REALTIME FILE

EHDI 2019

HEATHROW AB - SESSION 2

STRATEGIZING AND PARTNERING WITH VENUES IN PROVIDING LANGUAGE ACCESS AND SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILIES

MARCH 4, 2019

2:50 pm – 3:15 pm

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>> KATIE MCCARTHY: All right, everyone. I'm going to get started because it seems like we're at time. My name is Katie McCarthy. I work at Boston Children's Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts. I'm the Coordinator of Outreach and Support Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program at the hospital.

At BCH we believe in using a whole child approach to the work that we do. In the Deaf/Hard of Hearing team we have a psychologist, neuropsychologist, psychiatrist, and speech‑language pathologist as well. We see children from birth to age 22. The team provides different services including Cochlear Implants, audiology services, as well as baseline measurements for children that come into our clinics so that we can establish goals for the families and support the needs of the children as they grow. If the families have difficulty deciding what those options may be we present them options as a menu of services that they can choose from. And we always try to respect what the family needs in the decision making process, keeping a child‑centered focus on those decisions.

My program is specifically under the Deaf/Hard of Hearing program. We work in a much more collaborative approach with families and the medical professionals. And we include the community around us as well in Boston, just to make sure that the resources that they need are available for their children to thrive. All of the services that we provide, of course, are aimed at supporting the well‑being of the children and their educational needs as they grow into adulthood.

Families can come into the hospital in clinic settings and chat with us about the options that they have. And we feel like it helps them to have that face‑to‑face interaction and to feel heard and that their needs are expressed and that they can get access to the right educational resources outside of the clinical settings to have those needs addressed. And I'll show you some of the examples of that.

I'm going to focus on the family centered events and the collaborations in my presentation this afternoon but we offer other resources as well. We serve about 675 adults and children every year through our outreach program. We have about 900 parents that we distribute information out to through our e‑mail list. Our model is to encourage a natural environment with Deaf/Hard of Hearing opportunities where a child can just be a child.

We often see the word language access. We kind of throw that word around, I might suggest. We know that we need to provide some sort of access, but we might not be so sure about what that looks like in the community in general, venues, places that families can go and have access to language and social opportunities. That could be language models, ASL interpreters, printed texts, visual cues and social prompts.

In this picture here there is a woman who is showing what to do with this piece of equipment. In this other picture somebody's asking the children what they think the object is that they are saying and trying to get them to express how it works through the languages that they prefer. In this bottom left picture, we see someone trying to get the attention of another person in the area by using visual cues. And on the bottom right we see an example of important eye contact between a parent and a child.

So it seems to us that the more opportunities that children have in the community to learn these types of language cues the better they will thrive. And so we need to make sure that there are rich examples of these types of language cues in the community. And that can be either signed or spoken depending on what language choices that family has chosen for their children and in which languages the children function best in.

So our outreach program is trying to create enhanced opportunities for parents to get access to these types of language cues in the community. In my work at Boston Children's Hospital, I have to remind myself quite a lot that we have this program called Wonder, Think, Describe that we use in the hospital setting but it could be very important within the community setting as well. So we have these posters or these descriptions of this motto within our hospital setting, in the lobby, in the clinical settings that parents have access to that encourages them to really think about what's going on in the world and to chat about it with their children. But they have the same opportunities to do so out in the community.

Oftentimes parents with a deaf or hard of hearing child will come into the clinic and ask about language‑friendly areas in which they can exercise language options with their children, in social events, without feeling like it's, you know, hearing driven or deaf driven but that it's more just a natural social outcropping within the community. So we try to find venues or events that have low stress levels, that allow parents to exercise these types of things and provide them the resource that we know about in the community and encourage them to go.

So I'll talk a little bit about some of the venue that we worked with in order to establish these types of opportunities in the Boston area. These opportunities can encourage social skills, opportunities for Deaf/Hard of Hearing to interact with their siblings or their friends, and are mostly not technology‑driven. They are social experiences in which they can interact with other humans and adults.

So the examples that I'm going to be providing here are just examples of things that we have in the community. There are, of course, other venues that this could work for and some in which that wouldn't really work for various reasons. But these are the ones that we found to have been most successful based on a variety of factors and ones that I think would be most important to discuss today.

If you intend to do something like this in your community, it's important to make sure that you're cultivating the relationship with venues in your area to ensure that you can improve upon these types of events if they don't work out the first time. I'm not sure if you have access to the same types of venue as we do in our area but these are sort of common venue types that you may have in your community.

And in general, they share the same trait of being open to having families with deaf and hard of hearing children come into their venues and being willing to make some modifications to how they function on a normal basis to be accommodating to the language needs of those families. So that does tend to mean that these venues will have a little bit of funding leeway in order to change some of their approaches and so you might want to be looking at venues like that if you're looking to do this in your neighborhoods.

The Outreach Program approached the Discovery Museum several years ago. We thought specifically it was a very cool museum and one that children would like to access. But we didn't really see the ability for Deaf and Hard Of Hearing people to access the information in an accessible way. So we started supporting them through our foundation, giving some money to the museum for interpreters, making sure that they had the correct setup.

Eventually they found their own funding. They loved the idea. And so they decided to take it over and own it for their own selves at the Discovery Museum. So we now have two mornings at the museum and four evenings where they are including families with deaf and hard of hearing children and other types of disabilities as well such as autism and blind children.

So because they've seen the success of this program and the reception among those types of families, they decided to take it on and even expand the program for themselves, realizing that being partners with the community was really a boom for themselves. Part of the Deaf and Hard Of Hearing events incorporated storytelling, STEM topics, and other members of the Deaf community who can talk about relevant themes that the museum wants to embrace.

Interpreters are provided on site at the Discovery Museum, at the registration booth, at live events, or if someone just needs information and would like to ask a question of a member of staff.

We've also hosted a Communicate Learning Session for kids at the Museum of Fine Arts. We host this about twice a year. About four years ago we approached them and explained to them that we noticed they didn't have any accessible events or events specifically tailored to the Deaf/Hard of Hearing community. They did have an app that talked a little about the exhibits. But we encouraged them to think a little bit more about other things that they could put on. So we had a group of deaf children that came with a tour guide. And the kids really loved being guided around the museum with that sign language tour guide.

And, again, the museum found the value in this and decided to find the funding themselves to make this program sustainable. So we have ASL night at MFA as well. That's once a year. And, again, we see this transition from a small, start‑up type of event to a growing list of events that are welcoming to members of the Deaf community, especially to families with deaf and hard of hearing children.

The next example is at Boston Children's Museum. They actually asked me to come and look at one of their interpreted shows one night and offer them some feedback about their accessibility programming. I thought it was a fine event. But I did ask them to think about maybe a Deaf/Hard of Hearing Family Day at the museum. This was about four years ago when we started collaborating with them. And we brought in some members of the Deaf community; for example, a deaf musician, a DeafBlind dancer, and other members just to expose these families to the variety of folks who live within the Deaf community in our area. We always say people don't know what they don't know. And so by bringing in these members of our community we've been able to expose these families to the types of people who are just like their children.

As I said before, sometimes if you do something good or you learn something new that will lead to someone else recognizing it and wanting to do the same thing. So Open Door Theater saw a poster at one of the museums that we partnered with about the accessibility events that we offered. So they asked if we could provide an ASL interpreter for some musical ‑‑ "Shrek?" No. It was a different one, "Working," that they wanted an ASL interpreter for that event but it didn't seem like there were any deaf people coming. So I contacted them and asked if they were interested in adding deaf and hard of hearing kids to their upcoming show.

It's an inclusive theater company, I should say. They have members ‑‑ autistic members on the acting cast and folks with Down Syndrome in the shows, but they hadn't ever had a deaf or hard of hearing member join the cast of one of their shows.

So, we had the idea of hosting an audition, a workshop for them, about how to try out for a play, what that would look like to audition for a play at an inclusive theater as a Deaf/Hard of Hearing person. So we advertised that to the community and 12 children showed up for the workshop to see if they wanted to try out for the play. And four of them actually got into "Shrek," the play they had put on the following year. And since then we've seen Open Door Theater have deaf and hard of hearing people in all of their plays and add captioning to the performances as well.

So I think it's been a really great success of seeing how that organization has really embraced cultural diversity in the last couple of years. They're obviously set up with the mission that aligns with ours and so that might have been pretty easy but they owned it as we approached them and they have really taken on full leadership in that capacity.

The last example I'm going to give to you is the Peabody Essex Museum. One of the people who works at the museum graduated from Boston University which has a well‑known Deaf Studies program. So there was some knowledge within the organization that the Deaf/Hard of Hearing community was probably not very well served. So we met with them and we let them know that they should probably offer some Deaf Culture Awareness training among their staff, have more accessibility services offered at the registration desk or elsewhere in the museum, and to provide a Deaf‑friendly enjoyable experience for some of the children programming, including hiring sign language interpreters.

So they invited Sunshine 2.0 to come and perform. There are about 100, 150 folks who came to a performance by them. We felt that was a great event. That was a great start for them to become much more accessible. So this has been much more recent, started last year. And we've now been in dialogue with them about adding more programming for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing community in the Boston area to be supported by the museum.

So I think it just shows that as you add more programming, the community tends to respond quite well to having more social events to go to. And these, of course, are opportunities for families to participate in as well.

Here's some recommendations if you're thinking about approaching an institution in your neighborhood that you might want to consider. The first is that you might want to collaborate on these types of events. And that may mean a financial collaboration. That also means that you need to keep up with the relationship, not just do one event and then leave it be but to maintain those events and make sure that they keep going and that you ask for ideas from your surrounding community about what would be best.

It is always important to consider that staff at these institutions may need additional training in Deaf Culture Awareness. There's always a good idea to go in and take a look at some of the accessibility options that are allowed ‑‑ or that are available in those museums. FM ‑‑ for example, an FM loop may not be available in the auditoriums. So you might want to install that or put signage up if it's not very clear that there is one available. You might want to have Braille ready for blind visitors and so on.

Once those organizations become much more friendly to these communities, it's very common for us to see the Deaf/Hard of Hearing community respond very positively and to frequent the events that they've put on, on a more regular basis. And it's also quite easy to frame these types of conversations within the concept of diversity and inclusion at these institutions and also to point out that they have peer institutions who have started to do the same type of work and to maybe put them in touch with other museums or venues in order for them to discuss the best ways that they can go about doing it.

I am not necessarily always the person who gives training programs to staff. Sometimes I contact folks in the Deaf community who may be better resources out there. So this doesn't necessarily mean that you'll have to take on too much more additional work if you have a strong community who would be willing to participate.

There is always a fear that these types of events may cost a lot of money. For many of these venues, they offer them without any additional fees. They are included in the price of admission or even free for the community. And sometimes folks still respond very well to an increase in the fee for special events because they realize that the cost is justified in order to make those events accessible to the community at large.

Our main goal, of course, is to make sure that families with deaf and hard of hearing children can allow their children to thrive in the community, that they have access to language models, meaning deaf adults or other deaf people, and that there is a reduction in the frustration that they have of accessing language models in the community, that these venues become places where language is accessible, that they are not too loud, and that really they are friendly faces welcoming them into these events.

I want to close with a thought here that I've put on the slide. Thinking about where you live, where you work, what types of strategies do you think you could implement with venues in your area? Maybe there's a venue that you haven't thought of recently that would be a good partner in these types of events. And you can call them when you get back and ask them what types of accessibility efforts they've already undertaken. And if they don't have something that you might know about because they don't know what they don't know, then that would be a great educational opportunity for you to engage with them.

All right. I guess I'm done there. I'll open it up for questions.

>> Thank you. I know that initially you said you would maybe start a group and then maybe the venue would take over. When you started a group or took the group to a venue, did you have to worry about insurance and liability and all of that kind of stuff through the hospital?

>> KATIE PRINS MCCARTHY: No. That never seemed to be a problem. We have a foundation called the Caroline Bass Fund that gives us funding in order to do these types of things, so family events in different locations. And so that's where we've started some of these pilot things. That allows us to expose families to deaf and hard of hearing people in ways of being in the community. So it didn't really expose the hospital to any sort of legal ramifications. We, through the foundation, gave money to the museum to start the event themselves and then eventually we cut the funding off. That was how that transition happened.

>> And I have one more question. Was the foundation already there or did you search out grant money or whatever to get something like that started?

>> KATIE PRINS MCCARTHY: So that foundation is already established within our department. It's part of the hospital. We probably have supported maybe the first one or two events at each of the museums that we've partnered with in order to get that off the ground as an incentive to them. And then as time has passed, you know, we've reached out to them again and said, you know, we'd like to advertise this, get it going, do you think at this point you could take over the financial liability for this so that our foundation can start to support other events in the community? And because of the turnout from those events, they've seen the value inherent in those events and all of them have said, yes, they would take that on for themselves.

All right. Thank you very much.

[Applause]