

Ingham Impact Episode 17: Educational Audiology Services

We contract with Early On; the Early On program is for children ages zero to three that are at risk for delay. We are their audiologists and so we go out and either screen the children's hearing in their home with their parents or we have them come in here and we do a full hearing evaluation here to rule out hearing loss as a contributing factor to their speech and language delay or other social interaction delays that they may have.

It's an invisible handicap, you know, you can have a partial hearing loss and people wouldn't even be aware that that hearing loss existed and it would result in possibly a speech language delay, and if that hearing loss isn't identified, then that speech language delay can translate into reading issues, which translate into writing issues, so it all piles on top of each other.

We start at ground zero, you know, you have a hearing loss; this is what it means to you; this is how it affects you; this is how it impacts your life; inside school outside of school and helping, really, acceptance for their hearing loss and then helping them to explain it to others so that when they do come up with

the problems, helping them become independent.

We provide digitally modulated assistive listening devices to help in the classroom because hearing aids aren't like real ears; they pick up a lot of extra background noise that isn't pertinent to education so, what that system does is it turns the teachers voice up just a little bit so that they aren't missing anything throughout the day. If the teacher turns their back and faces the other way, walks around the classroom, if the student next to the hearing impaired student is shuffling their papers around or making noise, scooting in their chair, these systems make it so that nothing is missed in the classroom.

Because we are evaluating children from zero to three, some of those children we identify with hearing loss and therefore they need hearing aids which they would get from the private sector. You know, we all work together. Once we fit the children with some assistive listening equipment in their classroom, we also monitor it, do troubleshooting so the teachers might call us and say "Joe Smith's mic isn't working, can you come out and look at it?" So we also do a lot of troubleshooting. We travel between

the different schools, check up on the kids and make sure everything's going like it should be.

Jane and Kathleen do the testing, they do their functional listening evaluations, which is really important to us TCs because that tells us, okay, we know that they have a hearing loss, they were profound hearing loss but what does that mean in the classroom? And so they do data work, they kind of collect: well this is what it could look like in the classroom because they're missing 20% of speech at the high frequency range. So then I take that data and I will oftentimes create goals around that or I might use that data to explain to parents, since they're missing the high frequency sounds, this is what you need to do differently at home when you're communicating with your child. The earlier a hearing loss is identified the earlier that we can put amplification on the child. You need to be able to hear normally to develop speech and language normally, so it's very, very important that we find it as early as possible and those children that are found at birth or shortly thereafter, we don't necessarily see speech and language delays but if it's not found until

they're older then oftentimes they're behind academically, socially, speech and language they're behind, everything is affected.

You can do all the speech therapy you want, but if the child isn't hearing that, what is it worth? So if we can identify it early, amplify, and then get them back in the classroom then we're saving probably a million dollars in special ed, and we're saving that kid from a low self-esteem from failing repeatedly over something that's out of their control that maybe other people aren't even recognizing.

In school, we speak really fast, in the classroom, we often only say things one time, it's awfully noisy, especially if there's cooperative learning; there's lots of kindergarten classrooms you go to, and it's great because that means the kids are learning, they're active they're cooperating with each other and that student needs to be able to hear them. And so, audiology is essential in providing them access to those things through their expertise, troubleshooting equipment through everything that they need to do to hear.

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