

June 2004

Family meets challenge of raising only child who is deaf in small town

Raising a child who is deaf can be challenging, especially in a small town with few resources. For Karen and Todd Strom of Crookston, a “can-do” attitude keeps them going.

The Stroms have two children: Brittany who is 8 and hearing, and her brother, Joshua, who is 6 and has a moderate to severe hearing loss. The Stroms communicate by speaking and signing together using the manual system called “SEE” (Signing Exact English).

“We really wanted Josh to learn English,” Karen said. “ASL is fine, and he can learn that later. For us, it’s just so important he understands English.” The family also chose SEE because it encourages Joshua, who wears hearing aids, to use his residual hearing.

“We voice and sign together since he can hear a little,” Karen explained. “A lot of times, we notice he’s really reading our lips.”

Finding a class to learn SEE was a challenge — Crookston is 300 miles from the Twin Cities and an hour away from Fargo. If they found a sign class, it was for ASL.

“So, we got a book and started teaching ourselves,” Karen said. Now the family is learning from Joshua’s DHH teacher, Christie Fritz. Christie comes to the Stroms’ house each week with a new sheet of signs. She also teaches Joshua’s classmates in the public school Kindergarten.

“The kids love it,” Karen said. “They love to try to sign with Josh. They seem to gather around him in

the classroom.” While speech is a struggle for Joshua, when he speaks and signs with his friends, they seem to understand.

“They’re growing up together, so they’re very accepting,” Karen explained.

Joshua has an interpreter in his classroom and uses an FM listening system that amplifies the teacher’s voice through a microphone. The other children wear the microphone when they read aloud or work in groups with Joshua.

“They think that’s neat,” Karen added.

Even though Joshua is the only child in the school who is deaf, he fits right in with the other kids.

“His confidence level is really high,” Karen said. “We’ve never treated him any different except that we sign. He’s always been involved in something — playgroup, soccer, wrestling. He’s not isolated at all.”

Karen credits Josh’s sister, Brittany, as a “huge part” of Joshua’s success.

“She signs everything and is so patient with him,” Karen said. “They are so great together. I get tears in my eyes thinking of how blessed we are.”

The Stroms recently attended “Socialization Day” for families, teachers and interpreters in the Upper Red River Valley. The event was organized by the state’s Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division. It gave the Stroms a chance to meet other families living within an hour or two of them that have similar concerns.

“I met another woman who is in kind of the same situation with SEE,” Karen said. The two talked about trying to find a camp for families that use SEE. Karen said the day helped her feel connected to a larger community.

“It was really nice,” she added.



Karen and Todd Strom live in Crookston with their kids, Joshua and Brittany.

Here's What's Happening

**Saturday,
June 5**

The DeafBlind Services Expo goes from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Kelly Inn near the Capitol in St. Paul. The free Expo offers the chance to meet with providers and gather information about services available for deafblind consumers. Interpreters will be available. For more information, contact Paul Deeming, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division, 651-297-1384 (v/tty) or Paul.Deeming@state.mn.us.

**Sunday,
June 6**

"How Was It Made?" is the ASL-interpreted tour at 2 p.m. at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. The free tour starts at the round bench in the museum lobby. For details, call 612-870-3131(v), -3132(tty) or email dhegstro@artsmia.org.

**Thursday,
June 10**

Join friends for "Deaf Night" at the Minnesota Twins baseball game against the New York Mets at 7:10 p.m. Free tickets are available from CSD for this game and the game against Detroit July 10 and with Oakland Aug. 7. Contact Linda Pressley-Ford at 651-487-8867 (tty) or email lpressleyford@c-s-d.org.

**Saturday,
June 19**

CSD hosts Deaf Day at Valleyfair Amusement Park from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Tickets are \$24 for adults and \$12 for children less than 48" tall, but older than age 3. Tickets can be purchased at Valleyfair on Deaf Day or in advance at CSD of Minnesota, 2055 Rice St., St. Paul.

**Saturday,
July 24**

Share with other parents at the Family Support Connection's Coffee Chat from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. at Como Park Pavilion in St. Paul. Watch for details in the next newsletter.

**Thursday,
August 5**

Make friends at the Family Support Connection's picnic for families with children who are deaf or hard of hearing. The event runs from 5 to 9 p.m. at Como Park in St. Paul with a potluck dinner and fun activities for the whole family. More details in the July/August edition of *FOCUS*.

Sept. 17-19

Mark your calendar for this fall's Family Support Connection Parent Retreat at Ruttger's Bay Lodge outside Brainerd. The featured speaker is Dr. Ron Lybarger, a licensed psychologist who is nationally known for his work with deaf children and adults. The weekend's theme is "Trusting your instincts and following your child's lead." Ruttger's has beautiful accommodations, and golf is included with the hotel/meals package. Mothers, fathers, grandparents—as singles or couples—all will be welcome. Look for details in future newsletters.



ASL-Interpreted Performances

Flint Hills International Children's Festival

Saturday, June 5
Noon: The Boy and the Bamboo Flute
Sunday, June 6
12:30 p.m.: Very Eric Carle
Ordway Center for the Performing Arts,
345 Washington, St. Paul; 651-224-4222, 651-282-3100 (tty).
www.ordway.org.
Festival includes free events in Rice Park: circus stunts, mimes, clowns, worldwide foods, hands-on sand castle demonstrations, and student artwork.

Greater Tuna

Thursday, June 24, 7:30 p.m.
Tickets: \$12, seniors/students \$10;
Bloomington Center for the Arts, 1800 W. Old Shakopee Road; 952-563-8587;
www.bloomingtonartcenter.com.

The Stinky Cheese Man

Sunday, July 18, 2 p.m.
Tickets reduced to \$6-9;
Landmark Center lower auditorium, 75 W. 5th St., St. Paul; 651-225-9265.
www.steppingstonetheatre.org.

Peter Rabbit and Company

Thursday, July 29, 12:30 p.m. &
Sunday, Aug. 1, 2 p.m.
Tickets: \$12, children/seniors \$10;
Hopkins Center for the Arts Mainstage,
1111 Mainstreet, Hopkins; 952-979-1111; www.stagetheatre.org.

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Please note that information about events, services, or other organizations does not imply endorsement by the Family Support Connection.

The Family Support Connection's mission is to build better lives for children who are deaf and hard of hearing by providing parent-to-parent support to families. Please visit our website at www.familysupportconnection.org.

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In Your Corner

By Candace Lindow-Davies,
Family Support Coordinator

One of the best parts of working at the Family Support Connection is meeting so many inspirational parents — like Karen and Todd Strom, whose story is featured in this edition of *FOCUS*.

When you first learn of your child’s hearing loss, you can feel all alone. Then, through contacts with organizations like the Family Support Connection, you soon learn that there are many families like yours out there. When you listen to a family’s story, you realize you have so much in common.

In the out-state areas, those feelings of isolation can be amplified. However, some dedicated folks are working hard to build bridges between families.

Last month, I was invited to participate in Socialization Day for deaf and hard of hearing children in East Grand Forks. Never having driven that far northwest in Minnesota, I honestly did not know what to expect. Well, it was a truly moving experience. An entire cavalry of volunteers turned out to entertain the children. The kids seemed so at home, happy to see each other when normally playmates can be hundreds of miles away. And, the parents and professionals had a chance to gather and share their experiences.

The staff working on the event was incredible. I could feel a strong sense of community, as if everyone knows that if they don’t go the extra mile, chances are, a child with hearing loss will suffer. Resources may be more limited in rural communities, but I would have to argue that the commitment from professionals and other parents taking a mentor role fills any gaps. Those of us living in the Twin Cities could learn a lot from the resourceful families in the outlying areas.

Regional offices offer help to families closer to home

Families who live outside the Metro area and have a child with a hearing loss can receive help from a regional office of the state’s Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division (DHHS).

DHHS has regional offices in Duluth (888-234-1322), Virginia (218-748-2253), Bemidji (888-663-8329), Fergus Falls (800-456-7589), St. Cloud (800-456-3690), St. Peter (507-931-7580) and Rochester (800-311-1148). There also is a Metro office in St. Paul (651-297-1316).

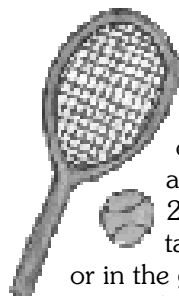
Regional offices can provide information about a whole array of topics including legal rights, assistive technologies (what’s available, where to obtain it), and interpreting issues. They also provide referral to other organizations when needed.

DHHS has developed a Family Resource Packet for parents who have questions about raising a deaf or hard-of-hearing child. The packet includes information about assessment services, communication options and DHHS services for families. A lot of the information in the packet is available online at www.dhhsd.org.

DHHS also sponsors a weeklong summer camp for families to learn/practice ASL: Family Communication Week at Camp Knutson. This year’s camp is Aug. 16 through 20. Applications for the camp are available online.

Tennis camp offered

St. Paul Academy and Summit School’s Summer Tennis Program offers lessons for tots through teens taught in English or ASL. Classes are available between June 21 and July 30. They take place on the courts or in the gym at 1712 Randolph in St. Paul. To request a registration form, call 651-696-1355 (V).



Family Institute canceled

The annual Parent Child Institute June 4 through 6 at Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf (MSAD) has been canceled due to low registration. The sponsoring organizations apologized if parents had difficulty opening their electronic flyer. They hope to plan another Institute next year. The event’s sponsors are MSAD, the Minnesota Department of Education, Minnesota Resource Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and the MN Dept. of Health’s Early Intervention and Detection Program.



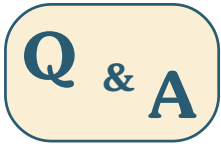
A Little Grin

By Lori from East Grand Forks area

When my daughter was first diagnosed with a hearing loss, she had a difficult time adjusting to wearing hearing aids. She was not very good about keeping them in, and we often had to encourage her by explaining how the hearing aids might help. In particular, we wanted her to be more aware of sound for safety reasons. So, we would tell her, “When you cross the road, it’s important to wear your hearing aids so you can hear the sound of the cars approaching.”

One day, we were crossing a busy street and came upon a squirrel that had been hit by a car. My daughter looked up at me and said, “I guess he didn’t wear his hearing aids!” (I wonder where a squirrel gets fitted for hearing aids...)

Submit your funny stories to fsc@lifetrackresources.org.



Ask a Professional

By Kim Opat, Coordinator
Greater Minnesota Assessment Service

Question: I live in northern Minnesota and am the parent of a child with hearing loss. I am very concerned about my son's behavior in and out of school and want a professional to do testing. Do I have to come to the Cities to have someone help me?

Answer: There are some agencies in Greater Minnesota that are qualified to do the right tests. However, most will not have background in reviewing the test results of deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind children or understand the perspective of a child with hearing loss. To get that expertise, you have two options:

Option 1: Contact the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Division (DHHSD) in your region to ask about local services that can help with your request. The regional DHHSD offices offer information and referral on a range of topics for families that have deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind children.

Option 2: Contact the Greater Minnesota Assessment Service (GMAS). This is a program funded through a state grant and operated under DHHSD. This service provides tests *in your area* by a licensed highly qualified psychologist with a background in deaf, hard of hearing and deafblind issues. GMAS handles referrals from families, deaf and hard of hearing agencies, school districts, counties, social workers and mental health agencies.

In addition to comprehensive evaluations, this service also provides presentations throughout the state on a variety of parenting, behavior intervention, resiliency and social/emotional topics. Mostly the focus of presentations is on the day-to-day realities of raising children for parents and growing up for youth.

If you are interested in getting a referral form, you should know who qualifies. The child (age 21 or younger) must be deaf, hard of hearing or deafblind and live in Greater Minnesota and have issues in one or more of the following areas: Social, Emotional, Behavior and Learning.

For more information regarding DHHSD or GMAS, see www.dhhsd.org or GMAS@lifetrackresources.org.

Have a question for this column? Call 651-265-2435 (v), -2379 (tty) or email fsc@lifetrackresources.org.

Websites show how to sign words

If you're trying to learn how to sign or just want clarification for a particular sign, free help is at your fingertips thanks to the growing number of online sign language dictionaries. Here's the rundown on what's available:

ASL Browser: commtechlab.msu.edu/sites/aslweb/

This is the site the others have links to. It was created by Michigan State University with Quicktime video clips of a woman signing each word in an alphabetical list. You can type in a word to have signed or use the list to find words.

ASL University: www.lifeprint.com

This site provides a progressive online tutorial for learning ASL. The dictionary doesn't have streaming video, just a series of photos to show a sign's movement. But, it gives excellent information on when to use a particular sign to keep you on track with ASL versus English. The creator is an interpreter/teacher who is hard of hearing.

Basic Guide to ASL:

www.masterstech-home.com/ASLDict.html

This site gives more explanation of ASL, such as which sign to use if a word has multiple meanings. For visual reference, the site uses the ASL Browser video clips. This site also has a text-based dictionary, which is quicker to use than the video — great if you just need a reminder of how a word is signed.

HandSpeak: www.handspeak.com

This is a subscription site, but you can preview the dictionary on the home page. The cool thing about this site is that it shows each sign in ASL plus other signed languages, such as Polish. Signs are shown in streaming video that's more state-of-the-art than the ASL Browser.

Signhear ASL Dictionary:

library.thinkquest.org/10202/asl_dictionary_text.html

The nice thing about this site is signs are grouped in categories, such as colors. However, it is slow moving from sign to sign.

Religious signs: deafmissions.com or

www.creative-communication.org/creative/lessons

Both sites have video so you can see how a sign is made. They both have extras, such as church songs.

Medical signs:

www.angelfire.com/pa3/ecarpenter/phrases.htm

This site combines video from the ASL Browser to show how to sign phrases commonly used in a hospital.

Fun: wings.avkids.com

This page has an aeronautics sign dictionary that's fun to browse. The vocabulary is limited, but worth a look.

Fingerspelling: For practice, see where.com/scott.net/asl. For downloadable fonts, see babel.uoregon.edu/yamada/fonts/asl.html. For a screensaver, see www.palantineinc.com/New%20Site/Free-dlNew.htm.

Captioning credit passes

The U.S. Senate passed a bill last month that provides a 50% tax credit to movie theaters and filmmakers that provide captioning access for deaf and hard of hearing patrons.

The bill was introduced by Sen. Mark Dayton, a Minnesota Democrat, who first requested a 90% credit. The captioning credit is now part of a larger corporate tax bill.

Students from Metro Deaf School spurred Dayton's action. Samantha Ruhland, an eighth-grader whose mother works in Dayton's Minnesota office, wrote to him last fall to request help in getting more access to movies. Dayton then visited the school and discussed the captioning issue with teachers and students in fifth through eighth grades.

Currently fewer than 500 of the nation's 35,774 movie screens have subtitles or captions. Open-captioned movies (captions are burned right on the film) come to a couple of theaters in the Twin Cities once or twice a month — usually weeks after a film's premiere.

Another technology, rear-window captioning, allows deaf patrons to see first-run movies along with hearing patrons. With rear-window systems, reversed captions are displayed at the rear of the theater. Deaf and hard-of-hearing moviegoers see the captions by putting transparent acrylic panels in their seats' cupholders and adjusting them so the captions appear superimposed on the movie screen. In the Twin Cities, there are only two theaters with that technology: The Crown Block E in downtown Minneapolis and the AMC in Eden Prairie.

It costs about \$25,000 for a theater to add a rear-window system. Dayton hopes the tax credit would make it feasible for more theaters to install rear-window systems.

You can see for yourself how rear-window captioning works: "Shrek 2" is currently showing in captioned theaters and "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban" which opens Friday, June 4, is also rear-window ready. For showtimes, see www.mnocfilms.org or contact the two local theaters directly.



Off The Shelf

By Robin Coninx, FSC Specialist

Over the last few months, we have highlighted different books in our lending library at the Family Support Connection.

This month, I want to highlight our "tool kits" from the Shared Reading Project to encourage you to read with your youngster who is deaf or hard of hearing. Sometimes reading together can seem to be too much to tackle, especially if you need to sign. Don't fret — we have tools here to help you!

The Shared Reading Project has been created to help parents and people involved with children who have a hearing loss to learn ASL in storytelling. It makes it easier for new signers to share a popular book in ASL. Each book comes with a video of a deaf adult signing the story, and can help anyone involved with the child learn a story in sign.

A bag from our library will contain: a popular storybook, a practice video, an activities guide with ideas that go with the story, and a bookmark with "Tips for Reading to Your Deaf Child."

I personally found that my younger children—deaf and hearing—really enjoyed the interaction we shared when doing these stories together.

To request a Shared Reading "tool kit," call the Family Support Connection at 651-265-2435 (v), 651-265-2379 (tty), or email fsc@lifetrackresources.org.

Bible camp cued for pre-K

Preschoolers who use Cued Speech have an opportunity to attend Bible camp this month at Diamond Lake Lutheran Church, 5760 Portland Ave., in Minneapolis.

The Vacation Bible School will be June 14 to 18 from 9:15 a.m to noon. Enrollment deadline is June 7. Cost is \$10 per child, with a maximum per family cost of \$20.

To learn more, call Deb Olson, 612-866-2579 or register online at www.dllc.org.

Storytime interpreted

This summer, Merriam Park Library in St. Paul will have a free, weekly storytime for children under 10 that is ASL-interpreted.

Storytime is 2 p.m. Tuesdays, June 15 to Aug. 3 (except July 6). The library is located at 1831 Marshall Ave.

For more information, call the library at 651-642-0385(v), 651-298-4184(tty).

Free webcam offered

Signers who want to take advantage of telephone video relay services can request a free TV videophone or Webcam from CSD of Minnesota.

CSD is offering the free cameras so that people can use CSD Video Relay Service (VRS). VRS allows callers to sign to a relay operator who voices to the called party and then signs their responses.

To qualify for the free devices, a person must be deaf or hard of hearing, use sign language to communicate, be a U.S. resident and have high-speed internet service.

For more information, contact Jason Smith at CSD, 651-297-6700 (v/tty) or jasonsmith@c-s-d.org.

FOCUS available online

Share the news: FOCUS newsletters are now on our website at www.familysupportconnection.org.

Click "enter" on the home page and you should come to "Our Services." Click on "FOCUS month newsletter," and you'll see the list of published issues available to view as portable data files.