

Charlene's Story

The Journey

During her 25 year career as a stylist Charlene had the privilege of meeting many clients who were unable to communicate through voice and many of them would use pen and paper to express their needs to her. It was through these meetings that Charlene began to think of how wonderful it would be if she could communicate with them through the use of American Sign Language (ASL).

Charlene had often toyed with the idea of learning a second language and finally decided that ASL would be the right fit for her. Little did she know that she was about to discover her life's passion!

Charlene enrolled in classes at The Canadian Hearing Society where she began to learn ASL as well as the history and the culture of the "Deaf". These classes would lead her to her volunteer work at the School for the Deaf working with children with diverse levels of hearing loss. Seeing many deaf children who have hearing parents, she noticed the need, and desire, for hearing parents to bridge the communication gap between themselves and their child; as well as between the hearing siblings. This prompted Charlene to further research various aspects of using ASL with hearing children. During this time her life direction changed as she went on to work in an industry that services the culturally Deaf, oral deaf, deafened and hard of hearing community.

A few years later Charlene experienced a personal trauma that rendered her temporarily unable to communicate through voice. Even though Charlene could sign and easy communicate none of the staff were able to understand her. It was during this time she found herself in a situation that her old clients were once in whereby she had to use pen and paper to communicate with staff, family and friends.

After a long recovery she continued on with the plan she started years before of signing with hearing children, and as a result of her personal experience in the hospital she also decided to offer another element to it; service to those with Communication Barriers.

Her research now broadened while she learned more about the use of ASL not only being beneficial for babies but for many who does not have a voice.

Charlene is passionate about offering a means of communication to those with barriers such as ASPERGERS, AUTISM, APHASIA, APRAXIA, CEREBRAL PALSY, and/or DOWN SYNDROME. Through the amazing benefits of ASL you can help give someone a "voice".

Charlene now is a Certified Independent Sign Language Instructor who has completed level 303 of the "Signing Naturally" curriculum through classes at The Canadian Hearing Society.

What began as an interest in American Sign Language quickly turned into a passion for Charlene. That passion led her to become an Independent Certified My Smart Hands™ Instructor where she will be able to further share her expertise with others.

"The communication, educational, developmental and social benefits of signing with your baby are truly spectacular! Signing with your baby gives you the ability to communicate much earlier then most realize. The hands can act as a "voice"; while the babies fine motor skills for speech are developing they are able to have access to language through sign."

"For those left without speech, perhaps due to a stroke, learning ASL signs may not mean telling stories to your grandchildren in full American Sign Language context, but it may mean you can tell someone your hungry or thirsty or that you love them".



About Us

My Smart Hands

My Smart Hands™ continues to grow with Instructors currently in Canada the United States , United Arab Emirates, Croatia, Oman and Mexico.

Imagine communicating with your baby before he or she can even speak. Baby sign language reduces frustration, accelerates verbal development and strengthens cognitive skills. It also enhances child-parent bonding through time spent teaching signs to your baby.

Research shows that preverbal infants can communicate through the use of sign language long before they can verbalize their needs. At My Smart Hands™ we offer classes and workshops based on the My Smart Hands™ program developed by Certified Teacher Laura Berg. We will give you the skills and knowledge you will need to communicate with your preverbal, hearing baby.

If you want to learn how to sign with your baby and the benefits of baby sign language then you've come to the right place!! If you are looking for baby and toddler sign language classes, My Smart Hands™ is here to meet your needs. Learn how signs taken from American Sign Language (ASL) can help you engage your child in two-way communication.

The Founder Laura Berg

Laura Berg the founder of My Smart Hands™ is certified with the Ontario College of Teachers. Laura has an undergraduate degree in Sociology and Child Studies from the University of Guelph and a post-graduate degree in Education. During her University career, she was introduced to the benefits of sign language for use in classroom management.

But it was when she had a daughter of her own that she truly realized the possibilities for communication and cognitive development that sign language offered. Baby sign language became a passion born of a mother's desire to give her daughter the best possible start in life.

Laura's teaching background and highly developed skills in curriculum planning make her a formidable force in the classroom. Her curriculum designed for My Smart Hands classes is spirited and engaging for both mom and baby and has been eliciting raves from her students. Most importantly they offer parents the tools they need to facilitate

early communication with their children. The primary goal is to help children achieve their highest potential.

Charlene's joins My Smart Hands

"Charlene was the first person I contacted when I decided to open up My Smart Hands to other instructors: It is very important to me to maintain a high standard of instructors who have ASL experience. Charlene's passion for ASL and interest in not only teaching baby sign language but also in communication barriers was what drew me to her. Charlene has become an integral part in creating a strong reputation for My Smart Hands.

Since knowing Charlene over the years and seeing what a wonderful instructor she is, it is clear that my initial decision to approach her to join My Smart Hands was the right one!

Laura Berg— Founder of My Smart Hands
April 24th, 2009

EMMA SIGNING "EAT" AT 12 MONTHS



Baby Signing Testimonials

Signing with Emma

Emma, who is just over a year, is our first child. Everything seemed to be a new adventure and experience for us: Most of the time it's a guessing game. Why is she crying? What does she want? What are we doing wrong? It's a frustrating situation for everyone involved, including Emma.

The first signs we used with her were Milk, Eat, Finished and More. When we first started signing to her we would sign Milk every time we gave it to her and she would just stare blankly at us. Then we started to notice her face light up every time we signed milk or eat to her, you could tell she understood what we were saying and associated the sign with the item. Slowly you noticed her signing while she was eating or drinking, then we noticed her signing to ask for things. We kept adding new signs and incorporating them into our everyday life.

One night when Emma was about 11 months old we were all really tired and skipped Emma's bath routine before bed. We put her in her crib, just like we do every night, and she cried and cried. We couldn't understand what was wrong with her; when we finally went up to check on her she was standing in her crib signing "bath". She was asking us for a bath! We were amazed! She had never used this sign before but had seen us signing bath every night when we gave her a bath. So we gave her what she asked for, put her to bed and she fell asleep right away. This is just one of the amazing stories about Emma communicating with us. She now asks us for Cheese, Crackers, Apple, Juice, Water...the list goes on and on. We don't have to guess anymore...she tells us.

It has also helped Emma's verbal and communication skills. She has an extensive vocabulary for her age because she was taught at an early age to associate items with words, signs and sounds. We can sign Duck to her and she says Duck...we can point to a duck and she says duck...we can say Duck and she signs duck. It has been a great way to teach her all levels of communication. It has not hindered her speaking in any way, only improved it and given her the confidence to ask for things.

The Smart Hands Class was a great tool to teach her these signs. I don't think a book or video would have given me the confidence to constantly sign items to her. We not only learned signs but sang songs and played games. It was a lot of fun for Emma and myself and gave us an opportunity to get out of the house and have some fun! I would recommend Smart Hands to everyone with a baby. It is such great feelings to have your one year old communicate with you and ask for anything from bed to bath or

juice to Cheese. It's amazing!! . The outcome of these classes and the communication we have with our daughter has far exceeded our expectations!

**Melanie—London, Ontario
April 9th, 2009**

Signing with James

I started using sign language with my son when he was just 5 months old. He picked up a few signs, and I gained more interest in learning further. It was when James was about 10 months old that I signed up for Baby Signing Level 1 with Charlene. Ultimately this class was a great reinforcement for both of us! I was teaching him the signs I knew; and we learned several more signs; upwards of 100 in the manual only! The My Smart Hands manual we received as a part of the course was a great reference book. We have loaned the book out to family members so they can know what James is saying to them. My son likes to flip through and look at all the pictures too!

They say that signing works and primarily babies love movement and signing is just that. In the classes he seemed to really enjoy watching other people signing, whether it was the kids, the moms, or the teacher.

I would highly recommend that any parent should teach their child sign language. James now at 17 months is a happy child who rarely gets upset, as he can tell us what he wants or needs. He takes great joy in signing about the dogs, birds and cars he sees on our daily walks. He tells me when he is hungry or thirsty and even when his bottom is wet! He can also tell me he loves me, what better reward is there than that.

**Jennifer-London, Ontario
May 27th, 2009**

JAMES SIGNING "MORE" AT 17 MONTHS



Signing with Barriers Testimonial

Patrick has Aspergers & uses ASL

My son Patrick is a very bright 11 year old that faces the daily challenge of ADHD and a learning disability: Recently he has also been diagnosed with Aspergers Syndrome. Because of all of this he has a great deal of anxiety. Due to the combination of Aspergers and ADHD he is not able to go to regular group sessions to help him over come his anxiety issues.

One recommendation given to me was to try to get him to focus on something that would keep his mind challenged, re-focus his brain and improve his eye contact such as sign language. The idea was to help him communicate even in higher stress times when he had a tendency to become non-verbal and withdrawn: Also it would allow him to "fidget" in a more constructive manner. With this in mind Patrick started lessons with Certified Sign Language Instructor, Charlene Slaats-Gray using the "My Smart Hands" program.

Within 3 weeks of starting the "My Smart Hands" curriculum it was noticed by his classroom teacher, and the resource teachers that work with him, that Patrick was calmer and more focused on his lessons: That he was not as anxious and was fidgeting less in class. Also another important benefit is that it has helped him to feel more confident about trying to socialize with his peers; children his own age.

As his mother I am finding it a great new way to communicate with him. In his "teaching" me the signs it has helped his confidence grow and has also given him a sense of achievement and therefore providing him with a great tool to help redirect his stress and frustration.

After 4 years of trying to find help for Patrick we now have found the perfect tool for him to use that will be benefit him throughout his life in many different ways.

**Jacqui - London, Ontario Canada
May 5th, 2009**



Communication Barriers

Bridging the communication gap

Generally when we hear the words “Sign Language” we think of those with deafness; however another dimension to sign language is using it with those with communication barriers such as Aspergers, Autism, Apraxia, Down syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Trauma and other speech and/or brain disorders such as Aphasia.

American Sign Language (ASL) can be used as an effective means of communication; whether it is to bridge the gap between the verbal and non-verbal due to a disorder or for language development before babies have developed spoken language.

Aspergers

Aspergers (AS) is an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), one of a distinct group of neurological conditions characterized by a greater or lesser degree of impairment in language and communication skills, as well as repetitive or restrictive patterns of thought and behaviour. AS is a neurobiological disorder that is classified as one of the pervasive developmental disorders (PDD)

Sign language often makes it easier for children to learn speech: The spoken language is complex as opposed to sign language being clearer cut and more simple. Research states there are “differential disturbances of left brain functions in autistic children and that signing may be processed in the right hemisphere” where we take in imagery. In children that are unable to speak using sign language allows a means of basic communication which is better than no communication at all.

Autism

Depression, anxiety, self injuring, and aggression are some of much anomalous behaviour that are associated with communication barriers and Autism and often stems from the inability to communicate with others. Signed speech (Teaching sign Language and speech at the same time) may stimulate verbal language skills as well as allow a person to communicate using signs.

Sign language comes in many forms and in using signed English you use the same syntax as spoken language as opposed to using American Sign Language where the syntax would be different. For example in using Speech with

Signed English you might say “It was nice to meet you” and in ASL syntax it would be “True nice meet you”. Verbal language is often accelerated by the use of sign language and speech simultaneously. Conversely with some Autistic children who are mentally retarded Learning Signed Exact English (SEE) may be too difficult for them or not conducive to meaningful communication. Thus learning basic ASL may give them some communication skills.

Apraxia

Apraxia of speech is as a result of damage to the parts of the brain that control muscle movement.

There are two primary types of speech Apraxia; one being acquired Apraxia and the other developmental Apraxia. Not always, but typically acquired Apraxia occurs in adults and may result from a head injury, stroke or other illness that affects the brain thereby causing impairment or loss of speech abilities.

Developmental Apraxia (DAS) is present from birth in children. Some scientists are of the belief that DAS is a disorder connected to a child's overall language development. To others the brain's ability to send the proper signals to move the muscles involved in speech is the outcome of a neurological disorder.

Children of Apraxia typically resolve most of their problem with talking and can do so by working with a speech therapist who helps working on factors such as inflection and speed in a controlled manner. The disorder will still exist but they learn to speak in spite of it.

Sign language is both rhythmic and visual, therefore providing the multi sensory input needed in order to develop normal speech in those of Apraxia and it also assists in bridging the gap to verbal speech. Speech therapists often use visual tools, such as white boards, pictures and signs. Children with Apraxia receive many of the same social academic emotional, benefits as those children with other speech development disorders with the use of sign language.

Sign language is considered a type of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and is used with adults with Apraxia to assist them in expressing themselves which may increase self worth and social interaction.

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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“MY SMART HANDS COMES TO LONDON”

My Smart Hands baby sign language classes came to London!) Teaching a hearing baby American Sign Language (ASL) was once viewed as a fad but now, many years later, parents are realizing it is a valuable tool that is here to stay.

Parents all over the world now see the value in giving their pre-verbal baby a way to communicate their needs to them through the use of sign language. This fact of this parental interest in baby sign language is clearly shown through the number of views on our My Smart Hands baby signing video posted on YouTube, now at over 1,000,000 views seen here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gSZfW4gVhI>

“I am extremely honoured to be a part of My Smart Hands, an educational company,” says Charlene C. Slaats-Gray, an Instructor of My Smart Hands “I’ve worked very hard on my business and am passionate about what I do. The Communication, Educational, Developmental and Social benefits of signing with your baby are truly spectacular! Signing with your baby gives you the ability to communicate much earlier than most realize. Your and your babies hands can act as your “voice”; while the babies vocal cords are developing they are able to have access to language through sign.

Imagine communicating with your baby before he or she can even speak. Baby sign language reduces frustration, accelerates verbal development and strengthens cognitive skills. It also enhances child-parent bonding through time spent teaching signs to your baby. Research shows that preverbal infants can communicate through the use of sign language long before they can verbalize their needs.

I also work with those with Communication Barriers (i.e.: Autism & Apraxia). Giving a child the opportunity to focus on something other than their internal angst, to involve them in their own learning process, and to see the joy it brings giving someone the ability to communicate, is amazing. After a personal experience some years ago I knew I had to research and delve into the area of offering instruction to those with communication barriers. That sudden feeling of knowing you are unable to communicate in any way leaves you in an emotional and physical turmoil. To try help anyone have a means to express themselves is why I do what I do. It may not mean telling stories to your grandchildren in full American Sign Language context, but it may mean you can tell someone you’re hungry or thirsty or that you love them.”

About My Smart Hands

My Smart Hands is a global company that teaches Parents how to communicate with their children through sign language. My Smart Hands has Qualified Instructor led classes all over North America, Mexico, the United Arab Emirates, Croatia, Oman and Mexico and soon to be in Germany, Belgium and Japan. For more information about My Smart Hands please visit www.mysmarthands.com

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