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Breaking the speech barrier

Deborah Vaughan shows Doug Croft and his son, Jake, a sign during a Monday, June 25, baby sign language class at Erie's Vista Ridge Community Center. Teaching sign language before a child can talk often can help reduce parents' frustration at learning their children's wants, needs.

By Chalan Harper
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Baby sign language classes offer frustration relief for parents

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Crying, tantrums, screaming and exhaustion can mar a perfectly serene day between parents and children, especially if a parent doesn't understand what a child wants.

For children who are still too young to verbalize their needs and wants, frustration can have free reign for parents who don't understand.

Deborah Vaughan and her knowledge of American Sign Language is doing her part to relieve such frustration for parents by offering

classes in baby sign language.

Though Vaughan does not teach parents the full language, just a few signs to help children communicate before they can speak, she said the few she teaches are an immense help to parents.

When you give them (babies) the tools, it's really an insight in their mind," Vaughan said. "They understand so much more at such an early age.

"It reduces frustration in the child and reduces tension and frustration for the parent who is trying to figure out what they want," Vaughan

added.

Because learning an entire language can be overwhelming to parents, Vaughan starts out with the basics and teaches almost directly to the parents to enable them to work the signs with their babies.

Initially, she teaches three prominent signs: more, eat and milk.

"You want to do it as early as eight months," Vaughan said. "There's been lots of studies showing that show a typically developing child

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who has been shown signs, they'll usually talk sooner and have a larger vocabulary."

The classes and workshops that Vaughan offers get into more complex signs as the class progresses, touching on signs such as simple foods, bath-time activities and names, such as mommy and daddy.

Vaughan said she has been using sign language as a teacher with the special education department at Broom-

field High School for years, and teaching the baby sign classes lets her integrate her love of signing with her love of babies.

"It's just been a wonderful tool we've used with the kids," Vaughan said.

Vaughan is currently offering classes and workshops at the Louisville Recreation Center.

Workshops are solely for parents and offer a two-hour intensive training class and

include a Sign with Your Baby book for parents to take home and utilize.

The workshops are \$35 for an individual resident and \$44 for non-residents. Residents couples pay \$50 and non-resident couples pay \$53.

For the four-week class, which parents can bring their children, the cost is \$63 for residents and \$79 for non-residents.