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Embedding Parent to Parent Support and Deaf Role Models and Mentors in the Early Intervention Process

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(Lost audio.)

>> Deaf or hard of hearing at the educational center for the deaf and hard of hearing.

>> BECKY: I'm Beck and I am a parent guide as well.

>>MEGAN GARRITY: I am Megan Garrity, for the guide by your side program.

>>MELINDA MEYERS: I am Melissa Wilson and I am the deaf mentor coordinator. I also do part C early intervention work as well. I can stand what I sign, will that work? Do you need me to repeat myself in we're good?

>> Are we good? All right. Well, we're a few minutes late but that's okay. We're from the state of Maine and as you can see Maine is a beautiful state. We have mountains, and islands, and country roads and tiny small cities but one of our biggest challenges is the rural aspect of our state. So what we have done is try to find ways to imbed deaf and hard of hearing and parents and that's what we're going to talk about. The best advice I can give you is to collaborate with people in your system, learn about as many programs as you can that involve deaf and hard of hearing adults and parents together. We have worked as a collaborative system with the deaf and hard of hearing to bring these programs to Maine. The key participants in this process involve Maine EDHI and the Hershal grant funds parent‑to‑parent support programs and the Maine department of EDHI. The Maine educational center for the deaf and hard of hearing, Hands & Voices and other programs. We are the only state that has a HRSA grant instead of the state EHDI program, and that's opened up a lot of doors and we have funneled a lot of money in that direction. I'm going to let.

Becky can talk about this part.

>>REBECCA BRADY: I can personally vouch for the experience that I have had with our child on the journey.

>> We have added a program, the deaf and hard of hearing program and it offers a diverse group of deaf and hard of hearing individuals so we share a lot of perspectives and we are focused with unbiased support. We are offering our life experiences with families who have their own deaf and hard of hearing children.

>> So in Maine everything funnels to early intervention. As you can see on this slide we have Maine Hands & Voices, guide by your side program, audiologists, physicians.

>> ED: Consultant who is a parent and a.

>> ED: Coordinator who is a parent. All of those people are referring to early intervention. One thing we focus a lot on is parent engagement and making sure parents are in key parts of our state. Parents have walked the walk with their children, they can add support to other families so we have 'em bedded that into our process with the knowledge that when a baby gets to early intervention they're going to open up more doors to early involvement, and the first is the Hands & Voices and the Deaf Mentor program. We will get to that in a minute. We have ‑‑ we have given three referrals for those programs. Sometimes families say I'm not ready, sometimes they fall through the cracks. We're trying to seal that gap and make sure no children fall through the cracks and no children and family miss opportunities to meet deaf and hard of hearing adults. Education consultant calls every new family that's been diagnosed deaf and hard of hearing and encourages them to go on to early intervention.

>> AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Away from mic.)

>> Two different spots that happens in. When the baby refers at the hospital the parent calls the parents. That's one phone call. When the parent ‑‑ when the child is diagnosed with deaf and hard of hearing, the parents get another phone call so let's move on into early intervention and gives them the support to do that. It also opens up the door for a parent guide to go in and also a deaf and hard of hearing guide to go in. They can provide support even before they meet anybody else. So there is support embedded throughout the system. That's one window, the next one is early intervention. So early interventionists are providing that window of opportunity for early involvement within the first visits of early intervention this are bringing parents and deaf and hard of hearing adults with them. The third window is transitions. Perhaps a child has progress hearing loss, gets new technology, is going to kindergarten, what have you. Anytime of transition is another time that our system is offering these supports to families. So early intervention in Maine is one door in, and everything opens up, all of our services are embedded in one place. Audiologists refer to part C, physicians refer to part C.

>> ED: Refers to part C. Once that happens we have an early intervention specialist with a background in deafness, from the Maine educational center for the deaf and hard of hearing, that goes in and meets the family and say with them from the beginning parts of their process. We have a six‑visit process that involves communication opportunities, attachment and bonding focus, understanding the child's hearing levels and adding these two parts. In those six visits parents go and deaf and hard of hearing adults go.

>> So the Maine Hands & Voices guide by your side both the programs are giving bringing support to families. Maine's early intervention program joins early interventionists as well as Hands & Voices guide by your side program with parent guides.

>> So with the family visit with early intervention we have a six‑visit process. This is a formal process of initial support for families and it focuses on several things. It focuses on attachment and bonding, sharing information, and exploring communication options, meeting parents and also meeting deaf and hard of hearing adults. We have several goals in that joint visit that we're trying to achieve. We want to create a safe place in which parents can ask questions, questions they might find silly. We want it to be a safe opportunity for them to ask. We provide unbiased support, and we share our experiences through conversation and through having those commonalities and being able to relate.

>> So here we ‑‑ so we're we approach the two different roles, deaf guide and Deaf Mentor. Specifically a guide by your side training which is a Hands & Voices affiliation, and with Deaf guides we are offering a diverse background of communication modes, experiences, and it's also receiving funding from the state grant which Karen has mentioned. And now we will share about the Deaf Mentor.

>> So in Maine we have the Deaf Mentor program that was started ‑‑ it was probably maybe fifteen years ago and really it was just me at that time and about three years ago we did some more training, some immersive training with the Sky High program so having that training meant that we had 18 deaf adults that were interested in the program. At this time we have eight that are currently involved in the program and offering services. Deaf Mentors have to go through the Sky High program and it includes language development and helping them acquire language, which our focus is ASL, and also early childhood learning is part of it so it all ties in together and that's for us to be able to offer those EI services. If they choose to communicate in their communication mode, ASL and they want to do visual language, that's when they contact us and the Deaf Mentors work with them for EI services and that's part of part C. With part C involvement that means we can have a formal ISFP. We sit down with the families and have a discussion and find out from the parents what they're looking for, what kind of communication they would like to develop for their child to get them the information that is needed and part B, which is ‑‑ part C is focusing on the communication access.

>> I just wanted to add that families have two key IFSP meetings and the initial one is what integrates that six‑visit process. After the six‑visit process is done families write a communication plan and from there Deaf Mentors are added so we have two IFSPs, where most states have one and they don't comeback for six months we added another one. Some families need more than six visits that's fine. We average it at six and if they need more to continuing exploring we add more but at the end of the six visits the next IFSP is written which hones in on the deaf services programs they may want.

>> In the state of Maine with the Deaf Mentor program they all us ASL trainers, you will see that term as well, it's a different perspective but the way the Department of Health looks at it and what the role is for what we are doing but we are Deaf Mentors but we are certified as Deaf Mentors so that requires the bachelor's degree so there are requirements to be able to be part of this mentorship program. And part C, that's where the fund being comes in, maybe you can talk about that.

>>KAREN HOPKINS: The deaf guide program comes from HRSA and the Deaf Mentor comes from the IFSP. This is a joint visit, bringing somebody in to meet the family. Deaf Mentor is a formal IFSP service and we continued to another formal process so we write it as family training, the formal word for IFSP and if we're writing it on an IEP it's parent training and counselling, if you're looking at how you get funding for that, that's how.

>> I think I covered my slide. There is more that I wanted to add. I'm sorry? Did I jump? I think you're next. Okay. So I will go on with my own part, sorry, I feel like we're working between many people here with the Deaf Mentor program there is also ‑‑ between the age of 3‑5 when children are at that age parents are wanting to continue learning sign language at that age so we offer to families a person that comes in that has ASL, they might not have an ISP or IEP or have their primary language as ASL but we come in and with the ASL family program we have weekly visits and that's where we are providing classes, the classes are sometimes all day, parents are involved. So nannies and caregivers can also be involved in learning ASL, some of the SLPs, the speech language pathologists want to be involved to work with these kids so that's who we pull in when we are talking about families learning sign language. The technology part ‑‑ let Megan back, I'm confusing myself. I always get confused with Deaf guide and Deaf Mentor program. The ASL provider as the Deaf Mentor and also as the ASL certified ‑‑ they have to be certified in ASL so we offer those ASL classes through that part.

Of course, we do have families that live in rural areas, like in Tanberg, so we're able to ‑‑ we can look at our map in our state and we realize where people are at, and then at that point, you know, we have a PowerPoint that shows the entire state and where families are located. How we can connect with all of those families. It's very similar to the Zoom system if you've seen that. It's a similar system that we use. We're able to tie in with families in different places and we're able to see each other and sometimes this can be done in high schools and so that's the Tanberg that I'm talking about the technology we are able to use, where we're able to reach people in other places, and this is through video conferencing, so even if they're in a rural part of the state they're able to connect to us and we're able to work with them on learning that visual language. So whether it's in a classroom where we're together or we're using technology to be able to have access to these families that's the important part and like I said it's similar to the zoom technology that we use.

With the mentorship program we call it the PIT and I've worked with many, we tall it the deaf classes and we invite parents to come in and do communication exploring, looking at their options. We have a play room, it's fun. We do it weekly from 9:30 to 11:30 we have the parents come in and 11:30 to 12 they're able to understand the teaching that we have and we can reinforce that with American Sign Language so it's about a half hour we are able to spend with the parents after the play room. All of our families have greatly enjoyed that and I think it's 8 weeks that we have that per year. With the deaf guide they're welcome to join us, whenever we have families come in as guests, we will have them as guest speakers that come in on a monthly basis and we have parents that will come in and they will say my concern is about this type of communication early intervention so I have questions about that or strategies for developing social skills for my child or language development, how I can start from the ground level and workup with language so we bring in someone from OT, a speech and language pathologist or a guide by your side they can get their questions answered and typically that's all part of the ISP program as well.

>> We have worked hard in Maine to ensure that when there are hearing professionals there are deaf adults there and the program is led by Mindy and a teacher of the deaf in speech language pathologist so that's critical.

There was a question on the Deaf Mentor program that was talked about in the last presentation. The question was can a family that's working on spoken language or spoken language in some avenue work with a Deaf Mentor. What we do in Maine with that is if a family is working with a Deaf Mentor and they're working on spoken language goals they do joint visits and they are supporting each other. That's a requirement in our state. They have to go once a month together. So that's working really well and it takes team planning and collaboration. It takes schedule, which is sometimes a nightmare but it's working well for those families that want to work on two goals together. Before they never saw the two providers until they got to the ISP and sometimes that caused conflict. Now they're together monthly and meeting before the IEP or IFSP and that's a key way we have utilized in our state to make sure there is communication happening in that way.

>> So through Maine Hands & Voices through our events, events which are ice skating, meeting at the park, Camp Discover where it's a fun camp where families can come together, meet other families with deaf and hard of hearing kids as well as meeting deaf and hard of hearing adults. Our goal is for each event that we host through Maine Hands & Voices is that we have three deaf and hard of hearing guides. So while we have talked about that joint visit sometimes that can be intimidating for families to meet a deaf individual, because their baby may have been the first they've ever met. So we can expose parents and families and siblings to deaf adults in a friendly and casual way. This is a unique opportunity again with deaf guides who have a variety of background. Really the goal is for parents and families to see how do deaf individuals interact, how do we socialize and interact with each other? It speaks for itself, which is really unique.

>> It's been fun watching that unfold because it started with Mindy showing up at a Hands & Voices event one day and I said wow that was magic and I was there, too, so two deaf adults and we were interacting with kids and our own kids, and I said we need to do this more than so we made it a requirement of at least three deaf adults being there at those events and that's been nice.

One of the things we have embedded into the process is reflection. Sometimes we move families really fast and we don't take the time to see if what we are doing is working, whether the provider is going in, the outcomes that the family has, sometimes the family makes a choice by checking a box and they don't look back. We talk about how it's going all the time and encourage exploration, reflection and the ability to change, if they want to change providers, modalities, that happens all the time in Maine. We are wrapping up, but I want to end with a quote from a parent and of course it's going to be read by a parent as it should be. Just this resonates with me and I encourage you all to think about these words.

>> Final thought from a parent is what we really want, really need as parents is opportunities to contact other families with deaf children, help in making regular contact with adults who are deaf or hard of hearing, information that is accurate, honest, unbiased and fair and then the emotional support to make those decisions.

>> Thank you all.

>> Thank you.

(End of presentation.)

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