

*Raising a child is a commitment to at least 18 years of parenting. (Parents of young adults will understand that it continues past that magic age of legal adulthood.) Of those first 18 years, a child who is deaf or hard of hearing will spend about 15 years in school, beginning with a preschool program. Last year we started asking for input from parents, professionals and parent/professionals about what they've learned through experience about advocating for educational services, and what they would have liked to have understood earlier, so as to pass the knowledge and tips on to younger parents. So far we've collected far more than can fit into one issue of "Wavelengths," so this will only be the first of several articles. In fact, the series is still in development, so feel free to send in your comments, suggestions, questions and stories!*

## The Fourth R: 'Riting the IEP

Lorna Irwin (with lots of help)

Where to begin? Perhaps with a brief overview of the basics. Special education services are provided in a formal legal framework. Before age 3, services are provided to the child and his family through part C of the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.) The lead agency for this in Idaho is Idaho Infant-Toddler, with many services provided by IESDB (Idaho Educational Services for the Deaf and the Blind) as well as other professionals in the community. At age 3, part B of the IDEA kicks in, and the child's education becomes the responsibility of the local school district (LEA or local education agency.) A Child Study Team (CST) meets and develops an IEP (Individual Education Plan) which spells out goals for the coming year and services to be provided. Parents or guardians are to be included as members of the CST and agree to the IEP for it to go into effect; the school must adhere to the IEP or have the parents agree to modifications.

The IEP process can be confusing and complex, especially if parents and school are in disagreement about anything. Idaho Parents UnLimited (IPUL) provides numerous workshops for parents about advocacy, IEPs and other issues. Go to their webpage at [www.ipulidaho.org](http://www.ipulidaho.org) to see what is scheduled for your area; they have also started to offer workshops as webinars. For specific questions, call them at 1-800-242-IPUL.

There are also some provisions of the IDEA and Idaho law that pertain specifically to students with hearing loss. If your child uses a sign language interpreter, Cued Speech transliterator, or oral interpreter in the classroom, that person must meet certain minimum skill standards set by the Idaho Educational Interpreter Act (for which there is finally some oversight--see article below.) Educational placement can be tricky for students who are deaf or hard of hearing; some thrive in the regular classroom and others find it isolating. The IDEA calls for placement in the "least restrictive environment" (LRE), which is generally considered to be the regular classroom, but also contains language about "special considerations" for children who are deaf or hard of hearing which are not always familiar to educators in the LEA. Knowing about these two points as well as general education law can be valuable to parents.

More about the legal stuff in future articles! For this month, I'd like to focus on a theme that kept recurring as I gathered information:

**Everything, from getting needed services into the IEP, to seeing that schools and teachers follow through with these services, to good parent-teacher-student relations, becomes easier when everyone involved truly understands what the child's hearing loss means for that individual child.**

Early identification and intervention, advanced hearing aid technology and cochlear implants mean that some children enter school with good speech and language skills and appear to be hearing just fine! School officials may question whether a child who doesn't watch the interpreter 100% of the time needs an interpreter at all; the classroom teacher who doesn't understand what the FM system does can get inconsistent about using it despite the IEP. The child bluffs his way through the day and seems to be doing okay while falling further and further behind. What can a parent do?

Some ideas:

1. First, understand your child's communication needs and how these may be different in a school setting. While he may not need an FM unit or visual support at home, at school he will be learning new concepts and vocabulary in a difficult listening environment. Track his progress closely--talk to him about school. Visit school and eat lunch with him! (A single experience with her son in the cafeteria prompted one mother to ask for a sign language interpreter during the lunch hour; another mother visited school one day to find the interpreter subbing for the school secretary rather than in the classroom.)
2. Find professionals who can provide training to or work with the regular classroom teacher. If you are in a larger district, they may have a formal program for students with hearing loss and include in-services for teachers. They may have one or more teachers of the deaf (ToDs) who work with students directly and/or team or consult with other teachers, and an educational audiologist to provide services to the students and teach other staff how to use FM units and other equipment. Smaller school districts may be dealing with their first-ever student with a hearing loss and need a lot more help, whether they realize it or not! IESDB has an outreach program to support students in mainstream settings and their teachers. The school district must initiate the request for their services; as members of the Child Study Team, parents can request or insist that they do so.
3. If your child will be using an interpreter or other facilitator of communication, it's important that everyone understand the facilitator's role. Most aides who accompany children with special needs into the classroom are there to assist the child and/or monitor and control behavior; this is what classroom teachers are familiar with and what they may expect from an interpreter unless informed otherwise. All three parties--teacher, student and interpreter--need to be on the same page here! The interpreter may also be the person best able to recognize what the child's communication needs are, and should be included in the IEP process.
4. Sooner or later your child will start making some decisions for himself, such as not to use the interpreter, not to use the FM, not to wear hearing aids.... Don't jump in and modify the IEP right away. He may change his mind after running the experiment! (And don't demand that he comply with the IEP, either. He may be right, or he may find out for himself that he really does better with that FM unit.) Your child should be included in the IEP meeting at as young an age as possible. For small children this may be as little as turning up for the first few minutes, showing some of their work to the group and telling them what they like about school. Older children can and should be making decisions about coursework and giving input about communication needs.
5. Don't forget the other kids! It may be possible for a teacher of the deaf to come in and do a short lesson on hearing loss to your child's classmates. Sometimes a parent will volunteer to do this, and if your child can help with it or even take the lead, so much the better. It helps if other kids understand what that thing on your child's head is, and that your child may not always respond to greetings or hear exactly what is said. (For a light-hearted take on this, see "Ears are for Earmolds, Not Gravel" by Corinne Coleman at the end of this issue.)

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### **New Support for Educational Interpreting in Idaho**

An exciting agreement between the Idaho State Department of Education (SDE) and the Idaho Educational Services for the Deaf and the Blind (IESDB) has made it possible to support a position: "Interpreter Education Coordinator". This position is housed with IESDB and part of the Outreach Program. There are two main purposes for this agreement and position: 1) Assist school districts in the delivery of better mediated instruction/educational opportunities for students that are Deaf or hard of hearing throughout Idaho. 2) Support the SDE in meeting the minimum standard requirements and continued professional development for educational interpreters as defined in the Idaho Educational Interpreter Act.

Joelynn Ball is the new coordinator. She has a long list of responsibilities and exciting things that she is working on under the agreement with the SDE. Some of her major areas of focus are, briefly:

1. **Coordination/Centralization:** act as a general resource, information clearinghouse
2. **Education and Awareness:** raise awareness of the *Idaho Educational Interpreter Act*, to stakeholders

3. **Professional Development:** coordinate region-based seminars and workshops and a multiple day annual, face to face training with intense focus on language development and skill development
4. **Evaluation:** act as a Local Test Administrator for the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA)
5. **Review:** facilitate the EIPA Pre-Hire screening that is part of the Emergency Authorization application process within the *Idaho Educational Interpreter Act*
6. **Monitoring:** school districts will provide information, at least annually, on any educational interpreter working in their district. Educational interpreters will provide documentation of the Continued Education Hours (CEH) they have accrued over the year.

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**Book Review: How Deaf Children Learn, by Marc Marschark and Peter C. Hauser**

Ordering one book on Amazon leads to being given further suggestions, and in that way I learned about this recent publication. It's an excellent, up-to-date, not-too-technical summary of what we know, what we don't know, and what we think we know about how deaf and hard of hearing children learn and what can be done to help them succeed. What is supported by research, and what seems reasonable given what we know about children in general, but hasn't been specifically studied in children with hearing loss? You can do an exhaustive (and exhausting) survey of the current educational literature, or read this book.

It will come as no surprise that success in school is highly dependent on parental support and early, consistent access to language and communication, in *whatever mode works for that child*. The authors point out some things that parents of very young children can do to lay the foundations for future success with both academic and personal skills, and make a case for allowing deaf children the same opportunities for freedom and exploration that hearing children have. There is a tendency at both home and school to provide more structure and more control, which leaves deaf children lagging behind in their ability to make decisions and organize their own approach to solving problems.

I'm including a review of this book in this issue because I think it would be a good resource to loan (or give!) to a classroom teacher who has limited or no experience teaching children with hearing loss. It's under 150 pages, and includes not only basic information about hearing loss, hearing aids, cochlear implants and communication choices, but what research can tell us about cognitive differences between deaf and hearing children that have implications for how best to support learning, not just access. While we are beginning to understand that deaf children are not just hearing children who can't hear (which may be due to how the brain develops with less auditory input, or language delays, or less knowledge gained through incidental learning, or combinations of these factors), we have yet to apply much of what we know to educating deaf children.

--Lorna Irwin

**Smoke Detectors Available for Families in the Treasure Valley**

The City of Meridian obtained a grant to provide smoke detectors to Meridian residents, including those that produce a visual alarm for those who might not hear a regular smoke detector. They are now extending the offer to Boise residents. Go to <http://www.meridiancity.org/fire.aspx?id=11079> to learn about the program and fill out an application.

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**Upcoming Events**

(Be sure to check our webpage or "like" our Facebook page to receive up-to-date information. If you'd like to have an interpreter present for an Idaho Hands & Voices activity, please let us know by email as far in advance as possible.)

**Workshop on Bullying Prevention** sponsored by IPUL and the Idaho Federation of Families, Wednesday January 30, 4:00-5:30 pm at three locations in region 2: 1118 F St, Lewiston; 1550 Troy Highway, Moscow; 216 South C St, Grangeville. The workshop is free, but you must pre-register. Contact Lorisa Wellock (lorisa@ipulidaho.org or (208) 342-5884 for more information.

**Tools for Life Secondary Transition and Assistive Technology Fair**, March 7-8 in Boise:

<http://www.idahoat.org/ToolsForLife2013.aspx>

**Idaho Parents UnLimited** mini-conference in Coeur d'Alene, March 19-20: [www.ipulidaho.org](http://www.ipulidaho.org)

**Winter fun with Treasure Valley Hands & Voices:** Activities for families of children with hearing loss at any age, using any communication method. Siblings are always welcome. Current members of Idaho Hands & Voices will receive a discount on admission or event prices (see below.) Come meet and talk with other parents while the kids enjoy time together.

Saturday, January 19: **iBounce** is a new bounce-house play place located at 6202 W. State Street in Boise. Cost of admission for IDHV members is \$4 per child; adults can play for free. Please mention our group when you arrive. Play time is from 11:00 to 1:00 p.m. No RSVP necessary.

Saturday, February 23: **Tubing at Bogus Basin** back by popular demand! We have a 2 hour block of time reserved from 11:00 to 1:00 p.m. **RSVP AND PRE-PAYMENT REQUIRED BY FEBRUARY 15<sup>th</sup>**. Email us if you plan to attend, as space is limited and a final count is necessary. Come bundled up & ready for fast fun! IDHV member cost is \$5/person. See [www.bogusbasin.org](http://www.bogusbasin.org) for hill-specific information.

Sunday, March 17: Time for fun on the ice! **Ice World** is located at 7072 S. Eisenman Road in Boise. IDHV member cost is \$3 per person, which includes admission fee and skate rental. (Helmets are available for an additional \$3 each.) Join us from 12:00-2:00 p.m. No RSVP necessary.

**Magic Valley Hands & Voices** will not have the usual Valentine party, as Lorna has been drafted into cooking, dishwashing, chair recovering and boat dock replacement in Arizona for the first half of February. We will be having an Easter party instead! Watch for more information in the March edition.

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS!** Idaho Hands & Voices has scheduled our first ever weekend Family Camp for September 13-15, 2013 at Paradise Point Camp near McCall. This will cost about \$300 per family, to cover food and lodging, and we hope to offer a few scholarships. Anyone desiring to help with planning, or with suggestions as to speakers or activities, please contact us.

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*How many of us have been asked (or have asked to) come into our child's school and help their classmates understand what hearing loss means? Here we have a memory from the child, now a college student, about Tommy, who wanted a pair of hearing aids for himself:*

### **Ears Are for Earmolds, Not Gravel**

**by Corinne Coleman**

My mom was asked to come in and talk about hearing loss, hearing aids and cochlear implants to our first grade class. Then I had bright green earmolds that you could see in my ear a mile away. But anyway my mom came in and brought some of my old molds, and aids for the kids to look at. It was as if the kids thought I was a secret agent with my neon green ear molds, and they were jealous, especially Tommy. Well the show and tell went great, my mom went home and we all went out to recess on our pea gravel playground. Tommy, obviously entirely intrigued by my mom's lesson, wanting to be like me, grabbed the first thing he saw to put in his ears. Well, that was the pea gravel. The next thing we know poor little Tommy is complaining about his ears hurting and that he can't really hear (who knew pea gravel doesn't amplify sound?) and we realize that he had put a generous handful in his ear and wedged them in his ear canal pretty well. I guess I call him my first diehard fan! Thank goodness my dad was an Ear Nose and Throat doctor, he helped Tommy get every last piece of gravel out. Poor guy had a serious Coleman overload that day! My mom and I still, to this day, have a good laugh about Tommy! So even though my aids are really so fascinating (and for you hearing people, it's just painful to wear because the feedback is so loud and having things in your ears just feels so weird!) and I make them look so cool, please don't do the rocks, or anything else, my dad's retired.

*Corinne Coleman is a Junior at BYU in Provo, majoring in Communication Disorders with the goal of becoming an audiologist. She's offered to answer parent questions and supply more articles--welcome to the "staff," Corinne!*

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*We welcome submissions from our readers! Send in articles, stories, ideas for stories, book and product reviews, anything you have to share (or questions for Corinne?) to [niwri2@msn.com](mailto:niwri2@msn.com), or call (208)324-7544. "Wavelengths" is published every two months, give or take a bit.*