



FAMILY NETWORK FOR DEAF CHILDREN & DEAF YOUTH TODAY

OUR SUMMER PROGRAM,



SUMMER

June 2022

FNDC values sharing information to deaf children, families, professionals and the communities that support them. These events, advertisements and/or articles do not necessarily reflect the viewpoint of FNDC or offer an endorsement

Hello FNDC newsletter readers,

This is the first FNDC newsletter that we are implementing our new communication connection:

- ▶ creating our newsletter to be articles and information that isn't time sensitive.
- ▶ sending out email updates regularly with information that has event dates and/or deadlines.

We hope this new format works well for everyone!

Our Deaf Youth Today Summer staff began their first day of work this week. We will soon introduce you to our staff by email and let you know a bit about each person.

The summer program begins with DYT Kids' Camp at Hornby Island for Jr. Campers (ages 8 to 12) and Sr. Campers (ages 13 to 15). Instead of a counsellor in training program, this year Sr. campers will have opportunities to sign up for leadership workshops and activities if they choose while at Hornby Island. They can also sign up for leadership days in the summer.

Membership time: Yes its renewal time!

The FNDC membership is enticing for 3 reasons:

1. Its affordable – **only \$10**
2. Your membership says **you believe in what we are doing.**
3. New this year: **Free member-only benefits** for families (reduced DYT program fees, access to free online opportunities AND occasional free sports and culture tickets for families.

www.fndc.ca/membership

A huge thanks to Gwen Wong with assistance from Pauline Anderson (both FNDC Board members), for working so hard on fundraising. We rely on fundraising, donations and grants, so a big thank you to both of them. Pauline led the Spring Plant Sale along with her parent recruits and DYT campers. The plants were amazing and we hope to do this next year, so remember DYT when you are planning your 2023 garden.

Twitter: @FNDcandDYT
Facebook: www.facebook.com/fndc.ca

Gwen is again leading the Matching Campaign. Yes, the Y.P. Heung Foundation has agreed to match every donation dollar for dollar to a maximum of \$25,000. Example: if you donate \$50. The Y.P. Heung Foundation also donates \$50 meaning that your donation becomes \$100. It's a perfect time to DONATE!

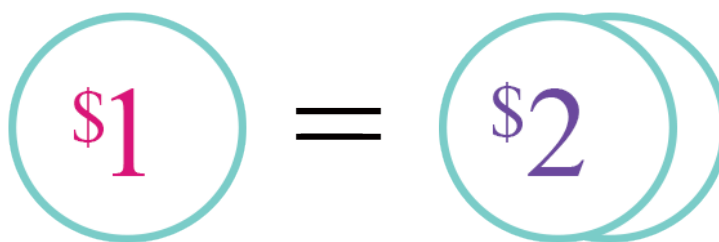
www.fndc.ca/donation



FAMILY NETWORK
FOR DEAF CHILDREN & DEAF YOUTH TODAY

OUR SUMMER PROGRAM,

DONATE AND DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT!



DONATE TODAY! www.fndc.ca/donation

Proudly supported by



Y.P. HEUNG
FOUNDATION

Enjoy the newsletter,

Cecelia



MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL DATES

June 30, 2022 that's the day when all FNDC/DYT memberships expire. The new/renewal membership year begins July 1, 2022, and goes until June 30, 2023. Our membership fee is only \$10.00 for the year.

Your membership says you believe in what we are doing and is an indicator that you support us! FNDC's Summer Program: Deaf Youth Today (DYT) provides social/recreational programs for deaf children, leadership opportunities for deaf youth and is the leading employer of deaf students during the summer months.

NEW THIS YEAR

Free member benefits for families!

We have upcoming **membership-only** benefits which include reduced DYT program fees, access to free online opportunities AND occasional free sports and culture tickets for families.

We keep our administration costs to a minimum by working from home offices, sharing a FNDC cellphone and applying for grants to employ deaf students as DYT summer staff. We do this because we believe that parents make huge financial sacrifices (ie gas costs, significant travel time, time off work) driving your children daily to attend our DYT Summer Program. Your membership fees and donations help us with the costs incurred in website maintenance, workshop planning, newsletter production and our DYT Summer Program.

We are extremely grateful for donations. If you wish to receive our newsletter and ongoing email updates, please make sure that you add fndc@fndc.ca to your "safe sender's list" and email address book.

To pay online: www.fndc.ca/membership

Thank you for your continued support!



FAMILY NETWORK FOR DEAF CHILDREN & DEAF YOUTH TODAY

OUR SUMMER PROGRAM,

FNDC's **2022 MATCHING CAMPAIGN** has begun! Every donation that we receive will be **DOUBLED** through a very generous grant-matching campaign with the Y.P. Heung Foundation.

The Y.P. Heung Foundation will contribute up to \$25,000 towards *DYT Summer Overnight Camp at Hornby Island* in this matching campaign, so now is the time to **DOUBLE** your money with a donation to FNDC for our DYT program! We are delighted to be partnering with the Y.P. Heung Foundation for the third time.

How does this work? We invite past and new donors to participate. For every dollar that you donate, the Y.P. Heung Foundation will match dollar for dollar. We invite you to take advantage of this matching gift opportunity where you can see your donation double in value. In return, your valuable contribution will have a positive impact on the lives of our deaf and hard of hearing participants involved in FNDC summer programs.



Y.P. HEUNG
FOUNDATION

Who is the Y.P. Heung Foundation? At the Y.P. Heung Foundation, they focus their support in the areas of Arts and Culture, Education and Health. As a charitable foundation and in order to effect real change and to create sustainable impact, they have concentrated their efforts on supporting smaller charities and non-profit organizations that have a proven record but are in need of funding for projects and programs. Please refer to their web site at www.yphfoundation.org

How to donate? Donations may be or made directly on FNDC's website at: www.fndc.ca/donation or large donations may be sent by e-transfer to accounting@fndc.ca or be arranged by cheque to avoid credit card processing charges. For further information about FNDC and why we are seeking donations, please email fndc@fndc.ca and we will be delighted to share more information with you.

FNDC Family Network for Deaf Children

Website: www.fndc.ca

Email: fndc@fndc.ca



Thank you to
Cob's Bread West
Broadway for
fundraising for
FNDC during
Hot Cross Bun
season!

Do You Need a Tutor?

Terry Gardiner has over 30 years of experience teaching at BCSD, and holds a current B.C. Teaching Certificate, and can teach B.C. Curriculum. Can tutor/teach Grades 5 through 12 but prefer Grades 5 through 10. Preferred instructional areas are: English (Reading, Writing), Science (Biology, Physical Geography, Earth, Chemistry), Social Studies (History), and Math. Please contact me at tgardiner77@gmail.com

Terry Gardiner, Tutor
Online Tutoring ASL Pah !

* ASL'll be used in all Online Tutoring Sessions

DYT Tshirt LOGO Winner



Congrats to Jenny Han (past DYT Camper & staff) - winner of this summer's T shirt logo contest!

Jenny's designs won both competitions – DYT Summer Camp 2022 Tshirt logo & our first Family Deaf Camp 2022 Tshirt logo.

Both Tshirts logos are a surprise – so we have to be patient until Summer begins!

RDSPs

HELPFUL HINT. Keep this information handy for future!

Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP).

Do you get frustrated trying to contact someone about your RDSP?

Helpful hint: send an email to: BMO.InvestmentCentre@BMO.com

And let them know that you are deaf or hard of hearing and would like a call back.

Make sure to include your video relay number for the callback.

Communication Stars
specialized childcare



full-day and half-day options available!

Communication Stars offers a specialized, bilingual-bicultural curriculum (American Sign Language and English) for children. We also utilize a parent communication app to ensure that you stay connected with everything your child is learning during their time with us!

Our **NEW** half-day program is available 2 or 3 days a week (T/Th or T/W/Th) from 9:30am-12:00pm.

Our program is open to Deaf and hard-of-hearing children, Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs), and hearing children. Spaces available for children aged 30 months to 5 years.

For more information or to register your child, please contact 604-584-2827, or email daycare@bcfamilyhearing.com

Barbie unveils its first-ever doll with hearing aids

MAY 11, 2022

<https://www.cnn.com/style/article/barbie-hearing-aid-ken-vitiligo/index.html?fbclid=IwAR3HJOFAJYO5j-50FvPM5kZ2QTOfyIrje9vh9UHnTQKisMIU-ckobLEh9n8>



Barbie, the 63-year-old American doll manufacturer, is releasing a new set of dolls in June as part of its ongoing efforts towards diversity and inclusion. From creating the brand's first ever Barbie with hearing aids, to a Ken doll with the skin condition vitiligo, 2022's Fashionista line up -- which will be launched in Walmart, Target and Amazon -- will help kids "see themselves reflected," said Mattel's Global Head of Barbie Dolls, Lisa McKnight, in a press statement.

Barbie's first ever doll with hearing aids, on sale from June 2022. She added that children should also be encouraged to play with dolls that don't resemble them to help them "understand and celebrate the importance of inclusion."

For the Barbie with hearing aids, the company sought the expertise of Dr. Jen Richardson, a leading practitioner in educational audiology, to help accurately imitate behind-the-ear devices for the toy. Richardson said the ponytailed-Barbie complete with hot pink hearing aid could inspire those who have

experienced hearing loss. "I'm beyond thrilled for my young patients to see and play with a doll who looks like them," she said in a press release.

Male Barbie dolls will now be sold in less muscular body types. Credit: Mattel

Changes have been made to the stereotypical Barbie body type, too. From smaller chests to fuller-figures and even slender, less-muscular male dolls, the new toys are intended to be more representative of varied body types.



The 2022 Barbie Fashionista line-up. Credit: Mattel

Barbie's range of dolls have become increasingly diverse in recent years. In 2019 they released a blonde, blue-eyed Barbie in a [wheelchair](#) and a brunette doll with a prosthetic leg. In [2020](#), the company unveiled a Black Barbie with the skin condition vitiligo -- it became one of the best sellers from the Fashionista line in the US that year, according to the company. Similarly in 2021, a Black doll with an afro hairstyle was a global success, ranking as one of the top five most popular models worldwide.

Burnaby students shine at contest celebrating Deaf pride

ASL poetry, communication and De'VIA featured at inaugural Deaf and Hard of Hearing Proud Showcase hosted by the Burnaby school district.

April 26, 2022

From: <https://www.burnabynow.com/local-news/burnaby-students-shine-at-contest-celebrating-deaf-pride-5303374>



Left to right, B.C. Provincial School for the Deaf students, Teanna Kay, Natasha Germaine and Angus LeMaitre square off in an American Sign Language poetry competition earlier this month.

Eighty students from across the province showed their Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing pride earlier this month during an inaugural online competition hosted by the Burnaby school district.

[The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Proud Showcase](#) on April 11 saw students in kindergarten to Grade 12 compete in American Sign Language poetry, art and communication – all on the theme of “What makes you proud to be Deaf or Hard of Hearing?”

Students from the B.C. Provincial School for the Deaf (BCSD), which shares a campus with Burnaby South Secondary School, owned the podium in the Grade 6-12 ASL poetry category, with Teanna Kay, Natasha Germaine and Angus LeMaitre placing first, second and third respectively.

“I absolutely love to advocate and support our community and be involved in all kinds of things and advocate for Deaf people,” Germaine said in an online interview with organizers, “so I felt that the more people that could be included, it meant the more the community could get together, but with COVID, I’ve noticed that it’s shrunk a little bit, the size of our community, so I’d really encourage people to participate and advocate for themselves.”

(Her words were translated by an ASL translator.)

In the ASL poetry category for students in kindergarten to Grade 5, BCSD’s Zoe Kalenuik came in first and Everly Hohnadel, also from BCSD, came in third.

The showcase also featured a Deaf Image Art (De’VIA) competition.

Burnaby Central Secondary School student Baowen Yan took first place honours in the Grade 6 to 12 section of that contest.

In the spotlight communication competition, Burnaby Mountain Secondary School student Izabella Kamaeva took third place in the Grade 6 to 12 category.

The event was put on by BC Provincial Outreach Program, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, a provincial program administered by the school district.

Prizes ranged from gift cards to Fitbit smart watches.

School board chair Jen Mezei opened the virtual gathering.

“Deaf culture is unique and part of a rich history with a beautiful language that enriches our school district,” she said.

Congrats to Molly Feanny - **past DYT camper and past DYT Counsellor in Training!**



Molly recently graduated from Gallaudet with her 2nd degree AND was selected to give the undergraduate commencement speech ...

AND she invited Tim Cook to deliver Gallaudet's commencement speech AND he accepted!

I Invited Tim Cook to Speak at My Graduation. He Gave Me This Advice

Written by Molly Feanny

<https://www.elitedaily.com/news/apple-ceo-tim-cook-gallaudet-university-commencement-interview>

A few weeks ago, I did something I never thought I'd do: I formally invited Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple, to speak at my graduation ceremony at Gallaudet University, the only university in the world dedicated to deaf and hard of hearing students. Even when I was [filming the signed invitation](#), I kept thinking, "*This is happening*. He'll probably say no — because I'm sure he's a very busy person — but it's still worth a shot." Doing that was a little outside my comfort zone, but so was my journey coming to Gallaudet.

Before coming here, I graduated from my hometown university in Victoria, BC, Canada, and I was at a turning point in my life, thinking about what I truly wanted to do. I was lucky to have an entirely signing family and a few friends with whom I could meet up and socialize with despite the communication barriers. Yet there was still an empty feeling deep inside me. I wished I could connect and interact with other deaf people like me. Despite not being sure what it would truly be like, I decided to take a shot and applied to Gallaudet.

Even when I was on the plane to Washington, D.C., to start studying at Gallaudet in August 2019, it still felt surreal. I was entering a whole different world. Soon enough, I met some new

friends, peers and teachers who could have direct conversations with me, instead of having to use an interpreter or writing back and forth. I also adapted to a signing academic environment, and found I could be successful and thrive studying technology. Finally, I was where I needed to be, in a completely accessible environment where I felt accepted and fully included.

Unfortunately, when the coronavirus pandemic hit in the spring of 2020, I had to return home, back to where I was effectively cut off from the Deaf community and anyone else signing except for my family and a select few of my friends. Over the one and a half years I spent studying at Gallaudet online in Canada, I faced a lot of challenges, especially being far away from university and trying to complete classes. One thing made a huge difference, however: the fact that Gallaudet and Apple worked together to ensure that all the students, faculty and staff members had access to the tools they needed through laptops and iPads. Technology was critically important for staying connected with my teachers, friends and classmates, helping me work remotely — and most importantly — allowing me to stay on top of my studies.



Although remote learning was very challenging, it gave me plenty of time to think about what I truly missed and wanted to gain back when I could return to the Gallaudet campus: That feeling of being so connected to everything there, the feeling that you could do whatever you want when you set your mind to it. So when I finally stepped on the Gallaudet campus after a long time away, I was rejuvenated — and motivated to make the best out of the time I had left as a student. Anything was, once again, possible.

When I saw that Mr. Cook actually accepted my invitation to come and speak at our graduation ceremony this month, I was really surprised and amazed. I also realized that this was an opportunity for Gallaudet to express our gratitude to Mr. Cook and Apple for giving us access to remote learning and communication tools. Before coming to Gallaudet, I wasn't sure how I would do, but now, despite everything that happened, I have a new degree in information technology, and the CEO of Apple spoke at my graduation ceremony. How wild is that?

Everyone's story is different at Gallaudet. Thanks to the confidence I gained there, I hope to continue to promote global connections as a young Deaf woman studying and working abroad in STEM. During his visit to campus, I had the chance to ask Mr. Cook about the importance of diversity, how technology can be a tool for inclusivity and his advice for starting a career in tech.

Do you have any advice for young people, and especially for Deaf and hard-of-hearing young people, who want to get their foot in the door and work in the tech industry?

Keep your curiosity. Curiosity should stay with you your entire lifetime. Keep asking the question “why,” and keep asking it over and over again until you get good answers. And when there isn't a good answer, that’s an indication that something needs to change.

How do you think technology can make the world more inclusive and accessible?

I think that part of what all of us are responsible for is to push humanity forward and make it more inclusive. I think technology has a key role in that because technology can amplify it. Technology empowers people. And so what we’ve always tried to do at Apple is to build accessibility into our technology from the start, and we’re going to keep doing that. Technology enables people to do things beyond themselves, to make a difference beyond what they could do otherwise. And so I see technology and accessibility one and the same.



What challenges did you face when first getting into the technology industry and how did you overcome them?

I still face challenges! We all have challenges, and so it’s more about how we deal with those challenges. I’ve always found that you should dissect things down to their smallest problems and put one step in front of the other — and it’s amazing what you can accomplish at the end. But challenges come at every level, whether you’re entering into a field or whether you’ve been in a field for a long period of time like me.

How do you think about the way accessibility can enhance diversity?

For us, we believe that the best products are made from the most diverse teams, and arguably you can’t have a very diverse team without having accessibility. And so we look at the intersection of these things — of diversity and accessibility — and because we do that, we make better products.

What is your favorite sport? Football. I root for Auburn, which is my undergraduate school.
Coffee or tea? Definitely coffee.

Are you planning on learning more sign language after being here today? Yes, I’m inspired to do so.

Apple CEO Tim Cook to Gallaudet graduates: 'Lead with your values'

The technology giant has helped the university expand accessibility for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, officials said

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/05/13/gallaudet-tim-cook-commencement/>

In a video last month, Gallaudet University senior Molly Feanny signed a message to Apple chief executive Tim Cook, inviting him to deliver the school's commencement address. About an hour later, Cook had accepted — and on Friday he stood in front of the Class of 2022, where he imparted advice, cracked a couple of jokes and wished the outgoing cohort of students good luck.



"I have one important piece of advice I want to share, so important that it's the only piece of advice I'm going to share today," Cook said. "And that is this: Whatever you do, lead with your values."

Cook and Apple have a unique relationship with the university for deaf and hard-of-hearing students in the nation's capital. In 2020, each student and faculty member was given an iPad Pro, Apple Pencil and Smart Folio tablet case. The program has since expanded to include MacBook.

Gallaudet was the first university to participate in an Apple scholarship for disabled students of color. Students have landed jobs at the Apple Carnegie Library in the District's Mount Vernon neighborhood, where the company also offers training and other programming for deaf people.

The relationship has allowed the campus in Northeast Washington to expand accessibility for students, offering more students the chance to excel academically and — eventually — cross the graduation stage, leaders say.

Feanny, who delivered the undergraduate commencement speech Friday, said she and university officials conceived the idea to invite Cook to this year's ceremony. It was the campus's first in-person graduation ceremony since 2019, and more than 200 mask-clad undergraduates accepted their diplomas.

"I thought it would be a great idea for him to come because Apple has contributed a lot to the Gallaudet University community," Feanny said in an email. "The MacBook laptops and iPads provided to everyone allowed us to maintain a sense of connection and continue our working and learning relationships and activities despite the covid pandemic keeping us apart for 18 months."

Elijah Henderson, who graduated Friday with a degree in communication studies, also touted some benefits of Apple products for deaf students. Among them are FaceTime, another feature that allows users to pair certain hearing aids with Apple devices through Bluetooth connection, and software that transcribes phone calls in real time. “It just gives deaf people the ability to communicate with ease,” Henderson said through an interpreter.

The partnership has also paid off in the classroom, said Thomas P. Horejes, associate provost for student success and academic quality. Eighty percent of full-time, first-time freshmen who entered Gallaudet in the fall of 2020 returned for their second year, the second-highest retention rate among a first-year cohort in a decade. The 2020 cohort is also performing better academically — 85 percent had “academic good standing,” compared with 78 percent of the 2019 cohort, Horejes wrote in an email.

“Technology plays a key role in supporting ‘extraordinary learning and academic excellence across the life span,’” Horejes said, referencing a tenant of the school’s strategic plan. “Apple has been instrumental in this effort.”

And at a university where about two-thirds of students are eligible for Pell Grants, federal aid reserved for students from low-income families, the introduction of Apple products means every student has access to the same hardware.

“Their ability to access technology and its resources is challenging and may present an academic inequity concern, which impacts the overall student success experience,” Horejes said. “This process helps ensure that all students get what they need regardless of their personal finances or with the support of their parents.”

SaraBeth Sullivan, who finished her PhD in educational neuroscience in November but crossed the graduation stage Friday morning, said accessibility “is the standard of Gallaudet.” She grew up “more hard-of-hearing” and participated in what deaf people call “the hearing world.”

Sullivan attended traditional public schools as a child, had friends who were not deaf and went to a hearing university for her undergraduate degree. But, she said, her experiences in the hearing world at times felt isolating.

“I realized I wanted to feel more like I didn’t have to beg for accessibility all the time or explain my needs all the time,” Sullivan said. At Gallaudet, however, her needs are instinctively met — and Apple has made life easier. The Sidecar feature, for example, allows Sullivan to double her screens, using one for taking notes or reading and another to communicate through video chat.

Gallaudet’s relationship with Apple began when its Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center — which houses elementary and secondary education programs — purchased iPads for kindergarten through 12th-grade students. The decision came “after various technological

options were assessed to decide the best fit for bilingual learning,” Gallaudet President Roberta Cordano said in an [open letter](#) to Cook in 2019.

After the success at the Clerc Center, the partnership was expanded to the university campus. Cook, in his address, gave a nod to that relationship.

“As Apple works to design technology that is accessible to all, we are incredibly fortunate to have such innovative and committed partners,” Cook said. “It’s thanks in part to this community that Apple Maps now has a series of guides that help users identify deaf-owned and deaf-friendly businesses.”

OUT OF TOWN FAMILIES with DHH children

Do you know you can book the Dorm this summer?

Booking PDHHS accommodations When / Time: July & August, Monday to Friday Location: 4334 Victory Street, Burnaby Costs: Free Booking organizer: Roger Chan Email: FS@gov.bc.ca	<p>Our site is available for families with deaf & hard of hearing children and youth who want to access local services and resources. This is based on first come, first served basis.</p> <p>Provincial Family Services will be available during your stay if you want in-person services. Please contact us if you want to discuss.</p>
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Emma Every Day series by C.L. Reid & illustrated by Elena Aiello

“Emma is Deaf. She uses American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate with her family. She also uses a Cochlear Implant (CI) to help her hear.”

I am so excited to share the Emma Every Day series with you! With four titles already available and four more due out August 1, 2021, this own voice series is a must have on your classroom bookshelves. Emma is a deaf third grader and in her books we learn about Emma's likes and dislikes, some problems she encounters and how she overcomes them, and we are able to study Emma and make some decisions about what kinds of character traits Emma has. Her deafness is just a part of her story, not the central topic in any of her books.

Emma's family and best friend, Izzie Jackson, speak ASL and Emma wears one Cochlear Implant (CI) on her left ear. At the front of each book, there is an information page that introduces Emma and her important people to the reader. There's also a page that tells a little more about Emma's CI and shows the ASL alphabet and manual numbers.



At the back of each book is a Learn to Sign page spread that shows signs that apply to the story. For example, a birthday party story teaches the signs: friend, happy, birthday, cake, gift, party, and thank you.

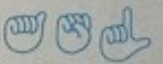
Each book also has a glossary with definitions for deaf and hard of hearing terms as well as other words from the story.



"I use a CI too!" Emma signed.

Candy smiled. "I love my CI,
but I still sign most of the time."

"Me too," Emma signed.

"And Emma taught me
ASL,"  Izzie signed.

The books that are currently available for purchase are Party Problems (a story about Emma attending Izzy's birthday party), Tap Dance Trouble (a dance recital story), Crazy for Apples (a story about Emma, her dad, and Izzy going apple picking), and Going on a Field Trip (when Emma and her class go to the American History Museum).

These early chapter books would be a fantastic addition to any first or second grade classroom. C.L. Reid, the author, has been deaf-blind since childhood. Her own voice perspective makes Emma's stories a fantastic mirror for any deaf or hearing impaired student to enjoy and a beautiful window for a hearing person to read.

I look forward to the August release of the four new titles. In the meantime, my home bookshelves already have the available titles living on them and this series is on the most recent book order placed for the school where I teach. I encourage you to check Emma Every Day out for yourself.



Push toward hearing interventions over ASL leading to language deprivation in deaf people, experts say

There are concerns avoiding sign language can cause developmental, educational delays and lead to isolation

CBC News: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/asl-deaf-language-deprivation-saskatchewan-1.6251693>



Michelle and Oscar Grodecki began learning American Sign Language against the advice of their speech pathologist when the boy was 18 months old. About a decade later, both mother and son are fluent in ASL and use it every day to communicate.

"You want him to learn to say 'Mom,' don't you?" That's what a speech pathologist asked Michelle Grodecki a decade ago when her son, Oscar, was diagnosed with a rare type of hearing loss at 18 months old.

The specialist at the Saskatchewan Pediatric Auditory Rehabilitation Centre (SPARC) told Grodecki that Oscar's best shot at learning to communicate would be through medical approaches. Learning American Sign Language (ASL) was out of the question.

"I was told, 'That's really not the best option. We really want him to speak, and sign language is going to prevent him speaking,'" said Grodecki, who lives in Regina.

Oscar Grodecki was diagnosed with auditory neuropathy at 18 months old. Now, at the age of 12, he speaks and uses American Sign Language to communicate with his friends and family.

For decades, academics around the world have argued over how best to



support children diagnosed with hearing loss. Some criticize what they call a binary way of thinking that favours medical interventions over sign language. They say that can lead deaf and hard of hearing kids to struggle to develop socially, delay them in school and cause them to feel isolated.

Despite calls for broader access to ASL, change has been slow in Saskatchewan. According to a [2016 Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission report](#) for Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing people, Grodecki isn't alone in her experience at SPARC.

Most families are sent to the centre after hearing loss is detected during a newborn screening test. SPARC focuses largely on improving speech through technology, like cochlear implants (devices that electrically stimulate the hearing nerve) and auditory verbal therapy, which focuses on listening and speaking without lip-reading.

SPARC takes this approach because most deaf babies are born to hearing parents who want their children to be part of their speaking culture, said Lynne Brewster, the audiologist who runs the centre. She said sign language support is usually recommended later, should the auditory verbal therapy or cochlear implants not work. "We really are not in a position to be all things to all people," Brewster said, noting it's only her running the centre with a couple of part-time specialists. She's also found children learning ASL while trying these other approaches can hinder their speech development.

But the report says this point of view is "in contrast to the opinions expressed by other health-care professionals who participated in this process." It also says the "medicalization of deafness and the focus on medical treatments ... is seen by some as an attempt to oppress and invalidate Deaf culture."

Grodecki agreed with the report, saying limiting access to sign language is akin to "linguistic genocide." "We are killing off a culture," she said.

The 'oral agenda'

Joanne Weber, the Canada research chair in deaf education at the University of Alberta, thinks a "very pervasive and very unconscious" stigma against sign language is partly to blame.

"People are going, 'It would be nice if deaf people could talk because that means that I don't have to do anything. It would make my life easier,'" she said.

Joanne Weber is the Canada research chair in deaf education at the University of Alberta. She is deaf herself and only learned ASL at the age of 25.



As a deaf child in the 1970s, Weber said she was subjected to the "oral agenda." "I was able to [speak]," she said, "but it didn't necessarily account for all that I needed to do to develop into a whole person." Weber only learned ASL when she was 25. She remembered doctors saying, "Why would you learn sign language? You can speak, for god's sake!"



Joanne Weber sits at the age of three years old for a hearing assessment by Dr. Edna Gilbert and audiologist Ken Stuckdell from Minot State College.

Weber said there is a growing body of research that shows using both sign language and speech development tools pays off. "That's because if the cochlear implant and the auditory rehabilitation doesn't work, at least you have given that child a language," Weber said, pointing to an [article from the Maternal and Child Health Journal](#). That also means a child's social and emotional development aren't stalled, allowing them to learn at the same rate as hearing children, she added.

Signing in secret

When Oscar was unsuccessful with auditory verbal therapy, Grodecki did her own research and learned sign language through DVDs. The boy's speech developed the more they signed together.

When the speech pathologist noticed improvements in Oscar's communication, Grodecki said she assured them he would "drop the sign language eventually." Oscar never did.

Oscar Grodecki says signing helped him make friends and find a community. Now 12 years old, Oscar said it's impossible for him to learn without sign language. "ASL helps me understand better and helps me understand what people are saying," he said. Looking back, Grodecki sees the first 18 months of Oscar's life as wasted time.

"I sacrificed language development chasing that dream of speech," the mother said.

The impact of language deprivation

When ASL is used as the last resort, Weber said it can lead to language deprivation. That means it's more difficult for children to learn to read, write or talk.

That's when many parents connect with Saskatchewan Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, a non-profit organization that helps families learn ASL.

At that point, most children are dealing with mental health issues because they don't have the language to express themselves, said Rae-Mairi Richardson, a sign support professional with the organization. Studies in the U.S. and Australia have indicated higher incidence of mental illness among children with hearing loss. "Because they've had inadequate access to information, the frustrations are ingrained into them," Richardson said.

'Looking for who I was'

For the first few years of Fatima Tun Nafisa's life, she only understood the meaning of one word: hurt. She first heard it as a toddler, visiting a hospital in her home country of Bangladesh. "I realized that's how I felt," said Nafisa, now 19, who was born with severe hearing loss. "I just felt so deflated and didn't know who I was or what my place was in the world ... Was I going to be normal?"

Favouring hearing interventions over ASL can lead to language deprivation in deaf people, some say

People are criticizing what they call a binary way of thinking that prefers medical interventions over sign language. They say that can lead deaf and hard of hearing kids to struggle to develop socially, delay them in school and cause them to feel isolated.



For years, her parents tried teaching her to read lips and worked on her speech, with the help of hearing aids. It's something doctors were pushing them to do. When she was 13, Nafisa and her family moved to Regina. There, experts gave them the same advice: speech is better than sign language. "I was very depressed," she said, explaining that communicating her feelings was difficult. "I was still looking for who I was."

It wasn't until she transferred to a high school program for deaf and hard of hearing people two years later that she learned the power of ASL and the community that came along with it.



Fatima Tun Nafisa (second from right) was also born with a severe hearing loss in Bangladesh. Her parents tried teaching her to read lips and worked on her speech, with the help of hearing aids. She was 13 when she began learning sign language at school in Regina. Her parents still weren't on board, though. So Nafisa signed in secret. Then her parents saw her perform in a show cast

entirely with people who are deaf and hard of hearing. Her family was in tears. Her sister even apologized.

Nafisa remembered thinking, "Wow, I can change my life and I don't have to give up. I can keep going."

Give children all options, advocates say

If all of the options — including auditory verbal therapy, cochlear implants, hearing aids and ASL — were available and promoted to parents when hearing loss is first detected in a child, experiences like Nafisa's could be avoided, Richardson said.

Fatima Tun Nafisa first learned American Sign Language when she moved to a deaf and hard of hearing high school program in Regina. Though graduated now, Nafisa continues to use ASL to communicate as well as in theatre performances.

It's among the 15 issues in an [updated Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing stakeholders report](#) by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, released in October, that still need to be addressed.

Providing access to sign language education is also noted in the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), of which Canada is a signatory.

For those who do seek out sign language education, access in Saskatchewan is limited. It's often focused on "signed English" — which isn't a language but the translation of words into hand signs — instead of ASL.

There are specialized programs in a few schools in Regina and Saskatoon. Although, according to the human rights report, many parents have criticized these instructors for lacking qualifications. That is because many tend to be educational assistants rather than teachers of the deaf. Weber went so far as to call Saskatchewan "one of the worst places to live for deaf people" when it comes to ASL education.

Nafisa said learning ASL in school changed her life. She wishes her parents had received advice sooner that it was a viable option.

"You would never question a hearing person who uses glasses," she said. "For me, as a deaf person, sign language is my glasses."

Rae-Mairi Richardson, a sign support professional with Saskatchewan Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, moved to the province from British Columbia over the summer, after noticing gaps in access to Saskatchewan's American Sign Language education.



Grodecki encourages parents with deaf or hard of hearing children to offer them choice.

"Your kid is going to tell you what they want," she said. "Giving them every option and every opportunity, until they're old enough to make that decision, will make you feel so much better."

Deaf education vote is the latest parents' rights battleground in LA

https://denvergazette.com/ap/health/deaf-education-vote-is-the-latest-parents-rights-battleground-in-la/article_903b0ed9-8465-517a-b9a8-747450d3bab6.html

Update: This resolution was passed on Tuesday May 10, 2022

The Los Angeles Unified School District is poised to vote on a controversial proposal that could reshape education for thousands of deaf and hard-of-hearing students, a key battle in a long national fight over how such children learn language.

Oscar winner Marlee Matlin and the American Civil Liberties Union are among those urging the Board of Education to pass Resolution 029-21/22 at its meeting Tuesday, inaugurating a new Department of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Education.



The move would elevate American Sign Language alongside Korean, Mandarin, French, Arabic, Armenian, Japanese and Spanish in the district's dual language and bilingual program. Students would be eligible to receive the state seal of biliteracy on their diplomas, and ASL would be offered as a language course in some high schools.

The resolution also would introduce ASL-English bilingual instruction for many of the district's youngest deaf learners — a move supporters say is critical to language equity and opponents say robs parents of choice and runs afoul of federal education law.

“For 400 years at least there's been a big battle between people who think children with hearing loss should speak, and people who think they should use sign language — it's a very old argument,” said Alison M. Grimes, director of audiology and newborn hearing at UCLA Health. “This is the leading edge of a nationwide push to have all early intervention programs be more cognizant of and more balanced or more open to having kids use ASL. It's very controversial.”

Currently, the majority of the district's roughly 2,100 deaf and hard-of-hearing students learn in oral classrooms, either in general education or in hearing special day classes. They begin early intervention programs in infancy and transition to district preschools at age 3, before most are ever exposed to ASL.

Typically, only those who cannot access spoken language at all or who “fail out” of mainstream classrooms are offered ASL, often in the form of “total communication,” which supporters of the resolution say lacks the rigor of a bilingual model. The '80s-era educational philosophy combines instruction in ASL and spoken English with lip reading, gestures, finger spelling and “signed English”, a method both sides of the current debate agree doesn't work.

“This is not a new fight for us — this is something that we have been fighting for, and finally we have the attention of the LAUSD board,” said Janette Durán-Aguirre, a school counselor for the district, who is Deaf and supports the proposal. “Especially for marginalized families, BIPOC families, families who don’t use English at home — these kids have been deprived on top of deprivation, on top of marginalization. We’re doing this for these students.”

Many deaf educators, activists, district parents and students agree, pointing to years of research showing that, although early intervention programs begin in infancy, most deaf and hard-of-hearing children still enter school with significant language delays.

The studies show that those in the LAUSD are roughly half as likely to test as proficient in English/language arts as their nondisabled peers. But hundreds of others, including many parents and listening and spoken-language specialists, say American Sign Language is being forced on them by a radical fringe.

“My daughter can hear amazingly well [with assistive technology], we do NOT need sign language,” Van Nuys mom Hailey Cohen wrote on a Change.org petition opposing the rule. “This is a horrendous violation of our freedom and rights as parents.”

The debate over whether and how to introduce ASL in the country’s second-largest school district is the latest salvo in a fierce and enduring conflict that has only deepened in recent years, as newborn screenings have become universal and cochlear implants are approved for children as young as 9 months.

In L.A., this longtime conflict is being argued in decidedly 2020s terms, with supporters adopting the language of equity and inclusion, and opponents trumpeting parents’ rights and decrying government overreach.



“Parents are their children’s first teacher, not the school district,” said Donna L. Sorkin of the Cochlear Implant Alliance, who is deaf and opposes the change. “They’re going to require every child to learn ASL, and if that’s not the family’s desire, that’s a violation of federal law.”

The federal law in question is IDEA — the Individuals With Disabilities in Education Act — which gives parents of disabled children significant input into what educational services and accommodations their children receive. It also requires that students be placed in the “least restrictive environment,” a provision that emerged from a long and shameful history of segregating deaf and blind students in underfunded and substandard schools, warehousing those with physical disabilities in basements and denying admission to intellectually disabled children, among other forms of exclusion and abuse.

Supporters say their resolution and the law aren't in conflict, that framing the issue with parents on one side and activists on the other ignores how most parents of deaf children understand the options they're being given when they're asked to choose between spoken English and ASL.

Indeed, the vast majority of parents of deaf children have never met a deaf person before their infant is handed to them in the delivery room, nor are they likely to meet one among the audiologists, otorhinolaryngologists and other pediatric specialists their child will see in their early years. Studies show such children enter school with far lower language proficiency than those raised by deaf parents, whether or not the children use spoken English or sign language in the classroom.



“Parent choice ... is being used as a weapon,” said Mallorie Evans, an educational audiologist who supports the proposal. “You can’t make a choice when you don’t have information. “In the beginning, you should be providing families with everything,” she said. “That’s not the same as saying ‘every single child who comes to LAUSD must learn ASL.’ What it’s saying is that ASL and English, whether spoken or visual, should be offered systematically to all families” of deaf and hard-of-hearing children.

Opponents say that logic doesn’t square with the demographics of deafness, since most children served by the district’s existing program have at least some hearing — including many who are hard of hearing in only one ear - and most of the rest now receive cochlear implants in infancy or early toddlerhood.

Rather than amplifying sound, as hearing aids do, cochlear implants send electrical signals directly to the auditory nerve, via an implant in the inner ear combined with an external sensor. With training, the device will allow most users to hear and understand speech. But it can also be exhausting to use, and often requires surgical revision to work optimally.

Experts point out that not every family has the same access to high-quality, well-fitted hearing aids, or to the surgical revisions and training necessary to use a cochlear implant successfully. Nor can families predict ahead of time how well an implant will ultimately work, or what degree of hearing the child will retain over time.

“You need a lot of services, and Medicaid doesn’t fully cover that,” said Tawny Holmes Hlibok, the language planning and policy counsel at Gallaudet University in Washington D.C., who is Deaf. Children under 5 “who got technical devices might still have struggled with acquisition of language. Only a very small percentage, those [whose parents] are white and well-educated, got the services they need.”

That leaves many of the most marginalized students without meaningful language access, supporters of the resolution say. “ASL was not even offered to my parents,” LAUSD’s Durán-Aguirre said. “I work with so many families, and many of them are clueless, they’re lost, they have no idea where to begin. What are the options? Which one is best? How do I pick something? Until their kids fail out of other programs and as a last resort they get placed in an [ASL program].”



The alternative she and others envision is closer to the bilingual and dual-language immersion programs that have proliferated across the district in the last decade, including a new Japanese program in 2021 and Filipino one in the 2022-23 school year.

Opponents say bilingual instruction is a burden for parents and a stumbling block for deaf children, who already lack the passive exposure to language that hearing babies get every day. But supporters say language deprivation is a more urgent crisis, one existing interventions have failed to solve.

“In our representation of many deaf adults who’ve been drawn into the criminal legal system around the country, we’ve seen the adverse effects of childhood language deprivation,” said attorney West Resendes of the ACLU’s national disability rights program, who is deaf. “The idea that you could acquire a signed language and that would impede your ability to acquire a spoken language is just not supported by the research.”

Instead, children like Ellie Shmilovich are forced into options that don’t fit them. “Sometimes I would really struggle,” being the only Deaf student in a classroom, said the sixth-grader, who recently gave an enthusiastic presentation on the silent-film star Charlie Chaplin to her hearing classmates at Nobel Middle School in Northridge. “I don’t know if the other kids learned anything or not — my friend told me they weren’t really listening, because at times the interpreter was trying to get caught up.”

Like most deaf children in the district, she was fitted with a cochlear implant as an infant and placed into a speaking-and-listening early intervention program. Her parents, who had grown up bilingual in Hebrew and Spanish, respectively, and who each spoke their own native language with their older daughter Estie, were given strict instructions to create a monolingual environment for their second child.

“We were directed to [speak only English],” Ellie’s father, Alon Shmilovich said. “We eliminated all the other languages from our house, and all we focused on was spoken English, trying to get her to speak a language she would never hear.”

Although they began learning ASL as a family when Ellie was 2, Heidy Alvarenga said her daughter was forced to “fail out” of a mainstream kindergarten before being placed in an ASL program, only to leave because the other children were just learning to sign, while she was already fluent.

Ultimately, Ellie ended up with an interpreter in a mainstream classroom, where she is doing well. But her parents grieve the opportunities she might have had in a bilingual program.

“I had all this misinformation that I built my parenting around,” Alvarenga said, fighting back tears. “I deprived my children of our culture, our languages, all because I wasn’t provided choices.”



What is FNDC all about?

Family Network for Deaf Children (FNDC) is a parent run, non-profit, charitable organization supporting families with deaf and hard of hearing children that use sign language or are interested in learning sign language.

Even though technology and methodology have changed over the years, we seek the wisdom of parents, professionals and Deaf/HH adults so that common themes of “access, equity and a sense of belonging” continue to be highlighted in areas such as: social/recreation, leadership, education, employment, general services and community involvement.



What is Deaf Youth Today?

Deaf Youth Today (DYT), is FNDC's summer social/recreational program and is committed to providing recreational experience and leadership opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing youth in British Columbia that use sign language for all or part of their communication or who are interested in learning sign language.



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Membership (Paid)

Membership is open to those who support the goals of our Organization.

- * Our membership is open to individuals, schools, and organizations. Parents/guardians of deaf and hard of hearing children are eligible to vote.

Join Our E-Mail List (for free)

Join our email list (for free) and receive:

- * Our newsletter (which is published four times a year)
- * Email Updates regarding upcoming workshops and courses, children & youth programs as well as community updates

Contact Us

Contact us below and be added to our email list or to request a membership form:

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