

MEDICAL

PROFESSIONALS

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JACKSONVILLE AND THE BEACHES

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JACKSONVILLE SPEECH AND HEARING CENTER

A SEVEN-DECADE LEGACY OF COMPASSIONATE CARE

Since 1949, the Jacksonville Speech and Hearing Center (JSHC) has served Northeast Florida with the mission “to provide the highest quality professional and compassionate care to all individuals in our community with speech, language, and/or hearing disorders, regardless of ability to pay.” Originally founded as a volunteer-led organization that provided speech therapy to an average of four children each week, JSHC has since grown into an award-winning, professionally staffed nonprofit that provides an average of 4,025 adult and pediatric patients with speech, language, and audiology care each year.

Voted as the Bold City Best Awards’ “Best Hearing Aid Center” for two consecutive years and “Best Local Nonprofit” last year

due to its high-quality of service, JSHC is dedicated to ensuring that its care is accessible to all individuals in Northeast Florida. During the last fiscal year, 62 percent of JSHC patients received subsidized care through its community programs due to lack of insurance or underinsurance.

JSHC also strives to ensure that its care is safe and inviting for patients with autism. In 2015, JSHC became the first, and remains the only, healthcare provider in Northeast Florida to earn credentials as a Certified Autism Center. All JSHC clinicians receive comprehensive training in autism care from the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES) and its clinic on 1010 N. Davis St. features a therapy room specially designed to limit external stimuli.

This May is Better Hearing and Speech Month, a time designated by the American Speech-Language-Hearing

Association (ASHA) to raise awareness about the importance of communication health. For JSHC, it is a critical opportunity to educate the community about the importance of treating speech, language, and hearing needs.

Early Speech Intervention and Educational Equity

When promoting speech-language health, JSHC strives to inform parents and caregivers about the critical role that early speech-language intervention can play in their child’s social, emotional, and academic development. When a preschooler has delayed or disordered communication that is left untreated, they are statistically more likely to develop poor self-esteem, disruptive behavior, and lower reading



skills when compared to peers with average communication abilities. Children with untreated speech-language disorders are also more likely to experience impediments when sharing their answers in class, raising questions about lessons, and interacting with other classmates during group work. Without appropriate diagnosis and treatment, such difficulties hinder students’ ability to learn content and can put them behind on the path towards graduation and career readiness.

Fortunately, speech therapy has proven effective in mitigating these negative outcomes. Through individualized speech therapy regimens, Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) at the Jacksonville Speech and Hearing Center can help individuals with speech or language disorders develop the skillsets needed to communicate on level with their peers. Using the results of each patient’s initial speech-language screening and later speech-language evaluation, SLPs are able to develop individualized goals and treatment plans that build each patient’s communication

traveling directly to the children, SLPs are able to eliminate the obstacle of transportation, a common health-care barrier for families with fewer resources. Since the beginning of this fiscal year, SLPs have provided over 600 speech-language screenings, over 140 speech-language evaluations, and over 1,600 therapy sessions to children at 25 different local preschools and childcare centers.

Children who require speech therapy through the Preschool Screening Initiative and other referral sources often lack the insurance or financial resources to receive proper treatment. As a result, JSHC provides subsidized speech-language care to children whose families would otherwise be unable to pay for treatment through the Fund-A-Child Program. This funding is provided from donations by individuals, corporations, and foundations. During the last fiscal year, Fund-A-Child provided 156 children with a total of 619 subsidized speech therapy sessions. Without such programs, it is likely that 90 percent of children who received care through the Preschool Screening Initiative or the Fund-A-Child Program would not have received treatment.

Amplifying the Importance of Hearing Health

When it comes to hearing health, JSHC seeks to ensure that adults and seniors are aware of the comorbidities associated with untreated hearing loss. Untreated hearing loss increases the risk of an individual developing depression by 40 percent. This is often a result of increased social isolation as an individual begins experiencing difficulty hearing conversations. When the brain is unable to receive the sounds that it should, individuals with untreated hearing loss are more likely to experience a greater degree of cognitive decline than peers who wear hearing aids. Further research indicates that untreated hearing loss not only costs individuals mentally, but financially, as untreated hearing loss has been found to decrease one’s income by as much as \$30,000 per year.



However, the severity of these conditions can be prevented or significantly reduced with hearing-aid use. Studies have shown that those who seek treatment for hearing loss early greatly reduce their risk of depression, and a 2018 study published in the Journal of American Geriatrics