

Easter Seals Manitoba

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Everybody Knows Somebody with
a Disability – Easter Seals is There



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Winter 2006

Published by the Society for Manitobans with
Disabilities Foundation. If you would like an
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Putting Children Front and "Centre"

The Communication Centre for Children gives families a helping hand

"Your son has a severe to profound hearing loss."

Try to imagine hearing a doctor utter those words to you. A million different things race through your mind: *What does that mean? How can I help him? What are we supposed to do now? Who can help us?*

You're a little scared and feeling a little helpless, wondering how this is going to affect your son's life...and for that matter, your life. You don't know the first thing about Deafness or hearing loss...and you're not sure who you can turn to or what the options are.

Marion Bremner, Supervisor with SMD's Communication Centre for Children, has dealt with hundreds of parents who've struggled with these types of questions during her 28 years with SMD.

"After being involved with CCC for this long, I've realized the huge learning curve I've had with respect to understanding hearing loss, its implications on education and, in particular, how families navigate through the diagnosis and learn how to support their child."

The things that parents of a Deaf or hard of hearing child are struggling with are things that Marion has seen time and again.



The CCC is a place where families can learn and grow together.

She's shared in the heartbreak and in the triumphs, wanting to ensure that every family is given the same opportunities for success.

"I want every family and every new child identified with hearing loss to have the best options possible for a program that will support the development of communication."

The Communication Centre for Children opens up a world of communication by customizing programs that will meet the specific needs of each child and his or her family. A team of professionals – including teachers of the Deaf, early learning consultants, speech-language pathologists, ASL (American Sign Language) specialists and audiologists – work together with families to develop a program that addresses communication, literacy, learning and development needs. The staff at CCC strives to provide the information needed for each family to make an informed choice on the programming options available for their child.

Marion is very proud of the work CCC does and feels blessed to have been involved over the years.

"What has been so truly heartwarming are the stories that are shared by young people who are graduating from high school or post secondary programs. They reflect on their own special memories of preschool (CCC) and what that time in their life meant," she says.

For the children and their families who every day gain strength, encouragement and vital communications skills, the CCC has been – and continues to be – a godsend. For Marion personally, she hopes that the work they do at CCC can grow into something bigger and better!

"My vision is to one day have a new facility and work with other stakeholders who are involved with the education of Deaf and hard of hearing children to develop a provincial Centre for Excellence."



CCC Supervisor, Marion Bremner is proud of the work the Centre does with families from all over Manitoba.

The Best Decision

The direction the Cherneski's lives have taken started with one decision

Being a parent naturally means making decisions for your child – decisions that will give your child every possible advantage in life.

When Greg and Leigh Cherneski's first daughter, Cassidy (age 5 1/2) was diagnosed with a moderate to severe hearing loss at three months old, one of the biggest decisions they had to make was where to turn to for information, support and services.

The audiologist at the Children's Hospital in Winnipeg (where Cassidy was diagnosed) gave them a few options to start with. She told them about two of the agencies in Winnipeg that could provide services and therapy for their daughter.

"We met with both, asked several questions, and made a decision to begin therapy with the Communication Centre for Children at SMD," recalls Leigh.

That decision proved to be the right one for the family, who found their first experiences with the Centre "positive, informative, friendly, helpful and hopeful." Their experiences also made it easy when it came to deciding where to turn for services with their second daughter, Jenna.

Jenna (now 3 1/2 years old) was more difficult to diagnose than her sister. Though the Cherneskis knew that Jenna had been born with hearing loss, they didn't know to what degree. After numerous tests in Winnipeg and Ontario, it was finally determined that Jenna – who was three by this time – has a severe to profound hearing loss.

"Having been through it all with Cassidy, we knew where to turn," says Leigh. "Again, SMD – and the Communication Centre for Children – was there for us."

Knowing the degree of hearing loss both girls have was an important factor in helping the Cherneski's make decisions about what therapies and services to use, based on the girl's different needs. For example, in addition to an occupational therapist for Jenna, both girls saw a physical therapist through the Communication Centre for Children. Both girls continue to see a speech pathologist and attend the CCC classroom for preschool.

There were also different decisions to be made about assistive technology for the girls. Cassidy has hearing aids, but Jenna had another option: a cochlear implant.

"The surgery was done in April 2006," says Leigh. "We decided to go that route because we wanted to give Jenna a chance to hear her world. She is a very animated, expressive little girl, who is very motivated to speak."

Like all parents, the Cherneskis want what's best for their children. As time goes by and the girls get older, the Cherneskis know that their decision to start working with the Communication Centre for Children was one of the best decisions they ever made... one that has made a huge impact on their lives.

"We are so grateful that there are programs and services available through SMD thanks to Easter Seals funding," says Leigh. "Without them, we would be lost. It's that simple."

"Not only have they provided us with therapy/services for our daughters, they have been there for information, answers, advice, friendship, expertise and encouragement."



The CCC has always been there for the Cherneski family.



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Call us at 1-866-282-8041 or donate online at www.smd.mb.ca or eastersealsmanitoba.com



Thank you!

From time to time, we share our list with other organizations to find new supporters. This allows us to continue helping people with disabilities in your community. If you prefer not to have your name shared, please tick here.

Most Valuable Partner

How Easter Seals helped two young athletes get a head start

When 19 year-old Bison football player Toshio Nishimura starts talking football, it's easy to see how much he enjoys the game.

"I love the thrill and exhilaration of every play," says Toshio. "When I see the running back come my way or the ball in the air I get this intense thrill, and when I make the tackle or intercept the ball there's no better feeling."

There is one thing that makes playing football a little different for Toshio and that's the fact that he was born with a hearing loss. His hearing loss, however, has never kept him from being part of the sport he loves – nor has it been an issue with any of his teammates.

"I've always prided myself in getting people to notice me for my athletic ability not my hearing loss" he says. "My friends did have a joke about when I got the wrong play in a game or missed instructions in practice. They would get mockingly angry and say, 'and you can't use the 'but I'm hard of hearing' excuse again!'"

Toshio isn't the only one in his family with a love of sports. His younger sister, Kiyoko – who herself was diagnosed with a hearing loss at 18 months old – is also an athlete. But her game of choice is basketball.

"I have played basketball longer than my brother has and I'm always on one or two teams at a time," says Kiyoko "I absolutely love it and I just made the varsity team at Kelvin High School where 13 out of 23 girls made it."

"I play basketball for the challenge and because it's so much fun to play. It takes a lot of

hard work but I have met so many people and even made a lot of very close friends just from playing the sport and being on different teams."

Both Toshio and Kiyoko are equally dedicated to their academic pursuits. Toshio is working on his Bachelor of Arts and wants to be an elementary school teacher, perhaps even traveling to Japan to teach for a year. Kiyoko will be graduating from Kelvin High School next year and then heading on to University.

As accomplished athletes and students, both Toshio and Kiyoko have worked hard to achieve their success. They also appreciate the start that their early involvement with Easter Seals-funded programs at SMD gave them.



A love of sports definitely runs in Toshio and Kiyoko's family!

"I had at-home developmental assistance with teachers from SMD and I attended SMD pre-school classes," recalls Toshio. "I definitely believe that the programs helped prepare me for school and helped me get to the same level of ability as everyone else. Without that I probably wouldn't have made the same friends and might have fallen behind in school."

"I know that having speech therapy every week helped me very much as I don't talk like some other hard of hearing kids," adds Kiyoko. "Without it I think that I would have had a very hard time keeping up and making friends in school. I'm very thankful to all the staff as without them my life would be very different."

Their appreciation for the services they received is what inspires them to encourage others

to support SMD programs by contributing to Easter Seals.

"I think it is so important for SMD to have enough funding," says Toshio. "The more people that they can reach out to the better."

Kiyoko agrees. "Easter Seals and SMD help kids and people of all ages who have disabilities. The more Easter Seals funding that SMD can get, the more people SMD can help. And if it has helped other people the way it helped me, it would be very helpful for other kids."

What is Easter Seals?

If someone were to ask... "What is Easter Seals Manitoba?" would you know the answer?

Easter Seals has been active in Manitoba for over 50 years, helping raise millions of dollars to aid programs and services for children and adults with disabilities. These programs and services are carried out by SMD – the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities. Each year, through a variety of Easter Seals initiatives, funds are

raised to support services, programs, public and consumer education, self-help resources, advocacy and research.

The two – Easter Seals and SMD – are intrinsically intertwined. When you hear one, you can't help but think of the other.

Growing Up Koskie

How one family balances Deaf and hearing needs

Mar and Cindy Koskie are both Deaf, and genetic Deafness runs in Mar's family. But after their first child, Dinnah, and second child, Eric, were born able to hear, the Koskies weren't expecting their third child, Brenna, to have any type of hearing loss.

So when Brenna's hearing loss was diagnosed, the family had to adjust to having two hearing children and a hard of hearing child growing up together.

"At that point, we had some changes to make," says Mar. "For example, for the first four or five months, the kids were talking to Brenna and once we found out that she had a hearing loss, we changed our mode of communication to everybody signing."

Other areas required a different approach as well. "The older kids can sign up for soccer, hockey – there's no barriers," says Cindy. "But for Brenna, we have to make sure there's access for her. We're lucky because the City of Winnipeg has a budget set aside for interpreter services. But there are other programs where there are no services available. So you have to get a friend to maybe volunteer as an interpreter or go without."

To make sure Brenna gets every advantage possible, Cindy and Mar decided to call on another family: the SMD/Easter Seals Manitoba family.

Mar's brother works at SMD and Mar himself also worked at SMD for twelve years as a Community Counsellor. When he left, Cindy was the one who took over his position. So the family knew SMD offered a lot of the services and programs they felt would be beneficial for Brenna.

Through SMD's Communication Centre for Children Brenna is involved in a preschool program where she learns ASL and oral skills with other Deaf and hard of hearing children. Because she has hearing aids, Brenna also receives speech therapy at home and at day care.

"She wasn't too keen on learning to speak," says Cindy. "Before she was doing one-on-one speech therapy, but yesterday, we had a couple of speech therapists come over and she was just loving it."

"I notice the difference in her," says Mar. "She's now more motivated. She's speaking more. She wants the tutorials to happen."



It's Christmas at the Koskie home!

The Koskies – kids included – all appreciate the important role a facility like the Communication Centre for Children can play in the lives of children and families. Through his position as an Outreach Facilitator with Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, Mar has seen the challenges that can arise when resources aren't available; children feeling isolated, parents who aren't sure how to communicate with their own children, and delayed learning development.

"I wish there was full access for everybody so when a child is born, they could do the testing, identify if the child is Deaf or hearing and if there's a hearing loss, the child could get exposure to language right away," says Mar.

Cindy agrees. "I know there are many parents who have children who are Deaf or hard of hearing. They may feel overwhelmed, may not know what to do or have a hard time deciding what's best for their child.... SMD's Communication Centre for Children is the place to go."