path but also in the social and emotional complexities that come with being a child who is deaf,” wrote the Christopherson family.

One way Hawley has had a positive effect on the family was by introducing the book, *El Deafo*. The storyline helps give language to feelings their daughter may be experiencing. As a result, Hawley has opened up an important line of

communication for the family.

“Her energy, positivity and communication techniques have engaged our daughter in owning her hearing loss and building her confidence in a way we couldn’t have imagined,” added the parents quoting Hawley’s mantra, “Be the Boss of Your Hearing Loss!”

Excerpted from an article in the MNH&V FOCUS Newsletter, 2017 September-October issue.



Sign Up for the SOURCE MNH&V Weekly Email

MNH&V SOURCE Weekly Email offers the latest news and events in the MNH&V community and other community organizations of importance to families who have a child who is dhh. Receive the MNH&V SOURCE Weekly Email by signing up at www.mnhandsandvoices.org.

☎ 651.265.2435 • 1.866.DHOHKID ✉ mnhv@lifetrack-mn.org 🌐 mnhandsandvoices.org 📱 MNHandsandVoices 📺 MNHandV

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 Lifetrack
Putting Hope Within Reach



The North Suburban Saint Paul Kiwanis Club



Thank you to the North Suburban Saint Paul Kiwanis Club for their welcome blanket donation delivered to MNH&V by Shannon Schuweiler, President Elect, and received by Laura Godfrey, MNH&V Manager.

Thanks for your contribution!

We rely on your generous support to build better lives for children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Make a tax-deductible donation today.

[DONATE](#)

Meet Lifetrack's DHH Role Model Kate Eckroth

"Becoming a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Adult Role Model for children and their families means being the person that has experienced it all and can tell you that 'everything will be OK,'" said Kate Eckroth who is a role model for Lifetrack DHH Role Model Program. "After I gave birth to my own daughter I understand the challenges of being a parent and wanting your child to have all the supports and encouragement they need."

When Kate was just 6 months old she became ill with Meningitis which effected her hearing. After recovering from her illness it took another year to be identified as dhh. Immediately after being identified her parents enrolled Kate in a local school with a dhh program. Throughout her schooling Kate used various versions of the FM System from the "clunky brown box" to the slim behind-the-ear version.

"As awkward as the FM system was at school, I heard better than most of the kids in my mainstream class and received an excellent education," Kate added. "Most of the kids in my classroom thought it was cool that they could talk to me through the microphone."

Kate communicates with spoken language. As an adult she has found social media helpful to connect with other adults who are dhh, which she feels could benefit children who are dhh by adding to their sense of community. In addition to her role model position at Lifetrack, Kate holds a masters degree in Public Health and is pursuing a career in Epidemiology.

Kate grew up in Minneapolis and still loves living in the city with her husband and daughter. She enjoys coffee, chocolate chip cookies, Indian and Ethiopian foods, "staycations", long-distance running, streaming TV, reading, and spending time with her family.

When asked if she had any advice or pearls of wisdom for parents of a child



Lifetrack DHH Role Model Kate Eckroth

who is dhh Kate offered, "As much as your child is able and as soon as your child has the language skills to communicate, involve your child in the decisions you make for them. This teaches them confidence and how to navigate their world."

Kate added how important it is to have your child's input, as much as possible, on decisions important to them regarding their education and the services they receive. Consider their likes and dislikes to find what motivates your child. With the right motivation she feels your child who is dhh will surprise you by how much they can do and are willing to do.

"Recognize that your child is going to strive and thrive in their own unique way and we all have the amazing ability to adapt and adjust to our current environments and your child will be no different."

Read more role model biographies and find information about Lifetrack's DHH Role Model Program at www.lifetrack-mn.org/rolemodel

Enjoy the Warmth of an Accessible and Inclusive

Many of us look forward to the holiday season and all the memory-making activities that go along with family gatherings. Whether your tradition is to gather as a big group with extended family and friends combined, or a smaller intimate group; there are ways to create an inclusive and accessible environment for children and guests who are deaf or hard of hearing (dhh).

Many parents who have a child who is dhh have watched them struggle to track the conversations at family gatherings. We trust relationships will develop naturally over time, but in that moment it can be heart breaking. Communication modalities such as: listening and spoken language, manual communication (cued speech or sign language), bi-lingual approach using American Sign Language (ASL), or a mix of all of the above, does not lessen the impact of these experiences. Holiday gatherings are a call to action for parents to help bridge the communication gap between our child who is growing up with the unique experience of being dhh and other individuals who are part of our traditional group.

There are many creative ways to make holiday gatherings feel more inclusive and accessible to people who are dhh. Listed here are just a few ideas you can try or adapt for your own family's needs.

Before the Gathering

- Ask your child or guest who is dhh for ideas on how to make the holiday gathering more accessible. Many accommodations can be arranged before the event.
- Share the guest list with your child or guest who is dhh. For young children draw a simple family tree to show which guests are related and which are friends. If possible label photos of the guests with their names and relation.

- If your child uses hearing gear make sure to have back-up batteries with you ready to use for longer holiday gatherings. Even if their gear has a long battery life it is always good to have back-up batteries.
 - Electronic devices such as mobile phones, tablets, and laptops can facilitate communication between guests who are dhh and hearing guests. Set up a charging station in a convenient area or remember to bring your device chargers to the gathering.
- Parents:** BEFORE the event discuss with your child who is dhh your rules of etiquette about using devices at events.
- Captioning please! If a TV is on during a gathering make sure the captioning is on, too. Whether your guest who is dhh is watching or not they will appreciate having access without needing to ask.

Set the Stage

- Nametags and place cards at the table are a great way to make the connection between a person's face and their name.
- Turn down the noise! Background music, televisions, appliances, pets, plus multiple conversations at once, all make it difficult to pick up the sounds of speech even with the latest hearing technology. Minimize as much of the "extra" sounds as possible.
- Keep plenty of note pads and pens handy for anyone who wants to communicate through writing or drawing. Save on paper and make it fun by keeping Magna-Doodles near by!
- Natural light can shadow a speaker's face if their back is facing the window. Position guests, furniture and window treatments to optimize lighting on individual's faces as well as avoid seating guests who are dhh where they would be facing bright windows.

- Turn up the lights! Dim lighting can make it difficult for individuals who are dhh to communicate. Good lighting is essential to read lips, see body language, facial expressions, signs, cues, interpreters, or transliterators. Try to illuminate areas of your home that are too dark to communicate.

Set the Stage for Listening

- For children who are dhh and use an FM system, strategically place the microphone on the table as close to the center as possible. Then at mealtime it will be easy to position the microphone in an optimal spot to pick up speech.
- Have a set of "conversation starters" cards at the table for your guests and your child who is dhh to chat about a topic your child is more familiar with.
- Many children who are dhh can be responsible to ask speakers to wear the FM system for better access. Before the gathering role-play how to make a request to wear the FM system and ways to advocate for themselves.

Set the Stage for ASL

- For children who are dhh and use ASL place a few American Sign Language books out on the coffee table and around the house. Make it easy for your guests who are intrigued and want to learn more about the language.

Set the Stage for Cued English

- For children who are dhh and use Cued English leave a handful of Cued English charts set out around the house for any guests interested in trying the visual system of English phonemes.

During the Gathering

- People who are dhh understand the need to get their attention to communicate. Polite ways to do this is to tap their shoulder or give a quick hand wave to catch their eye. To make an announcement from across the room quickly flick the light switch.

Holiday Season for You and Your Whole Family!

- When someone who is dhh asks, “What?” DO NOT dismiss their question with, “Never mind,” “Oh, nothing,” or “It’s not important.” Even if you think it is extraneous, let them be the judge. Out of respect always take the time to repeat what was missed.
- If there is some doubt in your mind whether your guest who is dhh understood you, rephrase your comment, rather than repeat. Vice versa, if you do not understand ask for clarification until you do. Communication only happens when both parties understand each other.

During the Gathering for Listening

- Make sure guests understand the importance of using the FM system to access conversations for your child who is dhh. If need be give a quick demonstration on how to properly wear or place the FM microphone.
- You and your family might feel self-conscious being the only people passing around the FM system or wearing it. Focus on optimal access to the sounds of speech and the long-term benefits for your child and it will get easier to do.

During the Gathering for Cued English

- Assign family members to take turns transliterating for your child who is dhh so they are included in the conversation. Cueing for your child who is dhh will not only provide access, but also act as a great language model. If your transliterating skills are not proficient what better way to practice!
- You and your family might feel self-conscious cueing in a room full of people who do not use the system. It is important to work through your feelings for the greater good of providing access.
- Consider hiring a transliterator for your holiday gatherings. They could provide continuous access for your child.

During the Gathering for ASL

- Assign family members to take turns interpreting for your child who is dhh so they can be included in conversations. Even if you are not an ASL interpreter do your best.. Eventually your child may be able to take the topic and join in conversations.
- You and your family might feel self conscious if you are the only family using ASL in a room full of hearing people. It’s important to get passed how you feel for the greater good of providing language access to your child.
- Consider hiring an ASL interpreter for your holiday gatherings. As your child who is dhh becomes older, there is a need for a higher level of language. An ASL interpreter can facilitate in-depth conversations between your child and guests who do not know ASL.
- If you are just learning ASL and you are addressing a person who is fluent in ASL remember to RELAX. Be courteous, but not overly anxious about making mistakes. Allow yourself to be corrected so the individual understands the full meaning of your comments. Do not debate sign vocabulary with a person who is dhh, just except the beauty and diversity of ASL and move on.

Inclusive Activities

- Play games that encourage turn taking, which are fun for everyone! In contrast games where you need to shout out the answer first for points puts guests who are dhh at a disadvantage.
- Children of all ages and abilities can appreciate each other by doing activities with little conversation needed. Building toys, marble run, puzzles, logic games, coloring books, craft projects, and many more activities are enjoyable to work on as a group or side-by-side.

Good to Know for Hearing Folks

- No need to shout! Hearing gear is calibrated to normal voice levels; shouting will just distort the words.
- Persons who communicate well one-on-one may have a hard time with two or more speakers, especially if there are many interruptions and interjections.
- Gatherings where everyone else is hearing can be very exhausting, and especially unbearable for teens that are dhh. Discuss an appropriate backup plan when they need a break, such as reading a book, watching a movie, or playing games on a mobile phone.
- Speak in a normal manner. In general people, who are dhh or hearing, watch other’s lips for clues as they speak to help them understand. Chewing food, gum, smoking, long facial hair, or obscuring your mouth with your hands makes it difficult to understand speech.
- Not all people who are dhh read-lips. Lip-reading to the level of a reliable communication mode takes years to develop and mastery of English. Children should not be expected to lip-read before they have language. An estimated 30% of speech sounds are not distinguishable by sight.
- Not all people who are dhh use ASL. American Sign language is NOT another form of English; it is an official language and the foundation of Deaf culture with its own grammar, contexts and rules.
- Not all people who are dhh are familiar with Cued English, also known as Cued Speech. Cued English is a visual representation of all the phonemes or sounds of the English language using 7 hand shapes and 4 vowel positions.

All of MNH&V wishes you and your family a fun-filled holiday season! Please email your ideas to add to this list for next year, mnhv@lifetrack-mn.org, subject: Holiday.



New MNH&V family, all three children newly identified as dhh in varying degrees, received welcome blankets and teddy bears on a recent visit from a MNH&V Parent Guide.

Transition

Hands & Voices Post-Secondary Transition On-Line Module for Parents and Their Teens

Hands & Voices recently released an online learning tool specifically for parents and his or her transition age teens who are dhh. Transitioning from high school to either the workforce or post-secondary education can be difficult for families to navigate. The goal of this online learning tool is to support families as their child who is dhh begins their new journey into adulthood and beyond.

IDEA defines post-secondary transition as beginning no later than the year a student turns age 16. The transition process is designed to be results-oriented focusing on improving the child's academics and functional achievements. This may include additional education, employment experience, and/or learning independent living skills.

For information and to register for Hands & Voices Post-Secondary Transition On-Line Module for Parents and Their Teens go to <https://handsandvoices.org/post-secondary-transition/index.html>

DCMP's New and Improved Website!

Described and Captioned Media Program (DCMP) provides equal access through described and captioned educational media. They support and improve the academic achievement of students who are dhh, blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind.

The DCMP website has recently been updated. Now it is easier to register for membership, watch videos, create student accounts, and find information with fewer clicks to reach your destination. They replaced long lists of video titles with improved preview images. Also, they added a Help Center and search utility to find what you are looking for faster.

DCMP makes streaming a wide variety of accessible videos at home or at school convenient. Not all YouTube videos are accessible. For this reason DCMP members can use their DCMP YouTube channel for accessible videos or for a 4-minute preview when available. Full accessible videos are available at the DCMP website.

Free membership to DCMP is offered to parents, teachers and other professionals who work with students who are dhh, blind, visually impaired, and DeafBlind. There are no costs associated with any DCMP services. Find membership registration at <https://dcmp.org>.



Welcome blankets and teddy bears recently delivered to our newest MNH&V families across Minnesota.



**The ASL “PAH” Club,
Central Lakes College
and the ASL Club,
Brainerd High School**

Thank you for volunteering your time and talent for the MNH&V Spooktacular and Safe Trick or Treating Family Event in Brainerd, MN. This family event is made possible and much more enjoyable for the MNH&V families who attended, because of your service.

“I rely heavily on volunteers for this event. Literally, it would be just me and a table if we didn’t have these two groups of dedicated volunteers,” said Leslie Hilde, MNH&V Parent Guide, Upper NW. “My sincerest ‘Thanks’ to all the amazing volunteers from the ASL Club at Brainerd High School and the ASL “PAH” Club at Central Lakes College in Brainerd.”



**The View from
Greater Minnesota**

Saturday, October 28, 2017, Spooktacular and Safe Trick-or-Treating Family Event took place in Brainerd, MN. MNH&V and other dhh resources were there to share information and safety tips with families.



Sixth Annual MNH&V Family Event at Engwall's Corn Maze in Hermantown, MN (NE Region). The topic was Social Media and Bullying.

Lifetrack
709 University Ave. W.
St. Paul, MN 55104-4804



MINNESOTA
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Minnesota Hands & Voices FOCUS Newsletter

November-December 2017

Quota International of Minneapolis,
Keystone Interpreting Solutions
and Deaf Equity is proud to host the ...

4th Annual Signing Santa!

Children who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing or
DeafBlind, their friends, and family are welcome!

Sunday, December 10, from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

**Charles Thompson Memorial Hall (Deaf Club)
1824 Marshall Ave., St. Paul**

Children can write a letter to Santa, have their face painted,
receive a goodie bag (while supplies last), and visit with Santa!

Light refreshments will be provided.

Please note: the Deaf Club building does not have wheelchair access at this time.
For alternative wheelchair accommodations email
Krissy Foreman at kforeman75@gmail.com

