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## Hearing and Vision team gearing up for another successful year



Back row l to r: Jeannette Sternhagen, Mary Wallen and Stacey Peterman (seated)

Ithaca, Stanton, St. Johns- Children are usually pretty good at expressing their wants and needs. If they are hungry, they tell their parents so. If a scraped knee is causing them pain, they cry and point to their wound. If they want to cuddle, they climb up on a loved one's lap. If they are overly tired, their whiny, grumpy disposition is a dead giveaway.

But when a child can't see or hear as well as they should, they are not always able to express it because they are unaware themselves that there is a problem.

Many children start school with these undiagnosed issues, which greatly affects their ability to read, pay attention, follow directions, and learn. But school achievement isn't the only thing that suffers in this type of situation. Hearing and vision difficulties often lead to

behavioral problems as well, which creates a host of additional problems at school, at home and in the community.

Diagnosing these problems at an early age is so important. That's why the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD), in conjunction with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), has been conducting free hearing and vision screenings for preschool and school-age children for over 60 years. Making sure that children in are seeing and hearing properly is a job MMDHD takes very seriously.

"Our three trained Hearing and Vision Technicians are committed to providing all children in our district with the highest quality hearing and vision screens to ensure they have the skills to succeed in school and in life," said MMDHDs Andrea Tabor, Community Health and Education Division Director.

The Health Department's Hearing and Vision trio has over 38 years of combined experience and screens almost 22,000 students a year. They each have their own unique passion for kids and work hard to ensure they provide the best service possible.

For Hearing and Vision Technician Mary Wallen, who screens children in Clinton County, identifying a hearing or

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vision loss is very rewarding and why she loves her job so much. According to Wallen, children are very good at accommodating for hearing and vision losses and it's often difficult for a parent to know if their child has a problem until they are screened. "We find hearing and vision deficiencies on a daily basis," she said, "And I cannot wait to screen that child again later in the year, because when I do, there is a good chance the problem will have been corrected, or that there is a medical professional working towards the best possible outcome. It's such a great feeling to know I made a difference in a child's life!"

Jeannette Sternhagen is the Hearing and Vision Technician serving Gratiot County. For her, helping kids in the community see and hear better is what makes her job so worthwhile. "I have had kids come up to me all the time in the store to show off their new glasses, some even point out how much better they can see, said Sternhagen. "One child told me they never knew there were lines on leaves before! He didn't even realize he had poor vision, but now he's seeing things in a whole new light."

Stacey Peterman, Hearing and Vision Technician in Montcalm County, is thrilled each time she gets positive feedback from principals, teachers and parents. But what really gets her excited is when she hears specific success stories, one of which has made a lasting impression. Several years ago, she received a heartfelt thank you letter from a parent who had struggled with her son's behavior in school. They had him tested for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and Attention Deficit Disorder, trying to get to the root of the problem. It was frustrating for this mom to try to figure out how to correct the problem. That's when Peterman discovered a problem with the child's vision during a routine screening. After months and months of psychological testing, this mom finally had the answer she was searching for--- her son didn't have a disorder, he just needed glasses! He had not been able to follow along in class because he couldn't see the board. His frustration led to him to act out, which is common in this type of situation. The parent was relieved and extremely thankful that Peterman was able to provide the service and was happy to report that the child is now on track with his grades and his behavior.

Michigan law requires the Hearing Screening Program to test children at least once between the ages of three and five years and every other year between the ages of five and ten. Goals of the program include identifying hearing loss as early as possible, reducing preventable hearing loss and ear disease, identifying hearing impaired children so their educational, medical and social needs can be met, and helping parents and school personnel understand the child's hearing loss needs. Early identification of hearing problems is critical as it can alleviate speech/language, social/emotional, academic and psychological delays.

Michigan law also requires vision screening of pre-school children at least once between the ages of three and five years, and school-age children in grades one, three, five, seven and nine, or in conjunction with driver training classes. Early identification of vision problems is equally important, as it can lead to the discovery and treatment of conditions like amblyopia, or lazy eye. The vision screening tests for clearness of vision, eye muscle balance, nearsightedness, farsightedness, and symptoms of other eyesight problems.

For more information on the Health Department's Hearing and Vision program visit [www.mmdhd.org](http://www.mmdhd.org).

*Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.  
We take action to protect, maintain and improve the health of our community.*

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