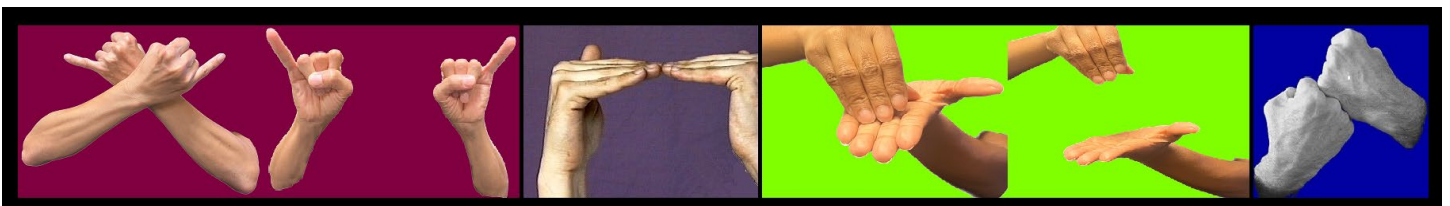


DMC DEAF SERVICES BACKGROUND HISTORY

The Dayle McIntosh Center (DMC) opened its doors in 1977. However, much of the activism which led up to it becoming a non-profit Independent Living Center for the disabled started long before this date through the efforts of its founders and original Board of Directors. The same can be said for DMC's Deaf/Hard of Hearing (HH) Services Department, which was already underway long before the 'official' date of 1981 before funding was available, when many of the services within the program were done 'gratis' and out of severe need.

HOW DEAF SERVICES BEGAN

[Brenda Premo, DMC's First Executive Director](#) was inspired and encouraged to go to college by Allen Kennedy, her Marina High School psychology teacher. As a blind woman born with Albinism, she hadn't thought of this as an accessible option, but was inspired to go as far as she could. She first took ASL classes while attending Golden West College in Huntington Beach. It was here she met two professors, [Dr. Geno M. Vescovi](#), who became deaf in his teens (and later DMC's original Board Vice-President) and [Dr. Paul M. Culton](#), a hearing educator (and later DMC's original Board Secretary and ASL Interpreter). It was here she learned how to sign and learned about the Deaf Community's challenges as an underserved group, frequently ignored by most institutions at the time. This left an impact on her heart to always remember that wherever and however she could, she would include ways to address this sector of the community as part of the inclusive work for access.



Premo strongly believed that no specific group of people with disabilities should have to fight for access and resources alone, rather everyone collectively should work together, even those with different disabilities to assist in moving things forward for all people with disabilities. After discussions with Board VP, Vescovi, George Gentry (part of DMC) and DMC Staff, Premo learned that deaf medical care assistance was severely lacking. She wanted to put into action, a plan of services which provided access for the needs of the Deaf Community to have access for basic things like health care and emergency services, access to vocational services, education, connecting socially and staying in touch with loved ones, to even help ordering a pizza – the array of needs was vast. Much of the 'in-

the-trenches' groundwork which was laid for Deaf/HH Services as an arm of DMC to bloom happened from 1978. What happened next? DMC's official '24-hour hotline' became octopus tentacles to do exactly that. Paula Margeson, DMC Director of Programs worked on the TTY machines as described in the 1980 article in Paraplegia News below, shared that she would take calls via a teletype machine. The work would become a family affair, as Margeson is blind and she would rely upon her family to assist with calls that came in.

newsbeat

Deaf Hotline Begins Operation

Paraplegia News/June 1980

A 24-hour emergency hotline began operating recently in Orange County, California, opening the lines of communication between the deaf and hospital emergency rooms.

Called MEND (Medical Emergency Network for the Deaf) the telephone-teletype system is co-sponsored by Dayle McIntosh Center for the Disabled in Garden Grove and the Hospital Council of Southern California.

Among the Dayle McIntosh Center staff members working on the project is Mrs. Paula Margeson, who takes night calls on the teletype in her home. Since Paula is blind, she needs the assistance of her daughter Melissa to read teletype messages to her.

Here's the way it works: A deaf or hearing-impaired person who has a teletype machine at home can call MEND (reaching either the teletype operators at Dayle McIntosh Center during the day or Paula's home at night) and relay printed messages and requests for help. MEND in turn telephones a hospital emergency room (15 Orange County hospitals are in the Network) and relays messages back to the caller.

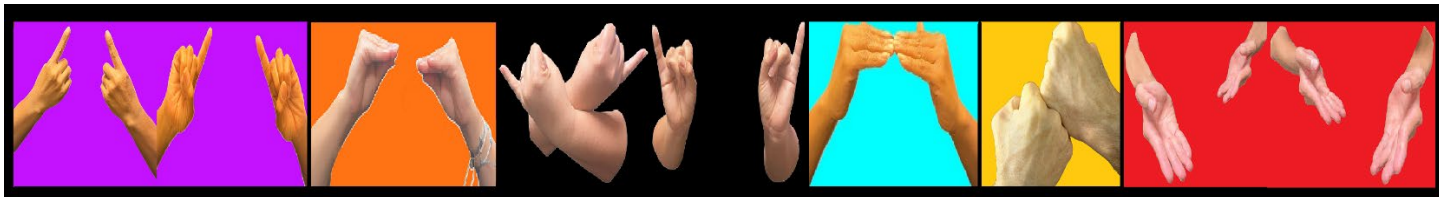
The system can be used to ask for medical advice at the time of an accident, alert a hospital that a deaf person is coming in, call for Paramedics, and arrange for an interpreter to meet the patient at a hospital emergency room.

"MEND is helping deaf and hearing-impaired people to live independent lives and it is bringing hospitals into compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (hospitals must be accessible to the deaf)," says Brenda Premo, Director of Dayle McIntosh Center for the Disabled.



Paula Margeson, blind staff member of Dayle McIntosh Center for the Disabled, operates a teletype machine in her home for MEND emergency calls from deaf victims of accident or illness during the night. Her daughter Melissa (center) is on hand to read teletype messages for her. Camille Busenbark (right) works for MEND at Dayle McIntosh Center.

Margeson confirms “Brenda had many goals for the area of deaf services back then, and even today with 500+ Independent Living Services across the country, not all IL and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) serve the Deaf Community. It is still underserved. DMC was one of the very first to acknowledge access was needed for emergency services.” MEND transitioned to COMMEND (Communication Medical Emergency Network for the Deaf), a piloted program for case-by-case fee-based service program connected to interpreting for hospitals and so much more, addressing being county accessible for 911 calls with interpreting services. The operation of DMC’s 24/7 emergency sign language interpreter service has been useful for both deaf patients and their family members as a bridge of communications in crisis situations with hospitals and medical facilities. Margeson was not alone in carrying out Premo’s plans. She further explained that the evolution of this service continued to change and evolve as programs do based on outreach, need, and the individuals DMC brought on board to assist in growing the program. She added that besides herself, Camille Busenbark and Debbie Pickett, a credentialed teacher in ASL also helped to expand the program along with Etta Stecker who worked at DMC for three years and was also a deaf professor at Saddleback College, alongside her husband Rusty Stecker. Many of these DMC staff members continued to develop what Deaf Services would become, as DMC’s original board officers, Vescovi and Culton, who were also Golden West College educators and counselors in the deaf education services program wanted to change the limitations and improve upon the average fourth grade level of education with accessibility to growing knowledge, opportunity, community and access.



Then, Margeson had a brainstorm, conceiving of the HEARTH HOUSE project for DMC. From bringing on Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) Counselors for the Deaf, daily living remedial academic training, and interpreters for deaf consumers and basic skills navigating the system, DMC continued to add to the service menu with financial education, and continued cross-disability advocacy, like Premo first envisioned.

By the time 1983 rolled around, the homelessness crisis in Orange County put people with disabilities in a vulnerable position. DMC jumped into action acquiring a house property by 1984 to address this problem. By its opening in 1985, this shelter also changed how the Deaf Services program itself transitioned into something so much more. Inside of Project H.E.A.R.T.H. (Housing Emergency Assistance for the Handicapped) in December of 1985, Deaf Services was now teaching Independent

Living Skills classes for the deaf five days a week and the house property project served approximately 20 deaf students at that time.

Here's the full history to show how Deaf Services was integrated into H.E.A.R.T.H. House:

<https://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip-221-36547p6p>

The Deaf /HH Services programs at DMC continue to grow and change, but the one thing that stays the same is cross-disability advocacy, inclusivity and focus on Independent Living for Deaf/HH. You can learn more about the full program service scope here:

<https://daylemc.org/services/services-for-the-deaf/independent-living-skills-for-the-deaf/>