



## Telemedicine brings therapy into rural homes; Behavior Change Institute began with one child's needs



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***Behavior Technician, Carly Chapa, works with Jordan Griffin of Alamogordo a few years ago. The telemedicine approach to providing services to Jordan led to the founding of the Behavior Change Institute, which now offers Applied Behavior Analysis therapy for children with autism in Chaves County and rural New***

## ***Mexico. (Submitted Photo)***

Behavior Change Institute began with one child.

Four years ago, Jordan Griffin of Alamogordo was diagnosed at the age of 2 with autism, and the closest provider of Applied Behavior Analysis therapy was nearly two hours away, making it nearly impossible for him to access in-home treatment at the clinically indicated intensity.

“He is really the reason why we are in New Mexico, and he is the reason why I developed this model of telemedicine,” said Dr. Joy Pollard, CEO of Clinical Operations for Behavior Change Institute. Pollard is also the president-elect of the New Mexico Association for Behavior Analysis.

Pollard is Jordan’s aunt, and she decided to develop a service delivery model using a hybrid of the traditional telemedicine approach.

At the time, Jordan was exhibiting significant speech delays and prolonged tantrum behavior. Jordan’s behavior was so severe that his day care services were terminated and his mother had to leave her job in order to care for him.

From those beginning efforts to provide services for Jordan, Pollard developed the Behavior Change Institute, which brings board certified therapists and clinicians into the homes of children through the Internet.

Under this model, a local behavior technician was hired, trained, and supervised by a remote behavior analyst, said Pollard on Wednesday.

Jordan began receiving in-home therapy five days per week for two to three hours at a time. Over the course of his two-year treatment term, Jordan achieved marked improvement in language and social skills, which led to a significant reduction in challenging behavior.

Jordan’s parents Alex and Christan report that Jordan is now in the first grade and is 100 percent included in a general education setting, where he receives minimal additional supports or accommodations, Pollard said.

The family refers to the telemedicine model as a “second chance for families,” especially those residing in rural and underserved communities.

“Using this model, provider organizations have successfully reached families in even the most remote locations,” Pollard said.

From this experience, Behavior Change Institute was born just under a year ago, Pollard said. She lives in California, but Behavior Change Institute is based in New Mexico, and offers services to rural and isolated areas of the state such as Chaves County, where access to certified Applied Behavior Analysis therapy was only available in Las Cruces or Albuquerque.

“The last time I checked, there are only 26 board certified ABA therapists throughout New Mexico, although there are probably a few more now,” Pollard said.

Four employees of Behavior Change Institute recently passed their boards, so now there is one board certified person in Chaves County — Kari Hoskins.

“We have seen growing popularity with telemedicine and I think this is where the future is going, especially for families living in rural or geographically isolated areas,” Pollard said.

Prior to the founding of Behavior Change Institute, families living in smaller communities, such as Dexter, Roswell or Alamogordo, traditionally haven’t had treatment options, Pollard said. “Most often, families did without services or they moved.”

The majority of services are actually provided in homes, where children live day-to-day lives, and where the technicians and analysts can make sure skills are applied, Pollard said. BCI also has a partnership with Reins for Life, which has offered office space at their facility for the therapists.

The Institute hires and trains technicians in the rural communities to work with patients. Using a computer tablet, the technician provides the training and therapy while a board certified therapist observes the session in real time via the Internet.

All the information on the patient is also entered into the tablet via a secure network connection that meets government regulatory requirements for the storage of medical records, Pollard said.

The board certified behavior analyst conducts assessment, writes treatment plans and monitors the child's progress in a number of ways, Pollard said. "They can see the child and how they respond to treatment, then provide modifications to the treatment plan as needed," Pollard said. "We also collect extensive data, and it is updated daily."

The technicians may work with families five or six days a week, Pollard said. "In some cases, it may be as few as six hours a week, or in some cases it may be 40 hours a week."

Families in New Mexico are fortunate, Pollard said, in that a 2009 Legislative mandate was passed requiring insurance coverage. The state Medicare plan now also covers services for children up to the age of 21, expanded just this year from the previous cut off which was the age of five.

Pollard said she is proud that Behavior Change Institute is not just helping children, but it also is providing jobs to the communities where BCI provides services.

"We have internships and provide training," she said. "We just had four staff test for their national certification and those four passed their exams and are now board certified behavior analysts. We want to build up that expertise in the state."

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***Grandmother Peggy Pollard, left, and mother Christan Griffin, right, pose with Jordan Griffin, who was diagnosed with autism at the age of 2. Jordan's inaccessibility to therapy inspired his aunt, Dr. Pollard, to create the Behavior Change Institute, which brings Applied Behavior Analyst therapy into the homes of children across southeastern New Mexico. (Submitted Photo)***