



Children's Therapy Center helps children, parents

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by Erin Johnson
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With locations in Eagan and Apple Valley, Children's Therapy Center aims to make life a little easier for children with sensory disorders and physical disabilities.

The clinic provides speech, occupational, and physical therapy for children with a variety of disorders, including attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, autism, Down syndrome, and cerebral palsy.

"We see any child that's having any difficulty with communication, fine motor skills, gross motor skills, anything that they should be doing for their age, said founder Sue Lacher.

The clinic's goal is to maximize a child's independence with daily living skills, communication, and mobility.

"We see the potential and the positives each child has to offer and work with that to overcome the difficulties, she said.

The earlier disorders can be addressed, the better, Lacher said.

"Changes come a lot easier and quicker if identified sooner, she said.

Sensory disorders can cause children to be sensitive to things like sound or touch, making it hard to communicate and interact with their peers and their environment.

"It can be emotionally exhausting for a child, Lacher said. "If they're afraid of touch, they might not want to be near other children.

If sensory problems aren't addressed early, they can turn into behavior problems, said Kathy White, who works at the clinic.

"We're teaching parents techniques they can use at home to make their lives a whole lot easier, she said.

Lacher decided to open Children's Therapy Center because, she said, "I knew there was a need in this area.

With a background in occupational therapy, Lacher had been driving from home to home, helping families whose children were struggling with sensory and physical disorders.

She wanted to work in a clinic so she would have more resources, but most clinics were located outside of Eagan. That presented a real inconvenience for families, she said.

"I'm a mom -- I know what it's like to be driving your kids around. To be going a couple of times a week to other parts of the metro area is a huge burden, she said.

She opened the Eagan location in 2000, followed by the Apple Valley site.

Children's Therapy Center is staffed with speech therapists, occupational therapists and physical therapists who, Lacher said, are "passionate about children and what they do. Occupational and physical therapists use a gym filled with swings, stairs, and other equipment that helps improve motor skills, and private rooms are used for speech therapy.

Children are often referred to the clinic by schools, doctors and even other parents. They're evaluated by therapists to determine where the deficits are, Lacher said, and therapists talk to the parents about their concerns and priorities.

"We bring in our professional opinion and work together with (parents) so there's good carryover at home, Lacher said

Therapists assess where the children should be at their age and set up long- and short-term goals to help them progress.

Lacher said that first-time parents often wonder if their child is behind in certain skills.

"We're here to answer those questions. And we're here to either reassure them or say, maybe we should take a look at that, she said.

The clinic works closely with schools, Lacher said, and gets a lot of support from the school system.

"The schools do a wonderful job, but they're stuff ends at the point of education, and there are children that have needs above and beyond that, so that's where we come in. We want to complement what they're doing, she said.

Therapists typically see children once or twice a week, and health insurance covers most services.

"Children really do enjoy coming here, because we're giving them something they can't verbalize that they need, Kathy said.

Lacher remembers one child who came in with no communication skills but, it turned out, could spell out words by pointing to letters.

"We realized he was a lot higher functioning cognitively than what everyone was expecting out of him, she said.

While helping children is the focus of the clinic, helping the parents is equally important, White said.

"You see parents come in that are just totally frustrated. They are ready to throw in the towel, she said. "They think they are alone in the world, and we give them a place that they can talk to other parents and learn techniques on how to handle their child. We have a lot of parents that come in and when their child is discharged, they are a different family.

For more information on Children's Therapy Center, call (651) 994-9644 or visit www.childrenstherapyctr.com

Erin Johnson is at eagan.thisweek@ecm-inc.com.