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The Silent People

DuBard Association method "works miracles with children with language disorders"

By LYNNE JETER

HATTIESBURG—Pediatricians, take note. Despite nearly 50 years of existence, few medical professionals recognize the extent of services provided by the DuBard School of Language Disorders at The University of Southern Mississippi.

"We serve children who have significant and complex communication disorders, often with various co-existing medical conditions," said Maureen Martin, PhD, director of the DuBard School since 1989 and a language disorders professor since 1975 at Southern Miss. "We provide comprehensive evaluations that not only include language and speech but also in-depth evaluations of academics and auditory and visual perception and processing. Sometimes, pediatricians don't know who to refer a child to with such a complex profile. They're looking for a comprehensive view of that child's ability, strengths and weaknesses, and sometimes that's hard to come by. If they knew we were a resource in that regard, it might be useful to them."

Of the 80 students from 22 school districts that comprise the core of the DuBard School, the average child has five diagnoses. Some children have as many as 10 and 11 diagnoses, said Martin.

"They look like any other child because you can't see all of this until you sit down and start working with them," she explained. "The great news is despite these challenges, if we can put all of the pieces together—medical, educational, and behavioral—then we can really give these children a chance at lives that are productive and independent."

Southern Miss established the DuBard School in 1962 when a faculty member's child needed special services, and named



Karen Irwin helping student develop his handwriting skills.

Etoile DuBard, PhD, to helm the School for Preschool Deaf and Aphasic children. DuBard expanded and refined the world-renowned DuBard Association Method, originally developed by Mildred McGinnis. The phonetic, multisensory teaching-learning strategy is implemented in an incremental, systematic and cumulative manner. DuBard passed away in 2004.

"One of the great legacies Dr. DuBard left us is that these children have so much potential," said Martin. "She was a masterful clinician and diagnostician and focused on what the children could do and not so much on the disability. Because of that, we have a success rate that's uncommon."

Language disorder specialists from around the country spend time on the Hattiesburg campus to learn the innovative, highly effective Association Method.

"We provide very intensive services rather than the traditional 30 minutes, two or three times a week of language therapy," explained Martin. "Unlike traditional therapy, our speech language therapy approach has a written component, so not only do we focus on how a child says a word or understands it, but also how that child reads and writes it."

The DuBard School reaches out routinely to school districts in 17 South Mississippi counties. Some families move into the geographic area served by the school to involve their children in the program.

"Even though different public school districts have their own speech language programs, the DuBard School has the only intensive public program in the state," said Martin.

After opening with only three students, the DuBard School has a waiting list of more than 100 children for the no-cost, full-time program that operates 11 months of the year. In addition to the core program serving children ages 3 to 13, the school serves another 40 children and young adults via outclient therapy.

Martin is taking the DuBard Association Method into public schools, with a goal of implementing a modified version in every kindergarten classroom.

"In the pilot program, it was estimated that one-third of kindergarteners come to school at risk for reading problems," said Martin. "Sure enough, 30 percent tested at-risk for reading problems. That's normal across the country not because of a diagnosed disability, but be-

cause of language deficiency. These children aren't talked to at home. They have poor vocabulary and oral communication skills. So when they learn to read in the classroom, they're learning oral and written at the same time."

Martin is very encouraged with the DuBard Association approach with kindergarten students, which should reduce the number of children on the special education or dyslexia track and allow teachers to easily identify children with language disorders early on, instead of several grades later.

"There's a lot of promise that it will help keep teachers focused and on track and give them time to do what they need to do," she said.

The DuBard School, which must raise funds through grants and donations for 40 percent of the \$18,000 annual cost per child, will soon embark on a capital fundraising campaign to coincide with its 50th anniversary.

"The DuBard School literally works miracles with children with language disorders," said Aubrey K. Lucas, PhD, honorary chair of the DuBard School 50th Anniversary Campaign, and president emeritus of Southern Miss. "Hundreds of DuBard alumni and their parents tell heartwarming stories of how this unusual school has helped its students to be happy, productive people."

Former student William Webb Warren II, IT manager for the City of Destin in Florida, appreciates the role the DuBard School played in his experience.

"The DuBard School has had a tremendous impact on my life," he said, "and has enabled me to overcome severe aphasia and apraxia that other professionals had deemed insurmountable."

Martin said the school's mission is to enrich the lives of more children with language disorders without geographic boundaries.

"Our goal, quite simply," she emphasized, "is to reach as many children as possible."