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**CSUN NON-PROFIT TO HOST FULL-DAY RETREAT ON OCT. 12
FOR PARENTS OF DEAF AND HARD-OF-HEARING CHILDREN**

Deaf Education And Families Project Helps Families Get #Connected

(NORTHRIDGE, Calif., Sept. 23, 2013) – More than 90 percent of the nearly 12,000 deaf and hard-of-hearing babies born annually in the United States have hearing parents. Usually, that baby is the first deaf person the parents have ever met, and questions switch from, “Will he enjoy sports like I do?” to, “Will he drive a car? Will he find a job?” and “How will we communicate?” as parents navigate a sea of unknown information.

On Saturday, Oct. 12, the Deaf Education And Families Project at California State University Northridge will answer some of those questions with “Connected: Celebrating Families,” a day-long retreat at Marlton School for the Deaf in Los Angeles. The event will offer workshops and family team-building activities for parents of all experience levels.

“We’re here to help parents embrace the life-long joys of bonding with and raising a deaf or hard-of-hearing child, as opposed to struggling with how to ‘fix’ a ‘disabled’ child,” said Rachel Friedman Narr, project coordinator for DEAF Project and a professor of special education and deaf education at California State University, Northridge. “This retreat is about ‘connecting’ by creating healthy family bonds, something that’s not always easy for the hearing family members of deaf children, as well as helping families network and ‘connect’ with other families like themselves. We’re also providing a space for families to meet deaf adults, to see the successful futures that are possible for their deaf and hard-of-hearing children.”

One goal of the retreat is to encourage families to explore language inclusion and multilingualism as building blocks for solid family relationships, as well as a key component of their child’s overall success.

“We want parents to understand that they don’t have to *choose* one method of communication,” said Friedman Narr. “There’s a lot of misinformation out there suggesting that if you want your child to listen and speak using hearing aids or a cochlear implant, you shouldn’t teach him to sign. Modern research proves that isn’t true – in fact, early acquisition of American Sign Language actually helps improve a deaf or hard-of-hearing child’s ability to acquire spoken language skills.”

(more)

A highlight of the Connected retreat is a special workshop, “For Dads Only” that will address the importance of fathers in the lives of their deaf and hard-of-hearing children. The workshop is led by Tomas Garcia, Ph.D., a professor of American Sign Language at East Los Angeles College, who grew up deaf in a hearing household, and who is raising two children of his own, one who is hearing and one who is deaf.

“In our community, there are many stories of families where the father is physically present but emotionally distant,” said Garcia. “It can be hard for fathers – especially in some cultures – to accept that their child is ‘different’ and to embrace those differences. We want our ‘For Dads Only’ workshop to empower fathers to learn a few simple signs and not be afraid to ‘connect’ with their deaf children.”

Additional workshops will address becoming an empowered advocate for your deaf and hard-of-hearing child; how to prepare for a successful Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting; the importance of relationships between deaf and hearing siblings; and the benefits of embracing a multilingual approach to communication. A supervised children’s program will entertain kids ages 3 and older while parents attend workshops. Families will reunite for a catered lunch and a team-building activity to end the day.

The workshops will be presented in spoken English, spoken Spanish and American Sign Language. To make the information available to as many families as possible, DEAF Project is heavily subsidizing the event through sponsorships and grant funding.

Tickets are \$25 for a family of four, including lunch. Additional members of the same family can attend for \$7 each. Professional tickets are \$20. Pre-registration is required, and is available online at www.csun.edu/deafproject. Registration deadline is Oct. 9. For more information about the event, call (818) 677-4007 V or (818) 435-8163 VP, or email DEAFProject@csun.edu.

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ABOUT DEAF PROJECT:

The Deaf Education And Families Project (DEAF Project) supports and empowers families with deaf and hard-of-hearing children. To date, the organization has positively impacted more than 1,000 families throughout Southern California. DEAF Project aims to help parents realize the positive lifetime journey of bonding with and raising a deaf or hard-of-hearing child, rather than struggling with how to “fix” a “disabled” child. DEAF Project uses parent mentors, who themselves are raising deaf or hard-of-hearing children, to offer invaluable first-hand experience and emotional support to fellow parents and families. The organization also offers free, family-focused American Sign Language classes (in Los Angeles, the San Fernando Valley and San Diego) and monthly Family Fun Days aimed at connecting families with others like themselves.