

# THE FIRST STEP...



## Dear Readers,

In this issue of the newsletter, I would like to share an important change concerning our organization. Following Italy's Third Sector reform, the Centro Assistenza per Bambini Sordi e Sordociechi Onlus has officially become the **Fondazione CABSS - Centro Assistenza per Bambini Sordi e Sordociechi ETS**, reinforcing our commitment to supporting deaf and deafblind children and their families.

I would also like to update you on Dr. Fadda's participation in important international conferences. She was a key speaker at the AIDAS conference in Lithuania and at the World Federation of the Deaf congress in Kenya, focusing respectively on accessible mental health services and the right to sign language.

CABSS has also been active in Italy through the participation of Dr. Harripersad and Dr. Fadda at the 24th International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (ICED) in Rome. In addition, Dr. Caravello presented on communication with young deafblind children during the seminar "Accessibilità e Inclusione: due percorsi per eventi più accessibili".

I am delighted to announce the return of the "Fulbright - Roberto Wirth" scholarship. The recipient will study at the prestigious National Technical Institute for the Deaf at the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, U.S.A. Our collaboration with Fulbright also continues through Mariana Ortiz, a Fulbright scholar in Deafness Studies, who is carrying out a project on Deaf culture at CABSS.

On the events front, CABSS continues to promote fundraising initiatives that support our early intervention programs. Among these, I would like to mention "CABSS Sotto Le Stelle", a special evening of conversation, wine tasting and music.

Before leaving you to read the articles, I would like to introduce the new Editor of the newsletter, Dr. **Manuela Rafaiani**, and thank everyone who supported CABSS with a donation. Every contribution is an act of trust in our mission and helps us continue supporting deaf and deafblind children and their families.

Kindest Regards!



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## The AIDAS International Conference and the WFD Conference - The Rights of Deaf People: Between Recognition and Implementation

In recent decades the issue of the rights of deaf people has seen significant progress in terms of formal recognition, yet it continues to face major challenges when it comes to concrete implementation. The need to promote awareness, rights and inclusion is now widespread globally and finds expression both in awareness - raising initiatives - such as the International Week of Deaf People - and in conferences and congresses organized in various national and international contexts. In 2025, our Director Stefania Fadda participated at the AIDAS International Conference and in the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) Congress, dedicated to the right to accessible mental health services and the right to sign language. Both events reaffirmed a crucial point: recognizing rights in principle is not enough unless policies, services and professional competencies are developed to make those rights truly effective, with accessibility treated as a prerequisite rather than the exception.

### ***AIDAS International Conference - The Right to Mental Health***

The conference was organized by *Aidas*, a Lithuanian association of families with deaf members. The conference, “*Promoting fair and inclusive access to mental health and well-being services for Deaf individuals, challenging systemic barriers and fostering culturally and linguistically appropriate care across Europe*” was held in Klaipėda (Lithuania) on June 19<sup>th</sup>. Speakers from several European countries addressed key issues such as the lack of accessible mental health services for deaf people, the importance of inclusion, and the need for collaboration between communities and institutions.

Dr. Fadda participated remotely and presented on, “*Equity in Mental Health and Well - Being Services for Deaf Individuals Across Europe.*” She highlighted the need to overcome systemic barriers so that deaf individuals can access mental health services that respect each patient’s cultural and linguistic identity.

To achieve this goal, several actions are essential: raising institutional awareness; collaborating with associations representing deaf people; increasing scientific research; training sign language interpreters to

work effectively in mental health settings; training both deaf and hearing mental health professionals; implementing highly specialized services that address the specific needs of deaf patients. These elements would significantly improve the quality of mental health services and ensure full implementation of the right to care for deaf individuals.

### ***Global Challenges and Deaf Rights: 5<sup>th</sup> WFD Conference***

Professionals, activists, researchers and Deaf leaders from more than 50 countries gathered in Nairobi (Kenya) for the 5<sup>th</sup> World Conference of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD). Organized in collaboration with the Kenya National Association of the Deaf, the conference addressed the theme *Advancing Sign Language Rights* in an era marked by major global challenges, including emergency response, social inclusion and technological transformation. Our Director, Stefania Fadda, contributed to the discussions as a member of the WFD Expert Group on “Access to Health and Mental Health”.

For the first time in its history, the WFD also organized a Pre - Conference dedicated to the rights and leadership of Deaf women, with the aim of promoting their full inclusion in communities and decision - making processes, in line with the 5<sup>th</sup> Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda, dedicated to gender equality.

The conference explored main sub - themes:

- A changing world - How can the right to sign languages be ensured in the context of climate change and disaster-related crises?
- Artificial intelligence and sign language - How can we address the challenges posed by AI while embracing its opportunities without diminishing the human dimension?
- Strong Deaf organizations - How can sustainable and resilient organizations be built to support the Deaf community?

The 5<sup>th</sup> WFD Conference concluded with a strong call for collaboration, innovation and unity, reaffirming that protecting sign language rights and ensuring the inclusion of Deaf people worldwide must remain central to any response to technological and climate challenges. In particular, WFD President Dr. Joseph Murray emphasized the need to ensure inclusivity for Deaf women living in rural areas and announced that the next WFD Conference will be held in Abu Dhabi from September 19<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2027, coinciding with the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the WFD.



From left to right: Sofia Isari - EUD President, Raffaele Cagnazzo - ENS President, Stefania Fadda - CABSS Director and Joseph J. Murray - WFD President



## CABSS at ICED 2025: The Importance of Going Beyond Words

Represented by Dr. Stefania Fadda and Dr. Laura Harripersad, CABSS had the honor of participating in the 24<sup>th</sup> International Congress on the Education of the Deaf (ICED), the oldest and most prestigious scientific event dedicated to deafness and education. The Congress, held in Rome on July 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> at the Auditorium della Tecnica Conference Center and welcomed thousands of researchers, teachers and professionals from around the world to explore the theme “More than Words.” The event showcased best educational practices that promote inclusive teaching methodologies that respect Deaf language and culture, and reaffirmed the importance of truly accessible high - quality education for all.

Our Director, Dr. Stefania Fadda, had the honor of being invited as a keynote speaker, alongside other internationally renowned experts in the field of deafness. Her lecture, titled “Fostering Well - being in Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children: Understanding Risk and Resilience across Development”, guided the audience through an exploration of well - being and mental health in

deaf children, beginning with a central question: what enables a deaf child not only to adapt, but to thrive?



Doctor Laura Harripersad at ICED 2025

Laura Harripersad, CABSS Intervenor and expert in early intervention for deafblind children, gave a presentation on “Early Multisensory

Intervention for Deafblind Children” during the “Learning and Literacy” thematic session on July 11<sup>th</sup>. Literacy - the ability to access, understand and produce language and meaning - can develop from the earliest years of life even in deafblind children, provided it is supported through concrete and repeated multisensory experiences, such as those offered by CABSS through its multisensory early intervention programs.

Thanks to Dr. Fadda and Dr. Harripersad, CABSS had the opportunity to contribute to the theme of ICED 2025, emphasizing the need to go beyond words to ensure that deaf and deafblind children can express themselves, access education and participate actively in all areas of daily life, using their preferred communication modality.

## The XXII National SITCC Congress

From October 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025, Director Stefania Fadda took part in the XXII National SITCC Congress, “Uno nessuno centomila - l'enigma dell'identità”, held in Chia, in the southern region of Sardinia.

The theme of identity - addressed from various cultural and scientific perspectives - is today a highly relevant area of study, enriched by recent neuroscientific discoveries and new models in psychopathology and psychotherapy. The aim of the Congress was to explore this complex enigma through interdisciplinary contributions, fostering dialogue on its clinical implications.

Dr. Fadda represented CABSS with a presentation entitled “Quando mancano suono, immagine e parola: identità incarnata e memoria del sé”, in which she examined the intricate

relationship between bodily identity, deafness, deafblindness and mental health. Her presentation highlighted how the self is constructed through sensory and tactile channels even before language acquisition. In this perspective, deafness is not viewed as a mere lack, but as a cultural difference rich in its own artistic and community expressions, where sign language and biculturalism play a central role in psychological well - being. Considerable attention was also devoted to deafblindness and to innovative communication systems such as ProTactile, which assert independence.

Dr. Fadda illustrated specific clinical methodologies and educational tools necessary to support the development of deaf and deafblind children, and emphasized the importance of ensuring rights

and accessibility in the field of mental health, promoting an approach that integrates the somatic and relational needs of patients.



Doctor Fadda at the SITCC National Congress

# ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS

## Communicating with Deafblind Children: CABSS at the CoNaSD Seminar

Communication with deafblind children is a crucial component of CABSS' early intervention programs. As the primary tool for connecting with the world and building shared meaning, communication - when it comes to deafblind children - becomes a complex process that goes far beyond the simple exchange of words.

Dr. Giusy Caravello, early interventionist at CABSS, addressed this topic during the seminar "Accessibilità e Inclusione: due percorsi per eventi più accessibili" and presented on "La comunicazione con i bambini sordociechi 0-6 anni" (S. Fadda, G. Caravello, M. Cidronelli, L. Harripersad). The seminar took place on November 29<sup>th</sup> at the ENS Rome Provincial Section, organized by the National Committee of Deaf People with Multiple Disabilities (CoNaSD) in collaboration with the ENS Lazio Regional Council.

When vision and hearing are compromised, communication takes on new forms centered on the body, touch, rhythm and presence. The communicative process requires skill and creativity, but it is rooted above all in the relationship and in building a bond of trust between the child and the adult.

In this perspective, CABSS considers the Total Communication approach essential. Its goal is to offer the child as much information as possible through all available sensory and communicative modalities (Sign Language, Tactile Sign Language, spoken and written language, tangible symbols, images, etc.). Its use promotes the development of concepts and language gradually in 3 areas, which allow for the development of concepts and language, starting from the concrete (real objects), to the semi-concrete (visual and/or tactile representations of the real object) and finally to the abstract (the written name of the object and/or its sign in Italian Sign Language and/or other communication modalities).

Dr. Caravello illustrated the CABSS' communication "toolbox", which includes resources such as:

- Tangible symbols: objects or parts of objects used to represent activities or concepts
- Calendar System: a communication support tool that compensates for the loss of sight and hearing and may include objects, cues, photographs and/or written words to represent an activity or sequence of activities
- Interactive stories to touch, see and hear; tactile Experience Books and Concept Books, designed to introduce new concepts and foster interest in storytelling and early literacy
- Tactile and sound books, cause-and-effect sound/visual toys, various tactile educational materials, and much more.



Doctor Giusy Caravello during the presentation at the CoNaSD seminar

The goal is to guide deafblind children from pre-intentional communicative behaviors toward increasingly intentional communication, eventually reaching more conventional and socially recognized forms. This is achieved through the acquisition of specific communicative modalities tailored to each child's individual needs, enabling full participation in social and educational life.

The CABSS presentation was met with great interest, in an atmosphere of exchange and collaboration among speakers, organizers and participants. Alongside CABSS, the associations Casa delle Luci, Lega del Filo d'Oro and FADI also contributed and agreed on the importance of multimodal communication as a tool for fostering autonomy, participation and emotional development.

CABSS extends its thanks to Grazia D'Agata - National Coordinator of CoNaSD, Laura Mantovani - Regional Representative and Giovanni Battafarano - Seminar Moderator and ENS Provincial Councilor.



The speakers at the CoNaSD seminar



## The 2026/2027 Fulbright - Roberto Wirth Scholarship

We are pleased to announce the “Fulbright - Roberto Wirth” scholarship for the 2026/2027 academic year.

The new scholarship will offer the recipient the opportunity to study in the field of education for deaf and deafblind children at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) which is one of nine colleges of the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) in the U.S.A.

The scholarship was presented during the webinar “Fulbright - Roberto Wirth Scholarship in Deafness Education Studies at NTID/RIT” on November 5<sup>th</sup> and was moderated by the Director of CABSS, **Stefania Fadda**. The webinar featured contributions from Italy by **Veruschka Wirth**, President of Fondazione CABSS; Dr. **Paola Sartorio**, Executive Director of the Fulbright Commission; and Dr. **Laura Cambriani**, Educational Advisor and Public Relations Officer at the Fulbright Commission. From the United States, speakers included **Thomasine Sarchet**, Assistant Dean and Assistant Professor of Deaf Education at NTID, and **Bryan Hensel**, Executive Director at the NTID Office of External Affairs at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

Dr. Wirth spoke about how the scholarship, created in 1992 by her father Roberto Wirth, “represents an

extraordinary opportunity to train young people to be capable of designing and implementing projects that can concretely improve the lives of deaf and deafblind children.”

Dr. Sartorio emphasized the fact that thanks to the “Fulbright - Roberto Wirth” scholarship, many young people have had the opportunity over the years to live a unique educational experience in the United States - an experience that many of



Fondazione CABSS, Fulbright Commission and RIT logos

them have then put to use upon returning to Italy, contributing to the growth and strengthening of the Italian Deaf community.

Former scholarship recipients have indeed become true points of reference in the field of deafness - “The Pride of the Italian Deaf community,” as Roberto Wirth described them. Examples include Susanna Ricci Bitti and Lisanna Grosso, former recipients who spoke during the webinar. Both highlighted how the scholarship enabled them to build a solid foundation of academic and cultural skills in the United States, a country that is progressive in many respects in regards to Deaf Rights

and Culture.

Dr. Fadda concluded by sharing the vision and values that will guide the scholarship for the 2026/2027 academic year. The recipient’s area of study must be oriented toward improving the quality of life of deaf children and their families and be inspired by the following fundamental pillars:

- Centrality of the child: attention to specific needs during childhood
- Accessibility and inclusion: creation of barrier free educational environments
- Meaningful relationships and communication: promotion of deep and effective communicative exchanges

The National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), the first and largest college in the world dedicated to deaf students in the technological field. Every year it welcomes over 1.100 deaf students from around the globe, who live, study and work alongside their hearing peers on the main RIT campus, in a truly inclusive environment.

## CABSS Welcomes Fulbright Scholar Mariana Ortiz

In December 2025 we welcomed Mariana Ortiz to CABSS, the recipient of the Fulbright scholarship in Deafness Studies. Mariana was born in Costa Rica and lives in the United States. She studied psychology and Italian at the University of Pennsylvania, later earning her Masters in Public Health in the social and behavioral fields. She is currently in her final year of medical school at Penn State College of Medicine (Pennsylvania), with the goal of specializing in child and adolescent

psychiatry.

At CABSS she will carry out a program designed for the children at the I.C. Silvestri primary school in Rome about, “*The Value of Deaf Culture*”. She will guide students in discovering various aspects of Deaf culture through the exploration of topics such as Italian Sign Language, the history of deafness, visual culture, art, theatre and sports.



Mariana Ortiz

# FUNDRAISING

## CABSS “Sotto le Stelle”

On September 24<sup>th</sup>, the “CABSS Sotto le Stelle” charity event took place on the splendid panoramic terrace of the Hotel Hassler - under the stars, suspended amongst the domes of Rome. The evening allowed us to raise funds to support the early intervention programs designed for deaf and deafblind children at CABSS.

On the top floor of the Hotel Hassler, guests were embraced by a refined and evocative atmosphere: a starry sky above and a breathtaking view of the Eternal City. The fresh September breeze made this evening dedicated to solidarity even more enjoyable.

Warmly welcomed by President Veruschka Wirth, Director Stefania Fadda and the long - standing staff at CABSS, guests enjoyed moments of conviviality filled with conversation, wine tasting and music including an enchanting group of violinists. Enhancing the gastronomic experience were the dishes carefully crafted by Marcello Romano, a Campanian chef who is the executive chef of Hotel Hassler and has led Salone Eva’s kitchen for over twenty years.

Chef Romano curated a refined gastronomic selection designed to accompany the evening with harmony and flavor, highlighting the quality of the ingredients and being attentive to every detail. Complementing the culinary experience, a selection of cocktails and beverages contributed to an even more pleasant and convivial atmosphere.

“CABSS was created with the aim of guiding deaf and deafblind children along a developmental path that helps them become autonomous, confident and aware of their potential”, explained Veruschka Wirth. “In synergy with Director Stefania Fadda and our entire team, we work every day to build a welcoming and stimulating educational environment where children can develop skills, self - confidence and freedom of expression through carefully designed programs”.



*One of the dishes created by Chef Marcello Romano*



*Violinists entertaining the guests*



*A sketch artist drawing a self portrait of one of the guests*



All funds raised during the evening were allocated to CABSS for the development of its multisensory early intervention programs. These programs aim to enhance and strengthen all the senses of deaf and deafblind children, stimulating their curiosity about the world around them. Through specific tools and methodologies, the children learn to integrate and understand information from the external environment, develop cognitive and communication skills, gain autonomy in making choices, and fully express their personalities.

The support of donors represents a fundamental pillar for CABSS, and we extend our heartfelt thanks to all those who participate in and believe in our events. During the “*CABSS Sotto le Stelle*” event, we had the pleasure of reconnecting with long-time supporters and welcoming new friends who chose to embrace our mission, offering deaf and deafblind children concrete support to be able to spread their wings and fly in life.



*The violinists at sunset*



*President Veruschka Wirth and Vice President Roberto Wirth*

## Heartfelt Thanks

This past Christmas was a moment of deep gratitude and hope for CABSS. Thanks to all of you who chose to donate, we were able to transform a gesture of solidarity into concrete support for many deaf and deafblind children and their families.

Every donation we receive represents far more than a financial contribution: it is an act of trust in our mission and in the value of early intervention. The programs CABSS carries out every day allow children to make the most of their residual senses, build the foundation of communication and open themselves to the world with greater opportunities for autonomy and connection.

Thanks to your support we can continue to offer personalized programs, accompany families from the very first moments after receiving their child's diagnosis and ensure high - quality interventions that truly make a difference in lives of children.

Your support has lit a light that will continue to shine throughout the New Year.

On behalf of the entire association - and especially the children - thank you for choosing to stand by our side. Together we can continue to build a future of communication and inclusion.



# FUNDRAISING

## Support us!

**Bank transfer** made out to the Fondazione Centro Assistenza per Bambini Sordi e Sordociechi ETS, Piazza Trinità dei Monti 6 - 00187 Roma.

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**Donate Online** at our website: [www.cabss.org](http://www.cabss.org).

### PLEASE NOTE

Your donation is tax deductible!

## Support CABSS directly from the U.S.A.!

American citizens can support CABSS by making a tax - deductible donation through the **Myriad U.S.A. Charity** (former King Baudouin Foundation United States - KBFUS) in one of the following ways:

**Online donation:** on the <https://www.every.org/myriadusa> website search for the "Assistance Center for Deaf and Deafblind Children" in the "search by name or location" bar. This will take you to the page dedicated to CABSS from which you can make an online donation (Paypal, credit card, Google Pay, etc.).

Myriad U.S.A. and send it to Myriad U.S.A., 551 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2400, New York, NY 10176. Important: in the "Memo Section" of the check please write "Assistance Center for Deaf and Deafblind Children".

**Wire transfer:** write to [info@myriadusa.org](mailto:info@myriadusa.org) or contact them by telephone (212) 713 7660.

For more information:  
[www.myriadusa.org](http://www.myriadusa.org)



**Check:** Write your check out to

## Donate your 5X1000!

Supporting Fondazione Centro Assistenza per Bambini Sordi e Sordociechi ETS is easy; make the decision to donate your 5x1000. You can allocate a portion of your income to a non-profit organization.

All you have to do is write down **CABSS' tax code in the space provided and sign.**

Remember that the 5x1000 does not replace the 8x1000 and you can donate to both. In the case that you decide not to donate be aware that the portion originally designated in favor of nonprofit organizations will go directly to the government.

**Children need your support!**

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**A portion of the proceeds from the sales of the book will go to Fondazine Centro Assistenza per Bambini Sordi e Sordociechi ETS in favor of deaf and deafblind children**

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