

LEAD-K's GOAL: Kindergarten-Readiness = Lifetime Success!

All children are born ready to learn, however far too many deaf children are deprived of early language development and are not kindergarten ready. Research has shown that language deprivation or delays between ages 0-5 is the main cause of many deaf children's eventual reading, academic, and social struggles. The type of language-rich environment and the quality of interaction to which children are exposed in the first five years of life greatly influence the outcomes of their adult lives.

The Problem

Research has shown that the first 3 years of life are crucial for language development and the basis for kindergarten-readiness. Early intervention programs for deaf children continue to be based on auditory language, spoken English, which, according to the growing research does not ensure a deaf child's full access to a language-rich environment. Deaf children's success in acquiring language at age appropriate levels when exposed to sign language is well documented; however the majority of deaf children continue to be denied exposure to a visual language. It is a denial of their human right to language and the ineffective educational system policies that perpetuate this injustice. This failure by the educational system to acknowledge a deaf child's visual experience of the world does not reflect the deaf child's full potential.

The Solution

Research has shown that when deaf children are exposed to a rich visual language environment (American Sign Language) they are provided the foundation for a first language and school readiness. The focus of LEAD-K is to promote language equality, a basic human right for all deaf babies by advocating for deaf children to have access to both American Sign Language and English.

The Strategy

LEAD-K's strategies are twofold: 1) raise the awareness and understanding of the general public, parents, and the education system of the Deaf child's experience in language learning, the role of visual learning for a Deaf child and how that impacts their educational success; and 2) to work with other partners to change public policy related to the education of Deaf children who use ASL and English, both or one of the languages toward Kindergarten-readiness.

Key Facts

- By age 5, a child's brain is already 90% developed, yet most deaf children enter kindergarten without language.
- The results of Deaf children not provided access to early language development:
 - Average reading level by 18 years of age has remained at 3rd or 4th grade level for more than a half a century.¹
 - Only 6% of deaf students scored proficient in English²
 - 51% of deaf students scored at the "far below basic" level which is the lowest level of performance³
- The lack of early and full accessible visual language exposure may be a contributing factor to the low levels of reading achievement in the deaf population⁴.
- Children are born ready to learn, but for a quarter of a million U.S. children who are deaf, they enter school not prepared to succeed.

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¹ Visual Language & Visual Learning Research Brief: Reading Research & Deaf children; Donna A. Morere, PH.D., June 2011

² 2008 California Special Education Management Information system (CASEMIS) Report, California State Department of Special Education

³ Ibid.

⁴ Baker, Sharon, Ed.D, Advantages of Early Visual Language, January 2011; Visual Language & Learning; Gallaudet University