

Signs of Success in Parent Engagement in EHDI Systems

Interview with Pam Aasen EHDI Mentoring & Family Support Project Director SPAN Parent Advocacy Center of New Jersey

Pam Aasen knows first-hand the impact of connecting parents with other parents when families have children who are deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH). She is the parent of two teens who are DeafBlind and has been hired by SPAN Parent Advocacy Center in New Jersey to collaborate with their state's Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) program: to increase parent engagement, to enrich parent support services and establish New Jersey's first Deaf Mentor Program.

Pam feels the NJ EHDI Learning Community has been one of SPAN's most "promising practices." The group is comprised of parents of children who are D/HH and are eager to share their experiences to create positive change for other families. The group has already created a family friendly letter that will be provided to parents of children who recently have been identified as D/HH. This letter replaces an existing "Next Steps" checklist of recommended follow up appointments, by offering a warm welcome from parents who have 'walked in their shoes.'

After attending the FL3 Family-Based Organization Meeting at the 2019 EHDI Conference and seeing an example of a custom-made notecard, the group will be converting the letter to that format. The parents currently serving on the Learning Community have had educational opportunities, including the National Center for Family Professional Partnerships' "Serving on Groups" training and will become part of the NJ Statewide Parent to Parent network. These and other trained parent leaders will participate in focus groups across the state to assist SPAN and other stakeholders in developing a Deaf Mentor program through funding from the "Leveling the Playing Field" initiative.

Pam said using the FL3 Needs Assessment as a guide about what families want and need from their State EHDI program has been very helpful. She credits their program's success to a combination of factors: the support of SPAN; close collaboration with the NJ EHDI program and technical assistance from Hands & Voices FL3 staff. Just like a new parent needs support from a variety of sources, a parent leader also needs support from diverse groups, all working together to achieve the same goals. Thank you, Pam, for sharing what has been working in NJ!