

Cognitive training support ... looking at learning disabilities from all angles

BY ELENA TUCKER
Features Writer
elena@boernestar.com

If even the most conservative nationwide statistics are to be believed, almost 400 area children grapple with some form of learning disability.

This article launches a two-part series featuring a young Boerne girl who struggles with a so-called "mild" learning disability. This condition affects not only her school experience, but her home life and her social interactions. As one difficult school year ended, over the course of the summer and a new semester begins, the student and her parents explore the new local option of cognitive training.

The actual names of the child and her parents were not used.

It's hard to imagine a more beautiful and intelligent girl than Andrea - an almost-teen who makes a wonderful impression on everyone who meets her. Andrea is attractive, polite and clearly quite bright. To all appearances, there's absolutely nothing wrong with her.

So why is Andrea's exhausted mom Donna at her wit's end? Why does Ron, Andrea's father, say he's "frustrated and bewildered"? Why is it that Andrea feels she's missing the mark in so many areas?

Although Andrea had never undergone professional assessments, Donna's just about heard it all: from teachers who insisted that she needed Attention Deficit Disorder medication, to therapists who - with equal insistence - maintained that Andrea's merely a "normal little girl." As well, the child's grandparents stubbornly assert that their granddaughter is completely "normal."

For her part, Donna has always believed that something is amiss. Despite Andrea's evident intellectual acumen, Donna says her daughter's performance - in the areas of study and work habits, organizational skills, task completion, and focus - is lamentable. According to Donna, the seeming root of these, and Andrea's most significant challenge by far, is memory retention.

Because such characteristics are hard to measure, and because Andrea exhibits no physical markers, it's not been easy for her pediatrician, her teachers or even her parents to put a finger on the precise nature of Andrea's challenges. This very lack of definition, in turn, creates tension and disagreement among those who care about the young girl.

For example, while Donna



Parents "Donna" and "Rob" listen to the results of their daughter "Andrea's" cognitive testing. Rafael Scarnati of Learning Foundations - a new cognitive therapy facility in Boerne - talks to the parents regarding Andrea's learning challenges.

tends to work hard at understanding her daughter's inner workings, Andrea's dad Ron has always figured that if he just disciplined Andrea enough, he could compel her to do better.

It's not that Andrea isn't trying.

"I do really feel frustrated sometimes because I know I'm smart," the girl said with evident discouragement during May's final weeks of school, "but I just don't get stuff - mostly math. And now in reading class my grades are getting lower too. Other kids get their homework done so quickly and it takes me forever." She shrugged. "But I blame myself 100 percent."

Donna refers to schoolwork as a "daily and constant struggle."

"Homework is a big one, because it takes her so long to do it," Donna said. "She will sit on a problem for hours if I don't help her."

The mother also says that Andrea's needs create imbalance within the household that goes along with one family member needing more attention.

"I have said the same thing to Andrea over and over," Donna confessed, "but she just looks at me like it's the first time she's ever heard the words come out of my mouth."

None of this is made any easier by the fact that Donna says her daughter is "sweet as pie around the house, eager to help and do what we ask."

The parents have turned to Learning Foundations, a new cognitive training facility whose Boerne grand opening was held last April. Learning Foundations' director and owner, Rafael Scarnati, believes that root causes of struggles like Andrea's are far too diverse to be addressed at

school.

"What a dyslexic child needs is very different than what a child with sensory processing needs or a child with ADHD or a child with depression needs," Scarnati said, adding that ADHD may be combined with dyslexia, or that dyslexia may be combined with memory disorders.

There is almost no limit to the manner in which varying cognitive challenges can manifest, even in the same child.

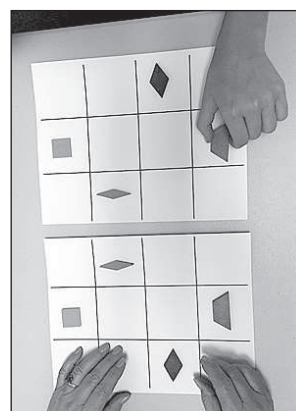
"A lot of different things can be going on and it all needs to be addressed in different ways," Scarnati said.

Determined to find answers, Rob and Donna were both on hand when Andrea underwent several hours of professionally administered tests at the hands of Learning Foundations' co-director, former public school psychologist, Leslie Jernigan.

As the organization's diagnostician, Jernigan explored Andrea's abilities with regard to number sequencing, concept formation, visual-auditory learning and a variety of memory skills. Jernigan's tests are dauntingly entitled "Woodcock-Johnson IV Tests of Cognitive Abilities," and "Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing" while measuring murky concepts such as "elision," "phoneme isolation" and "fluid reasoning clusters."

Such testing doesn't aim to pigeonhole Andrea. "I don't want to come up with a label," Jernigan said. Instead, the diagnostician is interested in how children process things, since, for example, once memory deficits are addressed, their attention is better because they can remember things better. Or they can pay better attention

Star photo by Elena Tucker



Cognitive training involves the many ways to think.

because they're understanding more clearly what the teacher is saying.

Anxious to hear what the tests would reveal, Donna and Rob met with Scarnati two weeks later to get their daughter's results. They were eager and even somewhat nervous.

"I've been counting the days," Donna said.



Take control of your pain.



RALPH MENARD, MD

Take the first step to finding relief. Join us for a free event and discover options including injections, implants and surgery for managing your personal pain.

PLEASE JOIN US

Tuesday, September 29 at 6pm

Complimentary dinner followed by presentation and Q&A with Dr. Menard.

Rainbow Senior Center at Kronkosky Place
17 Old San Antonio Rd / Boerne

RSVP

Go online to hillcountrymemorial.org/events or call 1 (866) 421-4264 to reserve your dinner and event seating.

hillcountrymemorial.org
hcmmedicalgroup.com



HCM HILL COUNTRY MEMORIAL

Language learning at the library

The library is proud to start English as a Second Language (ESL) and Spanish classes again next month with the help of some amazing volunteers.

ESL begins on Wednesday, Oct. 7 and continues through Wednesday, Nov. 18 with two classes per day: one at 10 a.m. taught by Helios Garcia and one at 5:45 p.m. taught by Maria Amberg. Please call the library to register for either class.

Basic Spanish classes will commence on Tuesday, Oct. 6, at 10 a.m., led by Mirza Garcia. This class is a very basic introductory Spanish class and will conclude after six weeks.

We always need language mentoring volunteers to assist students in continuing English and Spanish conversation.

We have about 6 volunteers at this time working with students in either language. It is an excellent way to give back to the community. If you are interested contact Robin or Demitra.

I mentioned our Mango language software last month. Mango provides instruction in 71 languages including 20 in ESL and foreign-language movies.

Even more fun are the 37 specialty courses on topics such as Arab Etiquette, Endangered Languages, Feng Shui, Medical Spanish, Pirate and Cherokee.

You can log in as a guest or create a login to save your courses.

CONFESSIONS OF A BOOKAHOLIC



Kelly Skovbjerg
BOERNE PUBLIC LIBRARY DIRECTOR

To get to Mango when you are not in the library go to our website at www.boernelibrary.org and click on Browse Catalog, sign in with your library card and last name then click on Mango from the list on the left-hand side.

PUBLIC ART

The library is fortunate to have two pieces of public art recently installed as part of Art Al Fresco, Boerne's new public art competition.

One of the pieces called Mango is located in the bioswale area at the front of the library. Mango has amazing glass pieces melded to it.

The other is near the bike rack and called Urban Moai Figure; it's a stainless steel piece that I've heard called knight and Marvin the Martian.

View all of the 10 pieces around Boerne that are part of the competition and then go online to www.artalfresco.org/index.html to vote for your favorite piece.

The piece with the most votes will be purchased for the city's permanent public art collection.

To get information on these and the rest of the temporary and permanent public art pieces now in Boerne, pick up a brochure. There is also

an app called OtoCast that you can download or you can scan the QR codes on any of the plaques on the public art to get to information on the pieces and the artists.

Soon the library will have two pieces of permanent public art donated by the Majestic Ranch Arts Foundation, the group that gave so generously for the construction of the amphitheater.

One of the pieces to be permanently installed near the amphitheater is now temporarily in the library foyer. It is a bench with two children reading on either end. The other piece is Three Musicians by Eric Christianson.

STAYING INFORMED

You can call us at 830-249-3053, or visit our website at www.boernelibrary.org to find out about our services and read our monthly newsletter. Email us at librarian@boernelibrary.org.

Track us down on Facebook, where you can like the library or Boerne Library Children's Corner.

You can learn more about the Library Foundation and the Friends of the Library by "liking" their Facebook pages as well. Follow us on Twitter at twitter.com/BoerneLibrary or pin us at www.pinterest.com/phplibrary. Check out [phplibrary](https://www.instagram.com/phplibrary) on Instagram as well.

To maintain your library account, go to www.boernelibrary.org and click on My Account on the right-hand side of the website.



SATURDAYS
9:00AM-1:00PM

33 Herff Road
Boerne, TX 78006

CIBOLO.ORG

*Fresh Produce

*Local Artisans

*Live Music

*Inspiration Garden

*Jr. Gardener's Club

*Weekly Children's Activities

*Herff Homestead Tours



The Farmers Market at the Cibolo
is Presented By:

