

OBJECTIVE

To investigate the available mentorship opportunities for Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) teenagers, and their families, in the the United States, determine the qualities and characteristics of an impactful and influential mentors for teenagers, and training opportunities currently available for prospective mentors for the purposes of applying potential findings to the development of a mentor program for DHH teenagers in the United States.

BACKGROUND

In the United States, 2 to 3 out of every 1,000 babies born has hearing loss and about 1 in every 5 teenagers experiences hearing loss¹. Additionally, 6.7 million students aged 3 to 21 receive special education services and 6% of those students have a developmental delay or disability⁵. Hearing loss has been categorized as a neurodevelopmental disorder, which is defined as "...multifaceted conditions characterized by impairments in cognition, communication, behavior and/or motor skills resulting from abnormal brain development"². As DHH children grow into adolescence there is a need shift ownership of their hearing loss from the parent to the adolescent for the purpose of cultivating self-advocacy skills and empowerment. About 95% of children born Deaf or Hard of Hearing have parents with normal hearing abilities³, therefore, introducing the adolescent to a mentor who knows and understands their situation can be an important step toward ownership. Deaf or Hard of Hearing mentors for DHH teenagers can play a crucial and important role of modeling this ownership for the mentee. Additionally, many DHH youth are often the only student in their community "like them" and may be less integrated in society than their normal hearing peers having more difficulty participating in daily activities and situations^{3,4}. Bringing DHH students together, via their mentor and community mentor programs, can help them create their own supportive community³. Moreover, mentors help to support youth in their academics, career aspirations, psychosocial development, and transition to adulthood⁵.

METHODS

Before developing a mentor program for DHH teenagers it was determined that the developers must know and understand the following:

- what qualities and characteristics are possessed by a successful mentor,
- what training is available for prospective mentors and what does the training consist of,
- and are there are mentor programs currently available for teenagers with neurodevelopmental disabilities in the community?

The answers to these questions were found by reviewing research aimed at measuring the success of mentor programs for teenagers, various organization's guidelines for youth mentor programs, and the training curriculums for youth mentor training programs.



DISCUSSION

What are the qualities and characteristics of a successful mentor?

The role of a mentor is to provide support and guidance to the mentee. A mentor relationship is based on underlying, mutual trust and respect that allows for an intimate learning alliances to form naturally⁶. Many researchers and established mentor programs suggested that the following qualities and characteristics were often found in successful mentors:

- willingness to emotionally connect with youth and share experiences⁷
- offers support, encouragement, guidance, friendship and new and positive perspectives^{6, 7, 10}
- enhances the youth's participation in society with new connections and resources that benefit the youth.^{8, 9, 10}

Lastly, mentors who are also Deaf or Hard of Hearing serve as role models with specific shared identities and experiences.^{3, 4, 12} The opportunity to learn from a mentor that has adapted to parallel life experiences and accepted their identity allows the youth, as well as the parent, to visualize what may be possible for their future.^{3, 4}

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What training is currently available for prospective mentors?

Training for mentors in an integral part of the mentor relationship and is often recommended before a match as well as ongoing training following the match.^{5, 13, 14, 15} Additionally, adults with neurodevelopmental disabilities themselves may offer a unique perspective for the design of appropriate mentor training.¹² Currently, there are several general mentor training courses available online for programs and prospective mentors such as:

- Effective Strategies for Providing Quality Youth Mentoring in Schools and Communities six part training guide
- AARP Experience Corps Mentor Toolkit
- National Mentoring Partnership's Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring Forth Edition
- Ongoing Training for Mentors: 12 Interactive Sessions for U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Programs

These programs focused on skills such as active listening, setting goals, communication, obligations and commitment, establishing boundaries, relationship development, and ethical and safety issues.^{8, 16, 17, 18}

What mentor programs are currently available for youth with disabilities, and their families, in the U.S.?

For Families	For Youth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hands and Voices Deaf and Hard of Hearing Mentors and Role Models • Support for Families of Children with Disabilities: Parent Mentor Program • Parent Training and Resource Center" • Peer-Parent Mentor Program • Tuscarawas Board of Developmental Disabilities Family Mentor Program • Parent to Parent USA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AG Bell Leadership Opportunities for Teens (LOFT) • Chicago Hearing Society Adult Role Models in Education of the Deaf (ARMED) Program • Ready to Achieve Mentoring Program (RAMP) • Thrive Center: Redeem Program • Partners for Youth with Disabilities Mentoring Program

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