



Mike McCollum

Janine Williams, left, interprets sign from Ayisha Knight, a student at UCSC, who explains the use and function of

a TDD machine to first- and second-graders at Starlight School.

# Understanding a silent world

## Students find interests of deaf schoolmates not so different

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The silent world of the deaf was introduced to Starlight Elementary School students Friday.

Starlight held workshops all day Friday in the school cafeteria, where hearing students were given three demonstrations designed to give them a better understanding of the hearing-impaired.

Hearing-impaired elementary students from Santa Cruz and San Benito counties attend Starlight, said Janine Williams, one of three teachers who work with the 17 hearing-impaired students at the school. Williams is not hearing impaired.

Students learned about sign language and how to say a few words using it, and found out how deaf people talk on the telephone.

The idea for the sessions, Wil-

liams said, was to make hearing students more aware of the special characteristics in the world of deaf people. Hearing and hearing-impaired students are already integrated in classes, but the workshops were intended to help hearing students better comprehend deafness, Williams said.

"This is an attempt to bring them (hearing and hearing-impaired students) together," she said.

At one of the workshops, students were shown devices with flashing lights used by deaf people in their homes to help them answer telephones and door bells, or to tell when a fire alarm is sounding or a baby is crying.

Also shown was a Telecommunication Device for the Deaf, a machine for "talking" on the telephone. A TDD has a device

on which the telephone receiver is placed, a keyboard for typing messages and a screen on which messages can be read.

Students learned about sign language and how some deaf people read lips.

Students also had an opportunity to ask two deaf people what it's like to be deaf. Students were told through a "signer," someone interpreting with sign language, that the world of the hearing impaired is not very different from that of people who can hear and that the deaf enjoy many of the things hearing people enjoy.

Classes for the hearing-impaired run from pre-school to fifth grade at Starlight, Williams said. In the morning, the hearing-impaired students attend their own class, which is considered their home room; in the afternoon, they are integrated

into regular classes with hearing students. Their home-room teachers accompany them to the regular classes.

Williams said hearing-impaired students are not ostracized by other students. On the contrary, hearing students are drawn to them, she said.

"Hearing kids tend to be fascinated by them and attracted to them," she said. "Hearing kids tend to be very embracing of them."

Only half of the student body was able to attend Friday's workshops. The other half, Williams said, will attend similar workshops Feb. 7.

Williams said there are no hearing-impaired middle school students in the district. Most high school hearing-impaired students from the Central Coast attend a state school for the deaf in Fremont.