

Mariah meets her hero

Posted: Wednesday, September 30, 2009 12:00 am

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Seaside Signal

A 6-year-old North Coast child suffering from Down syndrome had her dream of meeting a hero come true during a visit to Seaside last weekend.

Mariah Almoguer-Rawlins met Rachel Colman, the creator of "Signing Times." The 34-year-old has developed an honored series of educational materials that encourages communications for children of all abilities using American Sign Language. Mariah's mother, Maureen Rawlins, said the program offered by Mariah's special education teacher at Nehalem Elementary School "changed Mariah's life."

Coleman held a special "signing concert" at the Seaside Convention Center Saturday, Sept. 26, as part of the 5th Annual Buddy Walk. The Walk is the annual fund raising event for the North Coast Down Syndrome Network.

As the mother of a daughter who is deaf and another child who has cerebral palsy and spina bifida, Coleman spends time working to make sign language fun and accessible for all children through the "Signing Times" series. She said it is easy for her to understand what the parents of children with Down syndrome are going through.

"What they are going through. I go through everyday, so I know how it is: I live that life. The medical problems, the surgeries, and people just looking and staring and wondering why our kids look different."

Coleman hopes that "Signing Times" and her community appearances help empower children and parents.

Some may wonder how Coleman has time to deal with her special-needs children and still be on the road to teach sign language. She suggested that no one else is in a better position to do such work.

"Who is more passionate about communicating with children with special needs than the mother of those children? So I encourage people to look at their lives to see what's missing, and what is it they could perhaps contribute," Coleman said.

Coleman believes that each child that learns sign language dissolves a communication barrier. "We dissolve the fear that they may have had if they've seen a child who is different from them, or who communicates in a different way."

Rawlins and Mariah joined other parents of children with Down syndrome who brought their children to the concert in Seaside to see and hear Coleman illustrate the use of sign language.

Using her spirit and energy, Coleman engaged the audience through songs, signing, and cartoon DVD's during her presentation.

She also invited children on stage to join her in demonstrating the effectiveness of sign language and to show parents how to better empower their children.

"Sign language is an incredible learning tool that empowers your infant or toddler, or those special kids that are at a disadvantage," said Coleman.

After the signing concert at the convention center, Coleman gave Mariah a hug and posed for pictures.

