



## Models of Innovation and Resources for Best Practice

### Overview information: This resource addresses FCEI Principle 4 - Family Social and Emotional Support

*Families are connected to support systems so they can accrue the necessary knowledge and experiences that enable them to function effectively on behalf of their D/HH children.*

Contact Details	
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### Overview / Summary

Roots and Wings is a weekend long workshop that is designed for families with newly-identified children who are deaf or hard of hearing. The title, “Roots and Wings” represents the two lasting gifts we give our children – One is roots, the other is wings. The workshop is coordinated and led by parents in collaboration with professionals, veteran parents, and members of the Deaf community. This family support experience offers an opportunity for families to learn about the child’s needs, network with other families, explore ways to support their child’s development, and learn about educational advocacy.

### Program Values and Impact

Roots and Wings is founded on the following guiding principles:

- Respect the child who is deaf or hard of hearing as an individual whose unique nature, strengths, and learning style are to be celebrated.
- Honor each family’s unique beliefs, traditions, and strengths, as it is the family’s right to incorporate these values into their decisions for their child.

- Empower the family by providing unbiased and up-to-date information to support the promotion of optimal social, emotional, communicative, and educational development in their children.

These family-to-family support workshops are typically held annually and serve 20 families and their children. If the need exceeds this number, we hold a second workshop in the same year. Families evaluate all aspects of the experience and we use their evaluations to continuously improve the program. They rate their experiences with “veteran families” and each other as the most valuable aspect of the program.

## Content and Experiences

Roots and Wings starts on Friday evening at dinner and concludes on Sunday at noon. It is held in a comfortable setting that promotes interaction. In its current version, includes the following core elements:

- ***A meet and greet time*** – This informal session provides a comfortable forum for meeting other parents around the state and learning their stories. This is also a time when the families meet “host families.” The host families are experienced fathers and mothers, who participate throughout the weekend, offering both formal and informal supports. A key component of Roots and Wings is the opportunity to interact with these host families. Approximately six host families typically participate. They have children with varying hearing levels, communication approaches, and educational histories. They also include families of children with additional special needs.
- ***Panel discussions*** – We have discovered that facilitated panel discussions remain a highlight of the weekend. These discussions are moderated by Dr. Catherine Cronin Carotta and Dr. Mary Pat Moeller. Three panel discussions are integrated during the weekend (See workshop schedule below, which includes abstracts for these panel discussions):
  - ***Practical issues facing families whose children use hearing aids or cochlear implants***
  - ***Student and community members who are Deaf or hard of hearing*** – Several of the students on this panel provide support in the childcare program when they are not interacting with families. Two leaders from the Deaf Community participate in all family sessions throughout the weekend. This allows for many incidental opportunities for them to provide support in addition to their involvement in the panel discussions
  - ***Host family panel*** – This is always held at the end of the workshop. It provides an opportunity for emotional support and typically leaves families with feelings of optimism about their journey ahead.
- ***Learning lectures*** – Interactive presentations are provided on the following topics:
  - ***Parents the Language Partners*** – strategies for promoting communication and language development. This workshop includes hands-on practice activities, supported by host families and Deaf community members.
  - ***Learning about My Child’s Hearing and Listening Development*** – This is a nuts and bolts, practical and accessible discussion of hearing and the

audiogram. Parents have a hands on activity where they plot their child's threshold on an audiogram form, which promotes understanding of what the child hears and what the symbols mean.

- **Book Sharing with Babies and Toddlers** – This is a practical, hands on workshop about developmental strategies for book sharing. Practice with developmentally appropriate books is incorporated.
- **Networking with others** – All meals are shared together. Pool time has been invaluable for promoting informal interactions. Depending on our site and season, activities like hiking and roasting marshmallows have also been offered to promote networking.
- **Making agency connections** – Representatives from our state department of education, our regional programs for the deaf and hard of hearing, and our EHDI program are also active throughout the weekend, offering supports, linking families to services and to each other. This informal support helps families become aware of essential resources in our state.

### **Collaborative Funding**

The workshop is funded and implemented through collaborative efforts of the Nebraska Department of Education, the Nebraska Regional Programs for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Nebraska Early Hearing Detection and Intervention Program, and the Boys Town National Research Hospital. By pooling various resources, families are able to attend the event at no charge.

### **Service User Involvement**

Parent leaders of the Roots and Wings workshops are Teresa McEvoy, who is a Continuing Education specialist at Boys Town National Research Hospital (BTNRH) and the parent of three deaf children (two young adults and a high schooler). She is joined by Chris Grassmeyer, who is also a Continuing Education Specialist and the parent of a deaf young adult. They work in close collaboration with Dr. Catherine C. Carotta, Associate Director of the Center for Childhood Deafness at BTNRH to plan, organize and implement the event.

### **Top Tips**

*(What went well? What didn't go so well? What would you advise others who wish to replicate this piece of work? What lessons have been learnt?)*

- Encourage interaction from the first session on, but save emotional content for later in the weekend when families know each other better
- Ensure that parents have a strong role in the planning and implementation.
- Involve veteran families throughout the entire weekend!
- Involve Deaf community members and older children throughout the weekend!
- Provide developmentally-appropriate childcare and adequate levels of staffing expertise
- Carefully delineate all roles and responsibilities for individuals involved in any supporting any aspect of the weekend
- Establish guidelines to the values/beliefs, communication, teamwork and interprofessional collaboration needed to make the workshop effective

- Carefully organize the dissemination of information withing the workshop to promote engagement, learning, and sharing
- Avoid long lectures, especially those lacking hands on activities
- Break up lecture with experiential learning (e.g., parents plot their child's thresholds on an audogram and are supported by staff and veteran parents in making sense of all those symbols!)
- Because we host multiple panel discussions, we need to clearly define each set of questions ahead of time (Hands and Voices has been a useful resource in this regard), and we are disciplined about the conversations to avoid redundancy
- Plan informal interaction times – recerational activities like swimming or roasting marshmallows have been favorites
- Include a “where are you now and where are you going?” midpoint debriefing session. This allows us to get feedback from parents about what they learned and how they plan to apply it. It also helps us prevent misunderstandings on some key issues (see longer description for more details)
- Give families information so they can access resources and one another following the weekend
- Constantly listen to families and re-evaluate the program – that will allow for continuous improvement
- We ensure that Spanish speaking families have full access through spoken language interpreters and we make sure that families from their communities serve as veteran parents and panel members. All workshop materials are provided in both English and Spanish, of course

Date completed:

See links to more extensive descriptions, pictures, and a sample schedule.