

Career Profile

Becky McArthur, Speech-Language Pathologist

By: Emilie Ruel, Outreach & Support Peer



Becky McArthur graduated from Laurier with a BA Psychology degree in 2013 with the research specialist concentration. In high school, Becky participated in a co-op placement with a speech-language pathologist where she discovered a passion for working with children. After finishing her undergraduate degree, she then continued her education at Western University and obtained a Masters in Speech and Language Pathology.

During her time at Laurier, Becky contemplated going to medical school, however, she ultimately decided that a career in speech-language pathology would offer the opportunity to help others while maintaining a work-life balance. Throughout her time as an undergraduate student at Laurier, Becky volunteered with different practices such as Lear Communication (now known as Sound Expression), and was also involved with clinical placements throughout the two-year duration of her master's program. After her graduation from Western University in 2015, Becky obtained a job as a Speech-Language Pathologist at the private practice Speech Pathways before she transitioned to Let's Talk Guelph, which is also a private practice that provides multi-disciplinary assessments and treatment for adults, preschool, and school-aged children with diverse needs.

As a speech-language pathologist within private practice, Becky states that the majority of her day is spent conducting assessments and therapy with clients, while the rest involves paperwork, responding to emails, and other administrative tasks. In her current position, she sees clients within a clinic located in Guelph, while her previous job entailed home visits for assessment and therapy. As a speech-language pathologist, therapy is provided to a variety of areas - articulation delays, stuttering, children who are late to talk and swallowing disorders, just to name a few. In children with articulation delays, they have yet to learn how to say a certain sound. For example, if a child says 'tup' for 'cup', therapy will focus on learning how to make a 'c' sound. In children who are late to talk, a speech-language pathologist will look at various areas of development tied to language acquisition to get an idea of why a child is late to talk. Once this has been established, a wide variety of techniques can be used to help a child learn to use words. Becky normally sees 25-30 clients a week, and sessions are between 30 minutes to an hour in length.

Becky finds her line of work very rewarding because she can build close connections with clients and their families and she gets to personally see how her clients change and improve over time. Additionally, she states that working in a private practice generally allows for more therapy time than publicly-funded organizations due to restrictions the government places on public services. Some challenges of working within a private practice versus a public agency are

that it can be difficult to connect and collaborate with other professionals working with a client as there is not often the opportunity or time to reach out. Additionally, as with any human service-oriented career, it can be challenging when you are working with a client who is not making progress. Becky states that to be successful in this field, a person needs the ability to be compassionate and able to connect with other people, as well as empathetic with not only the clients, but their families as well. Additionally, since there are so many different clients per week, organizational skills are pertinent.

To become a speech-language pathologist, it is necessary to complete an undergraduate degree as well as a master's degree in Speech-Language Pathology (offered at 7 universities across Canada in English as well as abroad). To be competitive for the graduate degree, it is necessary to obtain relevant volunteer hours, take necessary prerequisite courses (for example some schools require developmental psychology, phonetics, linguistics, a life science, anatomy and/or physiology), and obtain both academic and clinical references.

Becky encourages students to increase their success in this area by aiming for a high GPA in their undergraduate studies as well as continuously connect and network with people in the industry to build contacts and knowledge of the profession. There is additionally the option of becoming a Communicative Disorders Assistant (CDA) which requires a post-secondary diploma or degree, as well as 1-2 additional years in a college program. CDAs apply the assessment and treatment goals set by a speech-language pathologist within their scope of practice in the treatment of communication disorders.

There are a few opportunities for advancement in the field including increases in salary and working in hospitals as a leader of a multi-disciplinary team. Additionally, opening new private practices is also a possibility, which allows for an individual to work clinically as a speech-language pathologist and act as a business owner.

Becky predicts that the speech-language pathology field will begin to more readily incorporate tele-health options, such as using Skype or other programs to effectively reach more clients. Additionally, she states that politics highly affects speech-pathology through funding, so any future changes in legislature may ultimately change how the industry operates. Becky also mentions the Ontario Special Needs Strategy, whose aim is to provide efficient and effective services within the public sphere. She hopes that this will continue to receive funding over the years to help more people get the treatment they need.

The College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario (CASLPO) is a great resource for students interested in the field. Becky also encourages students to reach out to speech-language pathologists in their location and engage in conversations to learn more about the profession.