

Stronger Together

By Amanda Hvass, Oregon Hands & Voices

Hands & Voices of Oregon (OR H&V) has been working to intentionally grow community among families and providers. With support and encouragement from the Oregon EHDI program, the Guide By Your Side program (GBYS) has focused on seeding community and doing the work a little differently- hosting more in-person live events and casual meet-ups, Facebook live events, texting families, and family camp. Participation and parent feedback is tracked and reported back to the EHDI advisory committee quarterly. Because of this, when COVID-19 began to hit the US hard, Hands & Voices of Oregon (OR H&V) responded quickly and found success in collaboration.

With the full support of the EHDI team, the GBYS program created a video for Facebook, asking parents what they needed most. Besides getting great parent feedback, Regional Programs saw the post, asked what parents wanted, and offered to collaborate. One way GBYS was able to help immediately was by educating parents about providers trying to contact them, helping them realize the providers weren't telemarketers, and explaining the importance/benefits of their services.

Another outcome was creating a variety of networking opportunities for parents, children and providers. Through brief captioned videos texted and shared on Facebook to families, they were invited to Facebook Live events and closed Zoom groups offering the following:

- Children's Play Dates: Children connect with other DHH children around a theme led by the GBYS coordinator
- Activities: Parents interact with their children in activities led by a Hands & Voices Parent Guide and her toddlers
- Deaf Liaison: Parents and their Deaf child could meet with a Deaf interpreter and hearing interpreter to provide communication clarification without cost to the family
- Trainings: Led by Early Interventionists and an audiologist regarding how to communicate in the home and technology tips and tricks during COVID-19
- Parent Connections: Tea Time in the afternoon and Parent Cocktail Hour so parents could unwind from the stress

While many of these opportunities were a big success, some of them fizzled over the weeks. To stay current with the ever-changing needs of families during this pandemic, the GBYS team met weekly and has communicated more than ever with the EHDI team to collaborate, share their activities and remind providers how family leaders support families.

When the OR EHDI team, Regional Programs and OR H&V started saying "let's do this together" it spurred on stronger relationships and empowered parents, creating an engaged community- despite a pandemic.

Oregon EHDI Coordinator Heather Morrow-Almeida offered "heartfelt gratitude for the leadership and genuine care given to community building and support for families of children who are D/HH by the Oregon Guide By Your Side team. Their work is powerful and moving and is an amazing complement to audiology and early intervention services."