

Grant will improve ASL mentorship in Utah

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12/04/2018



Jennifer Harvey

School based American Sign Language interpreters in Utah sometimes work in isolation. That's not good for the interpreters, who need opportunities to expand their skills and knowledge. It's not good in the classroom, either, since the interpreter may be a child's primary source of information.

"They're often a language model," said Jennifer Harvey, who recently came to the CPD to direct the Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education's TASK-12 program. "The statistic out there is that 90 percent of Deaf or hard of hearing children are born to parents who are not Deaf." Sometimes, though their families work to learn ASL, the children surpass their parents' proficiency.

In Utah, interpreters are required to advance their certification within four years, or they can no longer work as an interpreter practitioner. But too often, they wash out when they try to "level up" from novice to professional status.

Harvey is working to change that. She recently received a grant from the state of Utah to provide more small-group and one-on-one mentoring to interpreters statewide. The funding—just under \$300,000 per year for five years—will help in the mentoring of 30 ASL interpreters per year. It

will expand opportunities to those who work not only in the classroom, but in varied settings throughout the state. TAESE is located in the Center for Persons with Disabilities at Utah State University. TASK-12 is one of many projects at TAESE aimed at improving the experience of students in special education programs all over the United States, by working with state and local agencies. TASK-12 provides training and assessment of sign language interpreters in 14 states, including Utah. The project's goal is to expand training and mentorship in all of them.

This latest Utah grant could contribute to creating mentorship opportunities in other states as well, Harvey said.

When she came to TAESE and the CPD, she brought her own life experience, as well as expertise in grant writing, with her.

"My parents are the ones who got me started," she said. "I was fortunate, being born into a family where both parents are Deaf." She grew up speaking ASL and began interpreting in college. She loved it. "I knew it was something I wanted to do in my career and in my life." She received her master's in ASL English/Interpreter Pedagogy from the University of North Florida. Now, she is focused on nurturing not only the love of interpreting, but the technical skill that will allow practitioners to increase their proficiency and remain in the field.

For more information, visit the [TASK-12](#) page on the [TAESE](#) website.

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