



AUSTIN SPEECH LABS

stroke recovery one word at a time

Newsletter 2013

A LOOK BACK & A LOOK FORWARD

2013 was a year of exciting expansion and innovation for Austin Speech Labs. In July, we moved into new offices which are twice the size of our old facilities. Now we can serve more stroke survivors than ever before!

As our client base grows, so does our staff. We are happy to welcome Adrienne Pingel as a member of our team. Adrienne joined the team in October as our office assistant and also coordinates a growing group of dedicated volunteers and clients.

This fall, Austin Speech Labs partnered with the University of Texas at Austin to offer a new music program for our clients. UT music department students provide individual and group singing lessons for clients, a novel form of speech therapy. This is in addition to our ongoing Boot Camps and other reading and writing programs.

We are grateful to all of you for helping to make 2013 such a productive year!



Adrienne in our new office.



New music group.



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Gaby Villaneuva
Cassandra McGrath
Adrienne Pingel
Beth Rindfuss

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2013 Boot Camp Dates
November 4th-December 20th

2014 Boot Camp Dates
January 13th - March 7th
March 24th - May 16th
June 2nd - June 27th
July 7th - August 1st
September 2nd - October 27th
November 3rd - December 19th

Executive Director's Letter

A Five-Year Journey: Dream Turned Into Reality

From Dream to Pilot Program

It all started in 2008 when I was a speech therapist working at a hospital. I discharged a young stroke survivor from speech therapy even though he had not regained his language skills due to limited insurance. He was willing to work all day, every day on speech, however he could not afford private therapy due to already existing medical bills. So my colleague and I decided to offer affordable intensive speech therapy three hours a day, three days a week for eight weeks to stroke survivors. Affordability was important to us because we wanted stroke survivors to receive speech therapy as long as they needed it.

It started as a pilot session with four clients and one student volunteer from the UT Austin Speech Therapy Department. The volunteer assisted us (speech therapists) so that clients could get individual attention. Clients received intensive speech therapy (Boot Camp) three hours a day, three days of the week for eight weeks in September 2008. By the end of the pilot session, clients saw the benefit and wanted us to offer another session as they still needed to work on their speech. So we added another six week session to help them.

As the word got out, calls came from various sources and the session grew to 10 clients. The pilot session clients requested programs to help them relearn to read and write which led to the addition of a Book Club. One young stroke survivor needed help in biology and algebra to help her get back to college. However, none of the tutoring facilities understood a stroke survivor's method of recovery and with the financial burden of a stroke, she could not afford private therapy. So we customized sessions to help this young stroke survivor who returned to college the following year and graduated soon afterwards.

Undergraduate students from the University of Texas realized that they were getting real world experience by volunteering and working alongside speech therapists at Austin Speech Labs (ASL). We now had a model – two speech therapists, a steady stream of volunteer students and a unique program tested over a couple of pilot sessions. Now we needed to expand and reach the larger community of stroke survivors.

From Pilot Program to Nonprofit Organization

The catalyst for our growth came in 2009 when St. David's Foundation came forward with a "seed grant" for continuing our services. We moved to a 1200 sq ft office space with real therapy rooms and a computer lab. Clients served grew over 5 times during 2010 (from 12 to 69). We added afternoon sessions to increase the number of clients served. We quickly realized that several clients were attending more than two Boot Camps – by making it affordable we allowed them to customize and continue therapy for as long as they needed it. This rapid growth required us to expand again - in 2011 we moved into a bigger office, increased the size of our Board to seven, and hired two new speech therapist assistants to help us, the speech therapists.

Customized Programs Address Stroke Survivors' Needs

Our clients reflected a true cross-section of our community - teachers, doctors, engineers, professors, college students, attorneys, musicians, CEOs, CFOs, wives, mothers, husbands and dads. Interacting with their diverse requirements taught us that while a Boot Camp session helped them get their basic communication back, they needed more enriched programs to regain reading, writing and memory. Our clients wanted to do more than communicate - they aspired to return to work and feel like they had a place in their community. In 2012 we added programs such as intensive reading, intensive writing, auditory processing, pseudo toast masters, memory and cognitive programs. ASL partnered with the Music Department at UT to study the impact of structured singing protocol in combination with intensive speech therapy. Student volunteers from the Music Department provide one on one group and individual music classes to enrich our clients breathing, posture, voice projection and articulation skills.

We did not limit ourselves to serving stroke survivors in Austin and surrounding areas. Through the use of tele-therapy, clients from Houston, Amarillo, Katy, Laredo, Comfort, Corpus Christi, and Temple began receiving intensive speech therapy. Our clients also interact with stroke survivors at Houston Aphasia Recovery Center to expand their conversation skills and provide support for each other.



Our new offices!



It Takes a Village To Make a Change

As our clients grew from 69 to over 150, we added new services and again moved into a bigger office in July 2013. The dramatic growth over the last five years would not have been possible without the support of our entire community. Grants from the City of Austin, Austin Community Foundation, Sterling-Turner Foundation, The Mitte Foundation, St. David's Foundation and National Student Speech Hearing and Language Association (NSSHLA) were critical to enable our vision financially. In addition, we have dedicated board members, individuals, and company sponsors who donate every year to our annual fundraiser. We also have many caregivers that provide in-kind donations. We feel very blessed to have so many donors helping us achieve our mission. We increased our donor base from four near and dear friends in 2008 to over 400 by the end of 2012.

While our donors, board members and caregivers provide us the resources, our student volunteers enable us to deliver a high quality service. Today we have over 200 volunteers annually from various universities such as the University of Texas at Austin, Texas State University, Washington University in St. Louis, Baylor University and Alabama University to name a few. Many of these volunteer graduates have become Speech Therapists and are making a difference in other stroke survivors' lives elsewhere in various communities. Today we have four full time and five part time employees along with seven dedicated, hardworking board members and over 200 volunteers helping us serve our mission.

The Impact

What makes this journey worthwhile is seeing a demonstrable impact in stroke survivors and their caregivers' lives. From regaining the simple pleasure of communicating with a loved one, enrolling back in college or returning to work full time, our clients are working hard to get their life back. Each of you has cast a stone and it is those stones that have created many ripples in the lives of these stroke survivors and their families. We thank you for supporting our vision to improve the quality of life for stroke survivors.

Shilpa Shamapant, Co-founder
Executive Director, Afternoon Clinical Director



wish list

- Purell sanitizer
- printing paper (8-1/2x11)
- Kleenex tissue boxes
- puzzles for caregivers
- adult reading novels
- 4 oz or 6 oz plastic cups
- black printer cartridge for Brother printer
- iTunes gift cards
- computer PC headphones (Frisby brand)
- pencil sharpeners
- iPads
- laptop computers
- white-board erasers
- office chairs

If you would like to donate, please contact our office at 512-992-0575 or send a check made payable to Austin Speech Labs
7800 Shoal Creek Blvd, Suite 136 S,
Austin, TX 78757

From Learning to Talk to Now A Volunteer: One Stroke Survivor's Journey

As a volunteer at Austin Speech Labs there are a lot of activities that I do: help with the computers games; listen when the client is reading; discuss an article with the client; lead the Book Club.

I really enjoy to just talk with clients. 'How was your weekend?' 'What did you do last week?' 'Have you been to a new restaurant?' 'What are you doing when this session is over?' It is great when a stroke survivor laughs and smiles.

Before my stroke I had a mission that I should be helping others. That's why I became a professor and worked at Concordia University so I could teach and help others learn. When my stroke happened everything stopped. My stroke happened on Feb. 2, 2005. I was in St. David's Rehab for nine months but my insurance stopped and everything came to a standstill. In August 2008 Shilpa called me and said that there is a new place called Austin Speech Labs. Shilpa and Shelley helped me for three years with intensive speech therapy- my speech, reading, and writing improved a lot. My doctor said that I may not teach again as I still struggle with words sometimes. But Shilpa and Shelley showed me another path that gave me hope and enjoy what I did before my stroke, Teach. They suggested I volunteer at Austin Speech Labs and help others.

For two years I have been volunteering at Austin Speech Labs helping clients with reading, spelling and on computers. Last fall Shelley asked me if I could lead the Book Club. I was very excited, I wrote my lesson plans for the first time since my stroke. I can teach again! This type of teaching is different but it is great. Last winter session Shilpa said that I could help the community by educating them about stroke, so I could continue to work on my speech and language skills. Even though my speaking, reading, and writing are better, my auditory processing is messed up. That's okay, leading the book club and doing stroke awareness in the community gives me lot of satisfaction and happiness.

When you have a stroke everything can change. Some stroke survivors will progress very fast. That is great. But some stroke survivors' progress is very slow. Probably a famous writer said, "Take two steps forward and take one step backwards." It is tough when you cannot speak – or read - or write. But – you have to go on! Work hard to learn a new word every day. I look forward to ASL volunteering and community education. It gives me hope and energy. It is a great experience to work there. Shilpa and Shelley and their staff are awesome! God has a plan for me – and right now – I enjoy teaching as a volunteer again. -- *Tom Hilgendorf*



Recovery Never Stops: Casey's Story

On January 3, 2007, in the flash of a moment, the entire right side of Casey's 36-year-old body was paralyzed and all of his language disappeared. An amazing path of recovery has ensued. From a wheelchair and hand signs, Casey has moved through a series of complex recovery efforts to an astonishing life of independence.

In 2008 he enrolled in Austin Speech Labs' second Boot Camp. By then, he was walking without any assistive device but was still limited in his communication. He could say some words, but not phrases or sentences. Casey, a chemical engineer who worked at a brewery in New Mexico before the stroke, now moved in with his sister, Jeni, in the Austin area and began an intense focus on regaining his former facility and pleasure with the English language. Within the following year, he moved into his own apartment and, in 2012, Casey began a part-time job working at Austin Homebrew. Today he's employed two full days and two half days and faithfully maintains his work at ASL three mornings each week.

The amicable, positive atmosphere at ASL has been the perfect milieu for Casey to succeed. The clear direction and supportive respect from Shilpa and Shelley are unquestionably the guiding force he needs. From their sincere belief in him, he is regaining conversational skills and has been propelled into a self-confidence that is inspiring to his family and friends. He now Skypes regularly with another stroke survivor and follows along as his mother reads books to him over the phone. He has traveled alone by plane to visit friends and recently drove with a friend to visit a fellow stroke survivor in Laredo, Texas. Together they engaged in a variety of social activities and challenged themselves on bike trails.

Reaching out to make new friends and enjoy the camaraderie of friendly interaction has resulted from his perseverance in the intricacies of recovery. Casey and another ASL client meet for lunch regularly. Recently, Casey stretched his language skills to include texting. He does most of his own banking, pays the bills, uses a computer, works out and keeps tabs on his favorite Formula One race-car drivers.

Casey's faith and the support from loyal friends and family are stellar components in his motivation to recover. We have grown in many ways and been inspired by him as much as he has been by us. Thank you Shilpa and Shelley for your studied, marvelous expertise and for being an exquisite foundation of grace for us in Casey's recovery! -- *Helen Gwinn*

Casey (right) and Robert celebrate



One Word At A Time Event

Four Seasons Hotel
May 9th, 2013

Austin Speech Labs held its 4th annual "One Word at a Time" event this past May at the elegant Four Seasons Hotel in downtown Austin.

Attendees were treated to cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, silent auction, client stories, a video presentation, and a keynote address. Thanks to our fundraising committee, this year's event was a huge success, attracting over 250 attendees and raising more than \$100,000.

Bill Hrcir – husband, father, coach, business owner, and stroke survivor – opened the evening by sharing his personal story. When Bill called the offices of Austin Speech Labs in 2009 to inquire about speech therapy services, he labored for nearly an hour to convey his name, phone number, and reason for his call. It was thus with great admiration and wonder that gala guests heard Bill's speech chronicling his journey, his struggles, his accomplishments, and his goals for the future. A resident of Laredo, Texas, Bill has traveled tirelessly from his home to Austin for over five years to attend Austin Speech Labs.

His hard work, positive attitude, and sense of humor have proven not only instrumental in his own recovery but also inspirational in the recovery of his fellow clients as well.

Don Yackman delivered our keynote address. Mr. Yackman is a successful mutual fund manager, leading two of the world's fastest-growing stock funds. He has also been personally touched by stroke. Nearly ten years ago his daughter suffered a devastating stroke. She was a young, vibrant 30-year-old with no known risk factors. Mr. Yackman shared his daughter's story. He spoke of how long the recovery process has been, how difficult it has been, but how with hard work and dedication they have proudly watched her conquer goals the doctors once told them were impossible.

It was a successful and meaningful evening. We are forever grateful to all the volunteers who donated their time and energy and to our sponsors and supporters for their generous contributions.

-- Shelley Adair, Co-founder
Morning Clinical Director



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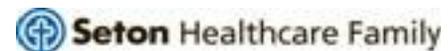
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stroke recovery one word at a time

Our Mission

Austin Speech Labs is a 501(c)(3) approved non-profit dedicated to improving the quality of life for stroke survivors and their caregivers. We provide intensive speech, language, and cognitive therapy at an affordable cost.

