

TOMORROW'S VOICES

Natasha's return proves to be a big boost

By Robyn Bardgett

Autism Awareness is celebrated next month and Tomorrow's Voices continues to provide hours of therapy for children with developmental disabilities such as those on the autism spectrum.

Last year marked the return of one of the charity's promising staff members, Natasha Pedro-Petty, who is now a senior therapist at the Tomorrow's Voices centre after completing her Master's degree.

Ms Pedro-Petty returned to Tomorrow's Voices because the facility utilises Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), which has shown to be an effective way of providing therapy for children with autism.

"I was with Tomorrow's Voices for three years after completing my undergraduate degree in psychology and behavioural neuroscience at McGill. I got a lot of good feedback and could really see myself progressing and received training with Tomorrow's Voices," explains Ms Pedro-Petty.

She went on to work and study in London, working with two families with children with autism while studying for her Master's.

"I really consider my time at Tomorrow's Voices the reason I was able to survive in London," she says.

When she returned to Bermuda to finish her dissertation last summer, Tomorrow's Voices contacted her to encourage her to come back to the facility.

Another draw of working at the facility includes the great group of therapists that are always open and communicative.

"I work with a great group of people that want to help," she says. "They care about every single child that comes through here. I knew that coming back here would be the best use of my skills and the best way to make the most impact. I'm supported by the people around me and we see success with every single child that comes here. If it's not working we change what we do. It's exhausting but there is a huge sense of satisfaction."

She adds that with little more than a Bachelor's degree and an interest and a desire to help special needs children,

Tomorrow's Voices happily takes on and trains recruits to work their way through the ranks.

She adds that working with parents and creating partnership is an important part of the success of the facility, which currently has a waiting list of children in need of help.

"Parent partnership is an intrinsic part and just as important as the therapy we provide. Parents know their child better than we do and we want it to be an open environment where parents can come and let us know what they are struggling with and how they can reinforce certain behaviours at home."

Due to the fact that the facility is run by a charity, the budget does hold the facility back from taking on more children. Ms Pedro-Petty says her dream is to see Tomorrow's Voices expand and be the silver lining for those parents receiving a diagnosis of autism in their children.

"When parents come back to Bermuda with a diagnosis of autism they will mourn every single time they miss a developmental milestone, they will mourn the loss of an ideal," says Ms Pedro-Petty. "And when an intensive programme of ABA is recommended by the doctor and they don't know what to do when they return home they can know that there will always be a place open to them."

Because the programme provided by Tomorrow's Voices is so intensive it requires mainly one-on-one work with children.

"What we provide is so individualised for each child. We are teaching them how to talk to how to use the toilet. We teach kids to communicate



Dedicated: Sherena Dickinson, Natasha Pedro-Petty, Logan Phillips, Emma Martin and Tahiyah Muwakkil.



Senior Therapist Natasha Pedro-Petty with 10-year-old La'Teaka Dehaney.

which is amazing. ABA is the basic principles of behaviour with hundreds of thousands of experiments done on how affective it is in applying to autism. It's about breaking skills down into their component parts so they are more likely to reach success along the way. Often with autism there are steps that kids miss. There is often a lack of

motivation to do certain things so we have to come up with many creative ways to get them to learn. We focus on each specific child so it's expensive but that's what they need."

Chairwoman and founder Thea Furbert, says the charity is hopeful that with a talented staff the charity can only continue to progress.

Now in its sixth year, Tomorrow's Voices has provided over 25,000 hours of autism and developmental services to children and their families, says Ms Furbert.

"The future for Tomorrow's Voices looks bright, with highly talented staff who have years of service and experience as well as a caring and compassionate for improving the lives of whatever child that walks through our doors. They are amazing and make me proud to have as staff. Having seen children walk through our doors that don't speak and then a few months later they are talking too much."

But she adds the cost of continuing the services continues to hold back the charity's expansion. Autism services are currently not covered by insurance.

"We cannot continue to provide these outstanding services without the support of the community, with an overhead of over \$500,000 a year, we need your support," she says. "Autism therapeutic services are not covered by insurance so this becomes a big burden in providing services to the community. We will continue to work hard to keep our support available, but we are realistic in knowing that with less support the amount of services we can provide are limited."

Autism Awareness Month is a great

time to find out more about autism as well as get an inside look at the services provided by Tomorrow's Voices, Ms Furbert explains.

"As the Board and Staff at Tomorrow's Voices embark into our sixth year of providing services to the community, I encourage all to find time to understand what autism is and how with just a little compassion and knowledge we can help to make the life of a child a little bit better. Don't judge a book by its cover as we never know what's going on inside," she says. "I also encourage the community to become a part of the change for these children, reach out and support Tomorrow's Voices in what we are doing in research-based therapies and teaching support."

The charity is staging several events in April including an Open House on April 19 at their new facility in the Sunshine League House as well as fundraisers such as "Autism Pops" on April 26 where the charity will be providing a variety of flavoured popcorns with the funds raised for the centre.

"We encourage the community to participate in all the events we are putting on to celebrate Autism Awareness Month. Each event will highlight important areas that are significant for either raising funds for our much needed services or providing important information on how we as a community can provide support to our children with autism and other developmental disabilities. As Bermuda's first and only Early Autism Intervention Centre we see a number of families needing our support daily. To speak with and know that there are families and their children in our community not getting the services they need is truly heartbreaking and we at Tomorrow's Voices seek to provide them with the support they need. We encourage the community to support our Centre by providing grant funding, donations as well as volunteering. This support will help provide additional services to a population of children that really need our support. With eight children on our waiting list for services, your support would not only be welcome but appreciated."

For more information on the charity's upcoming events visit www.tomorrowsvoices.bm, email tomorrowsvoices@northrock.bm or call (441) 297-4342.

TomorrowsVoices AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

TomorrowsVoices - Bermuda Autism Early Intervention Centre
AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH EVENTS - APRIL 2013

March 28 - Royal Gazette Special Feature - Featuring our services, staff, volunteers, and accomplishments in the field of Autism and our ramp up to celebrate Autism Awareness Month throughout April.

April 1 to 30 - "Eat! Shop! Give!" 2013 Fundraiser - All month get access to fantastic discounts & promotions from over 50 participating stores when you donate \$10 for an Eat Shop Give card. Your \$10 donation allows us to provide 30 minutes of therapy to children in need.

April 1 to 30 - "Giant Autism Puzzle Pieces" Window Displays - Participating merchants island-wide decorate their shop fronts with our giant puzzle pieces in support of Autism Awareness Month

April 1 to 30 - Membership Drive - April is an opportunity to become a member of Tomorrow's Voices, donate online to our Centre, or become a member of our Facebook group.

April 1 - "The Ladies Room" with Nikita - HOTT 1075 - Nikita has adopted Tomorrow's Voices as her charity for April. Tune in at 10:30am as we talk about Autism, our Centre and how you can support Tomorrow's Voices for Autism Awareness Month.

April 2 - World Autism Awareness Day - Join us and the rest of the world in observing this day dedicated by the United Nations to bring attention to autism, a pervasive disorder that affects tens of millions.

April 6 - Workout for Autism - CrossFitBDA will be holding a free/donation class for non-members where the class fee of \$5 will be donated to Tomorrow's Voices. Get a good workout while raising funds to combat Autism.

April 6 - Tomorrow's Voices Gives Back - We give back to Deloitte staff for supporting us during the Argus Walk the Walk 2013 as the Largest Corporate Team. They enjoy a beautiful walk through Spittal Pond while we support them with refreshments.

April 11 - Ministerial Visit to Tomorrow's Voices - The Minister of Health and the Minister of Education visit Tomorrow's Voices and learn about the services we provide to children between the ages of 2 and 21 and their families.

April 13 & 27 - Saturday Social Skills Group - Come join in as our clients and their typically developing peers participate in their Saturday Social Skills Group. Drop off your child and enjoy a half-day of respite. Volunteer your time and see how you can benefit our children with special abilities and change their lives!

April 19 - "Open House" at Tomorrow's Voices Autism Centre - Visit the Centre and meet our Staff. Find out what we do and why we do it! See how ABA/VB therapy can change lives!

April 24 - Tomorrow's Voices Training Institute - "All About Autism - Everything You Wanted to Know About Autism But Were Afraid To Ask!" - This is a workshop that will give you the ins and outs of Autism. All participants will receive Professional Development Certificates.

April 26 - "Autism Pops" - We will be selling a variety of flavoured popcorn island wide to raise funds for the Centre. Call us today to have your school or company participate in this great fundraiser. Combating Autism one Kernel at a time!

April 27 - "Get Puzzled" Scavenger Hunt Fundraiser - Join the DATs as they host the best Scavenger Hunt ever in the City of Hamilton. Get your team together to seek out clues, learn about Autism, and have a great night of fun!

April 30 - Autism Awareness Month Ends On East Broadway - Join us on East Broadway as we display our Autism Signs and Puzzle Pieces as we remind the community that it may be the end of Autism Awareness Month but it's not the end of Autism.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THE ABOVE EVENTS
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Online Resources for Children with Autism

- Start right here in Bermuda at TomorrowsVoices.bm
- Zacbrowser.com is a free web browser developed specifically for children with autism. Zac also has a social network where parents, caretakers and teachers can share tools, experiences and resources: www.zacsocial.com
- Autismspeaks.org is a clearing house for information and has a great directory of applications.
- Autismgames.org features games and resources

With continued thanks to Erica Smith of Tomorrow's Voices for all she does!

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A 'door opens' for young Kuhn

By Robyn Bardgett

Kuhn Bean has been with Tomorrow's Voices since he was two and a half years old. He is now six and after surgery to remove a cyst on his brain performed at Boston Children's Hospital, he is now making leaps and bounds with the help of the therapists at Tomorrow's Voices.

"Kuhn is developmentally delayed. He had infantile spasms which were caused by a cyst on his brain and has caused the delays," explains his mom Kim Rhoda-Bean, who has seen much improvement since Kuhn's 2012 surgery to remove the cyst. "He has taken right off since his surgery," she explains. "They have been excellent with him at Tomorrow's Voices. They have brought out a lot of him and he has had a connection with all of the therapists. They are all so welcoming and he is currently working with Logan (Phillips) and it's been great."

The developmental delay meant that Kuhn didn't mark milestones as quickly as his peers. He didn't walk until he was 18 and a half months and his vocabulary was limited.

"He's really catching up since



Student Kuhn Bean, 6, with his mum Kim Rhoda-Bean.

the surgery and you can see with the help from Tomorrow's Voices his language skills are really coming out. It has been like a door has opened," Ms Rhoda-Bean says.

Kuhn currently spends three days a week at the Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy in a classroom setting and two days spent with one on one interaction at the Tomorrow's Voices facility.

While it was mostly Kuhn's fine motor skills that were affected by the cyst, his time spent at Tomorrow's Voices has opened up so many new ways for him to learn.

"He's been exposed to so much and it has really helped with his social skills. Back when we were kids and before when children didn't develop typically they were put to the side but it doesn't have to be like that any more," says Ms Rhoda-Bean, adding that Kuhn is a lovable and flirty little boy, who always has a smile on his face.

For his future, Ms Rhoda-Bean hopes Kuhn will one day be independent.

"I hope that eventually he can function on his own - go out and catch the bus by himself and just be able to do things independently."



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Helping kids interact with the community

By Robyn Bardgett

One of the main components of Tomorrow's Voices is to help build appropriate social skills for children with autism.

Every second and fourth Saturday of the month, therapists and volunteers come together to provide a social setting for children who may not have the opportunity to engage with their peers.

"We do events within the community as well and see what might be going on that might be of interest," explains Emma Martin, senior therapist at Tomorrow's Voices.

row's Voices.

"It might be teaching them how to catch the bus or going out to have an ice cream," adds Natasha Pedro-Petty, also a senior therapist at Tomorrow's Voices.

While some days the children might work on completing some of the goals that are set during structured one-on-one therapy at the facility, they also get a chance to interact with people in the community.

"We can work on things like body space, taking care of belongings, sitting appropriately all of which a child can place those skills in a social setting," says Ms Martin.

Time spent on the programme also allows the children to build friendships and also allows parents and caregivers some respite.

"It can be full on with a child with developmental delays and it's often not easy for parents to find child care," says Ms Pedro-Petty.

The team runs the programme along with dedicated volunteers.

Alex King-Ellison, a 16-year-old student studying the International Baccalaureate programme at Bermuda High School, has been volunteering with Tomorrow's Voices for almost two years.

She originally started volunteering to work towards community service hours for her school work but has since stayed on having built relationships with the children she works with.

Ms King-Ellison helps out around the centre and supervises the children when they are on outings.

"The main thing I do is make sure that the kids make an attempt to socialise and have fun," she says.

While Ms King-Ellison is providing a valuable service to the children that utilise the Tomorrow's Voices social skills programme, she feels she has also learned a lot.

"I have definitely learned to be a more patient person," she says. "I have learned a lot more about autism itself and have enjoyed seeing first-hand the positive changes in the kids suffering from autism."



Secrets
Secrets congratulates Tomorrow's Voices on five and a half years of success, teaching and supporting Bermuda's Autistic families. Secrets is proud to support Tomorrow's Voices as its official charity since 2007.

Working hard today for Tomorrow's Voices.

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Raising the voices of tomorrow.

Capital G is proud to support Tomorrow's Voices and applauds all the work they do as Bermuda's Early Intervention Centre for autistic members of our community.

Tomorrow's Voices is designed to meet the individual needs of children who are diagnosed with Autism or on the Autism Spectrum between the ages of 2 and 21 years of age. The overall goal of Tomorrow's Voices is to provide clients with the skills to assist with their reintegration into their neighbourhood schools with minimal supervision and to provide them with a better quality of life through intervention.

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