

2021 COMMUNITY CENTER FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING SUMMARY

Summary of Services

CHSC's Community Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (CCDHH) had 139 active clients in 2021. This year, the total number of service hours provided by CCDHH represents direct service hours expanding across all service domains. Some clients benefitted from multiple services. Services in the CCDHH included: Community Support and Case Management, Vocational Rehabilitation (job readiness, job development, and job retention), Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), Education and Training, Advocacy, Support for Victims and Survivors of Trauma and Abuse, American Sign Language Education, Community Events for Youth and Families.

Breakdown of Services:

- VR Services-48 clients
- Pre-ETS-8 students
- Support Services-83 clients
- DV/SV Support/Advocacy Service clients -7
- Support Services and Advocacy –1,267.83 client service hours
- SignStage – 220 students
- Advocates 4 Kids events – 8
- Community Events - 11
- Trainings/Workshops -16
- Vlogs and Informational Videos –61 (with a total of 11,531 views)
- ASL Community Classes-115 students
 - 1 Business
 - 3 Private
 - After School Students-45
 - CHSC Staff– 21
- Interns- We had a first-year student in the M.A. of Social Work Program at Case Western Reserve University beginning in September of 2021

Global Objective for 2021

The goal for 2021 was to continue to increase vocational rehabilitation service participation and increase the number of hours of support services to community members. Unfortunately, the limitations and restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic persisted and impacted our numbers and in-person client interaction. We had quite a few clients who were unsure and concerned about their safety and did not return to work or pursue services with the CCDHH.

Program/Service Highlights of 2021:

The Center conducted a "Drive and Drop" to restock our food pantry, and we provided food and necessities to 15 individuals/families.

In the early months of 2021, we were able to offer free tax preparation services to 38 individuals from the deaf and hard-of-hearing communities.

In addition to the three Tax Preparation Days open to the Deaf community, CCDHH partnered with Neighborhood Family Practice to offer the COVID-19 vaccine. In addition, the Center conducted a FaceBook Live event explaining the illness utilizing sign language interpreters and deaf staff to ensure the information was fully accessible to the Deaf community.

As we adjusted to online and virtual meetings and trainings, we also provided workshops in that format in 2021. One of our new community partners, the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center, received CRCC Cultural Competency training to more effectively interface with Deaf clients. We also provided training to the University Circle Police Department, Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, the Family Justice Center,

In partnership with the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the Deaf Services Center in Columbus, our CCDHH developed statewide training for mental health clinicians. In 2021 we trained 134 mental health professionals and conducted five workshops. In addition, we developed an online training divided into three learning modules that provide clinicians with continuing education credits. This training lives on the ODMHAS website on their E-based Academy.

Midway through 2021, when we had expected our V.R. services to pick up again, it became clear that few deaf or hard of hearing individuals were interested in returning to the workforce. We developed a pilot program geared toward individuals with language and learning challenges with additional staff and free time. The project was titled: DEAFinitely Learning. The purpose of this project was to support activities of daily living such as healthy food choices and actions, coping skills, money management, and healthy relationships. We had seven individuals targeted to begin the program in 2022.

CCDHH was fortunate to host a CWRU intern in the Fall of 2021. Jessica M was a member of the incoming M.A. class of the Mandell School of Social Work. Jessica was a fluent signer and a CODA. Her insight and experience were an asset to the CCDHH department.

ASL Family Events and Advocates 4 Kids Programming offered the following events: A Coe Lake kick-off party, Penitentiary Glen nature center and trails, Wallace Lake fishing, Bexley Park to learn about street safety, Majestic Meadows Llama farm, Lakewood Park playground, Village Green Park for splash pad, B.A. Sweeties for mini golf and a closing cookout at Coe Lake.

SignStage provided an array of programs for youth and adults, including but not limited to the following:

Multiple classes for CMSD were offered at William Rainey Harper Elementary School in Cleveland. These were part of a "Summer Learning Experience" program designed to help students "catch up" due to COVID. They started in June but continued into July and August 2021. Approximately 100 students were served.

A Deaf Theatre workshop was conducted for Cleveland Public Library (Zoom workshop). Approximately 25 students of various ages participated.

"Dancing Hands Jukebox" was created and produced with 22 members. This project began as a CAC grant for a live performance at Near West Theatre but had to be converted into a video production (due to COVID). The video was shot all day on September 25th. There was a public showing on December 28th with 22 people in attendance. The lack of attendance was due to an upswing in COVID sickness and on a night of a significant snowstorm.

CHSC did not hire an agency interpreter to support the CCDHH team and to address the issue of equal access for deaf staff. Although this position was posted and advertised, there were no qualified applicants.

With the continued disruptions brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, formal satisfaction surveys were not distributed to clients in 2021. Instead, we gathered information in less traditional ways. In addition, we conducted a Staff Retreat that focused on the needs of the clients they served, information which they collected through informal conversations. This information helped to inform our "Vision for the Future."

Accessibility of Services

We serve our CCDHH clients at our main campus in University Circle. For those unable to access our Center due to transportation or other challenges, CCDHH staff will meet clients in their neighborhoods. We also continue to offer the Zoom platform and V.P. meetings for those who prefer a virtual approach.

All CCDHH staff are fluent in American Sign Language, which is also the primary language of the majority of employees in the department. We have not experienced any service challenges due to language or communication preferences.

COVID-19 created many barriers to accessibility for our deaf consumers. We offered video phone and virtual appointments in response to the pandemic and service requests. We always followed CDC guidelines and required mask wearing for staff and clients until the requirement was lifted. Even when the policy was reduced, we practiced safe interactions by asking our clients about their preferences. Given the challenges of masking, facial recognition, and lipreading ability, we attempted to honor our client's requests not to mask, ensuring safe distances between them and staff. Suppose they prefer us to wear a mask or stay 6 ft away. We required the team to quarantine and not physically come to work when exposed to COVID-19. Implementing these safe practices resulted in even our most vulnerable clients feeling safe and protected.

Financial accessibility is still a Center-wide objective. Besides our Community Sign Language classes, CCDHH provides services at no cost to our clients, community members, and partners. CHSC also offers the Audiology Patient Assistance Program (APA) for financial assistance in obtaining devices such as doorbell flashers, alarm clocks, baby criers, etc. In 2020, 53 deaf and hard of hearing people were served through APA, receiving hearing aid repairs, devices, or professional services at a significantly reduced cost. In addition to the APA program, CCDHH offered financial support to consumers who fell behind on their bills or needed rent support. We served 20 clients through our Basic Needs Funds. The agency initiated a Drive and Drop to stock our small food pantry to provide support to those especially vulnerable to food insecurity. Consumers can come to our Center to pick up a bag of groceries, or staff can drop food at a client's home.

Staffing Model

Our staffing model in the Community Center reflects the community we serve. Most of the CCDHH employees are themselves members of the Deaf Community. The CCDHH is humbled to serve the D/deaf community in northeast Ohio, and our model reflects our commitment to best practices of "deaf serving

deaf." Just as linguistic and cultural competency is key to serving racial and ethnic minority populations, it is also best practice to help deaf individuals with knowledge, awareness, and respect for deaf culture and ASL as a language of equal value to English. All of our staff are fluent in American Sign Language and skilled in other communication modalities to meet our client's diverse needs, many of whom are not English proficient but have dysfluent or atypical language.

Our team in 2021:

- A new Deaf Community Outreach Specialist, Timothy Skaggs, was hired in the last quarter of 2020.
- An Adult and Youth Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist (V.R. & Pre-ETS Services) who provides job readiness skills, job search & placement, and coaching services; Casey Ring
- Deaf Senior Program Associate who provided services in all areas and oversight to various programs and services; Kate Slosar
- A part-time Deaf advocate who provided violence prevention education as well as support in the criminal justice system; Sandra Hatibovic
- A Deaf social worker who provided support services and case management
- A Deaf Operations Manager responsible for scheduling and day-to-day cohesion of the team; Jeremy Vinluan
- An ASL fluent SignStage Artistic Manager who provided educational programming and ASL classes throughout the region; Bill Morgan

The staff in the CCD are led and supervised by the Director of the Community Center for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing. Dr. Maria O'Neil Ruddock has been affiliated with the agency since 1990.

Action Plan for 2022

Our Action Plan for 2022 includes the following:

- Recruit and Hire a Deaf CCDHH Director
- Provide Mentorship and Training to New Director
- Revision of the Client Satisfaction Survey
- Provide DV/SV Trainings and ASL Instruction to CRCC
- Explore Partnership with CCBDD – Continue to Develop and Promote DEAFinitely Learning
- Continue to Work on Agency Accessibility Concerns and Challenges
- Expand Mental Health and Deafness Training