

SOUTH SHORE ENTREPRENEUR: Speech pathologist uses technology to help patients communicate

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NORWELL — She's a speech language pathologist, but Tammy Taylor knows that actions sometimes speak louder than words. That's why Taylor, owner of the Speech Language Pathology Center in Norwell, is a strong advocate of using the latest technology with many of her patients.

She uses iPad applications, from videos and games to ones focusing on auditory stimulation. They can help people, including those who are nonverbal, learn to communicate.

Taylor said the easy touch-and-swipe technology of tablets has revolutionized her field, for which she has had a passion from a young age.

"I very distinctly remember working with developmentally delayed kids while I was in elementary school - it was like a mentor program - and I thought it was so rewarding," said Taylor, who received her undergraduate degree in communication disorders from Bridgewater State University. "I liked working with people and helping them."

Taylor went on to get a graduate degree in speech language pathology from California State University at Northridge. She worked as a speech pathologist at schools on the South Shore before opening her practice.

"I wanted something small-scale and going full circle with patients – like in schools, seeing kids from first grade through graduation," she said. "It started out with me in my home and kept expanding."

Taylor opened the Speech Language Pathology Center in Hanson in 2009. In February 2013, the business expanded with the opening of a second office, in Norwell. In addition to Taylor and an assistant, the Norwell office employs two part-time and two full-time speech language pathologists.



Tammy Taylor, owner of the Speech Language Pathology Center in Norwell, says the touch-and-swipe technology of tablets has revolutionized her field.

Photo: Greg Derr / The Patriot Ledger

The Speech Language Pathology Center is among the local speech therapy offices that regularly integrate technology into patient care. Taylor works closely with app developers, and the clinic has more than 750 apps downloaded on iPads.

Taylor points to a popular app called Proloquo2Go, which can be adapted to suit the needs of users with different literacy levels and speech problems. Speech can be generated through the app by tapping buttons with symbols or using the on-screen keyboard with word prediction.

"Our goal is to find the best apps to suit each individual's needs," Taylor said.

Apps such as Proloquo2Go have completely changed patient's lives, she said. Before the app, one of her nonverbal autistic patients was using a piece of paper and pointing to each letter individually. Now, with the iPad, he can easily communicate.

The apps, which range in cost from free to \$300, are much more accessible than older, traditional speech-pathology systems, which were large, cumbersome and cost thousands of dollars. It's easier for families to buy iPads and the apps than it was to buy such systems. As a result, working on therapy at home is much more convenient.

Taylor, who consults with schools and therapeutic habilitation centers, also runs workshops and gives speeches across the country.

"It's an amazing job to wake up to and look forward to going to work," she said.

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