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## Local Therapist Cracks the Speech and Language Code

By Sophie Braccini



Alexandra Coleman in the Teen meeting room Photo Sophie Braccini

completed my master's degree at San Francisco State University," she says, and then went on to intern at Stanford University Hospital. Afterward, she worked for the San Carlos School District. "I was especially lucky in that district," she says, "but in public schools there are often so many kids needing services and not enough time in the day to see them all individually."

The San Carlos School District sometimes let her see the kids outside of the classroom, at their homes, or let Coleman take them to Starbucks or to Pokémon tournaments. "And that's how I saw that this really works," she explains. "In the office it sometimes feels like we work in a vacuum and kids can appear to master their skills, but they have to confront reality to really measure progress."

Moving outside is often very progressive. "We might first go to the frozen yogurt place or the pet shop and just get familiarized with the surroundings," she describes. Then she and her client will work on a scenario, rehearse it and then go to the store and actually order frozen yogurt. Coleman says that evidence shows this is the best way for skills to generalize outside of the therapy room into everyday life. "I also have come to clients' homes to facilitate a playdate," she adds.

Part of Coleman's office space is dedicated to fostering social interaction between individuals with social communication disorders. She uses one of her rooms for pre-teen and teen Friday night special interest therapy meetings. "We could do an interest club, like playing Minecraft or Nintendo 3DS together, but there would be expectations and an exit ticket; they would have a checklist of certain things to say, do," she describes.

Coleman enjoys working with older children as much as with the little ones and has also worked with adults who need help with social skills and social thinking. "In middle school, high school and beyond you can continue to work on social skills," she says. With adults, she works on resume building, interviews or dating.

She also partnered with Crick Software that develops products for kids who have a learning or

Meeting each client and understanding their unique interests to help them progress is what Alexandra (Alex) Coleman really loves to do at her new speech and language therapy practice, Affinity Speech and Language Services, in Moraga. For example, one of her 3-year-old clients loves guitars, so Coleman has guitars on every page of a booklet she made for the child, and uses guitars to address other elements that this particular child needs to work on.

"I remember a little girl who loved fashion," she says. "That's where we started, with dresses she would create and would have to describe."

Coleman worked in Bay Area public school districts and at a private practice for six years before starting her own practice. She works with clients with autism or Asperger's syndrome, as well as those with articulation difficulties or stuttering, both children and adults, both inside and outside of her office at 356 Rheem Blvd.

"My first love was acting," says Coleman, who studied English and theater in college. "I went to New York, I went to Los Angeles, but decided to reorient my career toward occupational therapy. I

reading disability. "It helps kids organize their thoughts and work on their own," she says, adding that she is not a reading teacher, but can help to organize language.

Coleman continues acting in parallel to her therapist career. In February, she played Harper in the play "Angels in America" at Town Hall Theatre in Lafayette. For more information about Affinity Speech and Language Services, visit [www.affinityspeech.com](http://www.affinityspeech.com).

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