



Part 4: MN Hands & Voices and MN Deaf Mentor Family Program: Information Resources for Clinical Audiologists

MN Hands & Voices Role in Minnesota’s EHDI System on behalf of the MN Department of Health (MDH)

[Minnesota Hands & Voices, a program of Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota](#) is a parent-to-parent support organization contracted by the MN Department of Health (MDH) EHDI Program to connect with parents of children newly identified with a hearing difference/hearing loss. MN Hands & Voices is a HIPAA compliant organization and adheres to all HIPAA compliancy standards.

- After a clinical audiologist reports a child’s diagnostic hearing evaluation results to the MDH EHDI Program indicating that a child has a confirmed hearing difference, MDH sends the child’s name and parent’s/guardian’s contact information to MN Hands & Voices.
- A MN Hands & Voices Parent Guide then reaches out to the family to offer support, information, and resources that the family may need. Parent Guides will help refer the child through Help Me Grow MN to the child’s resident school district’s Early Childhood Special Education Program if a referral has not already been completed.
- Representatives of MN Hands & Voices support Minnesota’s interagency EHDI initiatives as members of the [MN Newborn Hearing Screening Advisory Committee](#) and the [MN Collaborative Plan](#). They participate in numerous Minnesota community activities in support of families of children and youth who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Clinical Audiologists Role in Connecting Families to MN Hands & Voices

- As part of Minnesota’s statewide EHDI system, clinical audiologists are asked to (1) **Report** a child’s hearing loss to the MN Department of Health, (2) **Refer** the child for possible Part C Infant-Toddler Intervention Services or Part B Preschool Special Education support services, and (3) **Connect** families with MN Hands & Voices. [Report—Refer—Connect poster](#)

- Although the MN Department of Health EHDI Program staff will notify MN Hands & Voices of children newly identified with a hearing difference, clinical audiologists are encouraged to talk about MN Hands & Voices with families and offer to connect families directly. Parent Guides may then be able to reach out to the family more quickly.
 - There is currently a [secure online referral form](#) that clinical audiologists can use to connect a family to MN Hands & Voices.
 - **Note: The MN Hands & Voices’ online “referral form” should not be confused with the referral of children through Help Me Grow MN for an eligibility evaluation for possible early intervention services or preschool special education services.** Clinical audiologists, as Primary Referral Sources, are required by federal IDEA Part C regulations to refer all infants and toddlers with developmental concerns to the state’s early intervention system. Connecting families to MN Hands & Voices is not legally required but is encouraged as a helpful support for many families.
 - ***Connecting families to MN Hands & Voices does not need to be a one-time referral/connection.*** Parents and family members may feel “ready” to connect with support organizations and other families of young children with hearing loss at different times in their journey. Clinical audiologists can refer/connect the family with MN Hands & Voices at any time, and for children and youth of any age. They can also connect families with MN Hands & Voices more than once. For example, families may not be interested in parent-to-parent support right after the child’s hearing difference has been identified, but they may express the desire to participate in family activities or receive supports from MN Hands & Voices in the future.

MN Hands & Voices Supports for Families:

[Minnesota Hands & Voices, a program of Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota](#) is a chapter of the [national Hands & Voices organization](#). In addition to its role in Minnesota’s EHDI system, MN Hands & Voices provides information and supports to families of children and youth who are deaf or hard of hearing across the state.

Minnesota Hands & Voices [support services](#) for families include:

- [Guides By Your Side:](#)

- Trained [Parent Guides](#) offer Parent-to-Parent Support: Parent Guides are themselves parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing and are a local community resource for families in a specific region of the state.
 - *Deaf and Hard of Hearing Guide Program*: Adults who have hearing differences can meet with families to share their lived experiences, communication preferences, hearing technology, educational background, self-advocacy, and community activities. DHH Guides also participate in MN Hands & Voices learning and social experiences with families.
 - *ASTra Advocates*, a part of the national Hands & Voices [ASTra Educational Advocacy Program](#): ASTra stands for **A**dvocacy **S**upport and **T**raining. ASTra Advocates provide educational advocacy support and resources to families who need information and guidance about special education law and creating educational plans for their child with a hearing difference. In Minnesota, ASTra Advocates do not serve as legal advocates on behalf of families. They do not speak on behalf of families at IFSP or IEP meetings, although they may attend meetings if invited by parents or guardians.
- Networking opportunities for families of children who are deaf or hard of hearing across the state: Note—As a HIPAA compliant organization, MN Hands & Voices will only connect families to other families or discuss issues with other entities with the express written permission (Release of Information) of the family, and only within narrow parameters agreed upon by the family.
 - Online and in-person social activities for children and families, topic discussions for parents, learning activities for children.
 - A [resource directory](#), compiled by MN Hands & Voices, shares information about numerous Minnesota programs that provide information and supports for families of children with hearing differences.
 - The MN Hands & Voices [website](#) and brochure provide more information about the supports provided to families.

Questions about MN Hands & Voices can be addressed to [Anne Barlow](#), Director, and [Brenda Hommerding](#), Guide By Your Side Manager.

MN Deaf Mentor Family Program Supports for Families

- The [MN Deaf Mentor Family Program](#) (DMFP), also a program of Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota, is an additional support opportunity available to Minnesota families who have a child who is deaf or hard of hearing. Trained Deaf Mentors

who are fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) can help a family learn about Deaf Culture and ASL. Classes and visits may be virtual or in-person.

- There is an application that families complete if they are interested in participating in the Deaf Mentor Family Program.
- Clinical Audiologists are encouraged to have information about the MN Deaf Mentor Family Program on hand to share with families who are interested in learning more about ASL and Deaf Culture. The [DFMP website](#) shares information about their services. A printed brochure is currently in process of being updated.
- Representatives of the MN Deaf Mentor Family Program support Minnesota's interagency EHDI initiatives as members of the [MN Newborn Hearing Screening Advisory Committee](#) and the [MN Collaborative Plan](#). They participate in numerous community activities across Minnesota in support of families of children and youth who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- Questions about the MN Deaf Mentor Family Program can be emailed to Emily Smith-Lundberg, Deaf Mentor Family Program Manager, at DMFP@lssmn.org

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