In an effort to make that difference in the lives of people with problems communicating and swallowing, Joy English has dedicated her life’s work for the past 30 years to those with speech and language disorders. Although involved in many activities from her chosen field of study, Joy is also a classically trained pianist, a former Nashville music publisher, a songwriter, an artist, a flea market scavenger, a lover of architectural salvage and a woman who has never met a stranger. Yet her heart, body and soul are dedicated to the art and science of human communication and how this artful expressive spirit can be shared or given back to people.

“Speech and language pathology (SLP) is the study of disorders related to a person’s speech, language, voice, hearing, swallowing and cognition, including memory. The field of SLP covers many situations dealing with children who develop speech and language late, to stuttering, to voice, and to auditory processing. It also includes the rehabilitation of those who have speech and language issues associated with autism, strokes and traumatic brain injuries, as well as various medical conditions. Speech-language pathologists also help adults who have elected gender reassignment to ‘find their voice.’ In many cases, it comes down to realizing that speech therapy can make a difference in one’s life and ability to earn a living,” said Joy.

**Communication Problems Hit the Most Vulnerable**

Part of helping people realize when to contact a speech-language pathologist comes from educating parents about the norms related to the development of speech and language. “May is designated as ‘Better Hearing & Speech Month’ by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) in an effort to raise awareness about communication disorders and the experts who provide services to those with difficulties understanding, speaking and hearing,” stated Joy. “Problems with communication affect the most vulnerable of our communities – the young, the elderly, the disabled and the poor. An issue with communication has no boundaries and can occur in any individual regardless of age, intelligence or background. The first communication of a human being is ‘the birth cry.’ Communication develops rapidly in infants. Babies are brilliant beings. A month of learning in an infant or toddler is equivalent to many years of learning in an adult. In some cases,
speech-language pathologists begin working with infants in NICU to develop their suckling skills so the baby can take nutrition orally. This is why it is of vital importance for a parent to seek guidance from a licensed speech-language pathologist for their infant or toddler as early as possible if they suspect the child’s swallowing or communication is not developing properly. SLP is a highly complex and medically oriented field of practice related to cognition and motor development, and syncing these two neurological functions together in order to facilitate communication and swallowing.

A Team Approach to Providing the Highest Quality Services

It wasn’t long after Joy founded her solo practice that she knew her company was growing and additional speech-language pathologists would be needed. She knew that someone skilled in running the day-to-day operations of a busy multi-county practice was required, so in 1993 Jeri Bates, VP & COO, came on board to handle managerial responsibilities. Operating within a 32-county region in central and western NC, Speechcenter’s primary office is in Winston-Salem (and virtual offices in Boone and Charlotte). “Jeri and I work very well together,” said Joy. “I am a big picture person, a visionary and the founder, President and CEO. Jeri runs the day-to-day management of our practice. I would be challenged to do any of this without Jeri Bates. We have a wonderful administrative staff and a team of highly-skilled speech-language pathologists who share our passion to serve our community. We specialize in SLP evaluation and treatment. We provide speech-language pathology services of the highest possible quality while doing so in a humanistic and ethical manner. Our cost is reasonable to individuals and agencies seeking our services. We serve individuals and facilities including public and charter schools, preschools, Head Starts, hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, and home health agencies. Any place we are needed is where we will go, including the patient’s home.”

The ladies of Speechcenter see their field as not only a commitment to help others, but a calling. “Before you can treat a person’s problems, the individual needs to know that what is going on with them can be helped,” said Jeri. “Education of the roles speech-language pathologists play is integral in knowing when our services are needed. Sometimes we say ‘our work takes us from birth to the grave,’ because speech-language pathologists begin working with infants immediately after birth, checking for sufficient oral motor functioning. A speech-language pathologist can also assist aged adults with communication and swallowing problems. Many times we can help a loved one communicate through nonverbal ways, adding to their quality of life.”

Helping the Caregivers

With this vast continuum of people, from newly born to the aged, in need of possible speech therapy, it is not only about helping those with issues, but about bringing peace of mind to the parent or the caregiver. “It’s never too early or too late to begin speech therapy for a child. We offer free speech-language screenings to anyone, but especially to children in order to give the parent who lies awake at night with worry that their child’s speech is not developing properly, peace of mind. For those older patients, issues of swallowing or communicating after a stroke or another health concern become more prominent. Our speech-language pathologists make home visits, treating our patients in their natural environment. We believe that a ‘problem named, is a problem solved,’” Jeri commented.

As the field of SLP has advanced with new innovative evaluation and treatment techniques, there is no substitute for the knowledge of a licensed speech-language pathologist. “We are a progressive profession. We use apps but we use them with the knowledge base of a wide variety of communication and swallowing disorders within a master’s level of university training along with NC licensure and ASHA certification. Our practice offers many innovative techniques including, VitalStim© Therapy, a type of intervention where tiny muscles involved with speech or swallowing are gently stimulated by an electronic pulse,” commented Joy.

Michaela Greene, M.S., CCC-SLP

A B E L L A  B E N E N I S  S M A L L S  M A R I E L A  C R U Z

Professional Services Available: Speech-Language Pathology, Augmentative Communication, and Dysphagia (Swallowing).
A Better Understanding of Speech and Language

Beyond working with individuals with speech and language issues, the speech-language pathologists at Speechcenter also work with businesses to improve their culture of communication. "Our work with corporations can deal with the dialect reduction of an individual or group of individuals, to helping physicians from another country pronounce the English language so their patients will understand them better, to an executive who wishes to improve their communication skills in general or feel more confident when doing presentations. We help people have a better understanding of their speech-language-swallowing, and help them know that contacting a speech-language pathologist isn’t a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength. Speaking with a speech-language pathologist is a positive step toward getting the issue resolved," stated Jeri. Even if the challenge cannot be completely eliminated, a speech-language pathologist can teach people with these challenges some strategies to help them cope. "So much of our life is about telling ‘our story.’ We help people tell their story through improved communication. This is a wonderful gift to give an individual. For us, helping our patients achieve an improved quality of life is very rewarding," said Jeri.

Speechcenter, Inc. is located at 185 Charlois Blvd., Winston-Salem, NC. For more information call 1-800-323-3123 or visit www.speechcenter.net.