



# Early intervention key to building skills

By CLAIRE VAN RYN

DIFFICULTIES with speech at an early age have the potential to impact on learning and development later on, St Giles Society speech pathologist Jacqui Dean said.

Next week is Speech Pathology Week, aimed at raising awareness of the work of speech pathologists in the community, and Mrs Dean said early intervention was key to treating speech impediments successfully.

She said this year's theme, Communication: More Than Just Words, fitted well with the work St Giles' speech pathologists who were part of the early intervention team who work with children from birth to school age.

"As children grow we work with them on their play skills and their language development," Mrs Dean said.

The help on offer includes everything from assistance with babies having trouble feeding, to speech sounds, fluency and voice problems.

"Often if they have problems with their speech and language development, it can impact on



the family in terms of frustration and child behaviour.

"Also, they need a really strong foundation of oral language before they can learn to read and write," Mrs Dean said.

However, if a child is having difficulties with speech there are communication alternatives that can be introduced.

Augmentative and alternative communication includes sign language, symbols, gestures, writing and communicating through picture boards, computer programmes and speech-generating devices.

"We work with parents in learning the sign vocabulary but also trying to incorporate them into everyday situations

like meal time, bath time and play time," Mrs Dean said.

Switch toys and communication devices are available to help children with physical and communication disabilities. They are usually activated by a large, easy-use button or switch, and are priced from \$160. More specialised technology to aid communication can cost up to \$15,000, Mrs Dean said.

But she stressed that the hurdle of cost should not get in the way of the ability to communicate.

"I think it's really a right — everyone has a right to communicate."

The Examiner St Giles Appeal aims to raise money for people with disabilities who need specialised equipment.

Donations can be made at collection tins in newsagents and offices around Launceston and any donations will be greatly appreciated.

Alternatively, donations can be made at The Examiner's offices in Launceston, Devonport and Hobart.

Donations: Tasmanian Chairlifts \$500, J. Tilt \$200.

Tally: \$1290.



St Giles speech pathologist Jacqui Dean is looking forward to Speech Pathology Week.

Picture: PHILLIP BIGGS