

Top left: Sandra Lynds teaches the signs for animals from storybooks.



Top right: Lynds teaches Keegan how to translate his name from signs to written language.



Middle : Using flash cards, children learn to fingerspell different letters of the alphabet.

Bottom left: During a game of matching, Lynds high fives Kaila when she gets one right.

Bottom right: (two pictures) Tools that Lynds uses to help teach signs to the children at the daycare.



A SIGN OF THE TIMES

“Kick the ball. Wash your hands. Clean up after your snack. Pay attention.”

These are all things that are said at a daycare or at a school on a regular basis - they're small, day-to-day things that we don't give any notice to because they're so trivial. They may be said in different tones by different people, depending on how many times they've already been said.

Or, in the case of Sandra Lynds at Little Rascals daycare, they're not said at all.

Lynds says nothing because she can't. As a deaf childcare provider, she's faced many challenges in the last five years since she started working at Little Rascals. However, she's been able to work past the language barrier and has managed to teach all of the staff at the daycare centre how to sign in American Sign Language (ASL or "Signing").

"She's had a lot of patience with us," Cheryl O'Hara says with a smile as her friend and colleague, Pam Elliott, signs with Lynds next to us, telling her what we're talking about.

Since opening Little Rascals in 2006, O'Hara and Elliot have had waiting lists for their daycare centre. With around 125 children at the daycare on any given day, they're kept busy. Some of the children need more care than others. There are several who use wheelchairs, a few with autism, and several five children. "There's

five children who are deaf and Sandra has done a wonderful job helping them be understood," O'Hara says with pride.

In addition to teaching the staff, she's also taught a lot of the children at the daycare. With the number of children at the daycare, it's no small feat. Kids who were in the toddler class four years ago can now communicate with her and the five other children.

As if teaching the community at the daycare on a regular basis wasn't enough, Lynds has also worked towards teaching the parents how to sign.

"When she first started working here, it wasn't the children who were scared of her," Elliott shares, "it was the parents. They were scared that they couldn't communicate with her, that they couldn't understand what she was saying."

Since that time, Lynds has worked patiently to teach the parents this new language. While they might not be fluent, they now know how to communicate with Lynds and can do so without much need for a translator.

Learning American Sign Language is like learning any other language - not only are there subtleties, there are also minor changes depending on who you're talking to.

"I use an older form of ASL," Lynds tells me. "Some of the younger kids don't use the same sign for some things. It can make things difficult when people learn from one deaf person and then

try to talk to another."

When it comes to numbers on how many deaf or hard of hearing people there are, the numbers aren't grounded.

According to the Canadian Association of the Deaf (CAD), "No fully credible census of deaf, deafened, and hard of hearing people has ever been conducted in Canada." Not only that, but the census that does go out makes it difficult for someone who falls in that category to answer.

Since ASL is another language separate from English and French, the written language can confuse some people, especially since the wording doesn't fit their disability. The term "difficulty hearing" is moot because they can't hear at all. If "have difficulty communicating with others" is asked, they don't have a problem if they are communicating with someone who is deaf.

With so little information being asked from deaf people, it makes it harder for people, such as the parents at the daycare centre, to know how to approach and find ways to communicate with someone who is deaf.

With Lynds at the daycare, teaching the kids their ASL, maybe the inhibition that people have will start to decline as they see that, with just a little bit of patience and some creativity, it is possible to communicate with someone who knows another language, even one that needs to be spoken with your hands.

