

Students gather to learn sign and finger language

A new program of learning is being conducted in Acton these days. It began approximately five weeks ago and was motivated by what humanitarians often refer to as the greatest human denominator, that of caring very much about other people and trying, wherever possible, to make their problems less difficult.

The classes are being held in a living room atmosphere at the home of Gary and Lorene Barton on Elmore Dr. There, students gather to learn sign and finger spelling of the deaf, under the able leadership of Kathy Quigley, a teacher from the School for the Deaf in Milton.

Classes were started primarily because the Bartons, with a deaf child of their own, felt they wanted to open as many lines of communications as possible between hearing people and those of the deaf community. "We feel, that with more people being able to speak the language of the deaf, the more will be able to communicate with Andrew," said Lorene Barton.

Took course
Mr. and Mrs. Barton attended a 20-week course in sign language sponsored by Sheridan college. It ran from October '74 to March just past, and was held at the Milton School for the Deaf.

Lorene said she and her husband became particularly enthusiastic about the course when they saw the effect it was having on their young son. "Obviously we felt knowing sign language would make things easier for all of us. As we went along though, we found the most wonderful things were happening."

Family camaraderie began to develop and a real personality change took place in Andrew. For the first time he could be teased in sign language and it was the beginning of humor. "It was the beginning of Andrew becoming part of normalcy," said his mother. "It was great!"

Andrew's mother explained that, although he was getting home visits, pre-school sign language instruction from the teacher at the School for the Deaf in Milton, the double exposure he was receiving from having his parents also able to relate, proved extremely helpful.

Today, at his present age of three years, seven months, Andrew's I.Q. shows him to be above average with perception abilities of a child four years and nine months old. He has a vocabulary of well over 200 signs and is using short sentences.

Opportunity for all
Having seen such progress in their own home, the Bartons feel it important that all deaf children have the same opportunity. Through the Milton school they learned there were eight deaf children in Acton. Parents were contacted and an investigatory meeting was held at the Barton's home. Ron Hackett, head of guidance at the Milton school and instructor on the Sheridan college course, attended.

Mr. Hackett expounded on the importance and value of children and parents being able to communicate with sign language. Lorene found that parents who had never taken sign language com-

municated with their children by means of "worked out" gestures. Some with difficulty in relating were amazed and thought it quite beautiful that Lorene could relate so easily to her own son. Andrew had been kept up that evening so his mother could demonstrate.

According to Mrs. Barton, language for the deaf at the Milton school has always been oral which means depending on lip reading and speech. Last September, visual finger spelling was introduced. Spelling out each letter of words individually, combined with simultaneous speech (pronunciation with lips).

This year the school has sent to teachers of pre-school children. "For the first time we will let you teach sign language, providing we have parents' permission." She suggests it is difficult to teach a child the alphabet when he can't spell out. "With a sign for words such as telephone, it's much easier."

Not recognized
Andrew's mother says that sign language is even now not recognized by some schools for the deaf and it is a real topic of contention. After pre-school years, deaf children are thrown right into finger spelling and simultaneous speech, no longer getting sign language instruction or allowed to use it. "Because it is sometimes easier, they resist to sign language once outside school limits," she points out that too often when children have picked it up subversively it is not spelled out in properly-constructed English sentences. "If they pick up a wrong sign they

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DISTRICT AND LOCAL residents gather in the home of Gary and Lorene Barton on Elmore Dr. They are enjoying classes in sign language being taught by Kathy Quigley of the Milton School for the Deaf. Sunshine by John Denver is being played on the stereo and students work out the words to the music.

"Today's child" is happy one

Gary and Lorene Barton of Elmore Dr. are unusual people. They adopted into their family a young deaf boy and strongly advocate choosing handicapped older children as a worthwhile method for other couples anxious to increase their families.

What makes a young couple feel they'd like to adopt a child with a problem? The Bartons felt their family was already blessed with two other beautiful adopted children, Jim 9½ and Janice, 7½ years old. Both had been procured as infants through the local Children's Aid Society.

Wanting to increase their family they decided it would be unfair to take one more tiny baby off the list for prospective parents. They concluded they had already enjoyed the delight of small babyhood and should consider adoption of an older child.

Today's Child
Gary and Lorene found their newest prodigy smiling at them from the pages of the Toronto Star, in January, two years ago. Under "Today's Child" with Helen Allen, he was headlined, "Little Alec's eager but bewildered too." The article gave a description

of the boy and said he had a hearing problem. Since that time, more complete examination has shown almost no hearing.

Holding a family conference, Mr. and Mrs. Barton discussed with their children the possibility of bringing Alec into their family. They explained he was probably deaf. Before taking definite steps and getting into something they perhaps, could not handle, they decide to first consult experts on possible problems.

They visited the School for the Deaf in Milton and learned there were qualified people there, willing to assist. These people with years of training deaf children from all kinds of backgrounds were prepared to help. "That was a turning point for me, when I was at the school and knew I wouldn't have to cope with the problem alone," said Lorene.

Reward
Gary Barton is a pharmacist. Before her marriage Lorene was a primary teacher in Etobicoke. Both have always been involved in community work. They felt that, having been in the business of helping people all their lives,

and finally being in a position financially to provide special aids, their plan to adopt the little boy just fitted perfectly. Also, their other children were old enough to understand some of the problems.

Through the adoption agency where the child was listed, the Bartons went to visit him. "Everything went well on that first visit," says Lorene. Gary Barton spent 20 minutes pretending he was a horse before finally gaining the confidence of the worried, tense little boy who rewarded him with a big, round smile.

"The couple told themselves, 'If he takes to us we'll go through with it.'"

A change was made. Alec's name became Andrew and, together with his mother and father, Gary and Lorene, he attended a summer course at the School for the Deaf in Milton. It was one held during off-school summer months when regular students are away. The week-long cram course is designed for parents of deaf children where they are given instruction on the use and care of hearing aids. They also have the opportunity of fraternizing with other parents of deaf children and

exchanging ideas and problems. The Bartons left the course feeling better informed and more able to cope with Andrew's disability.

Flying colors
"We as human beings have such great strength. If called up to face things we can come through with flying colors," Andrew's mother feels that today, life is so plush most people don't have to call on other sources. She feels her association with Andrew, although frustrating at times, has proved to be a tremendous blessing and joy.

Meeting the youngest member of the Barton family in his home is a delight. He is outgoing, happy and well-mannered. He does not hide from people but tries to talk to his parents, brother and sister respond beautifully to him, as well as neighborhood children. Visiting with the well-adjusted, healthy little boy makes one wish to know his special language.

Lorene Barton explains that of children available for adoption, there are many with handicaps looking for homes. She, with her family, has found their response greatly rewarding and worthwhile.

Landfill

Halton Region's Public Works Committee will review a proposal that the region's sanitary landfill site be established on Burnhamthorpe Rd. in Oakville.

Her greatest hope is that more people will learn the language of the deaf. Some enthusiasts see its use as a way of communicating when visiting foreign lands. Mainly, Andrew's mother sees it as a way of talking easily with a society of people who, through no act of their own, have been afflicted with a serious problem.

Today there are three schools for the deaf in Ontario. The oldest is at Belleville where visible finger spelling and simultaneous speech are taught. The second is at Milton which follows the same method. The latest one was built at London, Ontario. There students are taught the oral method which means they depend on lip reading and speech.

have to unlearn it."

Classes at the Barton home have grown from ten to about 43 people. Andrew's pre-school teacher Kathy Quigley, is the instructor who voluntarily takes her growing class through their piece of homework review, new words and sign language by music. Students break into groups to work out sentences and signs. Current records are played and, through the combined media of fingerspelling, lip movement and signs, students learn the delight of relating without vocalizing.

Credentials of the teacher are extensive. Kathy Quigley has a Masters and teacher-training degree plus those of specialist courses. Her greatest quality is her affinity with children. Living in Milton she travels, through the School for the Deaf, to deaf pre-school children in an area including Barrie, Erin and Collingwood. She is a graduate of Gallaudet college in Washington, D.C. the university for deaf students.

Advocates sign language

Miss Quigley is a strong advocate of using sign language with deaf children in conjunction with hearing aids and speech work. She explains that, in Canada, the concept of sign and speech is only about ten years old. "Before that authorities were arguing so much it had to be either or." She says more deaf children are learning to speak so they can be understood.

Those taking the classes at the Barton home come in from Erin, Georgetown, Guelph and Acton. They range in years from teenagers to middle-age. Driver of a bus who takes the children to the Milton school is one of the participants who feels a need to communicate with more proficiency. Parents and baby sitters of deaf children, as well as those who would simply like to relate with deaf people, are also part of the weekly classes.

At the moment, the house on Elmore Dr. is handling the crowd attending. When chairs are filled, guests sit around casually on the floor. A coffee time with refreshments supplied by students is a break in the evening. Hostess Lorene hopes to see the classes continue on at least until summer. She feels that students, as well as learning are also enjoying sociability.

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