

helping
kids with
hearing loss
find their
VOICES



Annual Report 2010–11

HEAR THE POS



MISSION

We will be an educational option and resource for every family that chooses listening and spoken language as the way to help their child with hearing loss reach their full potential.

SIBILITIES ...



Hearing, listening, talking.



Dear parents, families and friends,

I am delighted to be writing this letter as your new executive director. I embrace and strongly support the mission of Northern Voices, and I am constantly amazed by our students' remarkable achievements. For those of you who may not know, I was on staff previously as director of fundraising. Now, returning as executive director, I look forward to seeing all that we can achieve together.

Our main focus at Northern Voices is to help children with hearing loss learn to listen, speak and ultimately transition into mainstream classrooms at the same level as their hearing peers. Reaching this goal requires hard work – and not just for students. Teachers, parents and families all have a hand in helping each child reach his or her full potential. Our programs start well before preschool with parent education during infant years, and continue through toddler and preschool years. Even after a student transitions into a mainstream classroom, we're here to provide ancillary support.

In order to continue to provide these services, we need to ensure we have a stable financial base. So while we are fulfilling our mission every day with the students already inside our walls, we will also be continuing to raise awareness and support outside the classroom. We want Northern Voices to be an option for all families who choose listening/spoken language for their children.

I hope you will join me in this endeavor to grow and strengthen this school we love, whether through financial support, volunteering or advocacy. And if you haven't recently spent time at Northern Voices, we invite you to visit us in person and experience the transformative laughter and chatter of children with hearing loss finding their voices.

Sincerely,

Erin Loavenbruck, *Executive Director*

PARENT EDUCATION STARTS AT BIRTH

Parent-Infant Program

A diagnosis of hearing loss in a child can be very difficult for parents. There are hundreds of questions and likely some fear. How will this affect our family? Will our child be able to live a full life, to follow his or her dreams?

Northern Voices works to empower parents to communicate with their young children with hearing loss through listening and spoken language. This means helping parents to understand about hearing loss and communication options, and how hearing loss can impact communication development. When parents feel comfortable talking with their child, it strengthens the parent-child bond and promotes future language development.

It is never too early to begin working on listening and spoken language with a child who has hearing loss. Whether or not a child has yet received hearing aids or cochlear implants, parents can learn techniques and skills for talking with their child. Northern Voices offers sessions with a speech-language pathologist or a teacher of the deaf/hard of hearing one to two hours per week, alongside the support of a community of other parents in similar situations.

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HEARING LOSS IN CHILDREN

A few facts you may find interesting:

- Severe to profound hearing loss occurs in 3 of every 1,000 births.
- Genetics play a role in 50–60% of cases of hearing loss in infants.
- Northern Voices is the only nonprofit school in MN exclusively dedicated to teaching listening and spoken language to children with hearing loss.
- Northern Voices has worked with children as young as six weeks old.



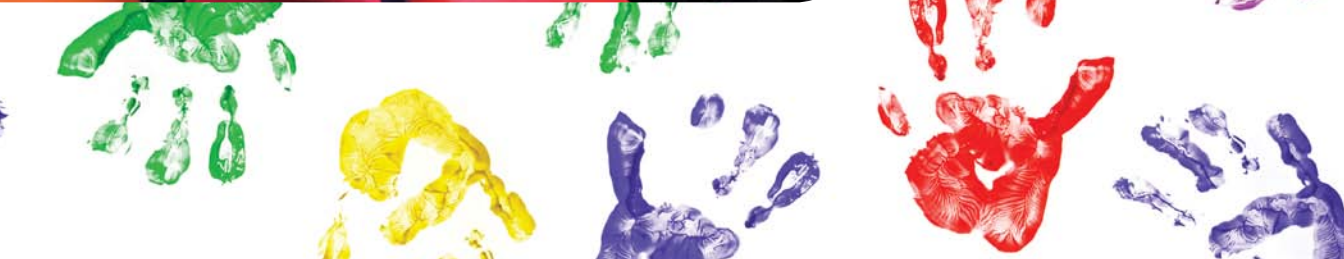
EARLY INTERVENTION

Toddler Program

When children are ready to begin social interactions in small group settings, usually between 18 months and two years old, they transition into the Toddler Program, which is available five days a week from 8:30 a.m. to noon. Each child attends at the level that is right for him or her – younger children may come only two days a week while older children may come all five days. Parent support continues through the toddler years, as teachers continue to help parents learn strategies and techniques for communicating with their child and encouraging development.

The Toddler Program features large group activities, small group teaching, and one-on-one sessions with a teacher of the deaf/hard of hearing or a speech-language pathologist. Individual sessions

focus on vocab, speech and language skills, and listening skills, while group activities allow for learning and observation of other typical child development skills, such as social skills, cognitive skills, and fine and gross motor skills. The group provides an opportunity for learning social language and for playing with other children in a linguistically rich, supportive environment.



SCHOOL READINESS



School Program

Northern Voices offers full-day school programs for children ages three and up, until they are ready to transition into a mainstream classroom. Our goal is to transition students as early as possible, and as fully as possible, so they require minimal services once they've transitioned and can focus on what is being taught in the general education classroom. Many students transition into kindergarten, but depending on a child's progress, he or she may transition as early as preschool or not until first grade.

We have two classrooms to accommodate the range of ages in our school program. The Discovery Room is geared toward children ages three to five and features typical preschool activities. Older students, ages five and up, spend their time in the Learning Center, participating in activities and learning skills appropriate to kindergarten classrooms.

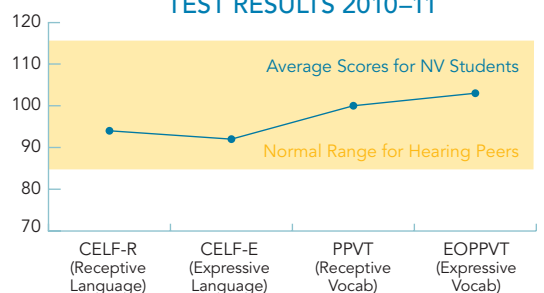
Students in both classrooms continue to work with a teacher of the deaf/hard of hearing or speech-language pathologist in a small group setting. In the smaller group, they continue to focus on vocab, speech, language and listening, and are able to then generalize and practice those skills when back in the larger group.



RESULTS

Most Northern Voices students graduate with vocab and language skills within or above the normal range for their hearing peers.

TEST RESULTS 2010-11



In the Spotlight

Dr. Jennifer Ward

Northern Voices' Board President, Dr. Jennifer Ward, is a pediatric audiologist with the Lions Children's Hearing and ENT Clinic at the University of Minnesota Amplatz Children's Hospital. She feels fortunate to have found a career that she is passionate about. "Every child, family and hearing loss has different circumstances. I enjoy working collaboratively with each family to educate them on all their options and to help their child reach their full potential. With today's advanced technology, the possibilities are endless for children with hearing loss."

Serving on the Northern Voices board feels like a natural extension of that role for "Dr. Jennifer," a Lake City, Minn., native. It is her way to give back to those who have already given so much to the school and to make sure that Northern Voices continues to be an option in the future. She says, "I will never get tired of hearing, firsthand, the progress of a child who had no language and now won't stop speaking – it is truly amazing."

The sense of community between the staff, parents, board members, volunteers, alumni students and families is what stands out to Ward. She says, "It is like becoming a part of a family that you never knew you would have. Everyone is working toward the same goal. The level of dedication and commitment from so many different people is inspirational."

"Northern Voices is about giving hope, providing exceptional education, supporting families and continually raising the bar on expectations for children with hearing loss. Northern Voices is about making a difference and changing lives. Those are beliefs I can stand by and be passionate about. I encourage you to visit Northern Voices and hear the possibilities for yourself."



Sherry Schaffer

Sherry Schaffer brushes off any suggestion that she is one special mom, despite the roller-coaster journey her family has taken since the birth of their extraordinary third child. Frank is profoundly deaf with bilateral cochlear implants, and he has an oral-motor disconnect called apraxia as well as cerebral palsy. One minute with Frank and you realize that these challenges have done little to slow him down.

Finding Northern Voices wasn't an easy journey for the Schaffers, and didn't happen quickly. When Frank debuted at Northern Voices the month before his third birthday, he had just five unintelligible words and a long list of physical disabilities. Physical improvements happened first, amazingly enough, with Frank ditching his walker after a few months, and then a verbal explosion ensued.

"Northern Voices has forever changed the course of Frank's life and ours," Sherry says. "There should be an educational choice for families of deaf children, including an oral program." The power of the oral approach is demonstrated in Frank's ability to share his outgoing personality with those around him. "We're just following Frank's lead," she says, as Frank at age six prepares to start kindergarten. "He gets up every single day and reminds us of what is possible."



In the Spotlight

Mitch Perry

Mitch Perry, a senior at St. Thomas Academy, immersed himself in life at Northern Voices as a volunteer last summer. Mitch's family history with the school inspired him to suggest that he and several of his buddies satisfy St. Thomas's 40-hour service requirement by volunteering together at Northern Voices. He says the young kids really enjoyed having the "big boys" come to play playground games and do other things with them.

Mitch's younger brother, Eddie, who is now 12, attended Northern Voices from age two to six, and Mitch remembers spending a lot of time at the school during those years. On leaving Northern Voices, Eddie was mainstreamed for kindergarten at St. Jude of the Lake School in Mahtomedi, and Mitch reports that Eddie is now in seventh grade and doing very well. "He's a happy, optimistic, athletic kid," Mitch says.

Mitch first re-engaged with Northern Voices last year, as a junior. His class had to plan a field trip that included a service component, and they adopted Mitch's idea to volunteer at Northern Voices, helping out for the morning and then running a wildly popular track-and-field event for the kids in the afternoon.

Why does Mitch keep choosing Northern Voices for his service projects? "I thought I'd like to do something to give back to the school that gave Eddie the opportunity to be all that he could be," says Mitch, who has his college applications just about done and is kicking around the idea of yet another volunteer stint at Northern Voices for his end-of-year senior project.



"Everyone here is cheering for the kids, and every day brings a new experience."



Aaron & Tina Johnston

Aaron and Tina Johnston's son Ben was a student at Northern Voices in its earliest years. Aaron was also one of the founders of the annual Northern Voices Golf Tournament, and is still involved in quiet ways today.

"When Ben was born, we didn't know anything was wrong," Aaron recalls. "My mother-in-law started to suspect when he was 10 months old. One day a fire truck went by and blew its horn, and he didn't even twitch. We were in shock and denial."

After Ben was diagnosed with severe to profound bilateral hearing loss, the school district brought in people to teach him to sign. Over time the family started hearing more about cochlear implants, but Ben didn't get his first implant until he was three-and-a-half. The Johnstons then advocated for an oral program through their school district, but eventually found their way to Northern Voices.

Aaron remembers the first Northern Voices golf tournament as just five fathers and some of their friends. He says, "We sat around afterward and said, 'You know, we could really do this!' I think we made a couple of thousand dollars that first time, but we've now hit our 10th year and raised \$70,000 this year alone."

Now 13, Ben plays on a championship soccer team and is on the "A" honor roll at school. The Johnstons continue to advocate for what's best for Ben, and they believe Northern Voices was a wonderful place for him and for their family. "Don't take it for granted," says Aaron. "We know Ben wouldn't be where he is today without those key three years with Northern Voices and their staff."



Amanda Tocko



Amanda Tocko has been a teacher of the deaf/hard of hearing at Northern Voices since 2003. Amanda studied communicative disorders at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, and then was fascinated to learn about the career option of teaching kids who are deaf or hard of hearing how to listen and speak. After earning her master's degree in early intervention in deaf education from Fontbonne University in St. Louis, including training at three oral schools for the deaf, she returned to her native Minnesota and started teaching at Northern Voices.

Amanda herself worked with a speech-language pathologist as she was growing up, having to address some articulation needs she had due to ear infections. She credits this experience with piquing her interest in the field.

At Northern Voices, Amanda has taught all the different age groups – from babies to six- and seven-year-olds. "It's been great to have this variety of experience and come to know what to expect at the different age levels," she says. Now she also acts as coordinator, helping with IEP (Individualized Education Program) meetings, giving feedback on lesson plans, helping with schedules and conducting classroom observations.

"Seeing the kids being able to communicate with their friends and families – that's what keeps me coming back," Amanda says. "When they first come in they don't say any words, and when they leave they don't stop talking! It is so fun to see that. Everyone here is cheering for the kids, and every day brings a new experience. I see myself here for a long time."

SUPPORT NORTHERN

Clip Box Tops

"I clip Box Tops for Education because it gives a dime every time to Northern Voices! Besides General Mills cereal boxes, I clip them from Pillsbury, Juicy Juice, Green Giant, KLEENEX, Ziploc, Hefty, and many other brand products listed on boxtops4education.com."

– *Sasha Moen, Northern Voices Teaching Assistant*



Give at Work

"I designate my gift to Northern Voices through my workplace United Way campaign because it is an easy, convenient way to give back to an organization that has given our son, Sonjay, the opportunity to reach his full potential. Northern Voices gave Sonjay the gift of spoken language, so no matter where life takes him, whether it be here or halfway around the world, he has the ability to effectively communicate."

– *Rhonda Sivarajah, former board president and alumni parent*



"I give to Northern Voices through my workplace giving program because hearing loss has forever changed the course of our family, and Northern Voices has forever changed what we dreamed was possible for our daughter."

– *Lisa Smith, alumni parent*

Sponsor Our Golf Event

"Our family business sponsors the Northern Voices golf tournament because it is a fun way to give back to the organization that is responsible for giving our daughter the listening and speaking skills that will allow her to realize her full potential in life. It is a wonderful opportunity for supporters like us to say, 'Thanks,' year after year."

– *Mark & Tracy Lindemer, alumni parents*



"We sponsor the golf tournament – an event our whole family loves to be a part of. It's a fun day finished with an emotionally inspiring program."

– *Kelly & Matt Ripley, parents*



VOICES!

Here are some ways our community members give back.



Volunteer

"I help Northern Voices by working on the quarterly newsletter, Chatter. I love to help Northern Voices and I can do this from home."

– *Jenny Hokanson, parent*

"Our daughter LOVES Northern Voices, and we show our appreciation and support in a variety of ways – for example, as an artsy mama I volunteered to teach art class in the Toddler Room."

– *Emily Burke, parent*



"I volunteer on the PTO because it's a great way to connect with other parents and do fun things to support everyone at the school – kids, teachers and parents."

– *Ugo Eko, parent*



Make an Annual Gift

"I make an annual donation to Northern Voices because it is near and dear to my heart since I was a teaching assistant there for nine years. Seeing such remarkable progress in the students and the many ways the students and their families benefit from this very special school is truly amazing!"

– *Donna Bordner, former staff member*

Join the Walk for Talk



"The 2011 Walk for Talk was a great experience for our family. Not only was the walk a great way to raise money for Northern Voices, but it also increased awareness of our school and cause among our friends and family. We had very positive feedback after the walk and look forward to it every year. It is a great family event and the kids have a BLAST."

– *Tony & Kari Townsend, parents*

Shop at Target

"We give to Northern Voices by promoting and participating in Target's Take Charge of Education (TCOE) program. TCOE makes it easy for us to donate 1% of whatever we spend at Target to Northern Voices."

– *Jim & Cheryl Melby, alumni parents*



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The Smith Family
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The Ward Family

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BUDGET OVERVIEW

(September 2010–August 2011)

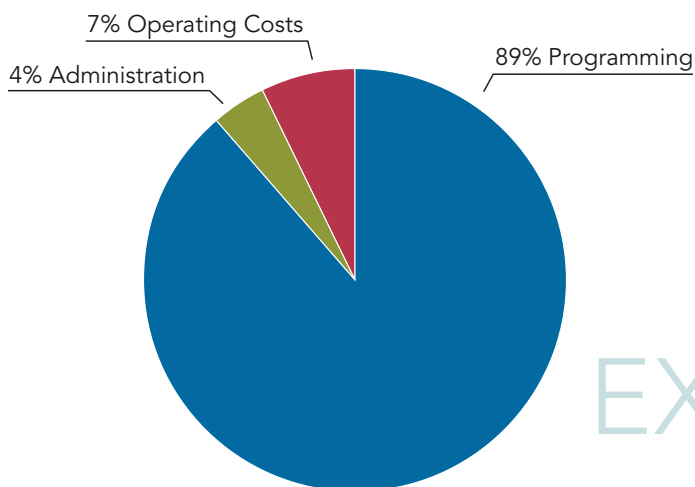
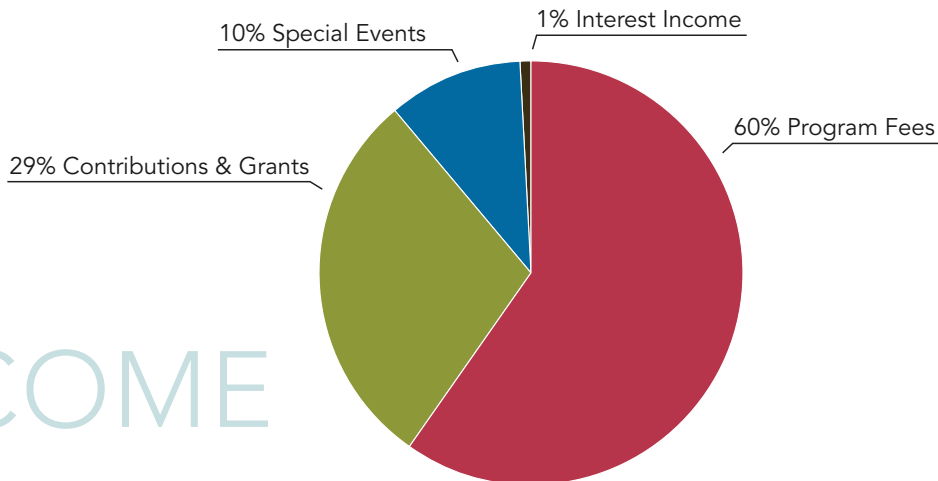
INCOME

Program Fees	\$521,353
Contributions & Grants	\$255,207
Special Events	\$90,788
Interest Income.....	\$5,296
Gross Income	\$872,644

EXPENSES

Programming.....	\$855,622
Administration	\$40,834
Operating Costs.....	\$68,401
Total Expenses	\$964,857

INCOME



EXPENSES

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