

# Raising a voice for kids with speech difficulties

05/31/06

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Speech and language pathologist Jennifer Kaley works with 5-year-old Lili Gilmore, who has epilepsy, during a visit to the SPEECH PATHways center in Westminster. Staff photo by Brendan Cavanaugh.

Five-year-old Lili Gilmore makes the journey once a week with her mom, Natalie, from their home in Glenville, Pa., to Westminster.

Lili was diagnosed with epilepsy at age 6 months, and suffers from a rare seizure disorder.

She can have as many as eight seizures in a 24-hour period. According to Natalie, Lili has developmental delays, is nonverbal and in need of lots of therapies.

But the Gilmores make the trip to Westminster for good reason - for weekly visits to SPEECH PATHways, a speech and language pathology service.

"Lili's therapist, Jennifer (Kaley), is wonderful. She is so enthusiastic and positive with Lili," Natalie Gilmore said. "Lili really enjoys going, she is into the routine and very responsive."

Natalie said that ultimately she and her husband would love to see Lili talking, making eye contact and developing some social skills.

That's a goal shared by SPEECH PATHways therapists, who work to help children, and parents, find their voices.

SPEECH PATHways founder Kimberly Bell said she felt Carroll County had a need for speech and language pathology services, especially for special needs children.

She said she noticed that families had to travel to large centers in Baltimore to get services.

"It is gratifying for us to know that we are offering these professional services closer to home," Bell said. "Unlike some of the bigger centers, we're not afraid to get intimate and personal with the families and the clients."

Bell and seven therapists at the practice provide resources and support for the family - a parent support group, a play area for siblings, a resource library, reading teachers, and complementary programs including yoga for children with special needs, movement and dance, wee sign and infant massage therapy.

Bell and some of her associates recently became certified to provide a therapy known as REI.

Rhythmic Entrainment Intervention is a music therapy program utilizing auditory rhythmic stimulation - usually in the form of percussion rhythms - to stimulate the central nervous system and improve brain function.

Lili is among the clients at SPEECH PATHway utilizing the REI approach, and Natalie said that she has already seen improvements in her daughter.

"It is not invasive, they don't have to wear head phones, which would bother Lili," she said. "She has definitely been making more new sounds and the therapy has been very useful in helping to calm Lili down."

Bell said REI has helped several clients improve focus and attention, which in turn helps them with their speech therapy.

According to Bell, REI therapy is a 10-week program. Compact discs are tailored to the needs of each client based on an assessment, and the music is to be played at intervals throughout the day as quiet background noise.

"We're excited about this therapy, it works very well in conjunction with other therapies like occupational and speech therapy," she said.

Bell said REI is part of a long-term goal to continue to expand the center's approaches to meet community needs.

Another approach is a partnership with the Shafer Center for Early

Intervention.

Located in Baltimore County, the Shafer Center will open this summer and provide resources and treatment for children ages 1-5 who are touched by autism spectrum disorders. SPEECH PATHways will provide speech language therapies at the center.

Bell said her company is also partnering with Tomorrow's Treasures art studio in Manchester this summer to provide Art Speaks - an artistic and language expression program.

Art Speaks is designed for children with language and learning disabilities to help them learn about expression through art as well as help develop social skills and friendships.

SPEECH PATHways currently serves about 75 clients - Bell said she expects to continue to grow.

"We are family-centered and very casual; we make an effort to keep that atmosphere," Bell said.

"Kids are at home here. They don't feel like they are coming to a hospital," she added.

"We like that feeling."

For more information on SPEECH PATHways, call 410-374-0555 or visit the Web site at [www.speechpathways.net](http://www.speechpathways.net). To learn more about REI Therapy, visit [www.reiinstitute.com](http://www.reiinstitute.com).