

The work of the Oberkotter Foundation has always been driven by the Trustees' passionate belief that all children who are deaf or hard of hearing should have the opportunity to reach their full potential. The Oberkotter Foundation focuses its efforts on supporting families who have chosen listening and spoken language for their child and on opportunities for children learning listening and spoken language to develop their social, emotional and language skills.

To produce the best outcomes for every child, we believe that families must have access to comprehensive information and quality services as quickly as possible to capitalize on the critical stages of cognitive and language development between birth and age five.

A NEW DIRECTION

For more than 20 years, the Oberkotter Foundation has supported schools where children can learn listening and spoken language. We have provided significant funding nationally, supporting approximately 50 schools throughout the country. This work has been important for increasing the number of opportunities for children to learn to listen and talk.

In recent years, the landscape for children who are deaf or hard of hearing has changed dramatically. Newborn hearing screening has become the law in 43 states and the District of Columbia. Virtually all babies are now screened for hearing loss at birth. This early identification and potential for intervention, combined with the dramatic improvements in hearing aids and cochlear implants, has changed the way children who are deaf or hard of hearing are taught, and it has changed the way they learn.

These factors, combined with our increased knowledge about the way the brain develops, has caused a shift in our thinking and thus, in the Foundation's approach. Although there are many areas of need for children who are deaf or hard of hearing, the Oberkotter Foundation has made the decision to concentrate its efforts and funding on two areas: strengthening the early intervention systems that play such a critical role in the lives of children and families and developing networks of professionals who can support children and families in a variety of schools and other settings throughout the child's education.

This new direction is reflected in our vision for the future and in the goals we have set for the Foundation. We plan to spend this year in conversation with current and potential grantees and partners to refine this framework into specific strategies.

IN THE FUTURE WE ENVISION

The family of every child who is deaf or hard of hearing will know of all communication choices for their child so the family can make this important decision in a timely manner.

Quality options for developing communication in the modality chosen by families will be available and affordable for children. This will include immediate access to hearing technology for children whose families choose to use it.

It will be common knowledge that children who are deaf or hard of hearing can learn to listen and talk.

Leaders and professionals in a variety of schools and other settings will be well-prepared to effectively teach and support listening and spoken language for children, beginning at birth and continuing through the child's education.





OBERKOTTER FOUNDATION GOALS

The Oberkotter Foundation will pursue this vision of the future by focusing its resources and efforts in three major areas that we believe will produce the greatest results for children and families:

- Generating greater national awareness that children who are deaf or hard of hearing can learn to listen and talk,
- Ensuring that families have access to affordable, quality early intervention services in listening and spoken language as early as possible, and
- Building networks of well-prepared professionals in a variety of schools and other settings who can teach and support children who are using listening and spoken language.

We will accomplish these goals and achieve our vision by joining with proven and promising partners, expanding the base of grassroots supporters and creating powerful collaborations.

THIS STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

A number of factors influenced the goals outlined in this strategic framework:

- The research in early childhood development and our own experience supports the concept that earlier is better, especially for children learning to listen and talk. The earlier children are identified, are amplified and begin receiving services, the more opportunities they have. It is that simple. There is real urgency around the issues of loss to follow-up, availability of fair and balanced information for families about their choices, and access to quality and affordable programs and hearing technology. Those issues require support and attention if we are to achieve our vision of the future.
- Services for children who are deaf or hard of hearing are and will continue to be provided by many different professionals in many different settings. Increasing the exposure, knowledge and skills in listening and spoken language

among those professionals will enable more children and families to have access to quality services, either face-to-face or through the use of distance technology.

- New partnerships are essential. While our history has been to create and support new organizations and programs that directly provide services, we recognize the need for an expanded approach in this changing environment. Looking ahead, our plan is to continue supporting current grantee organizations as they evolve, but also to more fully engage with other proven and promising organizations and change agents doing this work.
- Public awareness and mobilization of parents and professionals will drive change. In this new era, we recognize that beyond providing direct services, we are helping to create a movement. Public support of the rights of all children and families to receive comprehensive information and to have access to affordable quality services will create lasting change.

ALLOCATION OF OUR RESOURCES

The Oberkotter Foundation is committed to the effective management and allocation of its resources. Over the next year, we will look closely at how we can best allocate our resources in support of this new strategic framework and we will develop, in conversation with others in the field, the specific strategies that will help us achieve our goals.

A BRIGHT FUTURE

We look forward to this exciting time of transition and to engaging with current and potential grantees and partners as we refine this strategic framework into a more specific plan for the Foundation's work. We believe that the future we envision for children and their families is achievable. With a clear vision and collaborative relationships with organizations, programs and individuals who share this vision, we are poised to make real change.