

# ASCENT



## COEHDIs Ascent Program

*Deaf and hard of hearing adults guiding families to envision all possibilities for their young children*

### PHILOSOPHY

The Ascent Program offers an opportunity for families of young deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) children to connect with DHH adults. This is especially meaningful as most infants and toddlers who are DHH are the only DHH person in the family. The Ascent Program gives families an opportunity to interact with DHH adults. The goal of this program is for DHH adults to share their positive perspectives as well as their lived experiences of being deaf and hard of hearing. These experiences might include, but are not limited to:

- Experiences growing up as a DHH person
- Educational experiences
- Work/Career experiences
- Experiences communicating with others
- Perspectives on advocacy
- Support and guidance accessing resources
- Development of a healthy DHH identity

Connecting with a DHH adult can support family members as they look to their child's future and imagine possibilities. Parents and caregivers often have questions that can

be best answered by DHH adults who have lived with the experience of being deaf or hard of hearing. While some parents may naturally focus on what is “missing” or what their child is unable to do, due to the impact of being deaf and hard of hearing, DHH adults can offer a positive perspective and optimism, as they build relationships with families. DHH adults can provide support to parents and caregivers as they bond with their DHH child.

The DHH adults in the Ascent Program are knowledgeable about the continuum of communication and language opportunities that DHH children are able to access and utilize. They receive training and education on current trends and best practices in the field so that they may appropriately respond to any family questions and/or concerns, provide support, and create learning opportunities. While DHH adults may be asked to discuss their own communication and language experiences, a value held by the Ascent Program is to respect the choices and decisions made by each family. The role of the deaf or hard of hearing adult is to provide information and support tailored to each family’s needs.

## VALUES

- **Access:** Families can obtain the information they want and learn from a DHH adult’s experiences. Parents can obtain resources, connections in their community, and information about language and communication.
- **Community:** Families can develop a sense of fellowship with a DHH adult with common interests.
- **Empowerment:** DHH adults can support families as they become more confident in the decisions they make.
- **Inclusivity & Diversity:** The program is fully inclusive of all families and DHH adults participating in the program. Each family’s uniqueness is celebrated.

- **Informed Decision-Making:** Families obtain the information, resources, and experiences they need to make decisions that are best for their family and their child who is deaf or hard of hearing.
- **Relationships:** DHH adults and family members develop a sense of connecting, belonging, and learning from each other as family members navigate their journey.

## MISSION

The Ascent Program connects deaf and hard of hearing adults of diverse backgrounds and experiences with families to build relationships, share resources and develop a support system to empower families of infants and toddlers who are DHH as they make informed decisions to positively envision their child's future.

## VISION

Deaf and hard of hearing adults guiding families to envision all possibilities for their young children.

## OUTCOMES

The Ascent Program will be data-driven; data will be collected from families of DHH children, their early interventionists, and the DHH adults participating in the program on an ongoing basis. Data will be continuously identified, measured, and examined to enhance and refine the newly-established Ascent Program. The information we collect may include:

- Number of families of DHH infants and toddlers served
- Number of visits provided each year
- Frequency of visits
- Number of DHH adults working with the program
- Family and DHH adult demographics
- Outcomes from family surveys:
  - Parents' comfort level advocating for their DHH child
  - Parents' participation in DHH communities
  - Parents' feelings of increased efficacy
  - Parents' feelings of optimism about for their child's future
  - Increased knowledge and understanding of the DHH child's hearing acuity and its impact on their child
  - Parents' increased access to resources and information that they can use

Data is collected and reported annually to the Colorado EHDI Alliance and to relevant funding agencies.

## **Development (Years 1-4):**

- Families of DHH children, birth to three years of age, are given the opportunity to meet with DHH adults with diverse characteristics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, etc). In the future, the program anticipates offering families the opportunity to meet with DHH teens and/or college students.
- Families of DHH children are given the opportunity to meet DHH adults who use the language(s) and communication modalities of the family' choosing.
- Families of DHH children are given the opportunity to meet with DHH adults who use the hearing technologies families want to explore.
- Families of DHH children are given an opportunity to meet with DHH adults in various environments (e.g., in their home, in community locations, at community events, and/or via telehealth).

- Families of DHH children are given an opportunity to learn from DHH adults about a variety of topics the DHH adults have experienced including; their educational experiences, accommodations for effective communication, experiences growing up, work and career, parental and self-advocacy, helpful resources, parenting issues, and/or emotional supports.
- Families of DHH children have the opportunity to access multiple visits with DHH adults.
- Traditionally underserved families of DHH children (e.g., non-English speaking, those living in rural areas, etc.) are offered access to DHH adults who are culturally- and linguistically-diverse and/or sensitive to the cultural and linguistic needs of each family.
- DHH adults are trained on various communication strategies in order to meet the diverse characteristics of each family.

## Sustainability

- The Ascent Program has funding and staffing to serve all eligible families during the current HRSA-funded grant cycle. The sustainability of the program, when grant funding ends in March, 2024, will be explored.
- All families, with DHH children aged birth to 3 years, are invited to participate in the program.
- Participation in the program is free for all eligible families.

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