



Felton Institute Newsletter

The *Dec 2020* Issue

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Thank you. Just Thank you.



TRANSFORMING LIVES
& INNOVATING SINCE 1889

SPOTLIGHT

Kimberly Cohn

Program Division Director
Deaf Community Counseling Services (DCCS)



“I always choke up when I tell this story,” begins [Deaf Community Counseling Services \(DCCS\)](#) Program Director Kimberly Cohn, when asked about how she became interested in learning American Sign Language (ASL).

It all started with a piece of gum.

In her childhood, Kim fondly shares a story about how a little girl approached her father during a fire safety program at a local elementary school. Kim’s father, a career firefighter, was a Fire Inspector at the time. That little girl was deaf. She wanted a piece of gum and boldly asked for it from Kim’s father using sign language and reading lips.

Kim’s father was so charmed by this little girl that every time he went back to the school for a visit, he would find her to give her gum. Kim remembers him saying, “She’s just like you, only deaf.” The friendship piqued Kim’s interest in this little girl who used her hands to communicate.

Fast forward ten years, Kim is attending high school classes, and she’s approached by a student who recognized her last name and asked, “...is your dad the fireman?” Kim remembers getting chills from the happy encounter, inspiring her to take up ASL classes in high school and college.

A Bay Area native, Kim is DCCS's new Program Director hired in September. Kim landed the job after a LinkedIn application took an unexpected turn. She didn't find the job, Kim shares. The job found her.

"I had been at my previous community mental health agency for 14 years, in three different roles, and had been looking for a while. I saw that Felton was advertising a Division Director role through LinkedIn, so I hit the Easy Apply button. Within an hour, Felton's recruiting manager Rachita called me back. She said, 'I know you're interested in the Division Director role, but would you consider looking at the job description for Deaf Community Counseling Services?' Wow. I got my sign degree 20 years ago. Rachita found this little piece of my history. She must have dug deep into my profile and found it. I was really surprised that this job found me. And I am just honored to be here."

Kim took her double major in Music and Theater at San Francisco State University before taking an additional two-year degree in American Sign Language at Vista College (now known as Berkeley City College). Her first career was managing a restaurant in Silicon Valley that she helped expand into a chain throughout California. At one point, Kim aspired to become an ASL interpreter for Deaf theater, but after working with a few Deaf clients, she decided to become a therapist instead. Kim completed her Masters of Psychology degree, specializing in Counseling Psychology and Drama Therapy at the California Institute of Integral Studies. As a therapist at her prior agency, she was the only clinician who knew sign language and used her ASL skills to support the few Deaf clients served there.

Kim believes that music and theater have a direct correlation to ASL because both require creative self-expression. She says, "when I learned ASL, it opened up a whole new world of Deaf culture to me through Deaf poetry and Deaf theater. While I'm a visitor in the world of ASL, I can truly embody expression through music and theater as a singer/dancer/actor. Still, I hadn't realized the beauty and power of these arts in ASL until later, at Vista studying with Ella (Mae Lenz, esteemed local Deaf poet, author, teacher, and advocate).

Kim utilizes improvisational drama therapy in some of her clinical work, which helps her connect with Deaf clients. One of her interactive-CBT interventions is a fun and engaging game called "Wishball." In Wishball, Kim creates an imaginary ball that she throws to a client through the zoom camera. The client acts like they are catching the ball and can throw it back with a wish attached. Through play, the game empowers the Deaf client by utilizing their inherent visual skills, creative self-expression, and personal agency. Through this collaborative therapeutic process, the client can take the lead in the game, shrinking or enlarging the ball before throwing it back. Kim says one thing she loves about her role at Felton is that she not only gets to use her clinical experience and entrepreneurial skills to help the vision and expand the [DCCS services](#), she still gets to do some clinical work.

In her downtime, Kim loves practicing yoga and going on bike rides with her middle-school aged daughter and partner. Also a classically trained alto, she sang in the Vienna Opera House at age 15 and in the SF Symphony Chorus during MTT's inaugural season. She's a big music lover and confesses to being a not-so-secret DeadHead. One of Kim's favorite memories is attending Grateful Dead shows, sitting near the section reserved for Deaf attendees, affectionally called "DeafHeads," to watch the ASL interpreters. A DeadHead friend of Kim's who knew that she signed had learned he was becoming a Late-Deafened Adult. Once, during a local Grateful Dead-night show, he asked if she would sign some Dead tunes on stage with the cover band. He didn't know ASL at all but wanted to get a visual sense of the music he loved through Kim's embodied form of musical expression in ASL.

One of her favorite quotes comes from the Grateful Dead songwriters Robert Hunter and Jerry Garcia. "Once in a while, you get shown the light in the strangest of places if you look at it right." Those are indeed inspiring words that can help us through these strange and challenging times. 🍓

For more information about Felton's Deaf Community Counseling Services (DCCS) Program, please visit the [DCCS program page](#) or email dccs@felton.org.

Unmasking Mental Health in the Deaf Community

For over four decades, the [Deaf Community Counseling Services \(DCCS\)](#) has dedicated its mission to provide equitable access and the highest quality of mental health services to the Deaf, Hard of Hearing (HOH), and Deaf-Blind communities in San Francisco and Alameda Counties.



According to [one study](#), between 15% and 26% of the population have hearing loss, and about 1 in every 20 Americans is deaf or hard-of-hearing. Struggles to function in a hearing world can lead to mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety. And in the coronavirus era, these issues may be exacerbated by mask-wearing, social isolation, and higher needs around communication assistance.

DCCS is proud to have maintained its ability to provide mental health services for its clients and adapt to health guidelines throughout the pandemic. Services include mental health assessment, therapy and substance abuse counseling, psychiatric and medication services for clients of all ages. DCCS also provides rehabilitation services and can forge school partnerships through Educationally Related Mental Health Services (ERMHS) to foster academic and social success for Deaf and HOH students. All this is possible due to partnerships with [the City and County of San Francisco](#), [the Department of Public Health \(DPH\)](#), and [Alameda County's Behavioral Health Services \(ACBHS\)](#).

Understanding Deaf Culture

While all DCCS staff are fluent in American Sign Language (ASL), complete understanding and immersion in Deaf Culture is an important key to DCCS's success.

Today, the program has two full-time Deaf staff and one Rehabilitation Specialist, serving about 40 clients. The Deaf and HOH population is growing rapidly, and mental health service providers face a higher demand for this special needs group. [According to one study published in the American Journal of Psychiatry](#), Deaf individuals say they preferred a Deaf mental health provider

DCCS Director Kimberly Cohn has nothing but praise for her staff, calling them an exceptional group of mental health professionals.

"It's about possessing cultural competence and cultural humility within the Deaf community and arriving simultaneously with exceptional clinical skills. There's no wiggle room for 'on the job training' in these areas. High levels of education and training are required for our staff to possess the clinical skills, intellectual and academic rigor needed to do this work. But there's also the compassion piece; they have to be heartfelt and understand the needs of the client, and be able to integrate their clinical training with open-heartedness and the ability to serve in the most effective and appropriate ways."

Educating the public is also crucial, and general perception and stereotypes about the Deaf community are shifting. The idea of deafness as a disability is a thing of the past. Today, the Deaf community identifies as a linguistic minority, complete with its own community of ASL users, with unique customs, norms, arts and culture. To help broaden public understanding, DCCS has been active in community outreach. Deaf clinician Sharon

Haynes has been instrumental in maintaining the presence of DCCS not only within the Deaf community, but also coordinating DCCS staff and leadership to represent Felton in the larger landscape of specialty mental health services.

Innovation and Technology for the Deaf

[Medical studies](#) have found that deaf people suffer from mental health issues at about twice the general population rate. There is still much to be done to meet the demand for accessible mental health services for the deaf.

DCCS Program Director Kimberly Cohn explains. "Typically, if a deaf person needs to access mental health services, they need an interpreter with them, which may cost more than \$100 an hour. The truth is Deaf consumers often have to carry the additional burden of cost simply for access." Passed in 1990, the ADA act facilitated access through language capacity though more needs to be done. ASL users still encounter difficulties finding qualified interpreters, and medical organizations face problems getting reimbursed for providing such services.

One development in the time of COVID19 was the transition to teleconferencing technology as a platform for TeleHealth services. While these platforms play to the adherent strength of the visual skills of the Deaf, the use of these technologies doesn't come without some pitfalls. Poor wi-fi connections may "freeze" video - totally cutting off communication. Representatives from the Deaf-and-Hearing Loss communities are appealing to video conferencing services like Zoom to improve technology and make it easier for sign language users to communicate with each other and their colleagues of various hearing capacities.



The Road Ahead

Typically, [DCCS operates out of three locations with offices in San Francisco, Berkeley, and Fremont](#). However, during Shelter-in-Place due to Covid19, all sessions will occur remotely until further notice. Staff is eager to return to in-person services as soon as it is recommended to do so.

In 2012, Felton took over the operation of the program (formally known as the UCSF Center on Deafness), expanding and innovating service to the Deaf and HOH communities that has spanned over 45 years. DCCS has changed with the times, navigating policy change and innovating and adapting new technologies, which has provided solutions for its deaf clients. Yet, some hurdles remain.

Felton Institute's DCCS strongly advocates for equal access to mental health care and services for the Deaf and HOH populations, using cultural and linguistic affirmative approaches. The work requires challenging the more subtle forms of discrimination against Deaf or HOH individuals. For example, insurance paperwork, medical documents, and other requirements are written in and must be completed in English. An extra step requires that it must first be interpreted, translated, or transliterated into ASL to be accessible to the Deaf community for clarity and equitable access to services.

Al Gilbert, Felton Institute President and CEO, says these challenges simply provide more opportunity to innovate. "Serving the Deaf is just an opportunity for us to expand our ability to serve a different population. It is an opportunity to enhance our culture, exactly in the way we would like people who are considered minorities in this country to be incorporated into the workplace — treated as it is a valuable expansion of the asset base. We've been blessed to have leadership and a program that's been extraordinary in achieving this goal."

Plans for DCCS include hiring more staff to accommodate the Deaf and HOH clientele' growing needs in the Bay Area. DCCS is dedicated to diversity and inclusivity, welcoming people from all backgrounds, races, cultures, genders, and sexual orientations. ■

DEAF COMMUNITY COUNSELING SERVICES (DCCS), AT A GLANCE

Services Provided

- Psychiatry and Psychotropic Medication Management and Education
- Individual Therapy
- Therapy for Children and Adolescents
- Domestic Violence-related Issues
- Couples Therapy
- Family therapy
- Educationally-related Mental Health Services (ERMHS)
- Substance Abuse Education
- Mental Health Workshops
- Consultation, Collaboration, and Advocacy

Accepted Insurance

- MediCal/"Medi-Medi"
- ERMHS (formally known as AB3632)
- Individual private insurance with prior authorization (please contact DCCS for more info)

DCCS Staff

- **Cat Riddley**, Administrative Manager and ASL Interpreter, 8 years of service
- **Mal May**, Mental Health Rehabilitation Specialist, 7.5 years of service
- **Jolene Mahoney-Beaver**, Lead Clinical Case Manager, 4 years of service
- **Sharon Haynes**, Clinical Case Manager and Outreach Coordinator, 2.4 years of service
- **Kimberly Cohn**, DCCS Program Director, 3.5 months

Please reach out to Felton's Deaf Community Counseling Services if you or someone you know needs support during these challenging times of COVID-19, by fax 415-447-9701. For more information, about Felton's DCCS Program please visit the [DCCS Program Page](#).

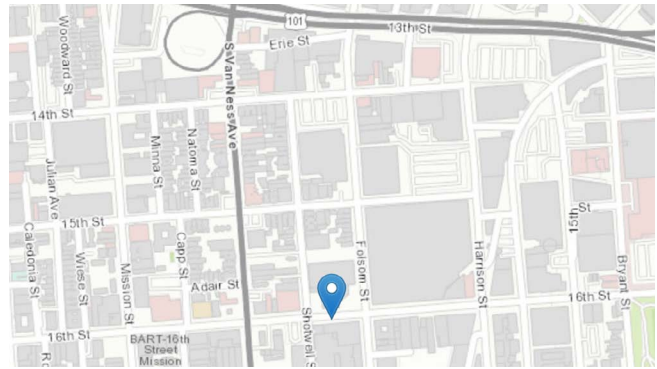
New ECE Location Taking Shape in SF's Mission District

Construction on the latest [Early Care and Education \(ECE\)](#) program location is in its final stages, on track for completion in July 2021 and in time for the school year opening in the fall of 2021.



Spearheaded by the CYF Division, Felton Institute will be unveiling the program site as part of a new 100% affordable housing development, "Casa Adelante." Located at 1990 Folsom Street in the rapidly gentrifying Mission District, the community housing project boasts 143 low-cost rental units while providing accessible birth-to-career resources. Some features are community spaces, preschool to after-school programs, and activities for youth and young adults.

This project is a joint effort between [the Mission Economic Development Agency \(MEDA\)](#) and the [Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation \(TNDC\)](#). Felton Institute is excited that our [Early Care and Education program](#) will open the additional site in the new development location, adding to families' future success in the Mission neighborhood.



Felton COO and CYF Division Head Yohana Quiroz explains, "This project is going to serve about 45 young children, from birth to age five and includes children with special needs. There is a high need in San Francisco, and we are happy that the city continues to invest in these types of programs. Felton Institute is proud to support the city's efforts in creating accessible early care and education programs for all children."

The newest [ECE center](#) will follow the same successful educational program models and curriculum Felton is known for, incorporating neurodiversity, inclusion, and intergenerational interaction. The goal is to support not only the child but the entire family. Quiroz explains, "To build the foundation for future learning, we work in partnership with families so that we can support them with their own personal and professional goals and needs. The two-generation approach benefits the entire family - ensuring that they are doing well, physically, emotionally, socially, and financially."

During the [groundbreaking ceremony in May 2019](#), San Francisco Mayor London Breed commented, "I'm excited about what this project will do, not just provide family housing, but childcare, which we know is so challenging for families who have small children. So, what a great opportunity for families to have a place to live that's affordable, and to have affordable daycare in the same building and know that their children are being cared for!"

Presently, CYF runs three other [ECE centers](#): Family Developmental Center, Sojourner Truth Center, Martin Luther King Center and Felton Learning Center serving 350 children across the San Francisco Bay area. 📍

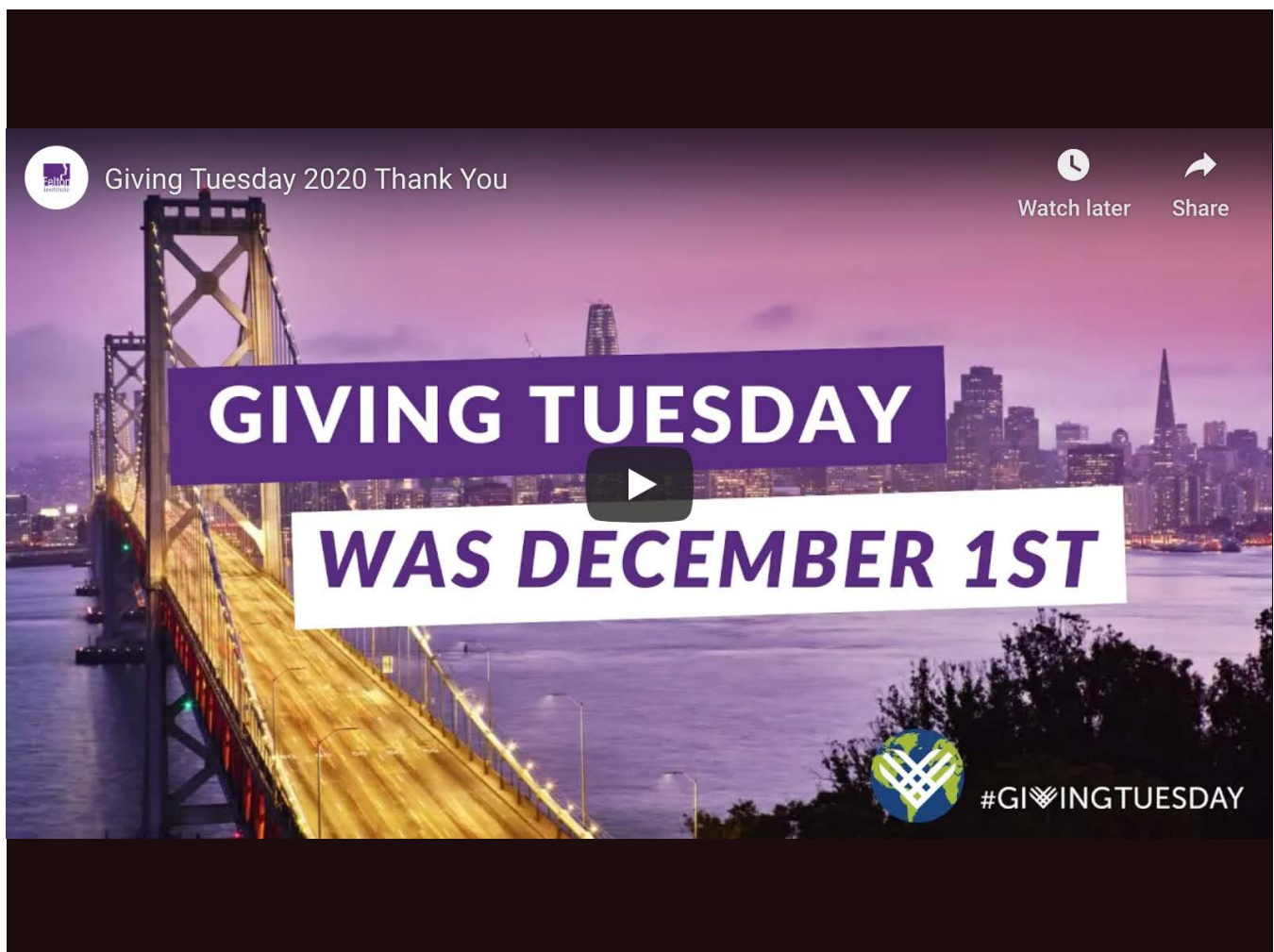
For general inquiries about Felton's ECE programs, please contact admissions@felton.org.

For more information about Felton's Early Care and Education Programs, please visit the [ECE program page](#).

FEATURED VIDEO

Thank you for showing your support for Felton Institute on Giving Tuesday!

Thank you so much for helping us surpass our goal. Your donation means a lot to us and will support over 50 social service programs, in the SF Bay Area!



FELTON AND YOU

Thank you. Just Thank you.

We are simply floored by the outpouring of support and generosity on December 1, Giving Tuesday. **Because of you, we were able to raise over \$35,000!** We totally surpassed our goal. Thank you!



There is no denying that 2020 was a challenging year. Facing issues such as the COVID19 pandemic, police brutality, wildfire season, and a dramatic political climate, Felton Institute still managed to close out the year strong.

Your contribution makes a real difference.

As an essential service provider to the community's most vulnerable, Felton Institute is fiercely committed to responding to the call of service. Just as we have for so many years, we have no plans on stopping now. Pivoting and adapting our social services and mental health programs to comply with health guidelines was no easy task. But we did it, with your help and your support.



As the holiday season approaches and the year winds down, we pause to recharge and reflect on our successes.

- Uninterrupted [mental health services for the Deaf](#) and [Senior Populations](#).
- The successful creation and launch of the ECE Community Hub, supporting students from low-income families with remote learning.
- [24-hour Suicide Hotline](#) through [San Francisco Suicide Prevention](#).
- Outreach and support for the [Unhoused populations](#).
- Programs promoting [social justice and reentry services](#).
- Clinical counseling services via [Telehealth](#).
- Providing Felton families and clients with [educational gifts and a holiday meal](#) through Felton's [Family Support program](#).

We look ahead to 2021 with optimism and hope. And we are grateful that you are part of the community of donors and volunteers who help us fulfill our mission of transforming lives through innovative mental health programs and social services. 📺

Thank you again for your generous support.

If you missed Giving Tuesday, it's never too late to give. Donations to Felton Institute are always welcome. Simply text "FELTON" to 41-444 or visit <http://www.felton.org/donate>.

Adopt an Angel

PROVIDING FAMILIES THIS SEASON WITH
EDUCATIONAL GIFTS, GIFT CARDS & HOLIDAY MEALS.



Together, we can meet the challenge of 2020, a very rough year for many of our families and give the best gift of all. In addition to presenting 300 children with an educational toy, and families with gift cards, Felton is asking for your support in adopting 30 families and providing them with a \$250 gift card to put towards a holiday meal.



- Make a donation by texting "feltonangel" to 41-444 or go to felton.org/FeltonAngel
- In lieu of gifts to friends and family who "have it all", [donate](#) in their name to our Adopt an Angel Program. You would be surprised at how many people would appreciate this thoughtful gift.
- Send this letter to your network, asking them to remember Felton Institute's Adopt an Angel Program with a [charitable gift in support](#) of our important work during the Holiday season.

FELTON.ORG/FELTONANGEL

Direct your donation to the **Adopt an Angel** Program

» **ADOPT AN ANGEL**



Make a *Donation* to Felton Institute today!

Help Felton continue creating impact in the Bay Area by making a [monthly or yearly commitment](#).

All contributions are tax-deductible.

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