



Mary-Anne Zubrycky, M.A. & Associates
Speech-Language Pathologists

250-B Greenbank Road, Suite 228

Nepean, Ontario K2H 8X4

Tel: (613) 820-4722 Fax: (613) 820-7097

Email: svlc@sympatico.ca

Happy New Year from the Speech-Language Pathologists at SVLC

The New Year is a natural time of reflection.

Besides hearth, home, family, friends, and health, the most important thing dear to many people's hearts is how they spend their days, more specifically their work.

At a Christmas party this past month we were stunned by a factoid about Canadians and work. Less than 10% of Canadians, when asked whether they hate, like or love their jobs, responded with "love".

We here at the SVLC wholeheartedly can say "we love our jobs", the clients we work with, the interesting, varied, intricate work that we do, and the satisfaction our work brings us.

We thought we would greet you with some reflections on what we love most about work and why.

Kim Matthew's Story

When I look back on my career as a Speech-Language Pathologist and my love for communicating, I have several special moments which I cherish.

My first poignant reflection is working with an elderly woman with end stage Alzheimer Disease. I was told that she did not speak; however, when I took the time to sit with Annie, I found that she could communicate with me through eye blinks and gazes. "Annie, do you want to wear the pink dress or blue dress today?" And she would gaze at her choice. "Annie, blink once if you want to go to bed." And she would do so if she was tired.

This non verbal method of communication opened up an entire new avenue for Annie. Annie's family was absolutely delighted that this was 'discovered' ---they once again had a way to communicate and connect.

I remember working in inner-city Philadelphia early in my career with children from birth to 5 years of age. Many of these children were from very impoverished backgrounds---some from drug dependent families, youngsters who witnessed gang violence, children who didn't know where their next meal was coming from, others with mental and physical disabilities. I recall working with one little girl who was diagnosed with selective mutism. While working with her in my office one day, I was elated when she whispered to me that she wanted to hold one of our baby dolls by saying "Baby."

Another work story that warms my heart involved a client who was a prominent radio personality. He had vocal difficulties and, through therapy, his voice became stronger and healthier. It was such a joy and honour to hear his radio broadcast one Sunday morning. Therapy had allowed him to finally return to work and resume his career.

Over the years I have had many joyful work moments---some big, some small, but all cherished. In every therapy session I try to have the next 'breakthrough' in working towards the individual's goals. It is a journey that I am happy to share with the clients and their families and I do believe that each session has the potential of being a very special moment in a child's or adult's life.

Melissa Moloissa's Story

As a relatively new Speech-Language Pathologist, I am always careful to cherish every fond memory created throughout my professional journey as time goes by and as I gain clinical experience.

I realize that these memories serve not only as a reminder, but also as a confirmation that I am indeed pursuing my calling in making a positive difference in the lives of those under my care.

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The most memorable experience that deeply touched me as a Speech-Language Pathologist occurred early on in my career.

I had taken on 3 year-old, Matt, as a new client. I can still vividly remember our first meeting. This bright, rosy-cheeked young boy presented as a chatty and very charismatic child who preferred expressing his thoughts and ideas over playing with toys. It was very clear to me that Matt was capable of engaging in full conversations despite his young age.

But there was something holding him back. Matt's speech was terribly unclear. His parents sometimes served as his interpreter, but even they had a difficult time understanding what he was saying. Matt had a severe articulation disorder that was complicated by many factors. This was, without a doubt, the most unique and most severe case of an articulation disorder I had ever seen. Knowing where to start was a challenge. All I knew was that I wanted to give Matt the gift of communicating his beautiful thoughts clearly and give his parents the gift of understanding their brilliant son.

Matt's parents, caregivers, and therapists were keenly on board this journey towards improved communication. We were all truly working as part of a team.

Before each weekly visit, Matt's parents would submit three progress notes: one from his grandparents, one from his caregiver, and one from them.

It was then that I realized that Matt was getting a daily dose of speech therapy even if he was not coming to the clinic on a daily basis.

Therapy continued for approximately six months before Matt was discharged. The family's goals were met and Matt started Junior Kindergarten with very clear speech. My goals were met and Matt was able to express his beautiful mind clearly and effectively.

Mary-Anne Zubrycky's Story

The reflections and stories are many!

My most memorable, is an elderly stroke patient Jean-Paul in a long term care facility whose daughter and son in law had been tragically killed in a motor vehicle accident. Family tried to break the news to Jean-Paul, but his language comprehension difficulties were too great for him to grasp the words. The doctors and nurses tried but to no avail.

Finally, it was suggested that the Speech Language Pathologist on staff might be helpful in communicating this devastating news. I used a framed photo of the couple which was in the patient's room, some toy cars from my son's toy box, and a crucifix off the wall which hung over the patient's door. I placed these objects on the therapy table. Jean-Paul was able to understand the message, and burst into tears. It was a sad and hard job to do, but there was satisfaction in knowing that we have the skills to communicate with patients in creative ways.

Reading intervention has been one of the most satisfying areas of my career these past 15 years. Reading is so central to learning in the early years of school and can make or break a school experience, academic path and eventually higher education and career choices. It is difficult to give news about reading and writing struggle, but many clients already know on some level, and come for confirmation and direction. It is a very special work role to start these families on a journey of intervention, and motivate them to engage in reading recovery.

The greatest pleasure, at my stage in my career is meeting past clients in shopping malls, or receiving letters from them recounting their milestones. News such as "Kelly now enjoys reading chapter books", "Jake received the English award in his graduating year in High School", or simply... "Stephanie still remembers you and coming to your Clinic for speech therapy"... makes it all worthwhile.

It is a privilege to work in all areas of speech, voice and language as these abilities are what connect us in a very special way to one another.

We at the SVLC would like to take this opportunity to wish each and every one of you a happy and prosperous New Year. May your hours of toil, obligation, and work of the moment, bring you meaning, deep satisfaction, and connection to those around you.