

Adventures of a Deaf* Playgroup

**Thea Cabral
& Claire Lombardo-Miller**

**EHDI
Denver, CO
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Deaf* is inclusive to all d/Deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, unilateral, and late deafened individuals, regardless of language modality





Hello!



Thea Cabral

PIP graduate (1984-85), former PIP parent (twice!), PIP Educator (2016-19, 2021-22), current PIP Coordinator





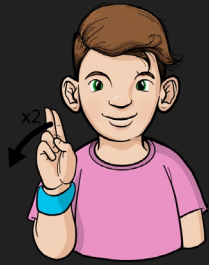
Hello!



Claire Lombardo-Miller

Speech Language Pathologist (2004-), Teacher (2002-), ASL-
English Interpreter (2016-)





Parent-Infant Program (PIP)


THE LEARNING CENTER
FOR THE DEAF

BADAVAS PARENT INFANT PROGRAM

- Est. in 1979 at The Learning Center for the Deaf: Framingham, MA
- First deaf* speciality program in the US with a Deaf coordinator:
 - 1988 to 2016: Nancy Vincent-Meotti
- Thea is the 3rd Deaf coordinator: 2022 to present



Mission Statement

The mission of The Learning Center for the Deaf is to ensure that all deaf and hard of hearing children and adults thrive by having the knowledge, opportunity, and power to design the future of their choice.



“ASL first” philosophy



- Access to fluent ASL and Deaf culture is a deaf human right
- Access from fluent Deaf models as much as possible, including Deaf leaders
- Some children’s L1 may become a spoken language, but ASL can remain a valuable part of their identity and linguistic self
- All families receive well rounded, research-based information from both hearing and Deaf professionals



Our Team



Coordinator (D)*



Family Liaison (H)*



Social Worker(D)



SLP (H)



Assistant (D)*



Teacher of the Deaf (H)



Early Childhood Center Principal (D)

* = former PIP participants

Present Day Demographics

- 19 families
 - 1 family with Deaf parents
 - 1 family with Deaf and hearing parents
 - 17 families with hearing parents

 - 8 children without hearing devices
 - 8 children with hearing aids
 - 3 children with cochlear implants
 - 3 Deaf+

- Historically, we have had Deaf + :
 - Autism Spectrum Disorders, DeafBlind, physical disabilities, global delays, medically complex, etc.



Connecting to Us

How do families find us?

- State-sponsored resource packet given to family after ABR test flags for hearing differences or at follow up/confirmation appointment
-OR-
If family has known Deaf members, info given at hospital after ABR results
- DPH calls families personally to connect them to local EI and encourage enrollment in Specialty Service Program
**English and Spanish available*



Connecting to Us

How do families find us?

- Early Intervention connects families to SSP via
 - EICS (in MA)
 - Email
 - Phone call
- Caregiver visits the program
- EI agency adds PIP services to the IFSP



*Children can be a part of more than one program (ex: PIP and a more oral-based program). We support this!



Our Funding Sources

- Staff salaried through TLC, not DPH or EI
- EI reimbursement procedure (EI funding from DPH):
 - We bill each EI agency monthly
 - Reimbursement rates are set each year by contract
 - Spoiler alert! They are small :)
 - We operate at a loss but continue to run under the larger umbrella of the school



Our Services



- **Playgroup:** 90 min. 3x/week (families come 1 or 2x/week)
- **Home visits OR center visits with Coordinator:** 1-2x/month for 60 min.
- **Family discussion group:** 2x/month for 60 min.
- **SLP center visits:** 2x/month for 30 min.
 - *Supplements home based services through EI*

Play Group: Our Core Service

- Everything we do supports and monitors each child's language, cognitive, gross/fine motor, and social development
- Opportunities for staff to touch base with families to provide support, answer questions, etc.



Play Group

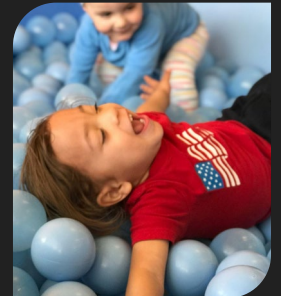


PLAY! imaginative play areas, themes, cause/effect play, sensory exploration, infant area



Field Trips

- Farms
- Apple orchards
- Public playgrounds
- Public splash pads
- Libraries
- Local children's museum
- Indoor play spaces



ECC Collaboration (age 3-6)





Interpreter Services

- **Playgroups:**
 - First 15 minutes + last 30 minutes without interpreter to encourage immersion
 - Interpreters “step back”
- **Home Visits:** Interpreter provided if needed for the first few home visits then families are encouraged communicate in ASL with Deaf coordinator
- **New Family Visits and Family Discussion Group:** Interpreters always provided
- **Foreign spoken language interpreters** as needed



*Interpreters are paid for by the PIP program (except for EI agency-led meetings/sessions and preschool transition meetings)

Circle Time!

Families engage in 2-3 activities using a bilingual approach (ASL and spoken English)



Movement Time

- *gross motor
- *joint attention,
- *recognizing name signs
- *feeling of community



Circle Time!

*ASL practice:
HS games,
themes

*Poetry/rhymes
as part of Deaf
culture



Circle Time - ASL Song/Poem



From Circle Time to Table Time

- Snack time
- Who's Here?
- Today's Weather



Who's Here?

- *joint attention
- *turn taking
- *Deaf rhythm
- *name signs
- *fingerspelling
- *printed names
- *feeling of community



ASL Story Time

- Actual books or books projected onto the wall
- In-house videos or videos from Deaf-made sources (RMDS , Hands Land)
- Deaf adults model book-reading strategies and ASL storytelling
- Online archive of staff-made stories and rhymes for families to access indefinitely



ASL Story Time



ASL Story Time

- Deaf special guest readers



- Caregivers as guest readers



Caregiver ASL Time

- Time with Deaf staff where caregivers can focus on ASL and Deaf culture relevant to the book that was just read and any other general questions, current events, etc.



- Toddler-free time for adults to bond with each other while they learn

Art/Sensory Exploration



Sensory experiences encourage the development of language and fine and gross motor skills, while allowing children to experience their world in multiple ways.

- *Messy play!
- *Adults hands-off
- *Sensory integration
- *Vocabulary and classifiers
- *Table, sensory table or bins, wall, floor



Art/Sensory Exploration







Cooking/Science



Language- and sensory-rich activities with strong connection to daily life:

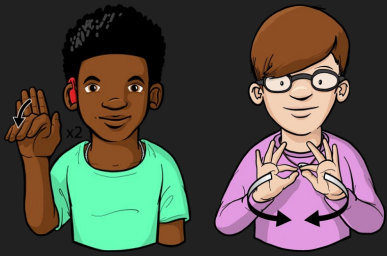
- *Uses all senses
- *Fine motor skills
- *Sensory integration!
- *Vocabulary
- *Procedures/following directions
- *Turn taking

(2-3x/month)









Bye-Bye Families song

*transition marker

*social language
(saying goodbye)

*feeling of
community



Transition/Attention Getting/Herding deaf* Cats

Methods to aid transition – the Deaf way:

- lights flashing
- ASL clean up song
- consistent schedule
- posted picture schedule
- names/pictures on chairs





Home Visits

(With Deaf staff) Provides individualized family support:

- share community resources
- provide information about child development
- give information on Deaf culture
- constant focus ASL language development, especially for home routines
- language plan development and review
- opportunity for questions and concerns
- guidance on preschool accommodations/placement



1-1 SLP Center Visits

- Optional but available to all families regardless of language goals and hearing levels
- Conducted in ASL or spoken English
- Bimodal development, when applicable
- Play skills development
- Caregiver education, including pre-CI counseling
- Guidance on preschool placement and accommodations for bimodal children
- Available to collaborate with EI



Family Discussion Group



- Led by a Deaf social worker and PIP Coordinator
- 2x/month for 1 hour
- Children stay with PIP staff, so families can participate distraction-free
- Open discussion or invited guests for special topics:

Literacy

Deaf history and culture

EI to preschool transition

Bimodal development

Educational audiology

Deaf student panel



Community Dynamics and Support

ASL-Safe community for all levels of learning

- If we encourage families to use ASL, we need to provide ample opportunities!
- Families are encouraged to make mistakes and learn from everyone
- We acknowledge the challenge of learning ASL as an adult and the privilege needed to learning a new language & culture while parenting, working, etc.

We try to “meet families where they are” on their journeys





Community Dynamics and Support

ASL-Safe community for all levels of learning

- Reducing financial barriers:
 - Evening ASL classes free to parents
 - Free subscriptions to online ASL classes through ASL Shop (grant)
 - EI provides transportation to families
 - educating families about that right is critical



Other Services: Evaluations



- Documents developmental milestones of children from birth to age 5 who are acquiring sign language, regardless of level of hearing
- Training and ASL proficiency exam are required to become an evaluator
- A combination of staff observation and parent report are used to complete the checklist
- Assess every 6 - 8 months, including shortly before 3rd birthday
- A report of the results is shared and discussed with families and EI team (and preschool transition team if applicable)

Other Services: Transition to Preschool



- Attend transition/pre-eval, eligibility, and placement meetings
- Towns may request to observe child in playgroup
- Attend mediation if needed
- If child will transition to our preschool, we provide visits to preschool during playgroup



Other Services: Toddler ASL Immersion Program

- Empower children through hands-on, play-based learning experiences that support the whole child's needs
- Foster cognitive development, social-emotional learning, language acquisition, physical development skills, autonomy, and more



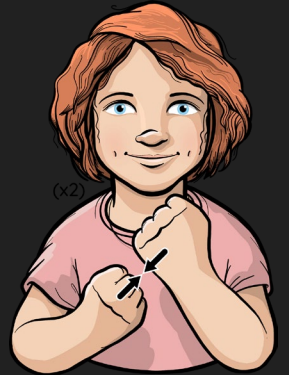
- For children 18 months to 3 years
- Drop off program: 8-3 PM
- 3 days/week
- Parent pay (with tuition support as needed)

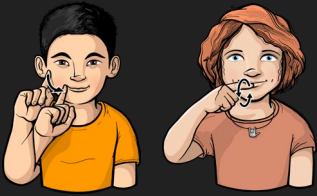


Deaf-Hearing Dynamics

How is communication facilitated and Deaf culture uplifted?

- Deaf leadership and majority Deaf staff
- Inviting Deaf guests for storytime/cooking
- Inviting other programs to visit us and see what we do
- Use of interpreters for full access, regardless of sign abilities
- Hearing staff modeling Deaf inclusion, reverence to Deaf professionals





Deaf-Hearing Dynamics

How do hearing staff maintain a productive and culturally safe role while working in Deaf space?

- Deaf perspectives, ASL expertise, and lived experience are referred to first
- Deaf people are the primary source of information when it comes to their own language and culture
 - Ex: Hearing parent asks an ASL/Deaf culture question to hearing staff, staff re-asks the question to available Deaf staff
 - Ex: Hearing parent talks to hearing staff without interpreter present, hearing staff interprets interaction to maintain access until interpreter is available



Deaf-Hearing Dynamics

How do hearing staff maintain a productive and culturally safe role while working in Deaf space?

- Being allyship minded and trauma informed
- Maintain open processes and communication
 - Asking each other questions
 - Referring to each other to answer questions
 - Checking in w/ each other
 - Ex: “Anything to add? What do you think? I noticed _____”
- We lean on each other and hold each other up

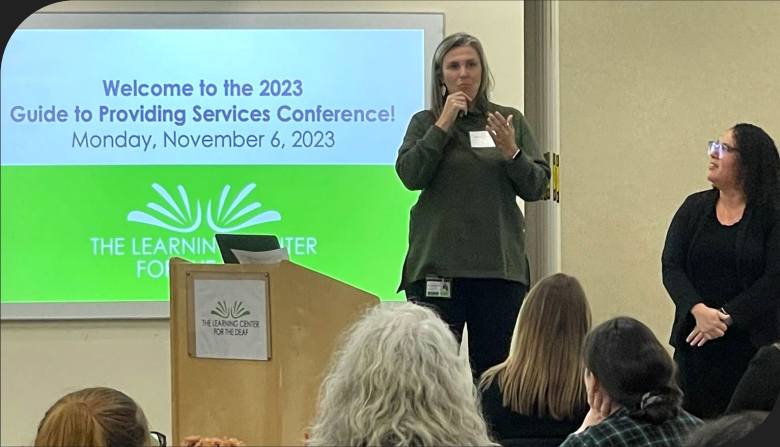
Outside Our Walls: Outreach to EI providers and the larger community



- Email and social media blasts to EI agencies, DPH
- Info booths at state EI conference and other related events
- Visiting EI agencies to present about the importance of SSPs for deaf clients
- Future plans:
 - Host open house for EI agencies to tour our facility and meet staff
 - Host story time in various locations around the state
 - Visit medical settings and present to audiologists and doctors



Guide To Providing Services (GPS) Conference



Save the Date!
November 2025
TLC, Framingham, MA



Connect With Us!

Instagram:
[@pip_tlc](https://www.instagram.com/pip_tlc)





THANK YOU :)



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