

Clinic makes speech therapy

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By Lisa Queen
Staff Writer

When Mark Cardinali first became a patient of Newmarket's Family Speech Clinic last October, he had difficulty pronouncing simple words.

Hardly surprising, given the then three-year-old's hearing loss, which appeared to have been rectified when tiny tubes were surgically implanted in his ears to help them drain properly.

At the time, Mark's mom said she hoped he would be able to articulate one word properly by Christmas.

"We started in October and I thought that if he could say one word clearly, it would be such a huge Christmas gift for us," Jeanine Cardinali said.

"We're excited that he will have an opportunity for intense speech therapy and it will be a lot of fun. Mark is looking forward to it. He likes camping and singing and having fun with his friends."

Mark surpassed his parents' expectations by being able to say simple sentences such as "I choose Mickey" and "dress the doll" by year's end.

Although Mark is still working on his speech patterns, his mother is thrilled with the progress he has made in nine months.

But as far as Mark is concerned, going to the clinic isn't work. It's just a place to play with toys, puzzles and



Beth Cranmer-Smith, a speech-language pathologist who operates Newmarket's Family Speech Clinic, works with Mark Cardinali, 4, to help him learn to enunciate properly through toys and games.

games with Beth Cranmer-Smith, who operates the facility.

Ms. Cranmer-Smith, a speech-language pathologist who is also a member of South Lake Regional Health Centre's neurological team, said the play is actually therapy that helps children to learn to enunciate properly.

An inability to communicate well can create social barriers for children if not addressed, she said.

"Kids experience lots of frustration if they can't communicate. What are six-year-olds going to think if one kid is saying 'tat' instead of 'cat'? It can affect that child's self-esteem."

Ms. Cranmer-Smith said most academic and health-care professionals agree positive communication skills are linked with intelligence development and school performance. Stressing early intervention is key, she said children with speech difficulties should receive therapy as early as 18 months.

At the clinic, the children usually receive therapy individually, but this summer they will get a chance to learn and play together at the clinic's day camp, the first of it's kind in York Region.

Campers will be doing the same activities as kids at any other camp- singalongs, story time, crafts, sports, drama, and show-and-tell.

Activities follow themes such as gardening, music, transportation, occupations and pets.

But along with the fun, campers receive intense speech therapy, said Ms. Cranmer-Smith, the camp director.

The camp is geared to children between ages three and 10 who have disorders or delays in speech, those experiencing difficulties with reading and writing and also those who are too shy to feel comfortable communicating

with others.

The camp, which will be held at Newmarket's Country Garden Montessori Academy and will

have a ratio of 2.5 children to one employee, will be staffed by experts in speech pathology, teaching and social work. "It's something I've always wanted to do, a speech camp," Ms. Cranmer-Smith said.

Jeanine Cardinali said Mark, who is in nursery school, is looking forward to attending the camp.

"We wouldn't miss it. We're so excited," she said. "We're excited that he will have an opportunity for intense speech therapy and it will be a lot of fun. Mark is looking forward to it. He likes camping and singing and having fun with his friends."

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Preschool camps for children three to six will run weekly from 9 a.m. to noon. Camps for youngsters in grades 1 to 3 will run in the afternoons.

Literacy camps run in the afternoons for the weeks of July 8 to 12, July 22 to 26 and Aug. 19 to 23 only.

The cost is \$285 for the first week and \$250 for subsequent weeks.

The fees include pre-screening and determination of each camper's goals by Ms. Cranmer-Smith, as well as all materials.

For more information, call 905-954-1312.