

West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

NEWSLETTER



“Advocacy is empathy, compassion, and community at work.”- Janna Cachola

Celebrating the Success of Deaf Awareness Day 2025

Deaf Awareness Day at the Capitol on March 19, 2025, was a tremendous success, thanks to the incredible support and dedication of so many individuals.

A heartfelt thank you to Senator Thorne for presenting the Certificate of Recognition, joined by Superintendent Clayton Burch, Dr. Christine Firkins, and myself. Your presence brought great honor to the occasion.

Laura Collin, your professionalism left a lasting impact—not only on us but also on the performers and their families.

Special thanks to Delegate Channon for sponsoring the citation and to Delegate Pritt for co-sponsoring, along with Gwen Bryant and Commission Chair Paul See, Delegate Kimble, and WVSDH Dean of Students Melanie Hesse. Your support helped elevate this event in a meaningful way.

We are also deeply grateful to Jeffrey Pack, Rebecca Sutton, Diana Ramsey, Vicki Pendell, and Michelle Lusk for your vital roles in making the day run smoothly.

It was a joy to welcome deaf students from five counties who performed in the House chamber, showcasing their incredible talents.

A special shoutout to Meegan Wolfe, Lead Teacher for the Deaf, for your exemplary coordination of the performance.

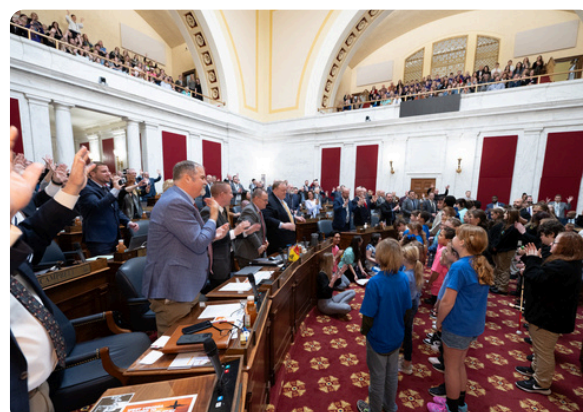
We look forward to continuing this important tradition and collaborating with you all again to make Deaf Awareness Day 2026 even more impactful!

Letter from the WVCDHH

Executive Director

Erik Essington, Ph.D.

erik.j.essington@wv.gov





“What works for your child is what makes the choice right.”™

Hands & Voices is a national, parent-led nonprofit dedicated to supporting families of children who are deaf or hard of hearing (DHH). The organization values all communication approaches and believes that families are best equipped to make informed decisions for their children when they have access to reliable information, resources, and support.

Established in 2010, the West Virginia Chapter of Hands & Voices (WVH&V) offers statewide support to parents and professionals through a wide range of activities and resources. These include outreach events, educational seminars, advocacy support, and meaningful parent-to-parent networking opportunities.

One of WVH&V’s most beloved events is Mom’s Night Inn, an overnight retreat designed for moms and female caregivers raising DHH children of all ages. The retreat provides a welcoming space to connect with others who truly “get it,” creating a sense of community and shared understanding.

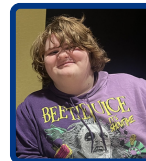
A highlight of the event is the Deaf Adult Panel Discussion—a powerful and emotional experience for many attendees. One of the most common concerns among parents of DHH children is uncertainty about the future. Often, families have little to no prior connection to the DHH community, making the journey feel isolating and overwhelming.



Christina Payne, Director of WVH&V, reflected on her own experience: “When I first learned that my daughter had hearing loss, it raised so many questions for me: Will she have friends? Where will she go to school? Will she enjoy music? Will she have a boyfriend or get married? What kind of career will she pursue? Things I had assumed would naturally unfold for her suddenly seemed uncertain. I remember the moment that fear began to lift—it was when I saw older kids and adults living ‘normal’ lives: going to school, hanging out with friends, working, loving, and having families. Sure, their experiences looked different in some ways, but the end result was the same.”

Christina’s goal in hosting the panel is to offer moms a chance to hear directly from DHH adults who are thriving and living fulfilling lives on their own terms. The Deaf community is incredibly rich and diverse, and there is no single “right” path to success—just the one that fits each individual best.

This year’s Deaf Adult Panel, left to right: Dr. Erik Essington, Executive Director of the West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Jenna Cunningham, Dental Hygienist Assistant, Krystal Dolch, Teacher of the Deaf, Franki Harrah, Educational Interpreter.



To learn more about West Virginia Hands & Voices Scan the QR code



OR

Go to: www.wvhandsandvoices.orgd





NEAPOLITAN PIZZA & SIGN LANGUAGE IS OUR **LOVE** LANGUAGE



Mozzeria is a Deaf-owned and operated mobile pizzeria and catering service based in the Bay Area of California. Specializing in wood-fired Neapolitan pizzas, Mozzeria takes pride in handcrafting every pie from scratch, using only the freshest ingredients and time-honored techniques to perfect each crust, sauce, and topping. The menu features a variety of options, including vegan, vegetarian, and gluten-free selections, ensuring something for everyone.



Founded in 2011, Mozzeria has grown into more than just a destination for exceptional pizza—it has become a vibrant cultural hub where Deaf culture is celebrated and meaningful connections are made through shared meals. Every aspect of Mozzeria reflects a deep commitment to authenticity, not only in its culinary offerings but also in the inclusive and welcoming atmosphere it creates for all guests.



At the heart of Mozzeria's mission is the belief that food can bring people together and foster a strong sense of community. The company is deeply dedicated to empowering the Deaf community by creating career opportunities, showcasing the talents of Deaf individuals, and championing inclusion in the food industry.

Mozzeria's identity is rooted in quality, passion, and innovation. Drawing inspiration from traditional Italian flavors while embracing a spirit of creativity and growth, the team brings bold culinary ideas from oven to table—offering more than just a meal, but a memorable experience.

Whether serving guests from their food truck or catering special events, Mozzeria is not just about satisfying appetites—it's about nurturing belonging, celebrating diversity, and creating lasting moments through the artistry of food.



To learn more about Mozzeria
Scan the QR code



OR



Go to: www.mozzeria.com



>>> Things to Do <<<



WEST VIRGINIA DEAF SERVICE CENTER (WVDSC)

Deaf Coffee Chat

ASL activities, games, Deaf culture, and More!
All ages are welcome!

Charleston

Fridays, 5:30-8:30 PM
April 18, 2025, May 9, 2025
912 Young Street, Charleston, WV

Parkersburg

Tuesdays, 4:00-7:00 PM
April 22, 2025, May 13, 2025
2501 Dudley Ave., Parkersburg, WV

For more information on the WVDSC, scan the QR Code



OR

Go to: wvdeafservicecenter.org

ASL Summer Camp

August 4-7, 2025

160 Old Jacksons Mill Rd.
Weston, WV 26452

Come join us for swimming, STEM, literacy, ASL activities, s'mores, and more!
FREE for deaf/hard-of-hearing children ages 8-13.

Scan the QR Code to register



WEST VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF (WVAD)

Spaghetti Dinner

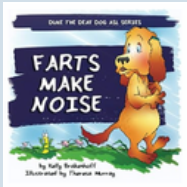
11:00 AM-5:00 PM
Saturday, May 3, 2025
Wood County Society
317 E. 8th Street
Parkersburg, WV 26101

\$15.00 per person
Spaghetti with meat sauce, garlic bread, salad or coleslaw, desserts, and drinks

For the latest information on WVAD events and activities, scan the QR code to visit their Facebook page.



>>> Media <<<



Farts Make Noise

Kelly Brakenhoff (Author), Theresa Murray (Illustrator)

Duke the Deaf Dog learns that some noises are loud and some are quiet. Whether it's a tapping crayon, a beeping fire drill, or a crinkly candy wrapper, both parents and children alike will understand the need to know the difference between noises.



Mighty Mila

Katie Petruzzello (Author), Nadja Sarell (Illustrator)

Readers of all ages will love Mila's spitfire personality and imaginative approach to overcoming obstacles, and will cheer her on as she uses her creativity, her willpower, and even her new cochlear implant hearing devices to face down challenges.





April 27, 2025 from 1:30 - 3:30 pm ET

Unlocking Perspective-Talking Skills Through Language and Literacy for DHH Children

This presentation will describe how language and literacy skills support and interact with perspective-taking abilities for all children, focusing specifically on DHH children. Practical suggestions for language- and literacy-based activities that can support the development of theory of mind will be presented. **Workshop Fee: \$39**

May 7, 2025 from 7:00 - 9:00 pm ET

Educational Audiologists: Partners in Language Acquisition for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children

This presentation will focus on educational audiology as a key area of support for global language development of DHH children. Participants will learn about the roles of educational audiologists as members of multidisciplinary teams, how to partner effectively with educational audiologists, and how educational audiologists can make a positive difference in language acquisition -- including both sign and spoken languages.

Workshop Fee: \$39

These events offer 0.20 ASHA CEUs

Only Participants who attend the live event will receive a certificate of attendance. Participants who attend the entire webinar and fill out the self-assessment form will be considered eligible to earn ASHA CEUs.

For additional information or to register, go to

language1st.org/events

OR

Scan the QR Code



THE LUKE LEE LISTENING, LANGUAGE, AND LEARNING LAB at Marshall University

2025 Summer Preschool Program Ages 3-6

- The L Lab is offering 4 different weeks that will include 3 intensive days of sessions for DHH children who listen and talk.
- The 3-day sessions include the child attending preschool Monday-Wednesday, from 8:30 am - 12 pm, with instruction from a speech language pathologist seeking listening and spoken language certification.
- Monday and Tuesday afternoons, parents and children will get to participate in a listening and spoken language intervention session.
- Each morning, parents/caregivers can stay for a guided observation of the morning preschool session.

- Week #1 June 23-25 Theme: **Beach and Ocean**
- Week #2 June 30-July 2 Theme: **Camping**
- Week #3 July 7-9 Theme: **Bugs and Insects**
- Week #4 July 14-16 Theme: **The Zoo**

For additional information or to register, contact **Jodi Cottrell, Au.D, CCC-A, LSLs Cer. AVEd, by June 1, 2025**
Phone: 304-696-3455
Email: cottrellj@marshall.edu



MARSHALL UNIVERSITY American Sign Language (ASL) Summer 2025

ASL I **June 16 - 20, 2025** • ASL II **June 21 - 24, 2025** • ASL III **June 20 - 24, 2025**

Courses will be offered on the campus of the West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind, located in Romney, West Virginia. Housing is available at no cost to the student.

Combined, all three instructors have more than 50 years of professional experience in the field. These courses are fun and incredibly valuable. You will be amazed at what you can learn in just a few days!

\$250 for three credit hours • Seating is limited • Get on the waiting list today!

Co-Sponsors: MU - DHH Teacher Certification Program | WVSDb | WVDOE-OSP

For additional information contact **Julie Barie**

barie1@marshall.edu
304-546-8499



Virtual

Professional Development Series for Educators and Related Service Providers. Concentration in Deafblindness & High Intensity Support Needs.

Summer 2025: An Introduction to Deafblindness

This first course will provide foundational knowledge of deafblindness and the impact of hearing and vision loss on learning and communication, as well as key evidence-based instructional strategies for supporting those with deaf-blindness.

This course includes content from the following Open Hands, Open Access modules: Overview of DeafBlindness, The Sensory System, the Brain and Learning, Building Trusted Relationships, Touch for Connection and Learning, Maximizing Vision and Hearing, The Role of the Intervener, and Intervener Strategies.

- \$450 registration cost
- Option to add 3 graduate credits through the University of South Dakota (separate registration link) \$120
- Course begins on June 10 (7 weeks)
 - 3 synchronous meetings on June 10, June 24 & July 22 from 10:00-12:00 CST.

For more information
contact
Brandy Sebera
brandy.sebera@usd.edu

Scan the
QR Code to register



>>> Conferences <<<



2025 LANGUAGE FIRST CONFERENCE

Tacoma, Washington

April 22-24, 2025

Language First aims to educate and raise awareness about American Sign Language (ASL)/English bilingualism and the importance of a strong first language foundation for Deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) children.

The Language First Conference is an opportunity for professionals who work in deaf education to gather and learn best practices for working with Deaf and hard of hearing children utilizing an ASL-English bilingual approach.

This conference is offered for 1.1 ASHA CEUs and 1.1 RID CEUs. Only participants who attend the live event will receive a certificate of attendance. Participants who attend the entire webinar and fill out the self assessment form will be considered eligible to earn ASHA CEUs.

For additional information
or to register, go to
<https://language1st.org/events>

OR

Scan the QR Code



WEST VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAF 44TH BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

Canaan Valley Resort, Davis, West Virginia

August 7-10, 2025

TREASURE OF RESOURCES!

Come join us for a weekend full of resources, socialization, and fun!

- Friday and Saturday Night Socials
- Saturday Evening Entertainment
By Keith Wann, ASL Comedian
- Saturday Lunch
- Workshops
- General Assembly
- Exhibits/Resources

For additional information
or to register go to
<https://www.wvad.org>

OR

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