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# Autism Certification

## MEETING A GROWING DEMAND

Jacksonville Speech & Hearing Center first to get all employees certified by May, which is Speech and Hearing Month

*Written and  
Photographed by  
Maggie FitzRoy*

**S**peech/language pathologist Dot Bourgeois was driving through Jacksonville one evening when she saw a young girl wandering barefoot in the street. Looking closer, Bourgeois realized it was one of her clients, a third grader who doesn't speak and has been diagnosed with autism, a disorder characterized by an impaired ability to socialize, and repetitive unusual behaviors that many people find startling or frightening.

Bourgeois realized the girl must have wandered from her house somewhere nearby, so she called police, and they were able to get her home safely.

Bourgeois feels fortunate that she found her

first because most police officers "wouldn't know what to do" when they encounter someone with autism, she says. That is why she approves of an autism certification and training certification program that the Jacksonville Speech & Hearing Center, where she works, has embraced.

The International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES), now based in Jacksonville, provides training and credentials for professionals working in fields that may involve contact with people with autism. That includes teachers, speech pathologists and audiologists as well as bus drivers, school and clinic receptionists and police officers.

The Jacksonville Speech & Hearing Center



*Jacksonville Speech & Hearing Center CEO and President Michael Howland, center, and his staff members, who are all getting autism certification.*

on North Laura Street, a nonprofit organization founded in 1949, is the first organization in Jacksonville to provide the certification and training to every employee, even the front office staff.

"It is something we jumped on," Speech & Hearing Center president and CEO Michael Howland says. "Because of the growing incidence of autism, and the real need that is out there."

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of children being diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder is growing, with a current rate of 1 in 68 children. Five times more common in boys, it is reported in all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

Myron Pincomb, founding principle of the Jacksonville-based Pincomb Group, recently acquired IBCCES, which had been based in Kansas City, and moved it to Jacksonville.

He says his company's goal is to provide training and certification to a wide variety of professionals around the country. IBCCES offers two types of certification. Certified Autism Specialist is available for those with Master's Degrees or 10 or more years of experience in the field, including speech language pathologists, principals, teachers and school counselors. Others, who work in a setting where they are likely to have contact with people with autism, are eligible for an Autism Certificate.

Many police departments have their officers complete training, because it's important for first responders to recognize the signs and behaviors of autism, Pincomb says.

School districts are having employees trained and certified, so they can demonstrate they are providing the best services possible for children with special needs.

Speech Language Pathologist Dorothy Train-Marsh, who works with children with autism at the Speech & Hearing Center, passed the Autism Competency Exam and is now certified, as are all employees at the center.

"It is important that the entire staff be certified," she says. In addition to demonstrating knowledge of methods and treatments for patients and their families, she says it demonstrates a sensitivity and support of the family. **HS**

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