



To Our Community and Friends,

September is Suicide Awareness Month, and it's something I am deeply passionate about. As a survivor of a suicide attempt 30 years ago, I continue to fight for mental health awareness within and for the Deaf Community. This month is also Deaf Awareness Month, so let me share two facts that demand our immediate attention.

Only 2% of the deaf community receive equal access to mental health treatment. On top of that, 40% of deaf children have mental health issues compared to 25% of their hearing counterparts.

This is extremely alarming and worrisome. A major reason for this inaccessibility is the lack of appropriate or adequate interpretation services for individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Despite decades of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), education, and steps to provide accessibility for all, the disparity continues while mental health needs are rising at an unprecedented rate, especially during and after the COVID pandemic.

Thrive has worked closely with law enforcement, first responders, mental health professionals, and other entities across the state for the past 23 years providing education on Deaf culture, language and the Deaf community's legal rights to access. However, we still have a lot of work to do. That 2% must increase to 100%, and that's what we are here to fight for.

There are many steps you can take to help. Visit Thrive's social media platforms (website, Facebook and Instagram) to learn about our community. Attend one of two workshops in Cedar Rapids and Council Bluffs for the Deaf community on the very real topic of suicide. Please encourage individuals in your area to attend.

We are also working to develop a Mental Health Accessibility for the Deaf Response Team in multiple locations around Iowa to build resources, increase awareness, and break down the barriers in the deaf community for mental health services. This team is geared toward key stakeholders, such as Deaf leaders, first responders and law enforcement, health care personnel, mental health service professionals, licensed sign language interpreters, advocates, and so on. If you are interested in joining our team or know of someone who could provide expertise, please let me know via director@thrivetogethertoday.org.

We invite you to help us help our community. *Together*, let's fight for Deaf and hard of hearing rights. *Together*, let's break down barriers and provide equal access for all. Let's make sure our communities thrive *together*.

All my best,

Jennifer