

Building Community

BY ARNIE ALTMAN, AG BELL NEVADA CHAPTER CO-PRESIDENT



AG Bell Nevada chapter members enjoy an event day.

Community, according to the dictionary, is “a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.” For AG Bell’s Nevada (AGBNV) chapter, it is the culmination of shared attitudes, interests and goals. Through hosting or managing special events, such as a town hall on hearing loss options or a local health fair, our chapter connects with parents of children with hearing loss, deaf and hard of hearing individuals, educators, hearing professionals, regional partners and the general public. We strive for excellence by understanding how to make these connections, or fellowships, by playing a crucial role in what we call building the community. Prioritizing community building allows us to better advocate for, offer support to and serve this community of those with hearing loss and their parents.

Community building is no easy task. It requires energy, effort and patience. Below I list some ways AGBNV continues to foster community and offers advice on how other chapters can nurture communities as well.

Creating Community Awareness

By creating community awareness, we become visible and begin advocating. AG Bell provides professional material

essential for offices of hearing loss professionals. From those responsible for early hearing detection to those providing solutions, AG Bell needs to be a visible presence for patients. Printing our contact information on promotional items and rallying members to promote our chapter’s message are worthwhile investments. They expand our regional profile to new parents beginning their journey with children who are hard of hearing.

We also collaborate with what marketers call “influencers” or “mavens” in our community to broaden our presence. Through well-tended relationships with hearing health professionals like Dr. Courtney Smith at the Advanced Audiology Institute in Las Vegas, Nevada, doctors become comfortable referring patients to our group to meet other adults and children with hearing loss.

Fruitful cooperation can also spring from partnerships with public health fairs, educational in-service projects, parent education programs, hearing loss agencies, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Early Hearing Detection and Intervention programs, Guide by Your Side, Hands and Voices state chapters, regional staff of hearing health corporations, and associations

of hearing loss professionals in school districts. Your awareness efforts will help build a great community.

Gain Community Support

Marketers are always taught to understand their product, audience and selling points, the latter meaning things that convince someone to purchase a product. In this situation, your “product” is the chapter, your “audience” is the public and your “selling points” are feel-good stories promoting your chapter’s benefits. For our members Nameer and Edwin, AGBNV is a fantastic “place where [our] kids don’t have to feel different.” Creative flyers, good photos and timely press releases spotlighting interesting “success” stories, like Nameer and Edwin, resonate well with readers. The “no limits” attitude of an individual with hearing loss or his or her family that we promote at the AGBNV strengthens our community support and helps our community building by attracting more members seeking similar “success” stories.

Provide Purpose Driven Events

Purpose Driven Events (PDEs) designed to nurture listening and spoken language skills allow our chapter to improve early learning, literacy and language development. PDEs simultaneously catalyze community awareness and offer rich networking opportunities for families to share experiences.

A retired teacher of the deaf, Dr. Catherine L. Cottle venerated our events as “perfect venues for families and professionals to share individual stories and experiences, exchange tips and ideas, provide mutual inspiration and encouragement, and develop relationships.”

For children with hearing loss, PDEs are filled with various fun activities encouraging playful competition. AGBNV organizes PDEs

annually, including the Spring Fling Picnic, a Charity Bowling Event and a Christmas family party.

Aside from the fun, food, crafts, gifts and hosting Santa at our annual Holiday event, we take time to recognize community generosity. AGBNV honors corporate sponsorships and individual contributions with the Shining Star Award, an engraved crystal accolade that is a special way to recognize well-deserving recipients.

Generate and Nurture Membership

Membership is the bedrock to a community. Keeping a membership database allows a chapter to constantly communicate with its community, tending to its needs and showing it what AG Bell provides. Email communications remind members about the benefits of being a part of the AG Bell community, including the Listening and Spoken Language Knowledge Center, Parent Advocacy Training (PAT), financial aid, scholarship

programs, Leadership Opportunities for Teens (LOFT), *Volta Voices*, eNews and various additional educational materials.

Website presence is another vital tool serving our AG Bell chapter. Information, announcements, helpful links, upcoming events, recaps and highlights of important milestones in members' lives all become important postings. The website is the first interaction new seekers encounter, so make sure it is updated, clear, accessible and responsive. Additionally, it helps if your website connects to your social media. Whether generally promoting the chapter or specifically promoting events, social media expands audience exposure. Photos and short captions provide a sense of belonging for current members and spark interest for potential members.

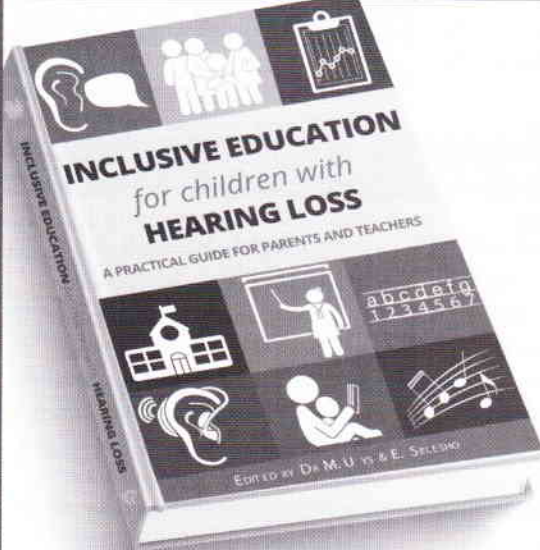
Build Community and Enjoy the Journey

Keep in mind that community building is—and always will be—a continuous journey requiring energy, effort and

patience. Nevertheless, remember to enjoy the journey.

My wife, Corrine, and I recently traveled to Maui, Hawaii. In Maui, there is a journey called "The Road to Hana," a 64-mile mostly uphill road to the city of Hana with some of the narrowest and most serpentine roads we have ever seen. There are 59 bridges, and 46 of them (approximately 80 percent) are unidirectional. At times, we experienced some of the slowest traffic ever. We almost immediately quit, concerned this journey was too arduous—we didn't want to spend the entire vacation on this road! However, I'm glad we didn't turn around because we soon experienced some of the world's most breathtaking oceanfront scenery, waterfalls and tropical flora.

Building community with your AG Bell chapter may feel like the winding road to Hana sometimes, but keep in mind all of the great things that will happen along the way and the wonderful people you will meet on your journey. 🌴




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