

# Early Literacy Foundations (ELF): An Early Years Program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children



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deaf  
children's  
society of bc



# Background



- Deaf Children's Society one of three non-profit early support agencies in the province of BC, Canada
- Government funding for services to families of d/hh children, birth to age 5
- SLP & SLI provide in-home services 0-5; licensed ASL preschool available from age 2.5-5
- Preschool 20 hours per week
- ELF program for 0-2; sessions once per month, Sept-May
- Open to families from other agencies, Deaf community

# ELF Program Background



- Established in response to implementation of province-wide newborn early screening in 2007
- Parents learning earlier than ever of the status of their child's hearing
- DCS did not have a group program for infants and toddlers that brought parents together
- Fundamental belief that language development must include literacy
- First ELF held in February 2009

# Purposes of ELF



- Ensures early start to language and literacy development – never too early to expose babies to books
- Helps foster and reinforce parent-child bonds through interaction with print materials
- Provides opportunities for parents of d/hh to meet and interact with other parents, especially Deaf parents

# Basic Tenets of ELF



- Parents are their children's first, best and most consistent teachers
- Children are their parent's most effective teachers
- Parents are usually already doing many things to help their children learn
- Bonding, communication and play are key components to the foundation of learning
- ASL unlocks print learning for d/hh children – parents need to learn how ASL and books go together

# Key Components of ELF

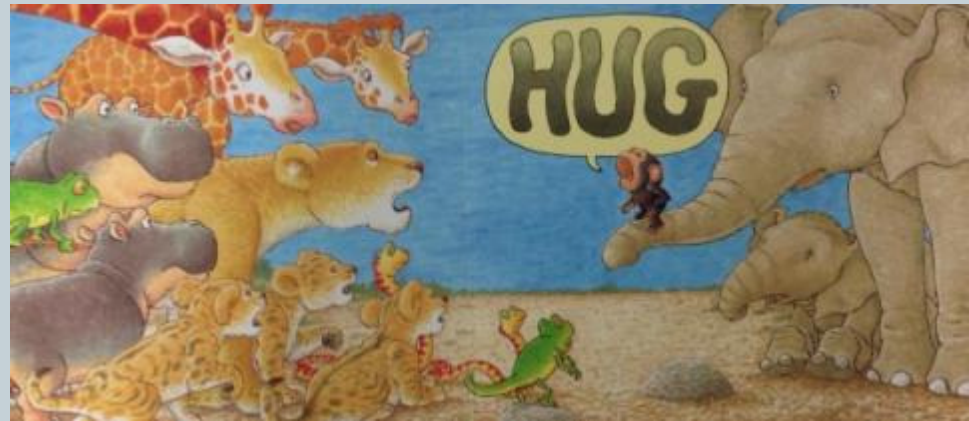
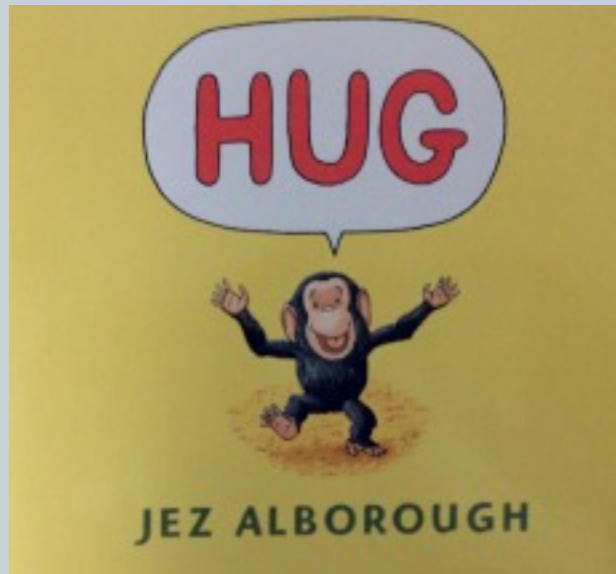


- Lead by Sign Language Instructor and Speech-Language therapist
- Program includes storytelling in ASL, music and play
- Every child goes home with a book to keep
- Full access for all participants, Deaf and hearing: ASL interpreter always present, staff are bilingual
- ELF is non-judgmental: everyone is welcome, regardless of their agency affiliation

# Structure of ELF



- Arrival, introductions, and play
- Storytime! Board books chosen in advance – seasonal themes, events, #/counting, ABCs



# Reading at ELF





# Reading Together at ELF



# Music, Songs and Bubbles at ELF



# High-Tech ELF



# A Successful Early Literacy Program...

- Includes books to keep
  - Books bought wholesale
  - Are age appropriate
  - Are engaging
  - Do not intimidate new signers
- Includes the Deaf community
- Is accessible to all
  - Interpreters provided
- Is small-group based
  - Encourages interaction



# Successful ELF...

- Connects with existing service provision
  - In-home sign instruction (review books)
  - In-home speech-language support (encourage ELF attendance)
- Ties in with other agency events
  - Signing Santa
  - Preschool Graduation

- The results:
  - Consistent language and literacy exposure and development
  - Strong parent-child bonding
  - Increasing comfort with the Deaf community

***“A childhood without books – that would be no childhood. That would be like being shut out from the enchanted place where you can go and find the rarest kind of joy.”***

- Astrid Lindgren, author of the *Pippi Longstocking* books