

## Spotlight on Success

### Connecting Families in Oklahoma

by Renee Powell, Oklahoma Family Network

Oklahoma Family Network and the Oklahoma Newborn Hearing Screening Program have collaborated to identify family leaders throughout the state in rural and urban areas with diverse backgrounds in communication modalities as well as degrees of hearing loss. Family leaders have been able to attend meetings, conferences, as well as focus on working on further outreach to families who have children who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Compensating families for their time, childcare, and transportation has allowed families the chance to participate. Oklahoma Family Network and the Newborn Hearing Screening staff have used conference calls and Facebook messenger to connect with family leaders living in rural areas to plan and carry out business.

The goal of the strategy was to increase family engagement in the Early Hearing Detection Diagnosis and Intervention system in Oklahoma especially with respect to families living in rural areas. This strategy in Oklahoma has been successful given that staff in urban centers of the state were able to collaborate on projects with family leaders who were in more remote locations. All of the family leaders bring various talents and backgrounds to the table to assist families with similar relatable experiences in the path of having children who are Deaf or hard of hearing.

One family leader expressed her appreciation in being able to participate in the Oklahoma Audiology Task Force meeting through the use of EHDI funding. I "loved seeing and hearing things from the professionals' view and am looking forward to the next one. I'm thankful for Oklahoma Family Network who provides these opportunities for me." Another family leader stated that "Oklahoma Family Network and the EHDI program have given me an opportunity to break back into professional life while allowing me to care for my family personally as well as to assist other families with children who are Deaf or hard of hearing while living in a rural setting."

Given the age of technology, social media, and EDHI funding means that living in a rural setting does not prevent families from having a seat at the table. Never underestimate the power of paying family leaders for their time and childcare to allow them to participate. Staying connected digitally breaks down the barriers of distance for families with children who are Deaf or hard of hearing.