

EDUCATION: FSU Early Childhood Autism Program: A Hidden Jewel in Bay County

written by Dr. Amy Polick, Program Director, FSU ECAP, Florida State University Panama City



When parents have concerns about their child's development or their child receives a diagnosis of autism, they can easily feel scared, worried and confused about which step to take next. Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are lifelong disorders that are more common today than in previous years. Recent estimates reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2012) suggest that one in every 88 children in the United States is diagnosed with ASD, making this a very real issue that families may face.

While these numbers appear alarming, there is hope for families in Bay County. It is now widely acknowledged that Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is the treatment of choice for children with ASD and residents of Bay County and surrounding areas can access these ABA services (which are difficult to find in other cities) through the FSU Early Childhood Autism Program (ECAP) housed at FSU Panama City.

Established in 2001, ECAP is a non-profit (501(c)3), early intervention and community outreach program that provides individualized ABA therapy to children with developmental disabilities, including ASD, Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy and Intellectual Disabilities. The primary mission of ECAP is to provide effective ABA services to children in the local community. These services include several important treatment components that are individualized per child in order to produce the greatest learning, and they include personalized treatment goals, direct one-on-one teaching, functional analyses of problem behaviors and ongoing data collection to evaluate treatment effects. Overall, ECAP's ABA services have helped hundreds of local children learn countless communicative, social, play, cognitive, academic and self-help skills over the past 11 years.

Since its inception, ECAP has provided these services to children in their homes, which allows therapists to provide extra teaching



and learning opportunities to children outside of normal school hours, as well as directly train parents on their child's treatment programs so they can also play an integral part in the therapeutic process. Recently, ECAP opened an autism clinic at the FSU Panama City campus to be able to provide further options for therapy, which now makes ECAP the only autism program in the Panhandle that provides in-home and in-clinic ABA services.

The Camille Butchikas ECAP Clinic opened in August 2012 and is equipped with state-of-the-art technology to enhance therapy and provide a quiet, controlled environment for learning. The clinic was made possible by the generosity of the George A. Butchikas Autism Foundation, whose donations to ECAP over the past 11 years have totaled more than \$330,000. This funding has not only assisted ECAP in opening the on-campus autism clinic, but has also been used to provide annual scholarships to families in Bay County in need of financial assistance in paying for their child's autism therapy.

A secondary mission of ECAP is to provide excellent clinical training to graduate students enrolled in the ABA Master's Degree Program at FSU who are studying to be effective behavior analysts. These students apply to the Master's Program from all over the world and travel specifically to Panama City to gain this autism training, making FSU and Bay County a hub for education regarding treatment of ASD and for innovative autism research being conducted at ECAP. Additionally, ECAP provides supports for the local autism community via workshops, trainings and community fundraisers, one of which is an annual "Auction for Autism Awareness" each April (Autism Awareness Month).

Not many people know that ECAP is here in Bay County. Even fewer know how hard the program's directors and therapists work toward helping children overcome autism. Most importantly, these individuals do this all in an effort to really make a difference in the lives of children and families affected by autism...and when those differences are made, the pay offs are greater than explanation allows. That is why ECAP works so hard at what they do, and why this program is a hidden jewel in Bay County.

For more information about ECAP contact the Clinical Director Rachel Wagner at 850.770.2272 or rwagner@pc.fsu.edu or Dr. Amy Polick, Program Director at 850.770.2252 or apolick@pc.fsu.edu. **BB**



NICHOLS & Associates

of Bay County, Inc.

1229 Jenks Avenue, Panama City, Florida

Insuring Lives. Enriching Futures.

Our experienced staff will help you choose a plan that suits your needs.
Health Solutions for Individuals, Families or Small Businesses

Benefit Plans for:

- Health* • Life • Dental • Disability
- Health Savings Account (HSA)** Compatible Plans
- Medicare Supplement Insurance Policies***

Your Local Agency for

Florida Blue 


An Independent Licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association

Call 850-747-0288
or visit bayinsuranceservices.com



Mike Nichols

Florida Blue is the trade name of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida (BCBSF), Inc. Life, Dental and Disability are offered by Florida Combined Life, an affiliate of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida. These companies are Independent Licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. *Policies have limitations and exclusions. The amount of benefits provided depends upon the plan selected and the premium will vary with the amount of benefits selected.
**Florida Blue offers only the high-deductible health plan to be used in conjunction with the Health Savings Account (HSA). For more information on the tax advantages and implications of HSAs as used with a high-deductible health plan, contact your legal or tax advisor.
***Not connected with or endorsed by the U.S. Government or the Federal Medicare Program. Policies have exclusions and limitations.
73863-0512 Agr



DaVita Dialysis, enjoy a vacation here in Panama City. Our Dialysis Center can keep you locally OR on the beach. While here, the only worry you will have is how to spend your free time. Appointments available to meet your needs. Flexible Vistation Policy.

Visit us at any one of our locations or at www.DaVita.com

Panama City
615 Highway 231
763-1233

510 North McArthur Avenue
914-0824

Panama City Beach
16201 Panama City Beach Parkway
233-0837