

PENNSYLVANIA SOCIETY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE DEAF

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www.psadweb.org

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The Pennsylvania Society for the Advancement of the Deaf's response to AG Bell

PSAD is appalled by AG Bell's response to the Washington Post article about Nyle DiMarco. See <http://www.agbell.org/in-the-news/response-nyle-dimarco/>. The letter contained no citations to research articles or verified statistics to support its claims/myths about American Sign Language (ASL). And indeed, the letter seems to contradict the AG Bell's own position statement on ASL that was published in 2008. See this excerpt:

"With respect to American Sign Language (ASL), AG Bell acknowledges ASL as a language in and of itself. AG Bell also recognizes ASL's importance in Deaf culture as a unique feature, and a language that many take pride in learning. AG Bell does not believe that ASL should be prohibited or restricted as a choice, nor does AG Bell advocate against learning ASL as part of a child's overall development if that is what the child's parents' desire". - See more at: <http://www.agbell.org/Document.aspx?id=387#sthash.2SDd9Een.dpuf>

Ms. Meredith Sugar, President of AG Bell, in her seeming zealotry to spread misinformation and eradicate ASL appears to advocate division and oppression of a culturally vibrant and diverse Deaf community. This is utterly shameful and denies reality. As the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) noted in its response to the AG Bell (see <http://nad.org/news/2016/4/nyle-dimarco-and-language-your-child>), there are numerous success stories of deaf individuals who use ASL as their primary language. Examples given were lawyers, an Academy Award winner, White House employees, and more.

In contrast to the success of exposure to ASL for deaf and hard of hearing babies, numerous medical studies and research articles note the devastating effects of language deprivation that result from children not being exposed to a signed language. See this quote regarding language deprivation from "Infants and Children with Hearing Loss Need Early Language Access" - <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3072291/>

"For the development of language, deaf children should be exposed to good language models in a signed language as soon as deafness is detected. There is no advantage to delaying exposure to sign language, and research on the development of language has found that early exposure reduces the risks of linguistic deprivation, which is frequently associated with cognitive impairment and psychosocial isolation."³⁰

PSAD encourages parents of deaf and hard of hearing children to include ASL as part of their child's language development even with the conjunction of other technological choices such as cochlear implants. And more, PSAD encourages all medical professionals who work with parents of deaf and hard of hearing children to educate themselves on the benefits of early language exposure via ASL.

PSAD has members from all walks of life, and from all backgrounds. PSAD's members encompass a broad range of individuals including those who come from multi-generational deaf families, and others who learned ASL as adults. What all members have in common is a love and appreciation of ASL and an acceptance of everyone no matter where they come from and who they are. The AG Bell would do well to model this approach for parents and medical professionals everywhere.

The Pennsylvania Society for the Advancement of the Deaf (PSAD) is a nonprofit statewide civil rights association whose mission is to empower deaf and hard of hearing individuals to achieve full and equal access to their civil, human, and linguistic rights through information, and advocacy. The PSAD is 135 years old, and is one of the oldest deaf civil rights organizations in the nation.

Sincerely,
PSAD board of managers.

CC: Sarah Polus, Washington Post