

**Stronger Together: Collaborations Across Nevada Benefit Families**  
**By**  
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Nevada Hands & Voices (NV H&V), Nevada Early Intervention Services (NEIS), and Deaf Centers of Nevada (DCN) have brought families together through collaborations between parent guides, deaf mentors, and early intervention (EI) providers. The development of language playgroups and other family engagement events has been a valuable way for these Family-Based Organizations (FBOs) to meet the needs of families of deaf and hard of hearing (D/HH) children throughout the state. Providing these interactions among D/HH children and their families has played a huge roll in increasing family engagement and connecting these families with NV deaf adults, EI providers, and parent guides.

The vision for the language playgroups was to provide families a place to connect and ask questions of a team of professionals, socialize with other families, learn through language, and receive resources at the early stages of their child's language development. Started in Reno by a NVH&V parent guide, DCN deaf mentor, and NEIS SKI-HI developmental specialist (DS), the language playgroups occur twice per month. At each playgroup, spoken and visual language is modeled by deaf adults, interpreters, speech language pathologists (SLPs), developmental specialists, parent guides, and audiologists through various activities a family can do with everyday items at home.

**Benefits:**

- D/HH children socialize and connect with other children with similar technology and varying modes of communication, learn listening and speaking skills, storytelling, play skills, and have fun.
- Parents get information and resources, bond with other parents in the community, engage with the professionals that support them, and enjoy structured play time with their child.
- Through deaf mentors, everyone is introduced to Deaf Culture, ASL storytelling, and connect with adults who are D/HH in a casual environment.
- Parents have indicated that the language playgroups have given them a safe and comfortable place to share their concerns, ask questions of a team of professionals all in one place, be welcomed, no matter the choices they have made for their D/HH child.

Drawing on the statewide network of EI professionals to bring in families, NV H&V and DCN conducted a series of town hall meetings to introduce rural families, we to resources and available support services such as the language playgroup.

Perry Smith, Nevada Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Program Coordinator, says of the collaboration, "the Nevada EHDI Program is extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to work with NV H&V, DCN and NEIS. These two FBOs and NEIS make a huge impact within the Nevada D/HH community. In addition to the provision of cross-program play groups, other valuable contributions include: Guide-By-Your-Side family support program, deaf mentoring services, follow-up activities for EHDI, parents and providers who are well trained, as well as representation from each of these entities on the Nevada EHDI Stakeholder Committee. Nevada EHDI and the state benefit greatly from these organizations."

Language playgroups in Reno and now Las Vegas, together with joint in-home visits, parent meetings, and family fun events, have provided a better understanding and appreciation among families of all three FBO's and their involvement in family's lives. We now have more families and early intervention providers who come to the language playgroup to communicate, work, and play with the children. We credit the success of this collaborative programs to our close working relationship with the Nevada EHDI program, deaf community, and professionals who understand the importance of community and support early on in a D/HH child's journey.