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By Jack Rowley

## Pilot Project Introduces Sign Language to Mister Rogers Neighborhood

Even though *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, like all PBS programming, offers closed captioning, most preschool children cannot yet read the captions that scroll across the bottom of the screen.

Family Communications is working with Kim Nussbaum and her non-profit organization, ASL Readers Inc., to insert deaf signers into one episode of "*Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*." Nussbaum is a teacher and interpreter of the deaf who felt her students would greatly benefit from the content found on the program.



"Fred Rogers strived to communicate with each child, rather than just entertain them," Nussbaum said. "Meaningful communication is what deaf children need most from their families."

Interpreters appear throughout the episode signing Mister Rogers' spoken words and songs for deaf children. The pilot is being distributed to deaf schools around the U.S.

James DeBee, who has twice won a National Cable Television "ACE" award, directed and produced the pilot, which was funded in part by a donation from the Scaife Family Foundation.

If the project is successful, the next steps would be to produce a week's worth of programming in which all of the Neighborhood characters have their own designated signers.