

Moog School Cracks Sound Barrier

Hearing-impaired students have more space.

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Don Shrubshell photo

Risa Venable, a speech therapist with Columbia Public Schools and teaching assistant at Moog School, helps Ally Albright, 5, work on her vocabulary and pronounce words today at the school's new quarters. The school moved to 3301 W. Broadway after sharing space for six years at Evangelical Free Church on Silvey Lane.

As she worked on an English assignment this morning at Moog School's new site in Columbia, Kylee Ratcliff was able to appreciate something that typically hinders her: quiet.

Kylee, 11, uses aids to offset significant hearing loss in both ears and supplements her California, Mo., middle school education with one-on-one speech therapy at Moog.

But until recently, she and Director Judy Harper had to share a workroom with other therapists and employees, causing background noises that would disrupt the sessions.

In April, the school moved to 3301 W. Broadway, next to Community United Methodist Church. The new quarters allow students and teachers to spread out and provide more space for individual or small-group therapy.

"It's nice, a lot more private," Harper said while working with Kylee. "Everyone doesn't have to use this office now."

Moog opened six years ago with four pupils in the basement of Evangelical Free Church on Silvey Lane. The program now serves 28 children, including toddlers, preschoolers and older students who receive therapy alongside their regular schooling.

"We were literally on top of each other," Harper said. "Here, we've built it to fit the needs of how we teach. It is also much more confidential."

The new location includes two main classrooms, as well as smaller rooms that can be used for therapy and parent conferences. Harper expects the site to accommodate the program for at least the next 10 years.

Already, Charlotte Brumfield, program director and teacher, can tell a difference in classroom lessons in the new environment.

"There is less interference," she said. "We definitely flow better. I feel like we can accomplish more."

Moog School in Columbia, a satellite program of the Moog Center for Deaf Education in St. Louis, serves people within a 90-mile radius of Columbia.

It's the only auditory/oral program in Central Missouri that teaches deaf and hearing-impaired children to speak and hear using implants and aids. The goal is to prepare children to function in a normal classroom setting by the time

they reach kindergarten and to provide them support, if needed, as they continue schooling.

After Friday, a dozen children will have graduated from the Moog preschool program since it opened in Columbia.

"The results are showing that this type of program is working," Harper said. "Students are going into mainstream schools with minimal support. They might get support here, but they're getting the work in regular classrooms."

Harper said she hopes Moog's new location will help the school become more visible and garner more community support for scholarships that offset the tuition of roughly \$18,000 a year.

Students and staff will celebrate the opening of the new facility with an open house from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. tomorrow. The public is invited.

"I think it would be nice to come and see what an auditory/oral school can do for kids who are hearing impaired or deaf," Harper said. "It's another option for parents as they're making choices for their deaf and hearing-impaired children."