



Helping Hands (Birth to Two) Newsletter

The American Samoa Early Intervention Program

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Department of Health

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HH HAPPENINGS!

*On October 14, Helping Hands will welcome Dr. Kaopua, an Optometrist from Hawaii and frequent visitor of American Samoa, to facilitate a second training on administering vision screenings on infants and toddlers. Helping Hands performs vision screenings on all children referred for early intervention services.

*Helping Hands will welcome the following people this month to assist in the planning and launching of our two new hearing grant awards:

-Dr. Jean Johnson from University of Hawaii Center of Disability Studies

-John Eichwald, MA, from Center for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC) National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities

-Audiologists Jill Craig and Wendy Switalski

*Join us for our 3rd Annual Truck or Treat Event! Bring your trick-o-treaters by our office in Tafuna on Halloween between 4-7pm. We will have a RAFFLE sign-up and treats to give out. See you then!

DOH's Helping Hands Awarded Two Early Hearing Grants!

Helping Hands is EXCITED to announce the awarding of two federal grants that will change the way American Samoa identifies and tracks children with hearing loss and disabilities.

Helping Hands, under the supervision of the Department of Health, is in the beginning phases of launching a new Universal Hearing Screening Program titled *Ulua'i Laguna*, commonly referred to as Early Hearing Detection and Intervention (EHDI) Program. Helping Hands will be partnering with the LBJ Tropical Medical Center in providing hearing screenings for all children born on the island. Under the upcoming *Ulua'i Laguna*, children who fail their first hearing screening will be re-screened and upon the second failed screening; will be treated for hearing loss and offered subsequent intervention.

Also included in this grant is the development of a new sound

room and equipment at LBJ's ENT Clinic and funds to bring down licensed Audiologists from the mainland. American Samoa is one of the last U.S. states or territories that has not previously implemented such a program.

The second grant awarded, titled *Share, Integrate, Link American Samoa (SILAS)*, will fund a linked data system to identify and track all children with special needs in American Samoa, including children with hearing loss. Currently, American Samoa has no universal system in place to track children with any type of disability or health condition. Also included in this grant is the development of an electronic birth certificate system, another first for American Samoa.

Both grants are phenomenal achievements for the territory. In July 2008, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force concluded;

(1) Children with hearing loss have increased difficulties with verbal and nonverbal communication skills, increased behavioral problems, decreased psychosocial well-being, and lower educational attainment compared with children with normal hearing.
(2) There is good evidence that newborn hearing screening testing is highly accurate and leads to earlier identification and treatment of infants with hearing loss.

More info on the new grants on back page and the attached EHDI/SILAS hand out. If you have any questions about upcoming developments, please call Dr. Jean Asuega at 699-4990.



Child Find Activities



Merina Tunupopo,
Community Child Find

One of Helping Hands' most important duties as the only early intervention provider in American Samoa is finding children who need services. Helping Hands provides physical therapy, speech therapy, feeding consultations, and educational therapy to children with hearing loss, vision loss, developmental delays and established disabilities.

Merina Tunupopo, Helping Hands' Community Child Find Specialist, takes a proactive approach in finding children who need services. She spends time in the community and collaborates with other service providers to meet families and share information about our program and

the services we provide. The following are some of the activities Helping Hands is involved in to find children in need of services:

- Attend LBJ's Pediatric Rounds weekly
- Visit child care centers
- Collaboration with DOH's Well-baby Clinics, Immunization and Maternal and Child Health Programs
- Media advertising and marketing
- Annual Public Awareness activities

If you know a child under the age of three who might benefit from services, call Merina at 699-4990.

HAPPY HALLOWEEN

Back to School!

This August, Helping Hands partnered with DOE's Early Childhood Education (ECE) and the American Samoa Parent Information Resource Center (ASPIRC) program under PICED to conduct parent orientations for ECE parents and the community. The purpose of the orientation was to familiarize the parents and community with the services provided by the ECE program as well as partnering agencies, such as Helping Hands and ASPIRC. Orientations were held on both the western

and eastern sides of the island. The orientations were successful with over 150 parents attending from all parts of the island. During the orientations, presentations were given by various individuals representing the health areas in ECE, as well as representatives from the attending agencies.



Over 150 families attended the ECE Parent Orientations



Grant Award Collaborators

Over the last two years, Helping Hands has been dedicated to building a hearing screening program for children who are receiving early intervention services. Jill Craig and Wendy Switalski, Audiologists, have been instrumental in the development of the hearing screening program for Helping Hands but also incredible resources in the development of the *Ulua'I Lagona* and SILAS programs. **The goal of Helping Hands, in collaboration with Jill and Wendy, is to identify all children with hearing loss in American Samoa and have the resources to treat them.**

Jill and Wendy have given their time and resources to American Samoa, making several trips to the Island out of a passion for seeing children have access to healthcare and hearing services. Jill and Wendy are returning to the island this month to provide hearing evaluations for children who have failed hearing screenings and to assist in the launching of *Ulua'I Lagona* and *SILAS* programs.

Thank you Jill and Wendy!



Wendy Switalski, Au.D. is a licensed audiologist and is director/owner of Alliance Hearing Care in Waterford Michigan, where she provides diagnostic and rehabilitative hearing services for children and adults. She holds advanced degrees in Audiology and Business Administration, and completed her Doctorate of Audiology (Au.D.) in 2007.



Jill Craig is an licensed audiologist and Regional Manager of MSR Northwest, an audiology equipment distributor. In her current position she is responsible for the sales, education and training of physicians, audiologists, hearing aid dispensers and other providers of hearing health care. Jill resides in Portland, Oregon.

