

# LCCC's College for Kids Program Teaches Sign Language to Kids

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter  
July 18 2023 3:37 PM



GODFREY - If Beth Smilack's American Sign Language class isn't using their hands to sign, they're probably playing air guitar.

Lewis and Clark Community College (LCCC) sponsors a College for Kids program every summer, which offers a series of weeklong classes in a variety of subjects to different age groups. When they contacted Smilack and asked her to teach a course on American Sign Language (ASL), she immediately said yes.

“It’s important because children who are going to school with others, maybe Deaf children, they could possibly rely on an interpreter. But it would just be so much better if they were able to actually communicate with their friends in their same language,” Smilack said. “It just gives them another option to be able to connect with somebody.”

This week’s class is for kids aged 7–10, and it’s off to a great start. Next week, ages 11–15 will be able to try their hand (literally) at sign language. These classes are titled “Say It With Hands” and will culminate in a performance for family and friends at the end of the course.

While this is Smilack’s first experience with the College for Kids program, she has worked with LCCC before to offer “baby sign” classes. Smilack is adapting this and other courses she teaches — particularly a “Kids Love to Sign” class — to fit the College for Kids model and age groups.

“It’s going to be very exciting,” Smilack said. “We’re going to teach a bunch of signs. We’re going to have a lot of games and some music, which is all incorporated into learning basic sign language.”

Smilack explained that kids learn best when it’s fun and repetitive. They are working through “categories” of language one at a time, focusing on signs about family on one day, signs about manners on another, and so on.

Games and music, including the air guitar riffs, help engage the class. While Smilack has taught a range of age groups before, she noted that children are particularly skilled at learning different languages.

“Kids are amazing. They can pick up things so easily, especially at a young age,” Smilack said. She added that ASL is like any other language you might teach a child. “You just use your hands instead of verbally. I think they’re going to enjoy it.”

Smilack has a strong background in ASL, starting when she received a certificate in sign language interpretation during college. She currently works as the Marketing and Communications Director at Jerseyville Public Library, where she also offers ASL classes every now and then.

LCCC is planning more ASL classes taught by Smilack in the future, as well as baby sign classes that are tailored toward infants, toddlers and parents. In the meantime, Smilack just finished a six-week adult class at Jerseyville Public Library; you can check out [their website](#) or [Facebook page](#) for more information, including upcoming programs.

ASL is the third most commonly used language in the U.S. after English and Spanish, with approximately 500,000 Deaf people who use ASL living in the U.S. and Canada. This is partly why teaching ASL is so important to Smilack. The language is an opportunity to engage with other people.

“When you go out into the world, you’ll see somebody signing,” she said. “Even if you just know fingerspelling, which is just the ABCs that you use with your fingers, you can actually talk to someone who’s Deaf and they’ll be able to understand you. be able to communicate with someone else that you wouldn’t normally be able to communicate with.”

Click [here](#) for enrollment information and LCCC’s full catalog of College for Kids classes.