

Signs of the times

Parents, children learn new way of communicating

By LAURA EMERSON
VIEW STAFF WRITER

Helen Meyer Recreation Center is offering American Sign Language classes to help parents and their children ages 18 months to 5 years communicate more efficiently.

Jennifer Barker sits on a royal blue folding chair in front of a half circle made up of parents and toddlers resting on similar seats. Some of the young children are sitting in their parents' laps, and others are off playing with toys scattered around the room.

Barker is teaching the group to sign words, including "thirsty," "hungry," "banana" and "cereal." Then, the group moves on to "more" and "bear." After repeating the words aloud and signing simultaneously, Barker reads a short story to the group that uses the words repeatedly in the narrative.

Inside the room at the center, 4525 New Forest Drive, one of the walls is painted with a beach-like mural of palm trees, sand and sea turtles. Another wall shows a grayish blue underwater scene.

The children sit enveloped by the murals as they repeat the phrase "bear wants more" while signing the words simultaneously. The parents in the room do so also. During the exercise, some of the adults take their children's hands inside their own and sign along with them, while others demonstrate to their children by only signing with their own hands.

"You guys did a good job," Barker told the group.

The Mom and Me Play and Sign class for ages 18 months to 2 years is from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m., and the Mom and Me Signing Time class for ages 3 to 5 is from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Both classes are held on Thursdays. The cost is \$26 for a six-week session.

As of press time, about nine students were enrolled. The next group of American Sign Language sessions runs from April 15 to May 20.

"Every day, we get more and more people," said Douglas Wenthe, recreation program supervisor at the center. "It's actually quite successful."

While explaining to the group how to say "where," Barker tells the class to use their eyebrows to emphasize a question.

"You have to use your whole body to sign," Barker said.

During class, Barker uses songs, short television clips and stories to practice words that she teaches her students. At one point, Barker handed a bear-shaped patch to a child and asked her to hide the object. Then, the group asked, "Where's the bear?" in sign language while another child looked for the patch.

Afterward, the group stood up and danced while repeating the words aloud and signing them.

"Sign language transcends all languages, so it's a good way for all our parents to communicate," Wenthe said.

Ken and Sharon Baer brought their 17-month-old twins Cole and Kelsea to the class. The Baers said the course fit into their personal goals as a family.

"(The class) is very good," Ken Baer said. "Everyone seems to be friendly and wanting to meet each other."


Children and parents of all hearing abilities are welcome.

For more information or to register, call 455-7723 or visit [www.accessclark county.com/parks](http://www.accessclarkcounty.com/parks).

Contact View education reporter Laura Emerson at lemerson@viewnews.com or 380-4588.

Find this article at:

<http://www.viewnews.com/2010/VIEW-Mar-23-Tue-2010/SpringValley/34880700.html>

 [Click to Print](#)

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.