

# Business Spotlight

## Communication Innovations:

Serving children with disabilities & their families

by Melissa Wegner

In 2005, Amanda (Houdek) Hoechst, a talented and innovative speech and language pathologist, had a dream that children with various disabilities would have a special place to learn, grow, gain self-esteem and experience life opportunities in ways families had only dreamed about. She recognized the challenges of families who love these children and the obstacles they face going about life while caring for a child with disabilities. Each family that Amanda came into contact with confirmed her ever-growing desire to make Madison, WI the perfect place for her dream to come alive. Thus, Communication Innovations, a private practice pediatric therapy company, was born.

Communication Innovations, also known as CI, is not like any other private practice. It is more than a clinic that families bring their children to for therapy. CI serves about 85 families who travel from a range of 5 miles to 1000 miles. Recently, Amanda was asked to describe what CI is. She said very emphatically, "We are a clinic that has been designed and developed by parents. When a parent identifies an area of need that isn't being addressed, we figure out a way to meet the need." Because of Amanda's love for families who have children with special needs and her understanding of the time, energy and resources it takes to raise a child with special needs, CI has grown to a staff of 19 dedicated therapists who exude the same energy and compassion for families. In 2007, CI moved to its current 6000 square foot location in Fitchburg. This parent-designed space has continued to allow Communication Innovations to be able to serve the community through services focused on "the whole child AND their families" – a mission, turned motto for the center.

CI offers a variety of opportunities for families, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, music therapy, aquatic therapy, life skills, social skills, intensive therapy sessions during the summers, and much more. Just one of many innovative ways CI reaches out to the whole family is by offering Family Resource Nights. These nights are designed for families who have children with special needs to come and enjoy food and fellowship with other families, and to find net-



works of support while visiting with community businesses such as dentists, salons, family resource centers, physicians, financial planners, and other businesses that families who have children with special needs don't know how to access, or don't have the time to do so. CI also recognizes the importance of siblings, so therapists regularly include siblings in therapy sessions, when appropriate, and offers siblings' groups as well.

Walking through the doors of CI, you may think you're in the wrong place. Couches, a television and a Wii are there to greet you. A chalkboard wall full of kid art and toys line the interior, and a kitchen stocked full of healthy snacks for the kids is just around the corner. While it may not seem like your typical waiting room, the whimsical yet professional atmosphere guides you around every corner. Amanda and the CI staff are always looking at ways to not only address therapeutic needs, but also ways to have fun. From Halloween and bowling parties to play groups; from kid written, produced, and performed "musicals" to kid art lining the walls of CI; from partnerships with outside businesses such as SwimWest of Madison to partnerships with non-profit organizations such as the Madison Children's Museum; there is ALWAYS something fun to do or see within and outside of the CI walls. CI strives to make therapy fun for the kids and their families. When working with Amanda and the other therapists at CI, you never know what new or innovative idea will come up next; it may even be yours. After all, that IS what CI is all about. |M•K|

If you'd like more information about Communication Innovations, or if you have any questions or comments, please visit [therapymadison.com](http://therapymadison.com), e-mail [info@communicationinnovations.com](mailto:info@communicationinnovations.com), or call (608) 204-6083.