

Spotlight on Success

Direct Referrals and Co-Training Benefit Families in Michigan EHDI System

By Tori McIntosh, Michigan GBYS Coordinator

Michigan EHDI (MI EHDI) and Michigan Hands & Voices (MIHV) have a history of collaboration and commitment to supporting families in an unbiased manner, with common goals of increasing family enrollment in both family-to-family support by six months of age and deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) adult-to-family support by nine months of age. As a direct result of this collaborative partnership, Michigan families of DHH children are supported by Parent Guides and DHH Guides in a variety of creative and meaningful ways.

With a direct referral system in place, the coordinator of the Guide By Your Side (GBYS) program reaches out to families after their child has been identified as DHH. When a family accepts Guide services, the coordinator purposefully selects their Parent Guide. MIHV has intentionally built (and continues to expand) the Parent Guide team to reflect the diversity of Michigan, and the variety of journeys families navigate following diagnosis. For example, Guides on the team have experience with hearing aids and cochlear implants, listening and spoken language, ASL, and Cued speech. Guides who are fluent in Arabic, Spanish, and Urdu, as well as a Guide with DHH plus additional disabilities experience are available. Having a diverse team of Parent Guides enables MIHV to meet families' unique needs and support them in meaningful ways.

A current goal of the program is to continue to further develop the DHH Guide program and enroll more families in direct DHH adult-to-family support. There are currently eight DHH Guides on staff, with a wide variety of lived experiences (including differences in hearing diagnoses and technology used, language and communication preferences, educational backgrounds, etc.). Having this range of perspectives is invaluable to offer families of DHH children.

Many new families are nervous about meeting with DHH adults. Parent Guides help to bridge the gap, lessen these nerves and connect families with their DHH Guides. A family's Parent Guide is their trusted bridge to Chapter activities and to DHH Guides. A Parent Guide walks alongside new parents on their journey, at their pace.

Benefits of Co-Training

To facilitate family-DHH Guide connections, the GBYS-DHH Guide Program recently held a training weekend led by Candace Lindow-Davies and Stephanie Olson from Hands & Voices

Headquarters, with financial support from Michigan EHDI/HRSA Carryover Funds. The goal: building connections between our Parent Guides and DHH Guides, learning each other's stories and strategizing how to effectively promote the DHH Guide program to Michigan families. To illustrate the success of this training, three DHH Guide visits occurred in the weeks following training. This is already a significant jump from the seven families enrolled in DHH Guide visits throughout 2022. Parent Guides worked on fine-tuning their listening and messaging skills. With an increased familiarity with the experiences and stories of the DHH Guides, they are now able to connect more intentionally with their families. For example, Guides might say, *“I hear your concerns about your child playing sports - I have a DHH Guide that can talk to you about his experiences! Or, “You are wondering what it was like to wear hearing aids and attend a mainstream school? I have the perfect person for you to talk to!”*



Michigan Hands & Voices DHH Guides and Parent Guides at Winter 2023 Co-training

Gina Cooper, MI EHDI Coordinator, shared, “MI EHDI is proud to partner with Michigan Hands and Voices to support families as active partners in the care of their DHH children. The journey from diagnosis to intervention can be challenging. MIHV connects new families with other parents who have navigated the same journey. Families can also meet with adults who grew up deaf or hard of hearing to learn directly from their valuable lived experiences. This family support is instrumental in increasing positive outcomes for infants and children with atypical hearing.”

DHH Guides support families through one-on-one visits, online panels, and family events in Michigan. This variety of services offers opportunities for families to learn from DHH adults within their level of comfort. The support from MI EHDI has enabled MIHV to make progress on our shared goal of increasing the number of families receiving DHH adult-to-family support in Michigan.