



29th Annual FAMILY LEARNING WEEKEND for Families of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children June 6-8, 2025



What: MSDB 29th Annual Family Learning Weekend for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
Where: MSDB Campus in Great Falls
When: June 6-8, 2025
Who: Families of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children Living in Montana!
Why: IT WILL BE FUN!!

The Learning Weekend is a creative program providing opportunities for families of children who are deaf or hard of hearing to learn about deafness, share their experiences with other families, and learn how to communicate more fully with one another in a warm, caring atmosphere.

The focus of the weekend is to enhance each individual's personal knowledge of deafness and how it relates to the education and development of their child. Informal workshops, group discussions (parents' groups, kids' groups, siblings' groups, etc.) and hands-on activities will be offered. Child care and recreation for the children (siblings included) available at no charge. Families will be reimbursed for mileage at the current state rate.

Housing is provided on a first-come, first-serve basis. Each family is generally provided with their own suite of rooms in the cottages and efforts are made to make assignments according to individual needs and preferences. Typically each family has their own bathroom, sometimes two, depending on the size of the family. **Participants need to bring personal items such as soap, shampoo and toothpaste. The MSDB Swimming Pool is OPEN!!!! Please bring your swimming suit. There will be time for the kids to swim and family swim later on Saturday.**

Children's Programs:

The children are divided into groups based mostly on age. Many factors are taken into consideration including friendships, maturity level, and interests when putting together the groups. The children stay with their groups until they join the parents for mealtime. MSDB's finest residential and school staff will be responsible for supervising your children and making sure they enjoy the day as much as you do!

Birth to two: Children will be in Camas wing with staff to provide supervision. *Parents should pick up their children prior to lunch and dinner and return them to the same location when they are finished eating.*

Three to five: Children will be involved in a variety of activities throughout the day. These activities will include snacks, program practice, and indoor and outdoor activities, including a trip to the MSDB playground (weather permitting). The activities for this group will remain flexible, depending on the ages and abilities of the participants.

Six through eighteen: Saturday morning after the group picture, children will rejoin their assigned teams which are designed for children to be involved with peers. There will be several activities including program practice, recreation activities and snacks. In addition, a representative from the Montana Accessible Communications Program (MTAC) will have fun projects for the children to enjoy. **Teens will have the opportunity to attend designated sessions with their parents.** Also, during the morning session MSDB Counselors will meet with hearing siblings, providing them an opportunity to discuss their feelings regarding having a deaf or hard of hearing sibling. Deaf and Hard of Hearing children will meet separately to share their thoughts as well. *This information (while names confidential) will be shared with the parents during the Sunday morning presentation.*

****The kids program is intended to provide entertainment and educational activities that will further the participants' understanding of deafness and its impact on the family. Activities are designed for youth with hearing loss and for their siblings. Participants are grouped by age and staff are assigned accordingly, depending on the numbers of the participants and their individual needs. If you have unique concerns regarding your child, please let us know and we will work with you to ensure that everyone has a good time. Information from various resources (serving Deaf and Hard of Hearing) will be available throughout the weekend.*

Presenter Bios

Alice Anderson is a Montana native. She was born and raised in Helena, Montana. Alice attended Montana State University. Following her graduation, she attended Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon and earned her Master of Education in Deaf Education. Alice taught for one year as an itinerant teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Lewiston, Idaho. She then spent the next 30 years teaching primarily at the elementary level as a self-contained Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing for Yakima School District in Yakima, Washington. During these years, Alice and her husband welcomed two children, Brooke and Nick, into this world! They enjoyed raising their children in Yakima and making frequent trips to Montana to visit family. In 2015, Alice went back to school through Gallaudet University in Washington, DC. She earned her Graduate Level Certificate in the Infant, Family, and Toddler Early Intervention Studies Program. In 2016, she spent the next 8 years working with Deaf and Hard of Hearing infants, toddlers, and their families at Children's Village in Yakima, Washington. Alice joined the MSDB staff in 2023 as a Deaf and Hard of Hearing Outreach Consultant. She also completed her Graduate Level certificate in the Concentration in Deafblindness and High Intensity Support Needs through the University of South Dakota in December of 2024. Alice and her husband live in Polson, Montana and are enjoying being back in the great state of Montana!

Andrew (AJ) Kauffman was born and raised in Kalispell, Montana. Became Deaf at 18 months and learned how to sign and talk at the same time. AJ has three brothers; the youngest is Deaf and is an MSDB graduate of 2007. AJ is the middle child; he loves to make puns, make people laugh, and attempt to make others smile. AJ's other two brothers are hearing. Mainstreamed in Kalispell from preschool to ninth grade, he decided to transfer to Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind from his sophomore year to his senior year and graduated in 2004. AJ worked at the school as a teacher aide in 2019 as a substitute teacher aide and then decided to transfer to work at the Cottage as Obsidian boys house parent. AJ is the class sponsor of Class of 2026, music director of Expressions of Silence (fun fact: he was in Expressions of Silence for three years), chairperson of the Activities Committee for the Cottage Life, and part of the Student Council for the Cottage Life. AJ loves listening to music; he also has another job working at Arby's as a shift manager. AJ has been a certified lifeguard for four years now. AJ got married last year to Amanda Kauffman.

Cindie Beaulaurier is the mother of two children, Regina and Ross. Raising her children has been one of her greatest achievements! Cindie was raised in an ASL rich environment and she attributes this to her parents, Frank and Leona (Gulotta) Rataezyk. Her parents, her mother's brother, her father's seven siblings, and her daughter, Regina, all graduated from the Washington School for the Deaf (WSD). Cindie is proud to say that she is a CODA (child of deaf adults). With that being said, Cindie's first language was American Sign Language. Her life has been enriched through being immersed in Deaf culture, Deaf community, and Deaf heritage. Currently, Cindie is enjoying retirement. She continues to interpret and stay involved with service work.

Emilie Banasiak has been with Hamilton Relay since 2012 and is the Regional Relay Outreach Coordinator for Idaho and Montana. She provides information on telephone accessibility services that benefit those who are Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing, Deaf-Blind, or individuals with speech differences. Emilie's goal is to inspire others to do more in their lives than they ever thought possible through education and self-advocacy. In her free time, she enjoys traveling, exploring new places and learning about other cultures and languages. She also volunteers as a Deaf mentor to families of Deaf and/or hard of hearing children, and is a member of the Idaho Council for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. In her free time, she enjoys reading, crocheting and finding new places in her hometown to explore with her husband and 6 year old son.

Jennifer St. Pierre: I'm excited to be teaching ASL at the Family Learning Weekend! I work full-time as an ASL mentor at the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind and am a student at Gallaudet University, pursuing my degree in Deaf Studies. Along with my work at MSDB, I also teach ASL at the Air Force and Touro Medical School, Community. When I'm not teaching, you'll find me at my children's sports events—whether it's basketball, dance, lacrosse, track, football, or anything else they're involved in. I love supporting them and being present in their activities. My partner and I also love to travel more these days, and with five kids Baylee (22), Irish(20), Damen(17), Kailynn(15), and Kamdyn(13). there's always something new to explore and experience together. I'm also passionate about criminal justice, especially true crime, and can often be found researching or watching documentaries.

Montana Empowerment Center-Montana's Parent Training and Information Center

Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) help families of children with disabilities have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children. We do this through individualized assistance, training, and resources that help parents work with schools, providers, and educational systems to meet the unique needs of their children. As a PTI, we help families of children with disabilities understand their rights, navigate special education systems, and access resources. We draw on the evidence-based resources from our network of 100 other parent centers to:

- Provide workshops, support, and one-on-one help to empower parents to advocate for their child's education and needs.
- Provide information and training for people with disabilities on special education, transitioning from school to adulthood, employment, and self-advocacy.
- Help parents understand how to navigate the special education process.
- Offer one-on-one support for individual needs related to special education and transitioning.
- Assist with planning the move from high school to adult life.

Free trainings and tips on special education, transitioning, and early intervention are available on our website: <https://mtempowermentcenter.org/>

Regina McGinnis is an Eastern Washington native but identifies as a city-girl, as she currently resides in Northern Seattle. Born Deaf, she was lucky to have Deaf grandparents, great aunts and uncles who shaped her Deaf identity and provided access to connection and communication. Regina experienced her formative years being a mainstreamed student until she delved into the Deaf world by attending Washington School for the Deaf. She then earned her BA in Psychology at Central Washington University and her MA in Mental Health Counseling from Gallaudet University, which is the only liberal arts university in the world for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. Having 17 years of working in the mental, emotional and behavioral health field, Regina currently works part time for Seattle Children's Hospital and for Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Youth (CDHY). When not helping others navigate life's challenges, she's wrangling her 2 (and one bonus, which makes 3) kids and waiting upon her 4 cats and golden retriever. During her "free" time, Regina indulges in her favorite hobbies- sleeping, reading, running and binge watching TV series (because who needs moderation?). She's thrilled to be here and looks forward to sharing her experience, insights and presenting alongside her mom!

Shawn Tulloch is the Program Manager of Deaf Services in the Disability, Employment, and Transitions Division which houses other programs including Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services. She is also the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf serving those who are culturally Deaf and those with a hearing loss to seek or maintain competitive integrated employment. She previously worked as a teacher of the deaf for 15+ years in Vermont, Arizona, and Montana. She graduated from Hope College with a Language Arts bachelor's degree and from Michigan State University with a Special Education master's degree. Shawn will be pursuing a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling starting this fall at University of Wisconsin-Stout. Shawn is a strong believer that all deaf can be independent and make their own decisions. In her dual roles, she enjoys working with people on accessibility issues for the deaf and hard of hearing people, researching assistive technology options, and encouraging deaf and hard of hearing individuals of all ages to pursue what they want to do in their lives. Shawn and her husband enjoy watching action-filled movies and TV shows, traveling in the USA and other countries, and RV camping with their dogs.

Sheri Devlin: I am in my second year as the transition coordinator at MSDB. Prior to MSDB, I worked a combination of 24 years as a vocational rehabilitation counselor. As a VR counselor, I started my career in Billings where I had the opportunity to work directly with clients who were deaf or hard of hearing. Later in my career I served as the Counselor Supervisor for the Blind and Low Vision Services in Great Falls. I am a certified Rehabilitation Counselor as well as a certified Benefits Counselor for Social Security. When I'm not working, I enjoy spending time with friends and family outside, going to local concerts, reading, and as of late, keeping up with my grandson.

Tearra Donovan: I'm excited to be teaching ASL at the Family Learning Weekend! I'm a full-time teacher at the K-12 level, teaching various classes. I'm also a full-time student at McDaniel's College, working toward my MA degree. In my free time, I enjoy reading as much as possible, whether fiction or academic materials, as I love expanding my knowledge. I have an 8-month-old son, Chayce, and spending time with him is my top priority. I cherish every moment I spend with him and watch him grow and learn. Being a mother has deepened my love for learning and has motivated me even more to pursue my goals in both teaching and education.

Sherri Widhalm is a Montana native, born and raised in Great Falls, Montana. She attended Montana State University and the University of New Mexico School of Medicine. Upon completion of her studies there, she worked in the field of genetic research at the McLaughlin Research Institute for Biomedical Research. After having two sons, Sherri returned to graduate school and received her Master's Degree in Speech Language Pathology from the University of Montana. She has worked as a speech language pathologist in multiple settings including the hospital, the inpatient rehabilitation setting, schools, and private practice. In 2020, Sherri pursued a board certification in Listening and Spoken Language through the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill. As the only board-certified listening and spoken language specialist in the state of Montana, she serves children and adults across the state who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and who are pursuing listening and spoken language as their communication modality. She provides guidance and support to families of children with hearing loss at the Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind, as well as families across the state of Montana through her private practice, Sound Start Therapy of Montana. She has received multiple ACE awards from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, which recognizes professionals who have demonstrated lifelong learning.

Thomas "Tommy" Horejes, Ph.D., has decades of academic and professional experience in legal policy & advocacy. His training in both the academic and professional canon is a multi/inter/trans disciplinary focus on law, advocacy, social justice & impact, policy studies, communication accessibility, and public administration. He takes great passion doing research & development on law, data, policy trends, education, consumer service, and innovation with the denominating factor in making a positive social impact to and for all.

Academically, Dr. Horejes has 15+ years of teaching disability policy, law, and sociology in higher education, 13+ peer-reviewed published articles including ([Re](#))[conceptualizing Disability Policy Frameworks](#) for the *Journal of Policy Practice*, and presented 70+ scholarly works on legal policy, accessibility, education, and justice studies for industry conferences, including the International Sociological Association and the American Educational Research Association.

Professionally, he is current Director of Government Relations for Convo Communications and former Director of Policy & Advocacy for Telecommunications for the Deaf/HH (TDI) as a national leader in policy advocacy, education, and innovation to foster full accessibility, equity, and inclusion in Information and Communications Technology. Prior to Convo, Thomas was Associate Provost for Gallaudet University; and Executive Director of Deaf Empowerment Awareness Foundation (DEAF, Inc.), a non-profit organization dedicated to empower, raise Awareness, and bridge a sustainable Foundation of advocacy, communication and accessibility for the Deaf, Hard of Hearing, DeafBlind, and the Hearing communities. He was also a former advocate for the Greater Los Angeles Agency on Deafness (GLAD), the largest deaf-run non-profit organization that provided legal advocacy and empowerment to deaf and hard of hearing consumers.

Tommy currently serves on the Board for State of Maryland's Hands & Voices, Deaf Youth Sports Foundation (dysf.org) and member of Maryland Department of Health's Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Advisory Council. Born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri where he attended Central Institute for the Deaf (CID), he currently lives in rural Maryland with his wife and blended family of very active children. When he is not busy with legal policy advocacy work, he enjoys watching his kids play baseball, soccer, basketball, and volleyball along with road biking, cooking, and tending to his small farm and animals.

Deaf/Hard of Hearing Family Learning Weekend 2025 Schedule

(subject to change)

Friday, June 6, 2025

- 4:00-6:00 **Check in:** Yellowstone Cottage. Room Assignments and Family Photo.
5:30-6:20 **Dinner:** MSDB main dining room.
6:20-6:30 **Transition to Activities:** Children will go to the Mustang Center (Gym). Parents will go to Bitterroot.
6:30-7:00 **Icebreaker Activity:** Bitterroot (IMC) with Parents.
7:00-8:15 **Parent and Child Panel:** 3 families, Bitterroot (IMC).
8:15 **Day Complete:** Announcements; Pick up children from respective areas.

Saturday, June 7, 2025

- 7:30-8:30 **Breakfast:** MSDB main dining room.
8:30-8:50 **Group Pictures:** All Participants together in front of the big MSDB Map sign (each family will get a "Memory Book" at the end of the weekend to take home).
9:00-10:45 **Regina McGinnis and Cindie Beaulaurier-** Signing Our Story: A Mother-Daughter Tale of Language, Love, and Understanding (Parents and Teens, Bitterroot IMC).
10:45-11:00 **Break:** Snacks and Resource Tables in Bitterroot (IMC).
11:00-11:45 **Breakout Session:** One time choice of presentations:
- Snapshot of MSDB Programs (Parents)
- Language, Learning, and Fun Play Groups (Parents and their Infants/Toddlers)
- Vocational Rehabilitation 101 (Parents)
11:45-12:45 **Lunch:** MSDB main dining room.
12:45-1:15 **Kids Program:** Mustang Center (Gym).
1:15-1:30 **Transition:** Bitterroot (IMC).
1:30-2:20 **Breakout Sessions:**
-ASL 1 -ASL 2
-Montana Empowerment- Everything You Wanted to Know About an IEP (But Were Afraid to Ask)
-Regina McGinnis- Whole Child, Whole Language: Language, Understanding and Mental Health
-Tommy Horejes- Unlocking Potential: Ensuring the Best Education for Your Deaf Child
2:20-3:10 **Breakout Sessions:**
-ASL 1 -ASL 2
-Montana Empowerment- Everything You Wanted to Know About an IEP (But Were Afraid to Ask)
-Regina McGinnis- Whole Child, Whole Language: Language, Understanding and Mental Health
-Tommy Horejes- Unlocking Potential: Ensuring the Best Education for Your Deaf Child
3:15-4:30 **Parent Groups:**
-Mom's Group
-Dad's Group
-Grandparent's Group
4:30-5:00 **Break:** Everyone to the Cottages.
5:00-6:00 **FREE SWIM/ BOWLING/ BREAK TIME:** All families in the Mustang Center (Gym).
6:00-6:55 **Dinner:** MSDB main dining room.
7:00-8:45 **Tommy Horejes-** Your Future, Your Choices: Identity, Advocacy, and the Path to Success (Parents and Teens, Bitterroot IMC).
8:45 **Day Complete:** Pick up children from respective areas in Cottages.

Sunday, June 8, 2025

- 7:45-8:45 **Breakfast:** MSDB main dining room.
8:50-10:10 **Emilie Banasiak-** My Journey, presentation in Bitterroot (IMC).
10:10-10:30 **Presentation:** Montana Accessible Communications (MTAC) & Door Prize Drawing.
10:30-11:00 **Sibling Summary:** MSDB Student Life Counselors will share with you information from the siblings of your DHH child. This session is intended to be "light and informing".
11:00-11:30 **Evaluations:** Bitterroot (IMC).
11:30 Pick up your children, Grab & Go Lunch, and on your way! Have a wonderful Summer and Safe Travels!



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FAMILY LEARNING WEEKEND for
Families of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children
June 6-8, 2025**

WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID ABOUT MSDB'S FAMILY LEARNING WEEKENDS!

"I think every family with a deaf child should come to at least one to see if it's helpful to them – we love it and learn each and every time we come to MSDB!"

"I like that my brother feels welcome and fits in every time he is here and I support him."

"I was very impressed with MSDB in general. I had no idea that this was such a 'gem'. Montana is very lucky."

"Informative, we met a lot of amazing families, the staff was great and the kids had fun"

"Seeing all the kids together is the best part! We always learn something new that helps us with our lives!"

"The staff are great, always different options for presenters – changes every year"

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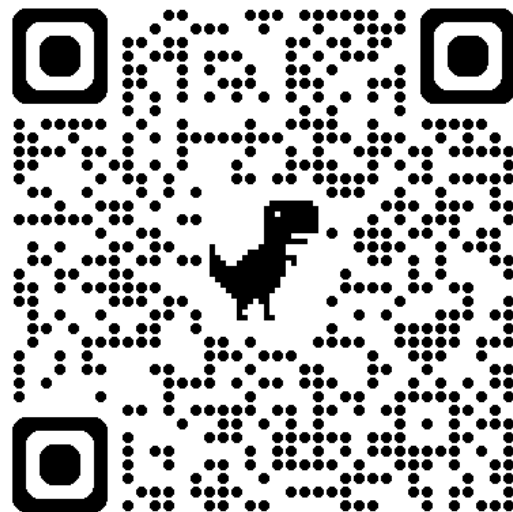
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