



GIVING DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING BABIES A **REAL** START WITH LANGUAGE



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EHDI ANNUAL CONFERENCE
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA
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WHAT IS CLERC CENTER?

National Programs and Outreach (NPO)

Training and technical assistance
throughout the nation for:

- Families with deaf or hard of hearing children (birth to age 21)
- Educators and professionals who work with those children



Kendall
Demonstration
Elementary
School



Model
Secondary
School for
the Deaf

OUR MISSION

To connect deaf and hard of hearing children with their communities through language and meaningful engagement.

We serve:

- Families
- Professionals
- Medical community



Family Engagement

Language-focused programs, mentorship, and access to learning materials to support families at home.



Professional Training

Tools and workshops for early interventionists, educators, and healthcare providers to support language acquisition and early development.



Community Connections

Collaborative efforts with local organizations to build support networks for children and families.

MEET THE CLERC CENTER TEAM

National Programs
and Outreach,
Early Intervention



Dr. Sarah Honigfeld
Director



Stacy Abrams
Project Manager



Lynette Mattiacci
Project Manager

REGIONAL EARLY ACQUISITION OF LANGUAGE (REAL) **VISION**

End Language Deprivation for All Children

- Builds strong language foundation
- Full access through all languages, plus literacy
- Full inclusion in family life and communities
- Prepare for a successful, fulfilling life



90% of a child's **brain development** happens before age 5.



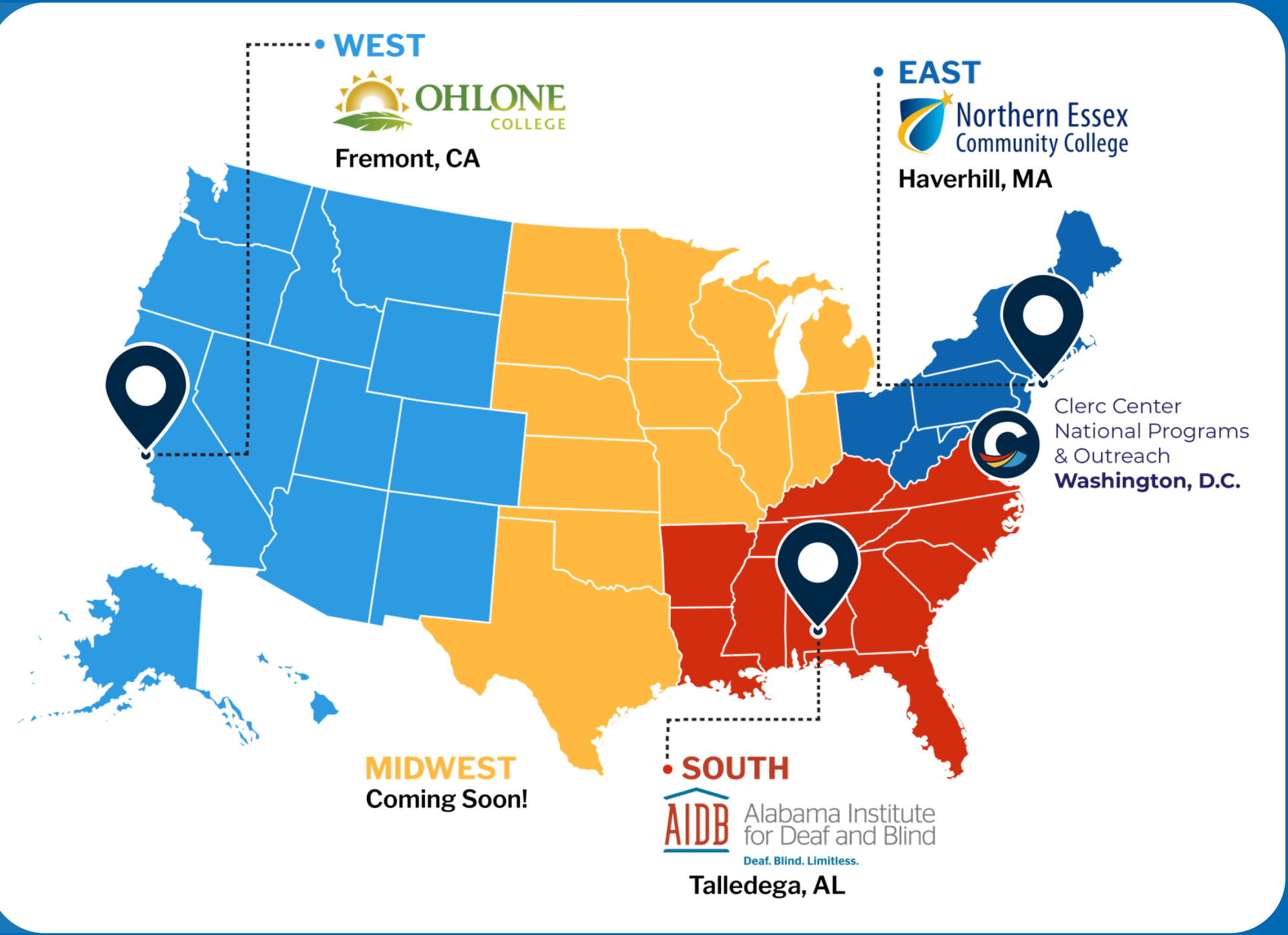
96% of deaf babies are **born** to non-signing hearing parents.



Early access to ASL leads to improved cognitive, linguistic, and socioemotional development in the child that continues through school age.



WHERE WE SERVE



MEET THE REAL SOUTH TEAM



**Victoria
Haggarty**
Director



**Laurel
Maradik**
Connector



**Kristen
Hammontree**
Family Services
Coordinator



**Dakota
DuBose**
Connector



Robin Sweeney
Interpreter
Coordinator

WE SERVE AS CONNECTORS

In partnership with early intervention providers and the medical community, we aim to build a network of tools and resources that help children grow and transition successfully to school and beyond.



Families

We connect families to ASL classes, Bilingual Storybooks & resources and more to support their language journey.



Professionals

We provide EI providers with evidence-based, family-centered materials, including educational videos, research, and trainings.



Medical Community

We provide access to educational and training materials on language access and ensuring access for deaf babies.

TODAY WE WILL:

- **Gain** an overview of research emphasizing the **critical** importance of **early language acquisition** for deaf and hard of hearing infants and toddlers.
- **Identify** strategies and tools to **promote** early language acquisition in deaf and hard-of-hearing infants and toddlers
- **Learn** how to **utilize** and **share** a **resource toolkit** to comprehensively support the deaf/hard of hearing **child's language-learning journey.**



BUT FIRST... **FACTS**

- The critical window of **early language access**: a vital period of neurological development spanning from **birth to age five**.
- To best wire the brain, **early** and FULL access to any **language** is necessary.
- A developed **language** foundation is essential for supporting cognitive, emotional, and social growth.

BABIES ARE BORN *READY!*



*Center on the
Developing
Child, 2011*

WHY LANGUAGE MATTERS

- **Supports Thinking:** Language is key for cognitive skills (thinking, understanding, abstract, memory, and learning)
- **Manages Feelings:** It builds emotional growth (self-control, understanding others, and empathy)
- **Aids Relationships:** It helps with social skills (communicating, making connections, building relationships)



THE **POWER** OF **EARLY** VISUAL LANGUAGE

- **Early** visual language helps prevent language delays
- Visual language does not interfere with spoken language development - it actually **supports** it
- Deaf and hard of hearing children can enjoy the **same bilingual benefits** as hearing bilingual children



THE STRATEGIES

- 1 The Visual Brain
- 2 Serve & Return
- 3 Visual Phonology & Literacy



THE STRATEGIES

1 The Visual Brain

- **Concept:** The brain is “modality-blind”; it craves language data, not just sound.
- **Research:** Petitto et al. (2016) – The left hemisphere processes ASL and speech identically. Early ASL prevents "Language Hunger."
- **REAL Resource:** Zarchy & Geer (2023) - ASL at Home

2 Serve & Return

3 Visual Phonology & Literacy



THE STRATEGIES

1 The Visual Brain

2 Serve & Return

- **Concept:** Mastering "Visual Cadence"—the rhythmic timing required for a child to see both the world and your message
- **Research:** Brooks & Meltzoff (2015) – Proven link between a child following a caregiver's gaze and accelerated vocabulary growth.
- **REAL Resource:** ASL Spring (Storytelling Videos) and Bilingual Stories Bookshelf.
- **The 3- Step Flow:** Direct → Pause → Deliver

3 Visual Phonology & Literacy



THE STRATEGIES

1 The Visual Brain

2 Serve & Return

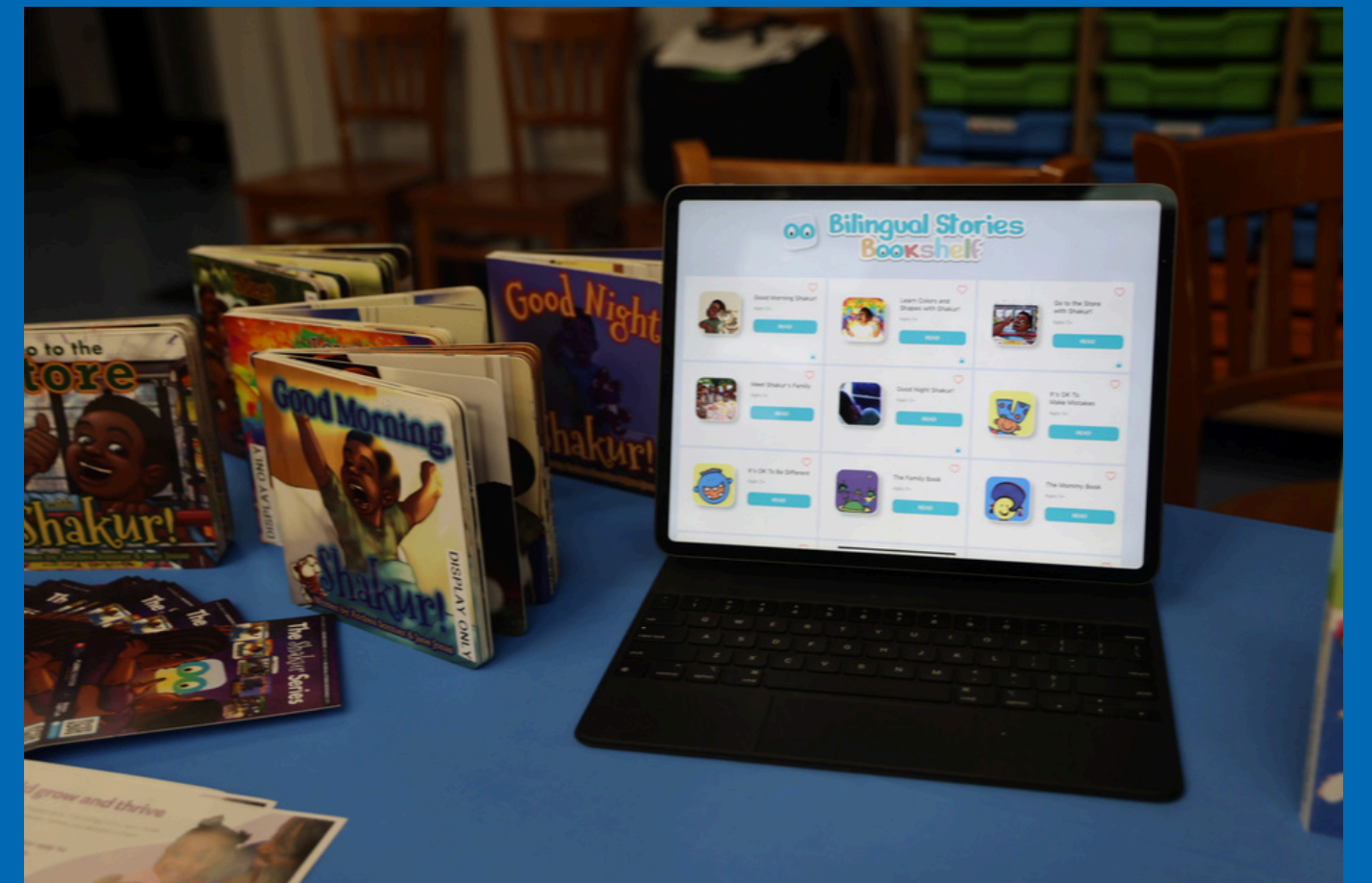
3 Visual Phonology & Literacy

- **Concept:** Establishing “Visual Music” the use of handshape patterns, rhythm, and rhyme as the foundation for reading readiness.
- **Research:** Holcomb (2021) – Demonstrates that rhythmic signing constructs the critical "phonological map" in the brain required for decoding written English
- **REAL Resource:** Board Books from the Family Resource Package.



OUR **REAL** WORK TO SUPPORT LANGUAGE

- 1 Bilingual Bookshelf App
- 2 Family Retreats
- 3 Professional Development
- 4 Family Webinar Series
- 5 Family Resource Packages
- 6 Academic Scholarships
- 7 Professional Networking Events
- 8 and more!



FAMILY RESOURCE PACKAGE

- Initial consultation
- ASL service/membership connection
 - ASL at Home
 - ASL Spring
- Local resources + connections
- Board books
- Age-appropriate learning tools
- Family friendly information
- Fun items for the whole family!



LAURENT CLERC NATIONAL DEAF EDUCATION CENTER

researches, trains, and models best practices in the education of deaf and hard of hearing students from birth to 21. Our work supports families and caregivers, education and healthcare professionals, and state leaders.



REAL RESOURCES FOR LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

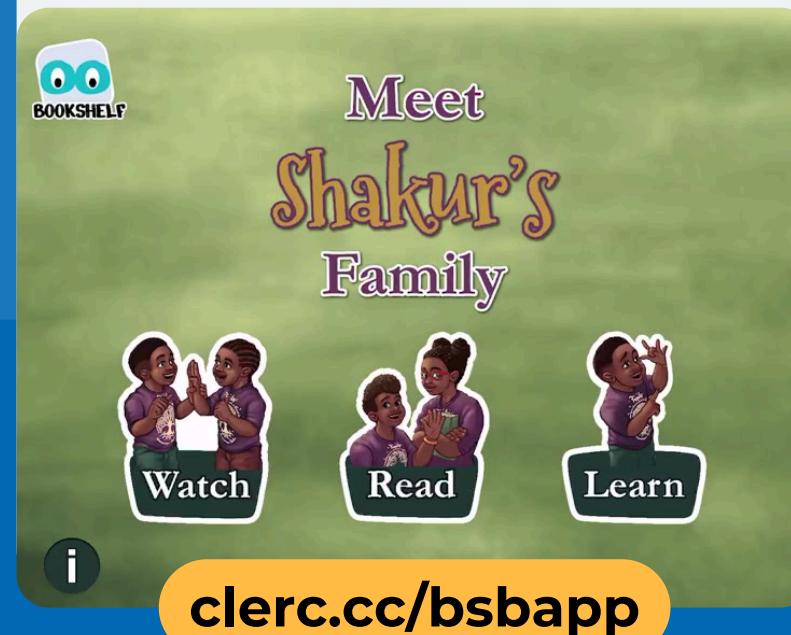
Setting Language in Motion

A free, web-based resource by the Clerc Center and Boston Children's Hospital that supports early language development in deaf and hard of hearing children for educators, professionals, and families.

clerc.cc/slim

Bilingual Stories Bookshelf

A free app with over 45 storybooks in ASL & English for children to watch, read, and learn!



clerc.cc/bsbapp

Top 10 Signs

A free kit provided to medical and early intervention settings that helps parents learn common signs.

bath



clerc.cc/toptensigns

Language Acquisition Toolkit

A training kit breaking down 15 principles for reading to deaf and hard of hearing children.

clerc.cc/langtoolkit

Want more resources?
Deaf Education Connections

clerccenteronline.com

SETTING LANGUAGE IN MOTION

A free, web-based resource developed by the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center and Boston Children's Hospital that promotes early language acquisition to support strong linguistic and conceptual development in deaf and hard of

hearing children. It serves educators, early intervention providers, specialists, parents, and caregivers.



1. Early Identification
2. The Ear and Testing
3. Hearing Aids
4. Launching Communication and Language Through Sign
5. Cochlear Implants
6. Communication and Language in the Home
7. Family Supports

INTRODUCING DEAF EDUCATION CONNECTIONS

A goldmine of best-practice deaf education research, video lessons, and live events.



17,125
MEMBERS

across all 50 states



500+
LEARNING PLANS

started



4+
LIVE EVENTS

Hosted annually



CLERC CENTER TRAININGS



FINGERSPELLING OUR WAY TO READING

Fingerspelling Our Way to Reading is a supplementary literacy program for deaf and hard of hearing K-2 students. The goal of this program is to enhance expressive and receptive skills and word recognition.



15 PRINCIPLES

Based on how deaf adults read to their own children, these principles are designed to support families, caregivers, and teachers in reading to deaf and hard of hearing children.



LIVE EVENTS

- Various topics in Deaf Education, birth to 21
- Attend and interact with other participants
- Complete evaluation and receive certificate, may count towards your PD hours
- Can always go back to the hub to watch it again, and share with others who may have missed it

A vertical registration card with a dark blue background. On the left, there is a faded image of a smiling woman with braided hair, wearing a dark top, with her hands clasped. On the right, there is white text. At the top right of the card, there is an orange button with the text "REGISTER TODAY!". Below that, the text reads "INSIDE DEAF EDUCATION: Planning Opportunities for Expressive Language". Underneath, the date and time are listed: "June 4th, 2025" and "4-5pm EST". At the bottom right of the card, there is a white circular button with a right-pointing arrow.

REGISTER TODAY!

INSIDE DEAF EDUCATION:
Planning Opportunities for Expressive Language

June 4th, 2025
4-5pm EST

REAL CASE STUDIES

MEET MAYA

- Age: 18 Months Old
- Profoundly Deaf
- 1 - Screened, 3-Confirmed, 6 - Enrolled
- Bimodal-Bilingual Home

MEET LEO

- Age: 18 Months Old
- Severe Hearing Loss
- 1 - Screened, 3 - No firm diagnosis, 6 - Missed Enrollment
- “Wait and See” Approach with Late-Fitted Tech

MEET MAYA

- Milestone: 200+ combined signs and words by 18 months.
- Social Development: Age - appropriate social-emotional regulation and peer interaction.

Meaningful access to language from Day One

MEET LEO

- Outcome: High frustration, 5-word vocabulary
- The “Cost”: Cognitive delays

Cognitive delays mimics learning disabilities but actually “no access abilities”

THE REAL ASSESSMENT

- How does the absence of Visual Phonology in Leo's "Wait and See" approach impede his future reading skills?
- Based on Maya's success, how can we provide a consistent linguistic "return" to continue supporting her visual language journey?
- How should the REAL framework bridge the gap between a medical diagnosis and the Clerc Center's resources?



TOGETHER,

we can and will uplift families and empower deaf and hard of hearing children to thrive, embrace their identities, and feel a sense of belonging from birth.

Deaf and hard of hearing children need

ALL OF US.

And we all need each other.



Oscar winner Troy Kotsur, a Deaf adult from a hearing family that learned to sign and supported his dreams.

The needs of deaf children are REAL

✉ real@gallaudet.edu

➔ clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/real



REAL National

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Washington, D.C. 20002



REAL South

205 South Street East
Talladega, AL 35160



Thank You!
Any Questions?

