

# Transcript

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Deaf to Deaf: Research and Stories. Inclusive Early Childhood Service System. December 2021.

The youth performers of Deaf Crows Collective will discuss the IECSS Policy Brief number ten, their life experience, and the stories they've created for their play "Apple Time" produced in 2018.

Kainat Wahid:

Hello, my name is Kainat Wahid and this is my name sign. For deaf children living with a family that doesn't use sign language, means there's almost no communication. It is very lonely. They feel left out. They don't have a real connection to anyone. How does that impact the child? They lack social skills. They don't learn to read, write very well. That makes them feel depressed, anxious and scared. Sometimes it feels overwhelming. I grew up and went to school in Pakistan. Going to school, I constantly felt overwhelmed. I didn't have a clue what teachers were saying or writing. I knew they were speaking to me, but I couldn't hear them and didn't understand what they were saying. I felt like a total failure. I felt stupid. In Pakistan, I was afraid when I was in school. I was shy. I will just sit quietly in my desk beside the wall and try to hide... go unnoticed. At home, we couldn't communicate... my family and me. They might gesture to me but didn't really want to accept I was deaf. I couldn't communicate to them how I was feeling. I just had to accept their beliefs and only use speech. Now that I'm in Canada, now I feel confident! I have sign language. I have friends I could actually communicate with. I was able to learn at school. I started to understand English! I got better because I understood! My family noticed my sister and I communicating using sign language. They realized then that I was capable of communicating, doing things myself. They realized that I was smart, I was capable. My family does not approve of me signing. They will push my hands away and tell me to use my speech. They really didn't understand the deaf experience. They did not understand what it feels like to not be able to communicate... to be left out. But I want to have a communication and I have a real communication in sign language, which makes me happy. Makes me feel important. It gives me confidence I can succeed. But alone with my family, there is no communication, no connection and it makes me feel depressed. What I would like my family to do is to accept my identity as a deaf person, and that I need sign language. Not too—For my parents to understand my rights for communication. To respect me and I will respect them. In the "Apple Time" play, my character was being followed by stranger, and was terrified. I couldn't tell my family because they wouldn't believe me, or they might blame me. So, I had to keep it from them. But I will tell my deaf friends. With their support, I was able to deal with the situation. After that, my character felt more confident, more courageous. I think that I will rely on the support of my deaf friends. At the same time, I was sad that I couldn't turn to my family for help. The moral of this story is that being part of a family is precious and requires shared communication. When children can communicate fully with their family, they learn the right social skills. They can do well at school. They feel included, happy, confident and courageous.

Fatima Tun Nafisa:

Hello, my name is Fatima Tun Nafisa and this is my name sign. And I'm nineteen. What do deaf children need most? Sign language! No matter where they live in Canada. Whoever is caring for the deaf child, no matter who, should be able to communicate in sign language. Governments should be funding sign language programs, as well as speech training. Governments need to properly fund sign language programs. I think it would be very bad if sign language programs were lost due to not enough funding. When I was young, the doctors told my parents that I should be taught to speak. That did not work. I started to learn sign language when I was thirteen. The first time I went to a deaf school. All those years I never signed. I was forced to learn speech reading and to speak. I was in a mainstream setting all alone. I never understood what was going on. I was left out. It was really tough. Learning sign language changed my life! Now I had a community of others like me and a teacher I could understand. Peers who I could easily communicate with. Now I have a future. I can think about the future. I belong. A classroom where everyone knows sign language makes learning way easier. How do my parents feel about me signing? They've accepted it. They're okay with it, but they still want me to use my speech. They want me to use both and that's fine by me. I can do both, but for me sign language is more comfortable than speaking. What I wish my parents had known when I was young? Is that you should start with sign language first, introduce speech later.

My character in "Apple Time" is not like her dragon family. She's kind of the opposite because they are dragons-- they love fires, warm temperatures and being in sunny places. Not my dragon character. I love cool temperatures. I enjoy the peace of lakes and streams, that's where I am happiest. I'm different than my family and that needs to be respected. The moral of the story is to accept what nature has provided. We need to help deaf children learn their natural sign language. They need to learn it when they're young and their family too. Let them go to school in sign language programs. Adequate funding must be provided, so deaf children can have their education in sign language. Funding for children and families.

Shayla-Rae Tanner

Hello, my name is Shayla Tanner and this is my name sign. I am Indigenous and I am deaf. I need both my First Nations culture and the deaf culture. I need both languages-- signed and spoken. I need a sign language program and they should be provided across Canada, no matter where we live. I value both my identities and want to keep both my deaf and Indigenous identities. My parents were advised what to do with me as a deaf child by the audiologist and speech language therapist when I was about four or five. I was taught to speak by a white person in the next town. So, I had to travel there. And by an Indigenous woman who was my rehab teacher. During this time, I communicated with my friends using a tablet. I actually didn't like using the iPad...I felt like a robot. When I was growing up, I didn't feel connected to anything or anyone. I didn't know anything about my Nation's culture or history. I didn't understand what was happening during ceremonies, what their purpose was, or what the significance was. Now I am twenty-three and going to university, where I am learning these things. I learned some of our history. The purpose of our powwows and the meaning of other ceremonies. I learned about the Creator and, because of this, I have a much stronger connection with my culture. My connection to my deaf culture started when I was about fifteen... maybe fourteen. That's when

I started learning sign language, in a deaf program with a deaf teacher and deaf friends. That changed me. I felt more confident.

In "Apple Time," my character was a wolf. But my family were Eagles. We weren't able to connect-- my family and me. In a dream, I spoke with my grandmother and she told me I had to accept who I was. She said "You are deaf. You are Indigenous. You are many things. You must accept all that you are." I took this to heart and embraced my deaf identity, my Indigenous identity. The moral of the story is that barriers prevent deaf children their language rights. Barriers also deny their identities and culture connections to the deaf community, and family cultures, and languages too. We must provide sign language programs across Canada.

Mustafa Alabssi

Hello, I am Mustafa Alabssi and this is my name sign. My emphatic recommendation is that you allow us to start our education early. Don't waste time. Provide the necessary funding to support services for deaf students by deaf providers. Various services are needed. Right now, deaf people are marginalized by the system. Why is that? Because you want us to be hearing! Never gonna happen! When I was young, I didn't know sign language. Some 'home signs' and gestures was the extent of my communication. But it wasn't a language. And I never was able to learn to speak. I was exposed to some sign language when I was going to school there. Well, the hearing teacher was speaking and signing at the same time, but it didn't make much sense to me. It was a mess of hand movements. So, I'd maybe learn a couple of words each day, but I wasn't learning a language. I couldn't read at all. I didn't learn to write either. When the war started, I would hide under the desks like the other kids. But I didn't hear any of the shooting or other sounds of war. After the school closed, I told my parents I wanted to go to school. But my parents said the school was closed because of the war. They thought I should get hearing aids, so I went for my first hearing test. They instructed me when I heard one kind of sound to put my left hand, or another sound to put up my right hand. I didn't hear anything at all, but I put my hands up in random order anyway. I was just faking my way through. I was fourteen then. Getting hearing aids at the age of fourteen is too late anyway. Why bother? My family doesn't sign. They just gesture and point, but I have deaf friends I can sign with. The one thing is... those deaf friends and family can read and write way better than me. I'm not that great at reading and writing, but I can tell you anything I want in sign language. When I was in Syria, I didn't have any friends. Everyone wanted me to be hearing. By then I was seventeen and they thought I should be able to speech read them. I could maybe catch one or two words. Impossible to speech read people talking. My natural language is sign language. I was part of the cast of "Apple Time." My character was a clown who had escaped from a storybook. The character couldn't read or write... like me. Until I came to Canada. Where I started to learn sign language and formed an identity for myself as a deaf person. I felt so much better. The moral of the story is that deaf children need to learn sign language and speech early. When they are young. And maybe it's hard, but it's important. In addition, services in sign language need to be available for deaf children. Stop trying to change us... trying to turn us into hearing, speaking people. It's not right. Current services out there are 'audist' and treat deaf children as inferior. That approach has to change. Has to be blown apart!

On behalf of the actors from Deaf Crows Collective, thank you for watching.

Credits for vocal talent and sources for photos and the policy brief are listed at the end of this video.