

## **The Circle of Change - Building a Network for Belonging for Families Raising Children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

Understanding how culture affects health and education is really important when supporting families of children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH). Culture influences how people see the world and how they make choices. When professionals make an effort to connect with families in a respectful and caring way, it helps families feel more confident and supported. This can also help parents and caregivers understand their child's diagnosis and feel better about making decisions.



- Increasing knowledge and understanding differences
- Shifting culture towards a shared community
- Sharing personal stories of diverse lived experiences
- Finding commonalities in our narratives
- Celebrating how likeness creates interdependence
- Empowering our village to elicit systemic transformation

When doctors, teachers, and other professionals learn about a family's cultural background and how it might be different from their own, they are more likely to build stronger, more positive relationships. This helps families feel heard and valued.

To make things better and fair for everyone, we need to change the systems that serve DHH children, especially for families who have been left out or underserved in the past.

### **Using Cultural Strengths to Improve Systems**

Hands & Voices Headquarters is working to create a welcoming and inclusive community for all families. We believe that leadership from a wide variety of backgrounds is key to building a better system. We believe in lifting up the voices of parents, empowering leaders of color, and allowing safe spaces to share their experiences and ideas.

The Hands & Voices Latino Advisory Council for Latino Family Support provides opportunities



for self-determination and leadership in supporting the Latino community. The H&V Advisory Council for Latino Family Support is an important group of experts who bring a wide range of participants committed to sharing ideas and strategies to support efforts to serve Latino families.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Advisory Committee provides culturally specific and D/HH-led training to support the engagement and development of D/HH Leaders in systems that serve children who are DHH and their families. These groups help create programs, teach others, and make sure diverse voices are part of the decision-making process.

Together, these efforts reflect Hands & Voices' deep commitment to inclusion by honoring the cultural strengths of the families and communities we serve.



### **AFFIRM: Leaders of Color Training**

The AFFIRM: Leaders of Color Training was created by Hands & Voices to make leadership more inclusive and representative. It provided a safe space for leaders of color—both family members and professionals in deaf education—to come together, share personal stories, and build a strong support network. Many of these leaders came from communities that have often been overlooked or underserved. Through open discussions and workshops, participants explored how culture, values, and lived experience shape family support and care for DHH children. The strong feedback from national conferences highlighted the need for more leader-led spaces like AFFIRM. These insights are now



shaping the future of Hands & Voices' work: expanding inclusive leadership, collecting meaningful data, lifting up diverse voices, and strengthening connections with groups like the Latino Council to ensure all families feel heard and included.

### **The CIRCLE of Change**

On September 20, 2024, Hands & Voices launched its first official **Circle of Change Training**, offering a certificate of completion for this exclusive learning opportunity. During the session, small groups—led by leaders of color—talked openly about the barriers they face when serving diverse families. Topics covered included how personal beliefs and values affect service delivery, how culture shapes health and education, and how social and community factors impact access to care. Most participants found the training helpful and valuable. They said it supported their goals, helped them understand inclusivity better, and offered useful lessons. Many appreciated the activities that centered on inclusion and some shared that the session helped them think in new and meaningful ways.

### **Advancing CIRCLE of Change to create a Network for Belonging**

Hands & Voices is advancing their strategic efforts through its **Circle of Change** training by launching the **Network for Belonging Initiative** that will focus on inclusive leadership, community engagement, and systemic equity. This includes forming diverse work groups to lead engagement efforts, holding regular stakeholder meetings, and gathering feedback to improve programs in health and education. This program will help to strengthen and create more efficient data systems to support smarter decisions and highlight what's working Health Programs, and Educational Systems. This inclusive community engagement platform will ensure diverse voices have a seat at the table and in partnership with local schools and health programs to help shape policies and direction. H&V will continue working with the Latino Council and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Councils to make services more culturally relevant and accessible. Communication efforts—like storytelling, events, and transparent updates—will help build trust and amplify impact. Rooted in values like Caring, Integrity, and Respect, this initiative aims to create a future where all DHH families feel a true sense of belonging and leadership is shared across parents, professionals, and communities alike.

By lifting up diverse leaders, creating spaces for connection, and embedding lived experience into every level of our work, we are not only improving systems—we are building a future where all families feel seen, valued, and empowered. Please join us in supporting our efforts to build a culture of inclusion for our Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children and their families.

For more information about CIRCLE of Change and the Network for Belonging contact [Rosabel@handsandvoices.org](mailto:Rosabel@handsandvoices.org).





# HANDS & VOICES CIRCLE OF CHANGE

## CREATING A NETWORK FOR BELONGING

When professionals make an effort to connect with families in a respectful and caring way, it helps families feel more confident and supported.

### Core Values

Caring • Integrity • Respect •  
Conviction • Leadership •  
Excellence



### Our vision

To create a future where every Deaf and Hard of Hearing family feels seen, supported, and included

Using Cultural Strengths to Improve Systems

Allowing safe spaces to share their experiences and ideas

### What we're Doing

A national effort that connects voices, promotes equity, and strengthens inclusive practices for families raising children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing.



### Key Strategies

- ✓ Networking and Leadership
- ✓ Shared Data & Resources
- ✓ Expand Impact
- ✓ Create Community



Expanding inclusive leadership, collecting meaningful data, lifting up diverse voices, and strengthening connections

Read the Full report here: <https://handsandvoices.org/diversity/assets/Circle-of-Change-report.pdf>

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