

About the Author

Rachel Betzen is a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist, or speech therapist, that owns the private practice Dallas Reading and Language Services. She recently re-opened her private practice and is accepting new students on a private pay/sliding scale basis. She will begin accepting Medicaid and insurance programs soon.

Read more about Rachel's healing journey below.

Rachel Betzen was full of ambition even before she started her private practice in speech-language therapy and reading programs. She had seen first-hand how improving a child's speech and giving him the tools to learn how to read could completely turn his life around .

Although she was working with chronic pain, she went full-time with her private practice in 2006. "The students I had were all behind in either speech or language, and had a significant reading delay, or were not reading at all", Betzen says. Her private practice was also unique in that she worked with lower socio-economic families, as well as middle class and higher income families.

Dallas Reading and Language Services offered their services on a sliding scale basis for private pay families. They accepted Medicaid and some insurance plans. Families with insurance whose children were enrolled in a reading program as well, still had to pay for that portion in a small sliding scale fee.

Another major difference between DRLS and other therapy providers, was that Rachel Betzen CCC/SLP had higher expectations of her students than other therapists do. "In each instance in which I received therapy reports on children who had speech therapy previously, my short-term goals for the child were always higher than the goals he had with the previous therapist. This was the case in every single instance". Whether the student had a learning difference or mental retardation, Rachel Betzen expected more from them in a shorter time period.

Accordingly, her students performed well, many reaching the point where their speech, language and reading skills caught up to their grade level. At this point the students were discharged, as they no longer qualified for or needed therapy services. Sixth graders reading on a second grade level, and second graders not reading at all, would each catch up to their peers. Their parents and teachers were encouraged and amazed. The students were uplifted, no longer able to believe that they were stupid, and not capable of learning or communicating well.

Mrs. Betzen's therapy and reading programs were individualized to each student. They all received immediate and distinctive feedback. Also, therapy was done right within each student's "Zone of Proximal Development". This means that each child's therapy was right at their level. They experienced success early and often during therapy, with much positive feedback.

Students went from hating reading to looking forward to each therapy session. Pre-schoolers went from wordless daily tantrums to three word sentences. Rachel Betzen's patience and dedication to high expectations did wonders for her students. It was life changing for them and their families. For the first time, these students were experiencing academic success. They were being discharged from therapy as they caught up to their peers in the classroom. Family life also changed dramatically as the student's communication abilities soared. Student to parent communication increased, and for some of them, the parents were able to understand their child for the very first time.

ASHA has reported that more than 70% of juvenile delinquents have a communication disorder or delay, and the majority of them are behind their reading grade level. I saw many students that were headed in this direction. They were angry at a world that couldn't understand them, and knew school was harder for them than any of their friends. They basically saw themselves as failures, and that was heart-breaking.

That's why it was so important to have high expectations of these children, and to make sure that they knew it. That's why therapy had to be structured for them to experience success early and often. This is why Betzen was relentless at trying every known or theorized method and do whatever it takes to reach these children. She often said "We don't give up on ourselves as therapists, so I'm not about to go giving up on my students. They must know without a doubt, that they can and will accomplish many great things".

Betzen herself struggled throughout middle and high school. She had trouble understanding people, and didn't know why they said what they did, or behaved the way they did. She experienced firsthand the difficulties that come with communication challenges. Despite her visual problems early on, she loved to read and devoured books of all kinds on all subjects. She watched her brother struggle with reading and all the challenges this brought him. It was all these things and more that led her to develop a private practice to drastically change the lives of her students and their families.

Then she was in a car accident, from which she has not fully recovered. After this her pain gradually increased as she developed many neurological symptoms. This eventually left her wheelchair bound.

She was a "medical mystery" for a few years as the neurological symptoms increased. She began having regular eye spasms and developed severe light sensitivity. This left her unable to function visually for much of the time she spent in the community. She began training to learn how to use a white cane, and started learning Braille.

She was finally given a clinical diagnosis for late-stage Lyme disease and went through intensive treatments. These left her crippled with pain and very sick, unable to eat regularly. She was finally forced to give up her private practice, and begin to focus all her energy on getting better. She was determined to heal, and return to working with these very special students.

Now, nearly four years later, Rachel's health has improved greatly. She is getting ready to re-open her private practice doing speech therapy and reading programs. To accommodate for her chronic fatigue she plans to work from a home office.

Rachel Betzen is now available on Wednesdays and Saturdays for individual therapy sessions. She plans to begin full time work in the fall after the completion of their rammed earth home office in the Oak Cliff area of Dallas. Parents interested in evaluations and therapy sessions should call or e-mail for further information.

Dallas Reading and Language Services

Rachel Betzen MA, CCC/SLP

www.DallasReading.com

rbetzen@dallasreading.com

(214) 274-7455