



JANUARY 2007

The Family Support Connection

FOCUS

—News from Minnesota Hands & Voices—

Theme for New Year: Collaboration

By Candace Lindow-Davies
Family Support Coordinator

With a new year full of possibilities before us, I wonder how 2007 will be different from 2006. It seems as each year passes, I look back and see a year peppered with carefully laid plans, spontaneous decisions, and detours I never saw coming. And each year, I try to do more planning in an attempt to control the unexpected, make decisions according to an overall plan, and advance the goals and mission of our program. This is all done with the intent to improve support to families throughout Minnesota who have children who are deaf or hard of hearing. **So, with all those objectives in mind, I would like to dub this year, 2007, as "The Year of Collaboration."**

With all the activities and efforts MN Hands & Voices/Family Support Connection offers this year, I would like to work very hard to gain participation from all those committed to improving the outcomes of our youth who have hearing loss. If I have learned anything in the past six years, I've learned we are better off combining as a unified force, rather than working independently, never stopping long enough to consult with each other. Case in point: a few years ago, there was a period when several organizations were all offering workshops at the same time. One frustrated parent e-mailed us and asked, "Do you guys ever talk to each other? How can I possibly choose which to attend?" Good point. While we can't always avoid overlapping events, we can work harder to coordinate our efforts.

With shrinking resources and hints that school districts are being forced to scale back on their support activities, duplication may be less of an issue. Collaboration may become even more necessary to ensure families have opportunities to connect with each other. Isolation for our children who are deaf or hard of hearing has always been an issue. The thought of it becoming worse is unacceptable.

Our Parent/Professional Advisory Board includes many stakeholders in the effort to improve the lives of children with hearing loss. One of the main reasons we formed this group is because we all need to work together to support families. I truly believe each group has an important role in the success of our youth, and each perspective is so important to making sure our children and families with their diverse needs are being represented.

When we formed our Advisory Board, one member asked, "Do you think everyone will be able to get along?" I hesitated, but replied, "We have to."

With such very different vantage points—different philosophies about the best way to communicate or educate a child with hearing loss—it traditionally has been very difficult to agree on issues. As a group, we have shot ourselves in the foot for looking so divisive. Legislators expect us to behave as a group and present a united front on issues of importance to us. With legislation on the table regarding newborn hearing screening and education for children who are deaf or hard of hearing, it has never been more important to agree on issues. 2007 will prove to be a pivotal year. We need everyone's help to affect change.

The recent development of our out-state "Guide By Your Side" program also was effort to represent the unique needs of families from each region. The program includes six regional Parent Guides who have been hired to support families in their local communities. The Guides are part of a trained, committed team of parents who respectfully work outside the system to call for change. But, our Parent Guides cannot possibly support families all on their own. We don't have the financial resources, first of all. We are working hard to increase our funding, but we do not have the resources to do nearly the amount of work we would like to do. At the same

time, we see ourselves as *complementing*, not replacing, the work of the many dedicated professionals already established in each region.

Can a community that has historically held such diverse opinions about the care of children with hearing loss, ever agree on anything? I believe we can. All parents want their children who are deaf or hard of hearing to reach their potential. Who is more motivated to see a child become truly successful and independent than the child's own family? We all have dreams for our children—ones that we don't wish to compromise because hearing loss has been identified. I have never had any parent confess that they secretly hoped their child would graduate with abysmal grades, be illiterate, dependent on government handouts, and live at home for the rest of his/her life. Hasn't happened yet and never will. So, can't we all agree that parents want the best for their child? And, who has been critical in advocating for advancements in technology, for earlier identification, for educational reform, and for better academic success? Those of us who have a child or children whom we cherish, and whom we know depend on us to open doors to opportunity.

Who else is a vested stakeholder? Adults who are deaf or hard of hearing who have experienced all the barriers to opportunity first-hand. We need to enlist their help and ask for their collaboration. Even though their communication mode/available technology/educational history might be different than that of our children, we need to be truly respectful of their experience, value their input, and actively seek them out. At the same time, parents ask that these adults respect the choices we are making. No one can possibly judge the decisions of another since the choices available today are so different than those even a few years ago. Plus, no two circumstances are the same.

Collaboration...continued on Page 4

What's Happening Around Town

**Fridays,
Jan. 12 & Feb. 2**

Open swim for families with members who are deaf or hard of hearing runs from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at Arlington High School, 1495 Rice St. in St. Paul. Cost is \$4 for adults, \$3 for children 12 and under, and \$1 for spectators. This pool has areas for diving, swimming and wading. For more information, e-mail Mary.Livingston@ci.stpaul.mn.us or call 651-266-6366 (v), 651-266-6378 (tty).

**Fridays, Jan. 12
– March 30**

Shoot hoops during Open Basketball for adults and teens, ages 16+ from 7 to 9 p.m. at Homecroft Recreation Center, 1845 Sheridan Ave. in St. Paul. Cost is \$8 for 10 weeks or \$1 each night. (No basketball on Feb. 2 and March 2.) Sponsored by CSD-MN and St. Paul Parks and Recreation.

Friday, Jan. 12

ASL interpretation is available on request for **Apple Valley High School's presentation** of "All I Ever Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten" and "The Colored Museum." The performance begins at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$7 for adults, \$5 for students/senior s. To request ASL, call 952-431-8208 (theatre box office) or 952-431-8737 (tty) at least 36 hours in advance.

**Sunday,
Jan. 14**

An ASL interpreter will be at the free **Minnesota Literature Reading** at 1 p.m. at Micawber's Bookstore, 2238 Carter Ave. in Saint Anthony Park (off Highway 280 & Como). This public reading of winning essays from a Minnesota Literature contest will feature six writers, including Deaf poet/playwright/essayist Raymond Luczak. See www.minnesotaliterature.org.

**Saturdays,
Jan. 20 to
March 17**

Reap the benefits of yoga while spending time with your family at CSD/St. Paul Parks & Rec Family Yoga for adults and children ages 6+. Classes run from 11 a.m. to noon at North Dale Recreation Center, 1414 N. St. Albans St. in St Paul. No class on Feb. 24. Cost is \$25 for adults, free for children in that same family. Register by Jan. 13. Contact Jessalyn at jfrank@c-s-d.org or Mary at mary.livingston@ci.stpaul.mn.us to register.

Through Jan. 27

The Miracle Worker, the play about Helen Keller and her teacher Annie Sullivan, will be performed with ASL interpretation at the Minneapolis Theatre Garage, 711 W. Franklin (at Lyndale) on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays at 3 p.m. Tickets have been reduced to \$11 for ASL patrons. For tickets, call 952-929-9097, e-mail info@torchtheater.com or go to www.torchtheater.com.

**Sunday,
Jan. 28**

Join us for our annual party at the Roller Garden in St. Louis Park. See the flyer for details. Make your reservation SOON! Contact us at 651-265-2435 (v), 651-265-2379 (tty) or e-mail fsc@lifetrackresources.org.

**Saturday,
Feb. 3**

The opening ceremony for the 2007 Winter Deaflympics begins at 7 p.m. at the University of Utah. For updates on the games, see www.2007deaflympics.com.

**Saturday,
Feb. 3**

The St. Paul Public Library presents Deaf Storytime with Estella Bustamante at 10:30 a.m. at the Merriam Park Branch Library, 1831 Marshall Ave. For details, call 651-642-0385 (v) or 651-298-4184 (tty).

**Sunday,
Feb. 4**

An ASL-interpreted tour of Twentieth-Century Art Since 1950 begins at 2 p.m. in the Target Wing third floor atrium of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. For details, call Visitor and Member Services at 612-870-3131 (v) or 612-870-3132 (tty) or e-mail dhegstro@artsmia.org.



ASL-Interpreted Performances

Twin Cities Storyfest:

Joining Voices Under the Winter Moon

Sunday, Jan. 21, 4:30 p.m.
Tickets: Free (donations accepted)
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, 2730 East 31st St., Mpls. Performers include Deaf storyteller Nic Zapko.

Chicago

Friday, Jan. 19, 8 p.m.
Ordway Center for the Performing Arts, 345 Washington, St. Paul; 651-224-4222, 651-282-3100(tty); www.ordway.org

Disney's High School Musical

Friday, Feb. 2, 8 p.m.; Tuesday, Feb. 6, 10:30 a.m.
Mention the VSA Offer for \$13 tickets.
Children's Theatre Co., 2400 3rd Ave. S., Minneapolis; 612-874-0400; www.childrenstheatre.org

Young MLK - And a Child Shall Lead

Sunday, Feb. 11, 2 p.m.
Tickets: \$11, \$9 student/senior
Weyerhaeuser Auditorium in Landmark Center, 75 W. 5th St., St Paul; 651-225-9265. www.steppingstonetheatre.org

Island of the Blue Dolphins

Sunday, Feb. 11, 2 p.m. Half-price tickets.
Howard Conn Fine Arts Center, 1900 Nicollet Ave., Mpls; 612-623-9080; www.youthperformancesco.com

Tale of a West Texas Marsupial Girl

Wednesday, Feb. 14, 10:30-10:30 a.m.;
Friday, Feb. 16, 7:30 p.m.
Mention the VSA Offer for \$13 tickets.
Children's Theatre Co., 2400 3rd Ave. S., Minneapolis; 612-874-0400; www.childrenstheatre.org

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Our mission is to build better lives for children who are deaf or hard of hearing by providing parent-to-parent support.

Newsletter Editor: Audrey Alwell

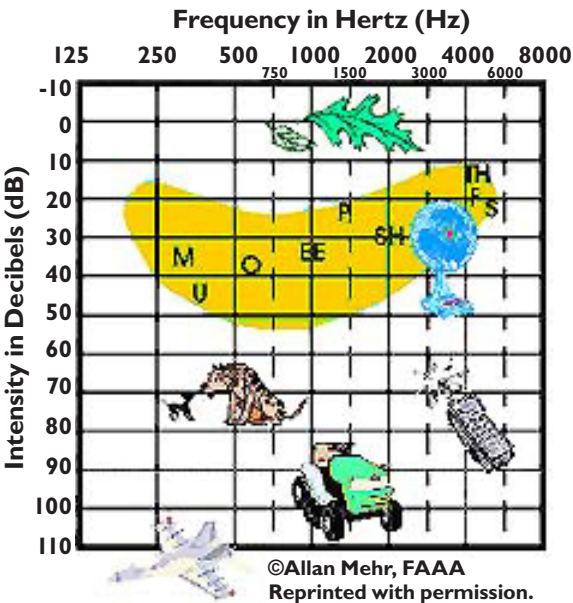
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Decibels vs. percents—experts explain best way to describe hearing loss

Have you ever felt confused by numbers as you tried to explain the level of your child's or your own hearing loss? Do you say, "my son has a 50% loss" or "I have a 50 decibel loss"? Are percents and decibels interchangeable? What do the numbers mean?

Audiologists measure hearing loss in decibels (dB) mapped out on an audiogram. The chart below plots where common sounds fall on an audiogram. The horizontal lines represent loudness or intensity. The 0 dB line near the top of the audiogram represents an extremely quiet sound. Moving down the chart toward 110 would be like turning up the volume control on a TV. The vertical lines represent pitch or frequency. The 125 Hertz (Hz) vertical line on the left side of the audiogram represents a very low sound. Moving from left to right on the audiogram would be like moving from left to right on a piano keyboard. The yellow area represents all the sounds that make up the human voice when speaking at normal conversational levels. This is often called the "speech banana" because of its shape.



"The dB level...marks the amount or intensity of sound needed to just be heard at a given frequency or pitch," explained Vicki Anderson, Au.D., HealthPartners. "The dB scale attempts to put numbers to how the ear...detects sound."

A decibel is a ratio of how many times louder (or softer) a sound is than a given reference sound level. 0 dB is not the absence of sound, but is an arbitrary zero.

"Decibels are meaningless without a reference," said Barbara Friedman, M.S., University of Minnesota. "Audiologists use a hearing level reference: 0 dB hearing level is referenced to the average hearing of young adults." That's what is shown on the chart above.

The decibel scale is logarithmic—every 10 dB increase in sound intensity is actually a ten-fold increase. That means that a sound intensity of 20 dB is not twice as loud as a sound intensity of 10 dB, but is 10 times

as loud. A sound intensity of 30 dB is 100 times as loud as a sound intensity of 10 dB. Similarly, a sound intensity of 50 dB would be 100,000 times as loud (10 x 10 x 10 x 10 x 10), explained Neil Bauman, Ph.D., Center for Hearing Loss Help.

For that reason, a 50 dB loss is not at all comparable to a 50% loss. If 0 dB were equal to 0 percent hearing loss (which it isn't), then you might think a 50 dB loss would equal a 50% hearing loss.

"Not by a long shot!" according to Bauman. "A 50 percent hearing loss would equal, believe it or not, only a 3 dB loss! Looking at it the other way, a 50 decibel loss is not just half as loud, like it would be in a percentage scale, but would only be one thousandth of one percent as loud!"

So where does "percent of loss" fit in?

"Decibels are often confused for percentages, maybe because we're more used to talking about percents, like tax brackets and class ranks," Anderson theorized.

So while percentages aren't correctly used to describe the degree of hearing loss, they can be used to describe a person's ability to discriminate sounds, usually measured through "Word Recognition" tests, Anderson said.

For these tests, the audiologist sets the volume at the person's most comfortable listening level, reads a list of words which the person repeats. The number of words the person understood can be converted to a percentage: 6 out of 10 would be 60%. This "discrimination score" can be done separately on each ear to identify the discrimination ability of each.

Audiologists use discrimination tests for several purposes, Anderson said.

"The score may give an indication of whether or not the hearing nerve may be affected in the hearing loss," she said. "Sometimes, especially in adults, it can suggest how well the individual might be likely to understand speech with amplification." It isn't as strong of an indicator for children because their brains are still growing and changing, she added.

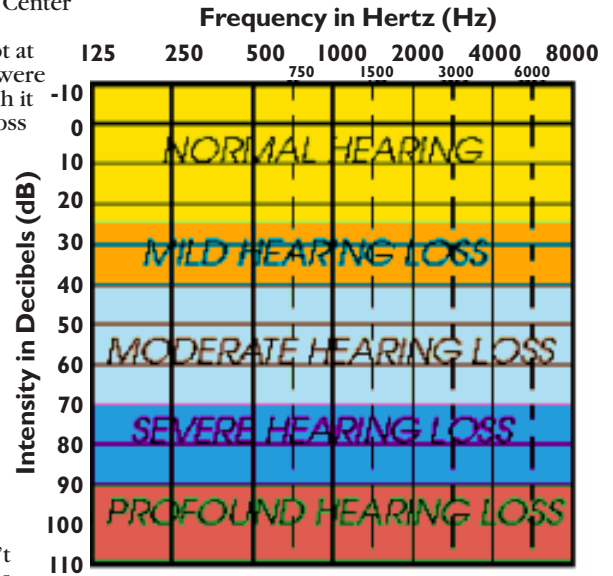
Still, some families may have been given a percent hearing handicap or disability score from their physician or audiologist, Anderson said. These numbers typically come from OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health) tables for defining a percentage of hearing loss due to occupational noise exposure or work-related injuries. These calculators are online at www.occupational-hearingloss.com/master_calculator.htm.

Using "just a number or name is often not enough" to describe a person's hearing loss, Friedman said. Anderson agreed.

"Neither measure can accurately reflect the impact of the hearing loss on an individual, with his/her unique skills and gifts, in

their unique communication environments," she added.

The chart below shows the typical labels for hearing loss depicted on the audiogram.



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"Today, research has shown that even hearing losses of only a few decibels can cause significant hearing problems," Bauman said. A more accurate (but still as arbitrary) scale, according to Bauman, would be:

Normal hearing	-10 to 15 dB
Slight hearing loss	16 to 25 dB
Mild hearing loss	26 to 40 dB
Moderate hearing loss	41 to 55 dB
Moderately severe loss	56 to 70 dB
Severe hearing loss	71 to 90 dB
Profound hearing loss	91 to 120 dB
Deaf	below 120 dB

Anderson, too, finds labels misleading.

"It would be more meaningful to describe the functional impact of the hearing loss," she said. "For example, calling a 35 dB hearing loss "mild" may suggest to parents and educators that this is not a very significant hearing condition, that the child may not need amplification or other interventions or services. However, if someone with a 35 dB average pure tone loss is listening to soft speech, or average speech spoken from across the room (distant speech), or if there is noise in the room...then this hearing loss may be as handicapping as a greater dB loss in someone listening to 1:1 speech in a quiet room."

She hopes for new descriptors in the future that will "accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative"—describing "surviving hair cell function..., hearing nerve reserve..., auditory responsiveness..." or similar capacity, she said.

"But, it is unlikely that any single number will ever completely capture the hearing 'losses' or successes of any child or adult," Anderson added.

See www.audiology.org/aboutaudiology/consumered/guides/ for more information.

Collaboration...continued from Page 1

Other key stakeholders are the professionals who have dedicated their careers to the care of our youth. These individuals were not pushed into their role as advocates for our children. They willingly elected to become advocates, and for that, we should be humbled and grateful. We all have examples of professionals in our lives that go way above and beyond the call of duty. Their interest in the welfare of our children goes beyond professional and is very much a part of who they are personally. Parents do ask that professionals respect the lead role parents have in the life of their child, and that professionals recognize the limit to their own role.

So, can these stakeholders form a consensus? Most definitely. But we need to dispel some myths, clear some misunderstandings, and really listen to each other. For example, our goal is to provide families with *unbiased* support. Sometimes, people have misconceptions about this mission. They think that by welcoming families who use various communication methods, we are somehow missing the boat on advancements in technology and research in brain development. Or, by supporting families who do not choose to sign with their child, we are not doing our job in educating parents. Or, because we offer families information on the full range of options, we believe there is not a place for strong advocacy for one communication method. This could not be further

from the truth.

Hands & Voices is hinged on the premise that there are strong advocacy groups for each communication method, educational placement and decision whether to use technology or not. Leeanne Seaver, Executive Director of National Hands & Voices says, "Remaining unbiased doesn't mean you can't feel passionately about the communication choice you've made, or righteous about the philosophy you've built your career around."

This is how I feel about our staff. We may be generalists at work, but we each have made choices for our own kids. In our role with Hands & Voices, we are dependent on the families who use oral communication alone, cue alone, sign alone, or combinations of these to represent what is unique about each component. We need a strong Deaf community, cueing community and oral community to support families in the way that only these groups can. The strength of these communities should allow each to feel confident enough in their philosophy to encourage parents to explore other choices.

While I support diversity in choices, I encourage all groups to find a common ground—a place in the middle where we all can meet and agree. I firmly believe that there is more that unites us than divides us. Our community is better because of our diversity. We will be better still if we

agree to interact with each other, to learn from each other, and to push for change. I know I am a better parent and my child is more successful because of the rich community in Minnesota. What a blessing it is to have choices in this state.

I challenge each stakeholder to see the necessity in supporting each other on common ground issues. And I challenge them to be truthful about the fact that not all children fit into one "basket" or benefit from one "tool." We all have known kids who clearly would not be successful using a particular communication mode, and thank goodness for the other choices. And, we all know children who might use one communication mode for 90% of the time, but for 10% of the time, they might really benefit from another strategy.

As Janet DesGeorges, Executive Director of Colorado Hands & Voices, has so eloquently said, "It is incumbent upon all of us to stand together—professionals, parents and deaf and hard of hearing individuals—to give the future generation of children the gift of an early and effective start to their journey, so that they may achieve their full potential as individuals and have access to language from the very beginning."

Well, there you have it. New Year's Resolution #1: Ask for collaboration. Resolution #2: Cut back on the preaching this year. Okay, gotta work on that one next....



The View from Here

Upper Northwest:

Family getaway will be Feb. 22 - 23 at Seven Clans Water Park in Thief River Falls.

Northeast:

Handing Down the Names will be ASL-interpreted at the University of Minnesota Duluth Theatre on Sunday, Feb. 11 at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$6-13. Call 218-726-8561 or see www.d.umn.edu/theatre. The play chronicles seven generations from 1766 Germany through Russia, Ellis Island, and finally to Colorado.

East/West Central:

Silent Night Out (SNO) will be a morning event Saturday, Jan. 27 from 10 a.m. to noon at Skating Place in St. Cloud. The rink will be open only to families and friends of the deaf community. \$4.50 covers admission & roller skates (\$2 more for rollerblades). Concessions will be open. For more information, contact Deaf & Hard of Hearing Services-St. Cloud at 800-456-3690 or 320-255-3502.

Swim with friends and family from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 22 at Becker Community Center. If 30 people sign up, cost will be \$5 each. RSVP by Feb. 15 to Kim.Konerza@monticello.k12.mn.us or call 763-271-0533.

Southwest:

Barnes & Noble in Mankato hosts ASL Storytime at 10 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 3 with Charity Fisher.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest will be ASL-interpreted at Mankato State University on Saturday, Feb. 10 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$9-13. Call 507-389-6661 or see www.MSUTheatre.com.

Southwest & Central:

DHHS Cross Cultural Ice Skating Event will be at Redwood Falls Area Community Center on Wednesday, Feb. 7 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Games, crafts, skates and juice boxes will be provided—bring a sack lunch. Sponsored by both Mankato and St. Cloud DHHS offices. RVSP to Diane Leonard at 866-274-5884 (tty), 800-456-3690 (v), or diane.leonard@state.mn.us.

Center makes art, birthday parties accessible

The Simon Technology Center at PACER Center hosts birthday parties and monthly activities at its Creation Station, providing the chance for creative expression for children with disabilities.

Free Creation Station activities take place one Saturday a month from 10 a.m. to noon at PACER Center. This month is Hand-Colored Photos with Kelly Povo on Saturday, Jan. 27. To register or see what's happening next month, go to www.pacer.org, click on Simon Technology Center and look for Creation Station on the left column.

The center also opens the Creation Station for birthday parties with hands-on arts and crafts activities for children ages 4 to 18. The area is open for private parties on Creation Station Saturdays from 2 to 4 p.m. PACER provides staff and supplies for the projects as well as the party space. Pre-registration is required and accepted on a first come, first serve basis. The cost is \$25. For more information or to reserve a party date, call PACER at 952-838-9000.

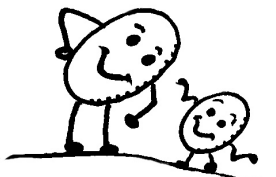
Internships offered to high school girls with disabilities

The EXploring Interests in Technology and Engineering (EX.I.T.E.) program is offering an internship for girls in their sophomore or junior years of high school who have disabilities.

Applicants should be interested in science, technology, engineering, and math, and have the potential to attend a post-secondary institution. The interns will mentor middle school girls with disabilities, help lead hands-on activities, explore post-secondary and career options, and complete a job shadow experience at a local business.

The internship runs now through July. Interns will receive a \$30 stipend for each activity they attend. For more information, contact Erika Frake at 952-838-9000 or erika.frake@pacer.org. Information also is available at www.pacer.org/stc/exiteIntern.htm.

Hands & Voices has a new bulletin board for parents to post comments. See www.handsandvoices.org.



A Little Grin

By Melissa McNamer

Recently when I was at home, I logged onto my computer to retrieve mail from my account at the Family Support Connection. A new family had e-mailed a photo of their young daughter, Sadie.

Sadie's photo caught Connor's eye (my nearly-3-year-old son who is hard of hearing). He came over and peered at the picture with a cute little look on his face. I told him this was Sadie and pointed to her hearing aid, saying she has "helpers" like him. He looked at me and said "Like ME?" Then, he moved to the other side of the screen to try to find her other ear (which was out of view) to make sure there was one on the other side, too!

It's funny, he's never really looked for our "helpers," but obviously knows we do not have them since he seemed so surprised she was "like him." Maybe a little match-making is in order!

Space Camp takes off soon

The annual Space Camp and Aviation Challenge for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing will be April 29 to May 4 in Huntsville, Alabama. Registration forms are due by Feb. 1.

The program for students who are deaf or hard of hearing is organized by Western Pennsylvania School for the Deaf. To see the students' movie about Space Camp, see www.spaceandbeyond.org/spacecamp.htm. For registration forms, see www.spacecamp.com/deaf.

Church seeks interest in Sunday school

Macalester Plymouth United Church, a blended Presbyterian and United Church of Christ community, is considering adding interpreter services for the Sunday school program. The church is located in St. Paul near Macalester College. It has a small, but active group of Deaf/hard of hearing people in the church, and many parishioners have been studying ASL. If you'd be interested in this Sunday school, contact Irene Harris at jirene@tcq.net.

Kit makes math fun

Gallaudet University's Clerc Center has developed a program for teaching math skills through games using American Sign Language (ASL).

Families Count! is based on Family Math, a program that uses fun activities the whole family can do together to improve math skills. There are three different levels of activities in the program: K-2, grades 3-5, and grades 6 to 8. Each level corresponds to the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Principles and Standards.

The Clerc Center has produced Families Count! kits to show other schools and programs how to set up their own Families Count! workshops. The format for the workshops includes a social hour (which can include a meal) and a video demonstrating math concepts in ASL. Then families divide into groups to play math games, and finish with a math-related story read live or viewed on videotape.

The Families Count! kits include an administrator pack with CD-ROM, handbook, orientation video for staff and volunteers, plus directions for all sessions, evaluation forms, and work sheets. There are also materials for session activities, take-home materials for each level, videotapes on communicating math concepts in ASL and videos of popular math-related storybooks signed by deaf adults. The complete kit costs \$175 plus \$25 for shipping and handling. (After March 1, the price will be \$225.) Prices for individual levels also are available. For more information, see clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/products/about-families-count.html.

NTID holds writing contest

Rochester Institute of Technology's National Technical Institute for the Deaf is hosting a writing contest for high school sophomores and juniors with hearing loss.

Winners of the second annual SpiRIT Writing Contest will have their choice of a scholarship and paid travel expenses to a week-long summer career exploration program at RIT for students with hearing loss, or a \$500 cash prize and all-expenses-paid two-day visit with a parent to RIT. For contest guidelines and entry information, go to www.rit.edu/NTID/WritingContest, e-mail WritingContest@ntid.rit.edu, or call 585-475-6723. The entry deadline is Feb. 1.



Off the Shelf

The Family Support Connection library is a great resource for books, videos or other materials related to hearing loss—and it's FREE! We mail items to you with a postage-paid return label, so there's no cost to you to have access to a large selection of materials to help you with:

- parenting
- auditory therapy
- speech therapy
- learning to cue or sign
- reading to children
- much, much more!

To browse titles, go to www.familysupportconnection.org and click on "Lending Library." You can type in a category to search, such as "cochlear implants." Or, you can browse all books in the library by typing "Index" in the Search box. To see all the video titles in the library, type in "videos." "Games" will get you a list of books and videos that include games, plus actual games like "Con-sign-tration."

At the bottom of each search page is contact information for requesting materials plus a direct link to our e-mailbox.

Really, it couldn't be easier to take advantage of this service. Remember, if you can't find a specific title, contact us anyway. We may know of another library that has it, or we may consider purchasing it for our library patrons.

We're currently planning social and educational events for 2007

with other organizations. Watch for details in future editions of FOCUS or check our website, www.familysupportconnection.org.

Hybrid implant shown to help patients with hearing loss

Preliminary results released last month of clinical trials of a hybrid cochlear implant for patients with partial hearing loss show promising outcomes.

The hybrid implant, developed at the University of Iowa and manufactured by Cochlear Corp., has been implanted in just over 80 patients in clinical trials. Before surgery, patients were able to understand about 30% of words on standard hearing tests. After one year or more with the implant, patients' scores increased to an average of 75%.

This new hybrid implant is made for a large segment of the 28 million hard-of-hearing Americans who have what is known as a "ski-slope" loss, in which their ability to hear high-pitched sounds plummets. They can hear sounds such as "aah" and "ooh" plainly, but not "ssss" or "shhh." For them, speech doesn't sound quiet; it sounds muddly. Hearing aids amplify sounds, while this new implant helps to clarify them.

The implant uses a thinner, shorter bundle of electrodes—10 millimeters long compared with up to 28 millimeters—than traditional cochlear implants. The hybrid is positioned just at the opening end of the cochlea, stimulating the auditory nerve only when high-frequency sound waves enter the ear. This less-invasive surgery means less trauma to the delicate cochlea, preserving a patient's natural hearing of low-frequency sounds.

Traditional cochlear implants bypass damaged inner ears to stimulate auditory nerve fibers directly, replacing a patient's entire range of hearing. Any natural hearing ability usually gets wiped out by the surgery.

The new hybrid implant, however, supplements natural hearing without destroying it. The device takes advantage of the cochlea's layout, which is similar to a coiled-up piano keyboard. Cells along the cochlea are tuned to particular frequencies entering the ear. Cells that respond to high sounds sit close to the cochlea's entrance, making them accessible to surgeons without affecting the cells tuned for low-pitched sounds, which are tucked away deep inside the cochlea. In the clinical trials, surgeons have been able to retain hearing in about 96% of the patients.

As with traditional cochlear implants, patients must retrain their brain to hear with the device. Still, the clinical trials are suggesting that the brain can adapt to this "bionic" boost. Patients have reported hearing better with the implant, especially in noisy situations. They've also found they can follow and appreciate music. The hybrid implant allows patients to continue to wear a hearing aid to amplify low-frequency sounds.

Researchers said they expect to continue the trials through this year before going to the Food and Drug Administration for approval. While around 25,000 people in the US currently use a traditional cochlear implant, the hybrid implant is expected to reach as many as double that number.

The new Cochlear Nucleus[®] Hybrid[™] cochlear implant and speech processor is designed for patients with normal or near-normal hearing in the low-pitch range and severe to profound loss in the high-pitch range. Patients who are considered candidates for this new device through the clinical trials must be at least age 15 and not benefit sufficiently from hearing aids.

Grant helps university improve early intervention

Researchers at The University of North Carolina-Greensboro have received an \$800,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education to help improve spoken language in deaf or hard of hearing children ages birth to kindergarten.

Project Duet, named to reflect the close partnership between professionals and these children's families, is a four-year program, teaching 14 youngsters over the first two years and 14 more over the next two years. The goal of the program also is to train specialists in early intervention. The University is one of 3 undergraduate auditory-oral training programs in the US, and the only one to focus on early intervention services and educational needs of children birth to kindergarten. This four-year program offers a Bachelor of Science degree in Special Education with a concentration in Auditory-Oral Training, and eligibility for North Carolina teacher licenses in Birth-Kindergarten and Hearing Impairment K-12.

For more information, see www.uncg.edu/ses/centers.html or call 336-334-3771.