

Representative of Queen Elizabeth Visits | CEHS

01/31/2017



USU was recently pleased to receive a visit from the Hon. Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Ontario Canada's Lieutenant Governor. In this position, Ms. Dowdeswell is a representative of Queen Elizabeth II, who is Canada's head of state. Ms. Dowdeswell earned a Master of Science in behavioral sciences from Utah State University in 1972. A graduate of the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services, Ms. Dowdeswell began her professional career as a teacher and university lecturer and has a deep interest in CEHS and its interdisciplinary approach.

The Sound Beginnings program exemplifies the best in scientific progress and focuses on helping young children who are hearing impaired to integrate into mainstream education. What started at USU in 2007 as a graduate training program now enrolls 35 children, with 18 graduate students helping them to learn one on one. Instead of learning only theories, these grad students are in the classroom from their first day in the program. This is not only beneficial for the children, but as Ms. Dowdeswell observed, "It makes a great difference in preparing educators to work in a real life situation."

Using the observation rooms at Sound Beginnings, parents can learn how to repeat the positive reinforcement techniques for better communication at home. Sound Beginnings is a free program, and many families with hearing-impaired children move to Cache Valley to take advantage of it. "I can see why people would want to come here if they have the option," said Dowdeswell. "It's just one example of how education is connected to health."

There is a dramatic contrast in the speech of young children who learn to use a cochlear implant to

communicate with the world. Some children say they have "bionic ears" and explain the function of the implants with great exuberance and confidence.

Nearly 40 percent of kids with hearing loss have other disabilities, such as autism. To help children with autism reach their potential as they learn to communicate, the ASSERT (Autism Support Services: Education, Research and Training) preschool program at Utah State uses applied behavior analysis, in which children practice appropriate behaviors and receive positive reinforcement. Children are taught to request what they want and to control their environment and get their needs met.

Both the Sound Beginnings and ASSERT programs help them to reach their maximum potential and study in mainstream kindergarten. USU professionals travel to other countries to teach how to identify and teach children with hearing loss. Utah State has built outreach programs to help build similar programs in the United States, Russia, Brazil, Canada, and throughout Europe.

"Getting the knowledge and training out there to the world is our goal," said Dr. Tom Higbee, director of the ASSERT program. "If we invest money when they're very young, we see the gains they make across the lifespan."