

## LSDHH Community Development Model for Deaf Communities

**Summary:** The Library Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (LSDHH) and the Nashville Public Library (NPL) will work together to **increase capacity** for the existing, interactive LSDHH website, **providing access** to the library users in the d/Deaf<sup>1</sup> and Hard of Hearing (D/HH) communities across Tennessee and the U.S. The website will serve as the nerve center for other states' libraries' sub-sites. LSDHH respectfully requests \$140,960 from IMLS.

**Statement of National Need:** Deaf children are graduating nationally at only a 3rd - 4th grade reading level.<sup>2</sup> This is a crisis in the education of deaf children. Early years of language acquisition and literacy are crucial for all children, yet Deaf children face unique hurdles in access to language. For the hearing community, these skills are usually passed down through speech, books, storytelling, and verbal interactions. However, deaf children and their caretakers-- especially in rural communities-- face unique challenges in acquiring these skills. Only 27% of the parents of deaf children learn sign language<sup>3</sup> -- often their own families cannot communicate adequately with them. These communities have less access to American Sign Language (ASL) courses and other services for the Deaf. YouTube and other online platforms may offer vocabulary tutorials, but cumulative language instruction comes with a price tag. Many families cannot afford the classes or the commute. LSDHH helps fill the need in these areas and promotes **lifelong learning**. However, illiteracy is just the beginning. Deaf children experience significantly higher rates of abuse. Deaf adults have a significantly higher unemployment rate than hearing peers and an increased incidence of substance abuse. These stem from deprivation of language and communication.

**Project Work Plan:** The goal of the project is twofold: 1) provide a free, accessible national portal for resources on hearing loss in each state via an interactive national map hosted on the LSDHH website and infrastructure and 2) update the existing website backend framework and public facing look and feel to serve as a national model for accessibility by the Deaf community. This project will require an increase in website capacity due to an increase in digital management (internal) and public interaction (external) with the website.

The LSDHH current website provides accessible, unbiased, comprehensive resources, for free, to the public. (<https://tndeaflibrary.nashville.gov/>) In addition to providing a point of access to the largest collection of print and media materials relating to hearing loss in the country, the website includes: 1) the TN Directory of Services for people who are D/HH, searchable by region and type of service; 2) a searchable, interactive Events Calendar which allows patrons to post happenings in their areas; 3) Employment Opportunities in Deaf-related fields; 4) links to curated resources within the state and nation that benefit D/HH communities, including abuse hotlines and Deaf AA contacts.

This project will build upon the existing website by re-theming/redesigning parts of the site to include an interactive national map of the U.S., including integration of national resources, in a static format. A webpage for each state will be created as a sub-site of the LSDHH website, and with a unique URL. We will develop a template that libraries may insert their unique information, including logos, images, highlights of events, and categorized links to local resources. If a state already has an existing source for this information, an option will be made available to insert this link.

The plan is to enhance the existing website by embedding ASL/captioned instructional videos for each interactive element, creating visual directives (instead of verbal) for the low language users, and creating a platform for archiving/dispersing converted digital materials from the LSDHH 15,000 item collection.

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<sup>1</sup> "D" Deaf refers to those who identify with the Deaf Community; "d" deaf refers to a medical condition.

<sup>2</sup> Stephanie Cawthorn, Schools for the Deaf and No Child Left Behind Act, 149 (4) American Annals of the Deaf 314, (2004).

<sup>3</sup> Marc Marschark, Raising and Educating a Deaf Child 65 (2nd Ed. Oxford University Press 2007).

This process will include collaborating with one library or statewide resource center per state to gather and update this information. A part-time worker will be contracted by NPL to do the research necessary to make contacts with libraries in each state and help facilitate the information. Website administrators from each state will be given access to directly update, add, and delete links on their homepage by logging into the LSDHH website, which is in Drupal. As the platform evolves, continual upgrades providing a work-flow driven, content management platform for publicly contributed resources routinely will be applied. These upgrades will support the primary LSDHH platform which supports the sub-sites. (This proposal includes documentation development that will be sent to administrators about how to use/update the site.)

LSDHH will market this project to U.S. libraries in a variety of ways. Contacts have already been initiated with the Kentucky Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing whose website states, “It is our goal to eventually create and maintain a network with all libraries in the state, allowing us to give everyone access to information on deafness and hearing loss.” As the organizations we contact connect to the website, they will accept the responsibility of updating and sharing the information for their states. We will also market within the national D/HH communities (like Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI), A.G. Bell, and Hands & Voices) through their conferences, newsletters and listservs. As the project nears its launch date, we will submit presentation proposals for the American Library Association/Public Library Association (PLA) conferences to promote this project among librarians across the country.

The project is set to begin in September of 2021 with the contracting of a researcher and web developer. At that time work will also begin on creating the ASL videos and preparing the infrastructure for the website, including templates. The new-user information will be ready for input by March of 2022. It will be visible to the public before September of 2022.

**National Impact:** This project will have a national impact by filling a gap of free public resources to families of D/HH Americans in need. National legislative efforts are active across the U.S. in an effort to eliminate language deprivation and illiteracy, but early family interaction is key to solving this challenge.

In 2019 a Deaf celebrity from the web (*Seek the World*) visited LSDHH to film a segment. Since then, the library has been bombarded with Deaf people from most of the 50 states requesting libraries in their states. Traveling Deaf people from Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Florida changed their routes so that they could visit LSDHH to learn how to start a deaf library in their states. Calls came from Illinois, Mississippi, and Indiana, asking how they could have what Tennessee has. On Facebook one wrote: “So wonderful to see a library filled with “deaf” related... Is there anyway books could be checked out if I live across the States?” Another wrote: “I didn’t know this library exists which is so so awesome!! I am very much in need for resources for my deaf son but there isn’t much... can you direct me to somewhere...- like this?”

This past year the PLA conference was in Nashville. One of the sessions focused on equal access. Afterwards, the LSDHH front room was flooded by librarians from all over the U.S. eagerly asking questions about how they, too, could provide this program to their library patrons.

The nation has a need. LSDHH’s website is the most effective tool for reaching D/HH America in need with resources to combat illiteracy, unemployment, and abuse. This website project with shared resources promotes **lifelong learning, builds capacity, and increases access** for a marginalized population.

**Budget Summary:** The proposed one-year budget of \$140,960 includes \$80,000 for web re-design: 135 hours for design and mobile theme updates, 170 hours for interactive design and programming, 80 hours for Drupal 8/9 updates, 55 hours for monitoring and security updates, 45 hours for education and resource management; \$15,000 for researcher/marketer at 750 hours; \$3,600 for captioning 300 ASL videos; \$20,000 for video creator (ASL version); \$10,000 for marketing; \$12,860 for indirect costs (NPL Foundation grant management).