

The Advocate

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SPEECH PATHways making a difference

Mary Scott 11.JUN.08

Two years ago, Kimberly Bell, speech pathologist and owner of the private speech and language pathology practice SPEECH PATHways in Westminster, noticed she received repeated calls from parents looking for services they needed but could not afford.

"I wanted to find a way so that anyone who wanted to come for help could come," Bell said.

Bell established the SPEECH PATHways Foundation in 2006, and said that by the end of this year the foundation should be able to give its first scholarship.

The foundation, which has been in fundraising and grant-applying mode since 2006, established the goal of supporting children with communication disorders by providing grants and scholarships to private speech-language pathology practices and programs in the Carroll County area.

According to Bell, many insurance companies don't cover speech and language services completely, or they might exclude pediatric issues completely. Communication disorders can be considered to be a pediatric issue, she said, because some children will outgrow them. Bell said that for a child to receive treatment for a communication disorder once a week for a year, it could cost the family as much as \$5,000.

Carroll County Public Schools offer speech therapy for students with communication disorders, but usually only if the disorder is negatively impacting the child's ability to learn, said Jane Conner, director of Special Education for CCPS. Formal evaluations and an individualized education plan team help determine this.

Ellen Poore, community liaison on the foundation's Advisory Board, said she knows first hand about the expenses of paying for speech therapy. The mother of five children, two of which are special needs children, took her daughter to Bell's private practice for a number of years, she said.

"A lot of insurance companies don't cover it, so a lot of people just have to pay out of pocket which is difficult, especially in this economy," Poore said.

Poore's insurance company offered partial coverage for her daughter's speech therapy, but she said they would not have been able to afford it otherwise.

Being that the foundation is a fund of the Community Foundation of Carroll County, Inc., Bell said she would like to see the foundation be able to give two full scholarships year, or several partial scholarships a year once enough funds have been raised.

Although Bell does not expect the first scholarship to be given until the end of the year, she said the application process has already opened up and she recently received the first application.

“When we look at applications, we’re not just going to be looking at the bottom line salary,” Bell said. “We’re going to be looking at the entire situation — how many kids are in the family, if any of them are in college, the extent of services needed.”

The foundation will be open for anyone aged 17 and younger, Bell said.

Bell said communication disorders are among the most common disabilities in the United States. Common disorders she said she frequently treats in her private practice include Autism, Down Syndrome, stuttering and learning impairments.

According to the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, current estimates suggest that about 400,000 individuals in the United States have autism, and are three to four times more likely to affect boys than girls.

Information from the NIDCD shows that between six and eight million people have some sort of language impairment.

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