

WI Families for Hands & Voices

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

## Highlights from the Family Conference

By Laurie Nelson



### HANDS & VOICES

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The Annual Statewide Professional / Family Conferences were held March 8-11, 2012 at the Radisson Paper Valley Hotel in Appleton. The Conference theme this year was “All Under One Umbrella: Super-conference-agilisticexpialidocious.” Janice Fialka and Harold Johnson were our keynote presenters.

There were over 100 families that attended the Family Conference and about 150 professionals who attended the Professional Conference this year! As individuals and families came together from all over the state, we had a very diverse group. All of the communications at the Conference, as well as the Conference workshops, were offered in three languages: English, American Sign Language, and Spanish. Interpreting and captioning made the Conference accessible to everyone.

Networking is one of the key goals at the Conference. There were “getting to know you discussion groups” so professionals / parents / grandparents / extended family members could network with one another. Old friendships were renewed, and new friendships were made. This was also a great way to start the conference – new and old friends could connect throughout the weekend over shared experiences.

Janice Fialka, our opening keynote presenter, is a nationally recognized speaker, author, and social worker with expertise in adolescent health, parent-professional partnerships, inclusion, and post-secondary education for students with intellectual disabilities. Janice speaks and writes from her dual perspectives as a seasoned social worker and as a mother of two adult children, Micah and Emma. Micah is a strong advocate and has been fully included in general education, college, and in his community. He is part of the new wave of young adults with intellectual disabilities who continue their learning on a university campus. Janice’s keynote “The Dance of Partnership: Why Do My Feet Hurt” focused on assisting professionals and parents who have children with disabilities to better understand the challenges faced as they form and maintain partnerships. Using humor and stories, Ms. Fialka explored the unique dimensions that complicate this working relationship from both perspectives: Parent and professional. (For more information, please go to: [www.danceofpartnership.com](http://www.danceofpartnership.com).)

Some of the workshops that were offered were: Hearing Loss 101; CI (Re)Habilitation 101; Building Social Language and Communication Confidence; Deaf/HH Children CAN See the Big Picture; Effective Advocacy Skills & Strategies; On the Road... A Day in the Life of an Itinerant Teacher; Helping Children Deal with Grief; Self-Care Strategies; How to Utilize Special Factors in Your Child’s IEP; The Importance of Communication: Strategies for Success with Your Deaf-blind Child; Incorporating Your Family’s Cultural “Blueprint” Into Your Child’s Life; What Every Parent Needs to Know to Prepare Their D/HH Student for a Successful College Career; Recognizing & Support At-Risk Families: Protective Factors & Resources to Prevent Child Abuse & Neglect; and Personal Journeys: A Share Shop of Learning. The presenters came from all over the nation and their dedication to our youth was inspiring to all attendees.

*Quotes about  
the Family  
Conference:*

*"Every year our family looks forward to a weekend of fun and learning. It is a great way to meet new families and reconnect with friends from past years, all of whom share the common bond of love for our children and interest in being the best parents we can be for our children who are Deaf /HOH/Deaf-Blind. Even though our son is only five years old, he has already made friends with other children that he is looking forward to seeing next year!"*

*-Alicia Boehme*

*"...you know our family always looks forward to the Family Conference. We value the opportunity our daughter has to spend time with Deaf adult role models and D/HH peers her age. She has the opportunity to make connections and communicate in both of the languages she uses. My husband and I always value the networking made possible with other families and access to great information at the workshops. We love the sense of community in which our entire family, siblings and even grandparents, can participate. Thanks so much to all those individuals who make the conference possible!"*

*-Beth Hall*

*"The Family Conference is a time to meet new families, catch up with those we know and it's our opportunity to learn something new, as we do every year. My entire family looks forward to this experience. The connections we have made with other families on a similar journey were unimaginable ten years ago when my daughter was being diagnosed. "*

*-Michelle Kihntopf*

*"Once again the Family Conference was excellent. I really enjoyed all the information I learned. My kids had a great time visiting the EAA Museum and spending time at the YMCA. The dance on Saturday night was a hit. My oldest daughter now has a new friend and my boys do too. Geoff and I met some new parents too. It is always fun reuniting with everyone. Looking forward to next year!"*

*-Marla Duncan*

*"A rich and fulfilling experience.... In eight years, the conference has transformed us from wide-eyed, not knowing what to expect, newly diagnosed parents to parents who can mentor other new wide-eyed families. At the conference, we get to reestablish relationships that may have been put on the back burner for the past year...at the conference, information and friendship flows freely. The conference is an experience in which we are very proud, humbled and honored to be a part."*

*-Rob Gretzlock*

**Board Member Spotlight: Laurie Nelson**

Hi, my name is Laurie Nelson and I am the President of Wisconsin Families for Hands & Voices. My husband, Larry and I have two children: Cole, age 23 (hearing) and Peyton, age 17 (hard of hearing). My passion is to support families diagnosed with hearing loss and helping them make informed decisions for their child(ren) by supporting the H&V mantra “what works for your child is what makes the choice right.” I am also the Guide By Your Side (GBYS) Program Coordinator (a parent to parent matching program) and the Family Conference Coordinator. With my work, I am afforded the wonderful opportunity to meet and connect families from all over the state and see the success in each of them raising, as we say at H&V, “wasks” - well-adjusted successful kids! In my spare time you can find me either on the tennis court, spending time with my family, or tending to my various flower gardens.



**Renew Your Membership or become a member today!**

**2012 Hands & Voices WI Membership**

- Please circle one of the following
- Parent of a deaf/HH child \$25.00
- Deaf /HH Adult \$25.00
- Student \$25.00
- Professional \$40.00
- Organization/agency \$75.00
- Additional Donation \$\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Become a Member/Renew Online!**

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Or clip and mail to:

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**DHH Event Schedule**

Date	Event	Location	Information
4/18/2012	"When Hearing Aids Are Not Enough: An Overview of Cochlear Implants and the Evaluation Process"	Milwaukee, WI	<a href="http://www.wesp-dhh.wi.gov/cms_files/event_attach/354853/2012_Candidacy_Meeting_Flyer.pdf">http://www.wesp-dhh.wi.gov/cms_files/event_attach/354853/2012_Candidacy_Meeting_Flyer.pdf</a>
05/04/2012	Deaf Olympic Day at the YMCA	Onalaska, WI	<a href="http://www.wesp-dhh.wi.gov/cms_files/event_attach/354852/DHH_Olympic_Day_at_the_YMCA_Flyer_2012.pdf">http://www.wesp-dhh.wi.gov/cms_files/event_attach/354852/DHH_Olympic_Day_at_the_YMCA_Flyer_2012.pdf</a>
7/30/2012 - 08/02/2012	WESP-DHH Summer Institute 2012: Save the Date!	Various	<a href="http://www.wesp-dhh.wi.gov/pro/event_view.cfm?memberid=85&amp;eventid=354854">http://www.wesp-dhh.wi.gov/pro/event_view.cfm?memberid=85&amp;eventid=354854</a>
05/11/12 - 05/12/12	The Southern Wisconsin Optimist Communication Contest for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing	Various	<a href="http://www.optimist.org/Form/CCDHH_RULES_PAD-E_11-12.pdf">http://www.optimist.org/Form/CCDHH_RULES_PAD-E_11-12.pdf</a>

**HELP OTHERS BY DONATING USED HEARING AIDS!**

WI Families for Hands & Voices is now accepting hearing aids donations as part of a partnership with Starkey. If you have old hearing aids that are not being used and would like to make a charitable donation to help WI Hands & Voices....



**Recycle now!**

Call Michelle Kihntopf at 920-609-7815 for a self-addressed, stamped envelope to send to Starkey.



**Recycle Old Hearing Aids Now!**



There were volunteers from the Deaf community, the Deaf Mentor Program and students from interpreting training, deaf education, special education, and early childhood education university programs who assisted with the kids and other aspects of the programming. Mentoring opportunities for all kids were abundant, with role models who were deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind involved in every aspect of the Conference.

There was an exhibitor hall with organizations for individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind, community and advocacy agencies, technology-related businesses, etc. The diversity in our exhibitors was great to see... Hands AND Voices!!

The entertainment this year was awesome!! Through the generous donations of WI Families for Hands & Voices, PIE (Professional Interpreting Enterprise) and BizLab, ticket pricing for Conference participants for the Broadway Performance of "Mary Poppins" was significantly reduced. The performance was fully accessible with three teams of sign language interpreters, three captioning screens, ALDs and opera glasses. Attendees were thrilled to participate in the "Meet and Greet" with the actors specifically for our group after the show. The Fox Cities Performing Arts Center was a pleasure to work with and the "Mary Poppins" performance was enjoyed by all! We also had bedtime stories signed to the kids by four amazing storytellers, Sheri Cook, Lulu Lee, Lisa Perry Burckhart and Alyson Urdahl. On Saturday night, Joe Riggio presented "The History of Telecommunication Technology," a Party Photo Booth (DreaminDJ Greg Navin) was set up so that everyone could take home a strip of photos for a Conference keepsake, and a Tween/Teen Dance (Jake Ciesielczyk DJ) entertained the kids ages 11 and up. There were smiles all around!

Sunday concluded with an important closing keynote presentation "Awareness & Advocacy to Protect & Prepare Our Children for Social, Emotional & Academic Success" by Harold Johnson. He emphasized that the success of our children is inherently tied to their abilities, life experiences, and academic opportunities. Research concerning the postsecondary performances of individuals who are D/HH has found that while literacy and academic knowledge are very important, effective communication, collaborative learning, and self-advocacy skills are critical. Unfortunately the "life" experiences of a significant number of our children include bullying, abuse and neglect. Dr. Johnson's presentation provided parents with the initial awareness, understanding, and resources that they need to prevent, or at least recognize and report, instances of bullying, abuse, and neglect experienced by children.

We concluded with a performance by the kids from the Sign Song Dance Troupe (SSD) from WSD (WI School for the Deaf). Kids and parents alike enjoyed this amazing dance performance. What tremendous role models for our youth! It truly accompanied our theme "All Under One Umbrella."

***WI Families for Hands & Voices appreciates the collaborative efforts with the WESP-DHH Outreach team. This year, WI Families for Hands & Voices provided:***

- Presentation of "Hands & Voices: State of The World Report" highlighting the 50 chapters of this organization and all the activities / work we are doing on supporting children with hearing loss to reach their highest potential
- Coordination of the book sales (great thanks to members Marv & Nancy Meinholz & Sherry Kimball)
- A sizable donation to underwrite the costs of the Mary Poppins tickets
- Funding for the Photo Booth (thanks to the Dull and Nelson families)
- Scholarship funds and coordination of scholarships so that many of the families could attend the Family Conference (thanks to Michelle Kihntopf)
- A silent auction / raffle (thanks to Monica Dull and Mariana Velasco-Faulkner, Coordinators) at both the Professional and Family Conferences. All proceeds went directly to the 2013 Scholarship Fund.

***Thank you to all our members and individuals/businesses/organizations who donated to the auction/ raffle/ scholarship fund.  
TOGETHER, we CAN make a difference!***

**SAVE THE DATE FOR NEXT YEAR: MARCH 8-10, 2013, RADISSON PAPER VALLEY HOTEL, APPLETON**

Laurie Nelson, Family Conference Coordinator

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