

Small Town Practice:

The Risks and Benefits of Being an Insider

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Abstract

Providing services to ensure the best child outcomes is a task that all professionals strive to achieve, and being a small town, local provider can have its risk and reward. Working as a Teacher of the Deaf (TOD) or a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) in a small town means that you are the specialist that people look to. Being that specialist, you have to build rapport with parents, as well as strive to be viewed as a professional. Providers and parents answered a variety of questions regarding the benefits and challenges of providing/receiving services, collaboration experiences and lack thereof, as well as boundaries that arise or need to be addressed.

Methodology

SLPs, TODs, and families that have children who receive services from the listed professionals were recruited directly or by other professionals and families to complete a questionnaire regarding the services they provide or receive.

Professional Participants Inclusion Criteria:

- Must be 18+ years old.
- Must provide services in a town with a population of 5000 residents or less.
- Must carry a state license/certification to practice in their area of expertise.

Professional Participant Exclusion Criteria:

- Does not have proper licensure/certification to practice within their field.

Parent/Caregiver Inclusion Criteria:

- Must be a resident of a town with a population of 5000 residents or less.
- Must be a guardian for a child(ren) under the age of 18 that receive services from a Speech Language Pathologist or Teacher of the Deaf either in a school, private practice, or home setting in the town they reside in.

Parent/Caregiver Exclusion Criteria:

- Commute outside of the town they reside in to receive services for their child(ren).

Responses were sent and gathered through an electronic questionnaire using Google Surveys. The questionnaire was completed electronically by the participant and gathered electronically from the participant.

- Data was collected and stored on password protected email on a password protected computer.
- No identifying information was included in presenting of the findings.

Provider Questionnaire

1. Do you practice as a Speech Language Pathologist or Teacher of the Deaf in the town you reside in?
2. Does the town you practice in have 5000 residents or less?
3. Describe the nature of the services you provide (e.g., articulation support, language support, auditory development, etc.)
4. What are the benefits of providing services in a small town?
5. What are the challenges of providing services in a small town?
6. What does collaboration with other professionals look like?
7. Do you set boundaries for yourself, or have them set by your employer, or both?
Examples: social media accounts, seeing them in public, sharing of information, gifts, etc.
8. How do you maintain best practice for child outcomes despite challenges you may be presented with?

Parent/Caregiver Questionnaire

1. Does your child receive services from a Speech Language Pathologist or a Teacher of the Deaf in the town you reside in?
2. Does the town you live in have 5000 residents or less?
3. Describe the nature of the services your child receives (e.g., articulation support, language support, auditory development, etc.)
4. What are the benefits of receiving services in a small, local to you town?
5. What are the challenges of receiving services in a small, local to you town?
6. Do you collaborate with multiple providers? If so, what does this look like?
7. What boundaries do you have or want set in place with your providers, if any?
Examples: social media accounts, seeing them in public, sharing of information, gifts, etc.
8. What do you wish to see more from your providers?

TOD & SLP Feedback

- The nature of services provided are articulation, language, AAC, and home-based therapy for Deaf/Heard of Hearing children and their families.
- Benefits include: relationships built with families, having more control over your schedule, and the “family feel” of working in a small town.
- Challenges include: maintaining a professional relationship with families outside of therapy and the lack of resources available to the providers.
- Professional collaboration proves to be difficult and frequently requires reaching out to professionals in other towns and infrequent meetings with a team.
- Professional boundaries require professional judgement as far as social media and what interactions include outside of the therapy setting.
- These providers maintain best practice for child outcomes by keeping up with research, collaborating with other professionals, and most importantly, reminding themselves why they chose these fields and advocating for their students/families.

Parent/ Caregiver Feedback

- Services received are for speech and language development/therapy.
- Benefits are that children can get services at the school and have therapy during the day.
- Challenges is there are not a lot of options to choose from, so families take what they can get.
- The extent of collaboration for families often just happen via email and the infrequent meetings included in IEPs or IFSPs.
- Boundaries vary person to person. Some caregivers are fine with the sharing of photos and information for provider growth, but still want to be in control of who is seeing the information publicly.
- Caregivers wish to see more collaboration between teachers and providers, so that it feels like one team instead of two.