

Linda Alsop Recognized | CPD Blog

JoLynne Lyon

05/11/2017

Linda Alsop has followed her passion, serving the Deafblind community for more than 20 years. The Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness recently recognized her dedication with the Exemplary Advocate Award. "It has always felt to me that it was what I was supposed to do and where I was supposed to be," said the director of Deafblind programs at SKI-HI Institute, which is part of the [Center for Persons with Disabilities](#) at Utah State University. "These children are very poorly understood, and their needs are very high, and education has not been great for them. We don't have great outcomes as far as what we see in adult life." But Alsop knows it could be better, and those possibilities have kept her motivated through years of program-building, advocacy and better- and worse-budget years. Utah has been the nation's leader in Deafblind education, thanks to the work of dedicated people at SKI-HI Institute, including Alsop. The organization has developed a curriculum, advocated for change and established certification standards for trained interveners, who serve as interpreters for Deafblind children. SKI-HI has helped people from other states organize and receive training. "We've done a lot of work nationally to make people aware of what interveners are, to help parents understand the need," Alsop said. "We've changed the law in Utah and things are rolling well, but many states are still struggling with this practice. ... The story's not done yet, but it's come a long ways." Alsop has stuck with it because she has seen the difference interveners make. People often assume that Deafblind children also have low cognitive function, because it is so hard for them to express themselves. "There are no test results that evaluate them because they can't communicate," she said. "They're undervalued, they're underestimated." And often, they are frustrated and angry. And yet, with the help of trained interveners, a different picture emerges. Intervenors work with Deafblind children in a way similar to Ann Sullivan's pioneering work with Helen Keller, including one-on-one instruction and tactile signing. "We see changes in behaviors, we see changes in personality," Alsop said. "I have amazing stories of what happens with these children. ... We have lots of data." SKI-HI oversees a website for the Deafblind community called [Intervenors and Children who are Deafblind](#). The group also has a [Facebook page](#) with videos showing intervenors in action. Alsop received her award in Boston last month.