

LONG DISTANCE AUDITORY-VERBAL THERAPY

Using the Internet to Make Services Accessible



When Heather and Mike Best discovered that their 3-year old twin girls, Paige and Mychaela, had severe to profound bilateral hearing loss, they knew that they had to act fast so their daughters did not fall too far behind in their language and communication development. At 3 ½ years old, each received a cochlear implant, and the family began using a combination of sign language and spoken language to communicate. This approach helped, but Heather and Mike knew there might still be a better way.

While attending a special program for families of children with hearing loss at the John Tracy Clinic in Los Angeles, Heather and Mike learned about Auditory-Verbal (A-V) Therapy, a parent-centered approach that focuses on listening as the primary input for learning language and which teaches the child to use sound meaningfully while wearing his or her hearing aid or cochlear implant. They decided that this was the approach they wanted to use to help their daughters learn to listen and speak. But when they got back home to rural northern Wisconsin, they were disappointed to find that the only Certified A-V Therapist in the entire state was nearly six hours away, at CCHD. Unless they moved, weekly visits for therapy would be out of the question.

Then they learned about the Center's Long-Distance A-V Therapy Program, which would make it possible for Paige and Mychaela to begin receiving A-V Therapy in the comfort of their own home via web camera and the internet. The Center launched this program three years ago for families just like the Bests, to ensure that geography was not a barrier to children getting the right services to meet their needs.

Today, "the girls really enjoy their therapy sessions with Amy Lalios [the Center's Certified A-V Therapist], and the long-distance program has worked very well for us," says Heather. "We have been so pleased with their progress and are amazed everyday at how the girls surprise us in their language skills and development. Without this program though, we would not have been able to pursue an Auditory-Verbal approach for them."

Already seven years old, Paige and Mychaela love school, sports and being with their friends. And, because of their parents' dedication and the novel use of technology to deliver services to them from hundreds of miles away, the girls have a very bright future ahead where hearing loss is just another challenge in life to be dealt with head-on and overcome.