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'Signing Time' star teaches local children language

By Katie Reutter / For the Hi-Desert Star
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YUCCA VALLEY — The Yucca Valley library was filled with parents, children and laughter April 11 as Rachel Coleman performed songs and signs from her PBS show, "Signing Time." Although the program is directed at children, at times it seemed as though the parents enjoyed the show more than the children.

In the six years since "Signing Time" began, Coleman has changed the lives of millions of people. In 1996, when her first daughter, Leah, was born, Coleman and her husband both played in a folk rock band, but quickly learned Leah was profoundly deaf. Coleman gave up her band and began to learn sign language.

In 2002, she and her sister Emilie decided to make a video filled with catchy songs to teach their friends how to communicate with Leah. Word of the new video quickly spread among their friends, Coleman said, and suddenly, everyone wanted one.

In 2004, twins Spencer and Bradley Pickren learned to sign from "Signing Time" for their role as Little Jack in the movie "Meet the Fockers." This proved to be vital in heightening public awareness of the benefits signing at an early age can bring. Many children who learn to sign have higher IQ scores and are usually able to read at an earlier age, Coleman said.

Coleman's proudest moment as creator of "Signing Time" came when a mother wrote a letter in which she told Coleman her child had signed, "Thank you" after being breast fed.

"All children know what they want," Coleman said. "They just can't tell you. Signing gives them a way to tell you what they're thinking before they learn to speak."

Coleman's youngest daughter, Lucy, was born with spina bifida as well as cerebral palsy. After watching the first episode of "Signing Time," she was able to use her stiff fingers to sign, "again." It was the epitome of everything her show stood for, Coleman said.

"It's about getting what you don't expect," she said. "And still making a difference."

For information on Coleman's program, visit www.signingtime.com.



Children sign along with Rachel Coleman April 11 at the Yucca Valley library. Coleman is the co-creator of the PBS show "Signing Time."

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