

Youngsters open highway to success

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ENCINITAS – Juliette Wallen’s 5-year-old son was having major problems before Brain Highways came into his life.

Wallen said her son spoke incoherently, couldn’t function socially, was rough with family members and had trouble sitting in a chair.

“He just wasn’t connected,” she said.

Two years later, with the help of Nancy Green and the Brain Highways program, Wallen said her son is a well-adjusted first-grader who excels in several subjects.

“He feels like he belongs in his body,” Wallen said. “He doesn’t feel so chaotic anymore.”

“He’s an incredibly bright boy and he didn’t get to show it,” Green said.

Wallen’s story is one of many successes that local parents attribute to Green’s program of brain reorganization through reflexive movement.

“We want kids to understand as much as the parents as to what’s been going on with them, why learning maybe wasn’t as easy and what we’re doing to make it easier,” Green said.

Green believes that improper neuro development overtaxes the frontal cortex with lower-level functions, because the pons and midbrain never developed efficient organization in infancy.

Green said modern baby care devices that restrain children in unnatural positions, potentially curbing natural learning through movement, are one factor in improper development.

Green believes there is a direct relationship between incomplete neurological development and behavior and academic performance.

The remedy prescribed by Brain Highways is a series of movement activities intended to develop neural networks and improve brain processing skills.

Through a nine-week course that meets twice weekly, Green teaches parents and children alike a variety of hands-on activities intended to wake up vestibular and proprioceptive functions of the pons and midbrain.

Green said nearly all of the Brain Highways exercises are simple activities that can be incorporated into daily life using common household or school items.

“We’re trying to show them how to get this back into the daily life, because we used to do this naturally,” she said. “So we’re just finding the balance.”

Green said simple exercises like sitting back-to-back with another child and rocking, pulling a “resistant” parent up from a bench, and popping bubbles while swinging back and forth all help develop underutilized motor neuron connections and free up the frontal cortex for high-level functioning.

“The kinds of things we do in here the kids just love, which we also interpret as their brains intuitively know they need it,” Green said. “It’s like they’ve been starved for this kind of stimuli.

“It’s all through movement, and that’s what we don’t do anymore,” she said.

“If the brain is getting what it needs, you want to learn, you’re happy and you’re cooperative,” Green said.

Ria Henshilwood, who practices the Brain Highways program with her 7-year-old daughter every morning, said their 15 to 20 minute home routine has changed both their lives.

Henshilwood said her daughter used to have problems with behavior, attention, focus and scholastic achievement.

“It was just challenging every single day,” she said.

Henshilwood said their daily dedication to 10 Brain Highways exercises has brought about dramatic changes in her daughter.

“She’s got more self-esteem,” Henshilwood said. “She feels good about herself.”

Terri Bass said the Brain Highways program has helped her 12-year-old son improve in spelling, reading, eye tracking, stress and coping skills.

“I recommend it all the time,” Bass said.

Green’s program is the expansion of a curriculum she has implemented in schools in Encinitas, San Marcos, Carlsbad and Escondido. Green said the program is open to all children aged 3 to 11, provided that their parents enroll too.

Open drop-in times during March are Mondays from 2 to 3 p.m. and 5 to 6 p.m., Tuesdays from 3:30 to 5 p.m. and Wednesdays from 5 to 6 p.m. at the Brain Highways Center, located at 207 S. El Camino Real in Encinitas.

“If you want to go on the Brain Highways ride, we’ll take you along,” Green said.

For information, call 760-943-0496 or visit www.brainhighways.com.