



INTRODUCTION

Section 1

Welcome

What is Alberta Hands & Voices?

Alberta Hands & Voices is a parent-driven, non-profit organization dedicated to supporting families with children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing without a bias around communication modes. We provide parents with the resources, networks, and information they need to improve communication access and educational outcomes for their children. Our outreach activities, parent/professional collaboration, and advocacy efforts are focused on enabling Deaf and Hard of Hearing children to reach their highest potential.

Alberta Hands & Voices started with a small group of parents who met for coffee in 2012. Charitable status and official chapter status followed soon after. The parent organization is [Hands & Voices](#) in Colorado. Chapters are located across Canada, the United States, and beyond.

What makes Alberta Hands & Voices unique?

- We believe no single communication choice works for all children. We support kids who speak, kids who sign, kids who speak and sign, kids who cue, kids who are aided or not aided, and/or kids who have cochlear implants.
- We think parents need access to good information free from a sponsoring agenda or ideology.
- We believe parent-to-parent support is a cornerstone for families finding their way.
- We aspire to get meaningfully involved in early hearing detection and intervention programs (EHDI, also known as universal newborn hearing screening); educational advocacy; and other systems. Our goal is to improve programs and systems from the perspective of the family, through input from highly trained, knowledgeable parents.

We've come to understand a child doesn't "fail" at a communication method, but the method can fail the child and family. This perspective keeps us child and family focused – an essential value for a parent-driven organization.

We are constantly reminded that sometimes a "wrong" choice leads to the "right" decision, and sometimes the "right" decision leads to the "wrong" outcome. This is confirmation of our belief there is no one right way.

At [Hands & Voices](#) chapters all over North America, membership includes many who are also members of [AG Bell](#), [American Society for Deaf Children](#), [Canadian Association of the Deaf](#), [Canadian Hard of Hearing Association](#), and more. We do not replace these other fine organizations, and in fact, will refer inquiries to them and promote their participation in our organization. But there is a need for an organization like Hands & Voices to bring us all together. We are stronger united for our children than divided by communication controversy. Respectful collaboration is our mantra.

From the start, a handful of people have volunteered their time and skills to get Alberta Hands & Voices up and running. Our early focus has been to support families and get the word out about our organization. We've coordinated coffee chats, presented at workshops, hosted social events, and last but not least, organized some highly successful fundraising events!

A main focus for our small, but mighty group is the Guide by Your Side program in Alberta. [Guide By Your Side \(GBYS\)™](#) is a Hands & Voices (H&V) program in which trained Parent Guides provide emotional support and unbiased information to other families and the systems that serve them. GBYS is a trademarked program of H&V that is available to authorized H&V chapters and approved agencies via an application process.

GBYS programs are grounded in the Hands & Voices values. In Alberta, we strive for the GBYS to have the following elements:

- Timely connection of Parent Guides to families with babies who do not pass the newborn hearing screening.

- Timely parent-to-parent support at the time of confirmation of hearing loss.
- A recognized role for a GBYS Program Coordinator and/or Guides in early intervention programs and public education at the decision-making levels.
- Continuity to families by providing support throughout a child's life, especially at times of transitions. GBYS is not limited to a specific age range.
- Support to families by combining an experienced parent's insight with knowledge of early intervention and educational systems. GBYS programs can also support families with older children and teenagers.
- Exposure to trained Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH) Guides for families with newly identified babies, young children, or to seasoned parents with teenagers who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.

This toolkit will be an integral part of the GBYS program.