



NORTHWEST SCHOOL FOR DEAF AND HARD-OF-HEARING CHILDREN WINTER 2019



One of the best parts about being a small school with such close ties to our families, staff and alumni is the spirit of support that flows through all parts of our community. Whether it's bringing a new family into our fold, finding unique ways to support our Spanish-speaking families, or celebrating the life of a beloved Signing Exact English (S.E.E.) pioneer, we hope you'll always find that Northwest School for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children (NWSDDH) is a supportive and inclusive place for all.

From Omaha to Shoreline: One Family's Journey to NWSDDH

Meet the Luther family. Stacy and Todd Luther are the parents to four children, Chase, age 15, Brady, age 13, Austin, age 12, and Hope, age 4. Both Austin and Hope are deaf, and after realizing that Austin was not getting the services he needed in Omaha, Nebraska where the family lived, they began looking into other options that would allow all the members of their family to thrive.

After a lot of research, the family decided that Northwest School for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Children (NWSDDH) might be the place for them. Stacy said, "Some of the things that really caught our attention included: the school's total communication philosophy, small class sizes and the connection with the neighborhood schools." The decision was made – they decided to give NWSDDH a try to see if it would be the perfect fit for their family.

But giving the youngest two children what they needed has not been without sacrifice. Rather than uprooting the whole family right away, the Luthers made the difficult decision to have Stacy, Austin and Hope move out to Washington so they could start school at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year. For now, Todd and the older boys remain in Omaha.

Fortunately, the Luther children have blossomed during their time at NWSDDH. According to Stacy, "Hope's signing has exploded. It seems she learns new signs every day. For Austin, it has been exciting to watch him have a peer group that he can communicate with in 'his language.' In Omaha he was mainstreamed with a full-time interpreter and was the only deaf student in the entire middle school."

We're so happy to have the Luther family as part of our community, and we look forward to watching their children continue to develop and learn!



Our Spanish Speaking Families Program

It's important for us at NWSDDH to be inclusive to all families in our community. Our Spanish Speaking Families Program helps us accomplish this goal by supporting Spanish-speaking families with deaf and hard-of-hearing children (D/HH), approximately one-third of our students and their families, through weekly gatherings and educational opportunities. This includes S.E.E. classes taught in Spanish that are open to the community -- anyone who has a D/HH child and speaks Spanish is welcome to attend, for free. These classes teach vocabulary, provide a forum for discussion of concerns and issues related to raising a D/HH child, and provide families the chance to network with other Spanish-speaking parents of D/HH children.

For those families whose children attend NWSDDH, a Spanish-speaking teacher of the deaf also conducts home visits, helping families learn techniques to encourage spoken language development and practice their S.E.E. skills in the comfort of their own home. The program also facilitates communication between families and staff at NWSDDH, provides community-wide training on culture and language, offers interpreter services at school events, and provides Spanish translation of written communication from school.

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[Our Spanish Speaking Families Program, continued]



Going the extra step to ensure our Spanish-speaking population has the same access to language and school resources has been game-changing for several of our families. Says the family of Citlaly, one of our 2nd graders from a Spanish-speaking home, “This school has done so much for her. In the beginning, she could not speak well and she was very introverted.” Today, students and staff know Citlaly as a friendly and chatty student who always tries to communicate with everyone, regardless of their language or signing abilities. Her skills are a credit to her educators and her family alike, who have all gone the extra mile to bring her language.

For more information on the Spanish Speaking Families Program, please visit our website: www.northwestschool.com/programs/spanish-speaking-families/

Alumni Spotlight: Laurie’s Story

We’re proud that our school has been serving the deaf community for over 36 years. Laurie Petruccelli Pagano was one of the original three graduates of the school; she began her education as a 2nd grader with NWSDHH in 1982, in the inaugural class.

She attended NWSDHH until 8th grade and mainstreamed at Edmonds Woodway High School. After high school she went on to attend California State University, Northridge earning a bachelor of science degree in Business Administration, Marketing. Today, she lives in Washington D.C. and serves as a Program Manager on a team that does oversight and policy for U.S. Customs and Border Protection offices around the country.



Looking back on her experiences, Laurie said, “High school was more challenging, socially; it was college that really allowed me to grow. While I loved my business courses and being elected official of campus organizations, I still didn’t know what I was going to do after college. Everyone has a different life strategy but if you don’t try, you will never know. While I fantasized living on the east coast, I still can’t believe I pretty much just up and moved across the country that one winter day 13 years ago! Sometimes it is only the little things you can see and count but if you stop and look back at the cumulative successes you’ve earned along the way.”

When Laurie isn’t busy parenting or working, she keeps herself busy with her family and a variety of home projects. “We just finished a major kitchen remodel last year after doing a lot of projects for our house over a course of five years. Due to the multitude of talents, many of my friends call me ‘Deaf Martha Stewart’.”

Visit our website to see past alumni features: www.northwestschool.com/newsletter/

In Loving Memory: Gerilee Gustason



It is with great sadness that we share the news that Gerilee Gustason, co-developer of our Signing Exact English (S.E.E.) sign system, passed away on Friday, November 9th.

Gerilee was an amazing woman who impacted the lives of thousands of D/HH children and she was a force in our community. She did many things for the D/HH community in her lifetime. She was a teacher, a S.E.E. instructor, professor, researcher, author, executive director, and national and international consultant in the field of deaf education. She was an incredibly humble woman and often was surprised by how much we at NWSDHH would celebrate her visits to the school -- but we just loved planning time for her to visit classrooms and sign our student’s S.E.E. dictionaries. The deaf community and the S.E.E. community has lost an amazing friend and advocate, and we are forever grateful for her impact on our lives.