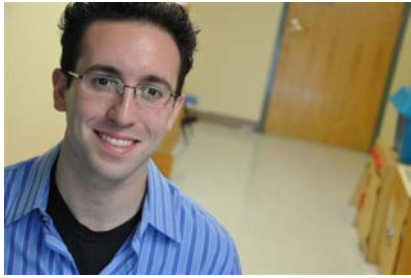


Journalist Credits SLCD with Overcoming Language Disorder



In the summer of 1989 Steve Russolillo, who was three years old, attended The School for Language and Communication Development. Back then, he had just learned to speak, but had trouble getting a complete sentence out without stuttering. As Russolillo tells it, his ability to speak was further affected after his maternal grandfather had suddenly passed away – a period in which he appeared to have developed a stutter. At the time, whenever a relative asked how he felt, it took him at least five minutes to get out the words, “I’m sad.”

Fast forward twenty years later to 2009. Today, Russolillo, a University of Delaware graduate who majored in both history and journalism, makes his living communicating. A business reporter, Russolillo now covers the equities market for the Dow Jones Newswire in Manhattan.

Russolillo credits SLCD with helping him overcome his language disorder. Prior to enrolling, Russolillo attended a local preschool where his mother, Bonnie Russolillo, of Massapequa recalls, “He was not progressing. If all the kids were sitting and listening, he wandered around the room. His teacher had experienced this with her child and told me that I should have Steve evaluated.”

Those who work closely with children understand that there is a period of time during which a child’s vocabulary develops rapidly. Between 24 and 36 months of age, hundreds of words are learned and stored for future reference. What’s more, according to The New York Times, as many as three percent to 10 percent of all children suffer from a language disorder in which a child has difficulty communicating,

Parents who are concerned about their children’s language development should have them tested as early as possible. Today, children with disabilities are most often diagnosed between the ages of birth and 3 years. The sooner a problem is identified, the better the outcome for the child. Otherwise, these children may never receive the kind of specialized instruction, support and modification that they need, and as a result, they often grow frustrated, fall behind academically, and even drop out of school.

Bonnie soon learned that Steve was disfluent – that is, the processing in his brain impaired his ability to express his thoughts. But at SLCD, he worked with teachers who helped him to overcome his obstacles. In fact, in one week his parents saw a discernable difference. “Within three days, he was changing, and responding,” Bonnie Russolillo says. “He became a different child.”

Enrolling in the school was “literally the greatest thing that happened to me,” Steve Russolillo says now. “Basically I was in an environment where I could learn and thrive.”

When he first started in the program, Bonnie came to class with Steve. There, she observed that the entire purpose of every activity during the day was to get the children to speak. Even though Steve attended SLCD many years ago, Bonnie still remembers the school’s nurturing environment. Each classroom had 12 students with two teachers as well as two aides. Instruction was geared toward

constant repetition, which in turn, helped to encourage the children to speak in an environment in which they felt at ease.

“The children sat at a round table and had a discussion about their weekend,” Bonnie recalls. “It was done in a song kind of way. It was so comfortable for the kids.”

Of course, not all of the children did speak, as their disabilities were more severe. Back in 1989, autism was not as accurately diagnosed as it is today. There were many misdiagnoses, and some parents were given dire diagnoses, over which their children were able to prevail, thanks to SLCD’s emphasis on strengthening every student’s language skills.

For Steve Russolillo, the program was extraordinarily beneficial. Because the school runs 12 months a year, Steve attended SLCD right through the academic year and during the course of the following summer. After that, he went on to the neighborhood public school in Massapequa, and was placed in a self-contained Kindergarten class with six other children. Next, he was put into a mainstream first grade class and subsequently a second grade class, though he was pulled out for a portion of the day so that he could receive speech services. By third grade, however, Steve spent the entire day with his peers, without being pulled out for any kind of special instruction. To Steve, this moment was a big win. “I was so thrilled to be in the class and be with my friends,” he says.

Although Steve says he has “no memory “of his classroom experience at SLCD, today he fully recognizes that his time there literally transformed his life – and for the better. He is living proof that early diagnosis and a strong language foundation can help a child succeed both academically, socially and professionally.