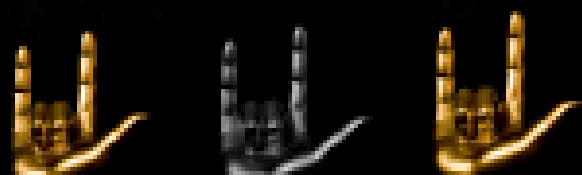




DEAF MENTORING & THE IMPACT ON DEAF CHILDREN & THEIR FAMILIES



90% of Deaf people have hearing parents, but only 10-30% of those parents learn sign language. As a result, 70% of Deaf children and teenagers face language deprivation.

LOWI.FRIEDMANN

ABOUT US

TODD GARDNER

DR. KIM SCHAUB

TODD GARDNER

I became Deaf at 1.5 years old due to spinal meningitis. I attended public school from kindergarten through seventh grade before transferring to a Deaf school in Riverside, California. It was there that my journey of self-discovery began. Over the years, I've taught at various schools throughout the Vegas Valley, where I noticed a recurring challenge: many Deaf students lack sufficient language skills.

After my time with CCSD, I decided to join the Deaf Centers of Nevada and became a Deaf Mentor—a journey that took nearly seven months to complete. This role allowed me to work with families in need of mentorship, helping them bridge communication gaps. Along the way, I found a sense of belonging and a deep passion for helping Deaf children develop language skills and meaningful communication with their parents.

DR. KIM BAUER-SCHAUB

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I graduated in 2004 with a social work degree. I spent 14+ years in direct service with children and young adults with specific medical needs. Many of my clients were Deaf/Hard of Hearing. One of my favorite jobs in social work was time with Early Intervention in Texas. Seeing the needs of families and the gaps in services, I decided to further pursue education in public health with a goal to advocate for improved access to services and increase provider care.

I have 2 amazing children. My son, William, is three. He started Early Intervention at 5 months old and aged out of the program at three years. He is currently receiving school services for a communication disorder. My daughter, Ava, is almost six years old. She was officially identified with Central Auditory Processing Disorder in February 2024; however, her audiologist with Early Intervention suspected this condition. Ava began Early Intervention at 9 months old after not responding to fireworks. We were linked to services in Nevada to support our decision for ASL with Ava, including a Deaf Mentor. Our Deaf Mentor experience changed the way we view the Deaf community and support Ava.

WHAT IS EARLY INTERVENTION (EI)?

- Provides services for children birth to 3 years.
- Covered under IDEA Part C.
- Evaluations and services are at no cost to families.
- Services in natural environment.
- Parental choice.
- Anyone can refer a child!



EARLY IS BEST

- EDHI (2018) found **81.6%** (40) with a confirmed newborn hearing loss enrolled in EI services.
 - **Three percent** of Nevada children receive Part C Early Intervention services (Weglarz-Ward, J., Atwell, N., Rudenauer, H., Morris, P., 2019).
 - **70% increase** in children receiving services since 2008 (Weglarz-Ward, J., Atwell, N., Rudenauer, H., Morris, P., 2019)
1. Long-term impact on development
 2. Improve quality of life
 3. Reduce medical costs
 4. Family support
 5. Reduce behavior challenges and frustrations
 6. Peace of mind – acting vs “wait and see”

EARLY IS BEST FOR D/HH

1. ASL provides a visual-manual language exposure.
2. Language deprivation in D/HH children is shown to have negative impact on neural pathways. (Cheng, et al., 2019)
3. ASL exposure at infancy positively impact “the ability to rhyme words, to hear that different words start with the same or different sounds, or tell the number of [sounds] included in single words (Corina, Hafer, & Welch, 2014).”
4. Early ASL exposure can improve reading fluency when going from English to ASL (translating) (Easterbrooks & Huston, 2007).
5. Protective factors include “deaf community identification, socialization with deaf peer, and early access to communication with family and peers” with the most significant factor being parent communication. (Hall, 2017)

WHO QUALIFIES FOR EI SERVICES?

01	MEDICAL DIAGNOSIS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Condition with high probability of developmental impact• Examples include deaf, autism, down syndrome, blind• Requires formal diagnosis from a medical provider
02	DEVELOPMENTAL DELAY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 50% delay in one area or 25% delay in 2 or more areas• Cognitive, physical, communication, social-emotional, self-help
03	CLINICAL JUDGEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opinion of clinician (OT, SLP, etc.) and team• Atypical presentation may impact development• My kids are examples on their original IFSP qualification

State of Nevada, Department of Health and Human Services.
(April 2015). *Parent Handbook*.

EI SERVICES MAY INCLUDE

- Audiology Services
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Service Coordination
- Counseling
- Sign Language and Cued Language Services
- Service Coordination
- Speech-Language Pathology
- Vision Services



State of Nevada, Department of Health and Human Services.
(April 2015). *Parent Handbook*.

WHAT IS A DEAF MENTOR?

1. A Deaf person who is fluent in ASL
2. Be willing to work with families once a week (sometimes more, depending on the family)
3. Expose the families to Deaf culture
4. Work with Deaf children from birth to 6 years old
5. Be trained by SKI-HI for three days
 - a. Must have SKI-HI curriculum book.
6. A SKI-HI certification will last for 5 years

What is SKI-HI?

A Deaf Mentor provides family-centered, home based, and curriculum-led early education in the home, focusing on Visual Communication, American Sign Language, and Bridging and Navigating Deaf and Hearing Experiences with the families with deaf children, birth to age six (or beyond)

...is Deaf (including those who views self as hard of hearing and may have acquired American Sign Language at varying points in their young lives or later).

...has ASL skills, both expressive and receptive. ASL Deaf Mentors must exhibit fluency in ASL. Hard of hearing mentors would need basic sign communication skills to interact with other Deaf team members and to support families who are also using signs with auditory-oral skills.

...is well trained in early intervention principles and receives basic training and ongoing professional development.

...helps families gain an understanding of what it is like to be deaf, so that they, as parents, can better facilitate some of the experiences that their child may have as they grow up.

...is someone that the child and family can look up to and learn from - a role model.

...is comfortable working directly with children birth to six years of age who are comfortable working with young children and with families in the family's home, sharing their life experiences being deaf and answering any questions that would help families feel empowered.

...acts as a language model for the deaf child, interacting with the child in ways that take advantage of his/her visual environment. ...provides opportunities for the families to bridge auditory and speech experiences into visual communication and ASL, and vice versa.

...supports, teaches, facilitates, and models with families ways that they can more effectively communicate with their deaf child.

...teaches the family ASL in a manner that is structured and designed specifically for families of infants and young children, and acting as a guide and/or facilitator into the local Deaf community, including where and how the deaf people who may not use ASL live their lives.

...monitors with the families the deaf child's language development and progress according to standards (and/or stages).

...is actively involved in the Deaf community and events where the families may be involved in for mutual support and enjoyment.

...is kept abreast of current trends, research and discussions pertaining to best practices.

...partners with the Early Interventionists serving the child and with the child's educational team to ensure the child reaches his/her full potential.

Deaf Mentor in Action



DEAF MENTOR EXPERIENCE

- Deaf Mentor in 2020 through Deaf Centers of Nevada (DCN).
- ASL is parent choice.
- Used SKI-HI curriculum plus custom lessons for our family trips.
- Deaf culture was HUGE.
- Helped us incorporate ASL as a true language.
- Gave us how & why of ASL.
- Affirmed us as parents and helped us to keep going in ASL.
- Gave parents a safe space to talk about hard issues (dinner table).
- Parents and Ava used daily.

THEN....we lost Deaf Mentor Services in September 2021.



AFTER DEAF MENTOR LOSS

- Since 2021, Ava has no ASL instruction (3 years)
- Family struggles to learn ASL
- Identity challenges
- Hearing technology vs. ASL
- Wrong signs
- Less extended family involvement
- Lack of support
- No choice for Ava
- Insecurity & apprehension with ASL



Key reasons why Deaf Mentors are important:

Cultural understanding: Deaf mentors can introduce Deaf culture, traditions, and perspectives to mentees, fostering a sense of belonging and identity.

Language support: They can provide expert guidance in American Sign Language (ASL) and communication strategies, particularly for young deaf individuals learning the language.

Role modeling: By showcasing successful Deaf individuals in various fields, they inspire and motivate mentees to achieve their goals.

Navigating challenges: Deaf mentors can share their personal experiences overcoming obstacles related to hearing loss, offering valuable advice and coping mechanisms.

Family support: For families with deaf children, a deaf mentor can provide valuable insights into Deaf culture and communication techniques, supporting their child's development.

Advocacy and awareness: Deaf mentors can raise awareness about Deaf issues and advocate for accessibility and inclusion within communities.

Why a Deaf Mentor?

During my experience as a substitute teacher at CCSD, I've observed a recurring theme across students in both elementary and high school. Many of them lack the signing and communication skills essential for independent living. At times, I found it challenging to understand what they were trying to convey, often resorting to gestures or basic signs to interpret their messages effectively.

Additionally, I've noticed that many students struggle with social skills. While I fully support deaf students spending time together and learning from one another—especially if it helps them improve their signing skills—I've become concerned about their social isolation. When I ask students about their activities outside of school, most report spending time alone in their rooms, playing games, or isolating themselves.

A particularly troubling pattern emerged when I inquired about their family communication. Unfortunately, around 80% of the students shared that their parents do not know how to sign. This lack of communication at home further





ACTIVITY RELATING TO COMMUNICATION BARRIERS:

- ☐ We will be building the tallest marshmallow tower we can without toppling it.
- ☐ Only marshmallows and toothpicks will be allowed to support it.
- ☐ Every member of the team must participate.
- ☐ There will be absolutely no talking (signing or verbal).
- ☐ The time limit will be 10 minutes.