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Babies learn sign language When more than words are needed

BY TRACI KRATZER
Record Gazette

Communicating with an infant who has yet to learn how to speak can be a trying task. They cry, they point, but parents don't always know what their child wants. Parents celebrate the day when their child can speak and use their words to communicate.

But what about the parents who have hearing impaired children or children who have speech and other developmental delays? How are they supposed to communicate with their child?

Beaumont resident and American Sign Language (ASL) instructor Robin Williams is providing parents and their children with a special tool that will make it easier to communicate with one another: sign language.

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Toddlers learn American Sign Language during a class last summer taught by Beaumont resident Robin Williams. She will be offering classes beginning next month at the Beaumont Library.

SIGN

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Last February, Williams became a Master Signing Time Instructor with Signing Time Academy. The Signing Time Academy is a global network of certified instructors who offer community sign language classes based on the award-winning Signing Time products. Williams is the co-author of the guide, "Enhance Literacy Instruction Using for Signing Time," which shows how teaching ASL to hearing children can improve their literacy skills and has also co-authored "Using Sing Language in the Classroom" and "Using Signing Time in Early Childhood Settings: A Guide for Educators."

"Signing is an excellent way for children to communicate before they are able to talk, they can even communi-

cate how they feel," she said.

Last summer, Williams taught signing classes at the Banning and Beaumont libraries, the Beaumont Adult School and the Yucaipa Community Center, and will be offering a new round of classes beginning Wednesday, Feb. 2 at the Beaumont Library. This class will be the Baby Signing Time class for ages 3 and under and their parents/caregivers. The cost is free for local families in the library district. Williams will also offer baby and Kinder Signing Time (for children up to 6 years old) at the Beaumont Adult School, which is also free to families, starting March 7. In April, a four week session for older students, upper elementary to high school, will be offered at Mountain View Middle School. On Tuesday evenings beginning March 15 she will teach Kinder Sign-

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BABIES

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ing Time, for ages 4 to 6 years old, at the Banning Library. The cost is free for local families in the library district.

For specific times and details visit, www.LittleOnesLove2Sign.com.

Williams believes that there are many benefits that come with using ASL with a child.

She said children with speech delays, learning disabilities, autism and other developmental or learning delays can also benefit from exposure to sign language.

In addition, Williams said children who sign may have higher IQ scores, have enhanced literacy skills and increased vocabulary, read at an earlier age, and increase their ability to read and understand language.

"Three years ago my son, Alexander, was born and we noticed that he had speech and other developmental delays," Williams said.

"When he was 24 months he only used six words verbal-

ly."

Having used American Sign Language for 14 years by then Williams said she decided to teach it to him.

"It really helped to bridge the communication gap," she said.

Williams said by using sign language it helped to reduce the frustration with communication and now Alexanders' oral vocabulary and reading skills have improved greatly.

"He talks non-stop and a lot of that is because of the signing," she said.

In fact sign language worked so well with her son that she began using it with her daughter, Isabella, who is almost two years old.

"Both of them started signing when they were nine months old," she said. "Even before that, they could understand the signs."

In addition to becoming a Master Signing Time Instructor, Williams was also named the Instructor of the month for the Southwest Region, which includes Southern California, Utah, Nevada, Mexico and South America, of the Signing Time Academy.



Parents and their children learn sign language during a class held last summer at the Beaumont Library. During the classes children learn songs by signing.

Her other qualifications include studying ASL at Brigham Young University for three years, was an ASL interpreter in Utah, taught

elementary school for eight years and has a master's degree in teaching with a Reading Specialization.

For more information

about Williams and her classes visit www.LittleOnesLove2Sign.com or email her at rwilliams@signingtimeacademy.com.