

# Putting The "S" Back In Stephanie's Speech

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**Stephanie with therapist Irene Schulz, MS,  
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"S-s-s-s-sun."

"Good sound!" praises Irene Schulz, the speech-language pathologist who works with Stephanie on correct production of her "s" sound during speech-language therapy. A big smile lights up Stephanie's face. She takes pride in her "s" production, remembering how difficult it was to



produce just a few months ago. Stephanie is a lively, gregarious nearly four-year-old, who has been receiving speech-language therapy services at All Children's Specialty Care in Fort Myers, Florida, since she was two and a half. When Stephanie first came to the clinic, back in the fall of 2000, she was extremely hard to understand due to the large number of articulation errors in her speech. She frequently substituted or omitted consonants within her words. Therefore, Stephanie often sounded as if she were speaking a foreign language. A simple task like requesting a drink would turn into a guessing game for Stephanie's parents as her request would sound like "I wahk gink." As anyone could imagine, it was incredibly frustrating for this bright, verbal child to be rarely understood, while it was just as maddening for her family to be constantly guessing what she was saying. Her mother, Monica, remembers how difficult it was for Stephanie to talk on the phone with her grandparents. "She would try to talk to them, but they could not understand her. She really got frustrated and upset, and I think it affected her self-esteem."

Fortunately the self-esteem of this little girl has greatly improved since then. Stephanie now has very few problems communicating her ideas clearly and effectively. With the help of speech-language therapy and the support of loving parents, Stephanie's speech is now much easier to understand and contains only a fraction of the errors that once afflicted her speech. But improving her articulation was not an easy process. Stephanie had to attend two half-hour speech-language therapy sessions twice a week. The speech-

language pathologist taught Stephanie how to produce target sounds in various contexts including isolation, syllables, words, etc., and how to transfer her newly learned skills into conversational speech. This process required frequent practice at home. Stephanie was given worksheets, activities, and picture cards, which were to be completed and/or practiced several times per week. This took much motivation and perseverance on the part of Stephanie and her parents.

Now Stephanie rarely gets frustrated and, instead, enjoys talking to family members and friends in her preschool class. Her mother remarks, "You can actually have a conversation with her now without guessing what she's trying to say. We are extremely happy with her progress." Although Stephanie still has articulation errors that necessitate continued weekly therapy sessions, this little girl, with work and dedication, should sound just like her classmates when she reaches kindergarten. She will finally be free from the disorder that once confined her dynamic personality.

Stephanie's therapy would not be made possible without the charitable contributions of The Scottish Rite Foundation of Florida, Inc. Through its generosity, countless children, like Stephanie, are able to receive the therapy they so desperately need.

The All Children's Specialty Care of Ft. Myers, home of the Scottish Rite Clinic for Childhood Language Disorders, was opened in January 1999. The 21,000-square-foot Center provides high-quality medical and therapeutic services for the children of southwest Florida in a convenient outpatient setting. All professionals who work in the Center are extensively trained to meet the special needs of children of all ages. They work closely with community physicians, early intervention programs, school systems etc., providing a continuum of comprehensive care for children with complex medical and/or developmental problems. It is uniquely designed, with two waiting areas complete with toys to help alleviate the stress a child may feel before a visit. Its colorful exam rooms and facilities feature kid-sized equipment, and three experienced speech-language pathologists (Kate Smiley, Angela Trewartha, and Irene Schulz) working in the Scottish Rite Program evaluate and treat articulation and language development, oral-motor feeding skills, and other pediatric speech-language disorders. An additional position will soon be added due to the demand for services, such as audiology, where children receive hearing tests and, if necessary, are fitted with hearing aids. Also, there is follow-up for children with cochlear implants. The Speech-Language Pathology staff welcomes Scottish Rite Masons to visit and see firsthand the services provided to the children. For more information about the RiteCare Program in Florida, visit [www.helpforkidspeech.com](http://www.helpforkidspeech.com).

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**\*All Children's Specialty Care of Fort Myers is one of 11 Scottish Rite Clinics for Childhood Language Disorders supported by The Scottish Rite Foundation of Florida, Inc., in the "Sunshine State." This article is edited from *Quarterly News* (Vol. 3 Issue 3) published by the Foundation.**