

Business

Local Therapist Cracks the Speech and Language Code

By Sophie Braccini



Alexandra Coleman in the Teen meeting room Photo Sophie Braccini

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 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 mid-

dle 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 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.

Lamorinda Weekly business articles are intended to inform the community about local business activities, not to endorse a particular company, product or service.

business briefs

Farmyard Darlings Expands 20 Lafayette Circle, Lafayette

www.farmyarddarlings.com - (925) 818-1038

Farmyard Darlings recently opened its second store in Lafayette, just in time for the Lafayette Art and Wine Festival on Saturday, Sept. 19. Kim Berry and Carole Sinclair opened their first country chic furniture store at the end of 2010 in the cottage in the back of Mt. Diablo Nursery at 3295 Mt. Diablo Blvd. The two ladies are now taking over the building that was known as The Hen House at 20 Lafayette Circle, between The Cooperage and The Round Up. This historic building was first built on what is now Mt. Diablo Boulevard in 1920 before being moved to Lafayette Circle approximately 20 years later. The most recent business owner was Elizabeth Kirkpatrick who managed an antique and collectible store there for more than 12 years. Berry and Sinclair love collecting and repurposing vintage and farm-related objects and one-of-a-kind treasures. They feel that they are cowgirls at heart; they were both raised with horses and have been collecting and reclaiming antiques gathered in Northern California even before they met. They create custom furniture from old farm pieces that get repurposed. Their merchandise has attracted a growing number of clients, and they needed to expand. They will continue to exhibit their merchandise in the nursery.



Kim Berry and Carole Sinclair in front of their new store on Lafayette Circle. Photo provided

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Marley Cabinetry Opens a Showroom in Orinda

81 Moraga Way, Orinda (925) 260-4198 - www.marleycompany.com

Marley Cabinetry originally from Danville recently opened a new showroom in Orinda. Marley designs custom cabinetry for kitchen and bathroom remodels.

Moraga Produce To Change Ownership

Moraga Produce that has been closed for a few weeks and has now changed owners for the second time in less than six months. Details about the new owners have not yet been confirmed. The store was bought by the Cortez family in 2012, and then by the Soronz family at the beginning of this year. Rumor is that the store will reopen with a higher-end produce mix.

News from the Three Chambers of Commerce Lafayette

Monthly Mixer at Rivulet Chiropractic at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 23 at 3732 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Suite 280.

Save the date for the 23rd Annual Lafayette Reservoir Run from 6:30 to 11 a.m. Sunday, Oct. 25. For more information, visit <http://www.lafayettechamber.org/events/reservoir-run/>.

Moraga

There are no upcoming events scheduled.

Orinda

October Mixer at Land Home Financial Services from 5:30 to 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct 22 at 2 Orinda Theatre Square, #146.

If you have a business brief to share, please contact **Sophie Braccini** at sophie@lamorindaweekly.com



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Meet Jill. Jill Cabeceiras is the client care manager for the East Bay. She has been working with older adults for more than ten years and is an expert on managing care within the home. Let Jill help you and your family!



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