



Handy website

Sign language helps some people with autism communicate

April is National Autism Awareness month. Technology, especially portable devices like smartphones and iPads, have helped make life easier for many people on the spectrum and their caregivers.

Numerous websites and apps have been developed to help people with autism communicate with others and navigate a world that they find bewildering. **ASLpro.com** (**ASLpro.cc** for mobile devices) is a website that uses modern technology to teach a language that is hundreds of years old.

American Sign Language is usually associated with people



KEVIN O'NEILL

InSites

who have hearing issues. But many non-verbal people on the autism spectrum can use it to communicate. Children who may never speak can learn to recognize and use hand signs to let their needs be known.

The site's mission is to serve the American Sign Language educational community, but parents and caregivers will find it useful for learning to sign. There are lesson plans, games and quiz-

zes for teachers of sign language to use in their classrooms. There are also dictionaries of words and phrases so you can look up how to sign specific things.

Helpful videos

Videos are used to demonstrate how to do the various signs, which is more useful than still images. Most signs involve not only hand motions but body and facial expressions as well. The videos can be paused or advanced/rewind frame by frame to study signs.

The sections that are the most useful for people trying to learn specific words and phrases are

the dictionaries and finger spelling pages. Other sections delve into more advanced signing.

The main dictionary features a scrollable, alphabetical list of words. Clicking on a word launches a video of a person demonstrating how to sign it. A grid of all the letters in the alphabet lets you jump to specific areas of the list to speed your search.

There's a phrases dictionary that is set up like the word dictionary. You can select a category, such as animals or food, and then you can choose from a list of related phrases or words.

The finger spelling is nested in a section called Signing With

Cindy. The videos show how to form the letters of the alphabet so you can spell words.

ASLPro.com will not win any awards for website design. The homepage features a black background littered with mostly white type. The placement of the type follows very few rules of organization or hierarchy. There are no photos or art on the page other than a small logo in the top left corner. Despite its looks, it's a very useful site.

KEVIN O'NEILL is a staff artist for The Times-Tribune. Share your favorite websites and apps with him at koneill@timeshamrock.com; 570-348-9100 x5212.