



By Ruth Villeneuve

Photos by Courtney Simpson

# “Seeing a Brighter Future”

Dr. Bradley Habermehl first encountered the practice of vision therapy as a student at the Illinois College of Optometry, yet it would take several more years before he would expand his practice to include the technique, bringing hope and success to the families of struggling students from every corner of Michigan.

“It was a necessity for me and my family,” recalls Dr. Habermehl. With his wife Cindy and two children just entering school, the doctor was beginning to enjoy the fruits of his many years of advanced education. That’s when he got the call. It was his son Chad’s first grade teacher. “We need to talk to you about Chad, and it’s serious,” she told him.

The resulting parent-teacher conference revealed to Dr. and Mrs. Habermehl that Chad was struggling as a reader. Knowing that his son was very bright, and desperate for

an explanation, Dr. Habermehl examined his son’s eyes more thoroughly and discovered that Chad was suffering from an eye-teaming problem. “It is more than 20/20 sight,” explains Dr. Habermehl. “My son was unable to use his eyes together to move smoothly across a page of text. The extra effort that he was forced to exert caused the words to appear as if they were moving.” Nationally, it is estimated that as many as 25 percent of school age children suffer from similar conditions.

As a father on a mission, Dr. Habermehl made calls across the state of Michigan to find an optometrist who practiced vision therapy. His search led him to two doctors who were covering new ground in the area of vision therapy and its relationship to school success. “Dr. Hohendorf of Grand Rapids and Dr. Fortenbacher of St. Joseph really took me under their wing. In addition, I

read every book and attended every continuing education class that was offered in this area of specialization.”

Soon after becoming certified by the Baltimore Academy for Behavioral Optometry, Dr. Habermehl began to offer vision therapy services in Genesee County. For the past ten years, his patients have included not only children who were simply struggling to make the grade in school, but also those with diagnoses such as ADHD, dyslexia, and Autism Spectrum Disorder. Families travel from all over Michigan, the Midwest, and even Canada to take part in his innovative programs. Dr. Habermehl currently serves as the President-Elect for the College of Optometrists for Vision Development.

As past recipient of the Service Above Self award from Rotary International, Dr. Habermehl takes pride in the services he is able to offer to his hometown. “It has been an amazingly rewarding experience for me and my staff. We see kids who feel defeated due to a lack of success in school. When we explain that their problems are caused by a lack of coordination and can be corrected, they begin to feel a sense of hope for the first time in years.” As for Chad, he passed first grade with flying colors and will begin his first year of college at Michigan State in the fall.

Once diagnosed, vision therapy patients meet one-on-one with the therapist to work on a host of specific eye teaming and eye movement skills. Dr. Habermehl states, “These skills are absolutely necessary for success in school, sports and even driving.” After ocular motor efficiency has been achieved, a certified teacher tests patients to reveal specific reading and math skill gaps. These gaps are addressed with the tutoring portion of the program. School districts are certainly taking note of the dramatic results. In addition to referring specific students, several have asked for and received in-service training on the importance of vision training for academic success.

#### Sensory Learning and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

In order to better meet the needs of his autistic patients, Dr. Habermehl

added the Sensory Learning Program to his practice nearly five years ago. “Sensory Learning is based on a tri-modal approach and was developed by the mother of an autistic child. Mary Bolles, an expert on the effects of ocular light therapy, took three separate interventions that showed success in treating patients with Autism Spectrum Disorder and combined them into one dynamic treatment. This intervention is based on input instead of output and has shown to greatly improve communication skills and reduce repetitive behaviors.” Mary Bolles serves as an associate member of the College of Syntonic Optometry, and is a popular speaker at conferences around the country and in Europe. There are currently 31 Sensory Learning Centers throughout the United States and around the world.

In the Sensory Learning Program, patients experience the sensations of movement, light, and sound in order to improve their sensory receiving abilities. It requires one hour a day for twelve days in office and is followed by another 18 days at home with a portable light box.

As word of the success around this intervention spread, Dr. Habermehl increased his Sensory Learning Rooms from one to three in order to accommodate the influx of new patients. He currently runs sessions from Monday through the following Friday and has a staff of ten full-time employees to assist in running both the Vision Therapy and Sensory Learning programs.

A parent whose son participated in both the Sensory Learning and Vision Therapy programs writes:

“This program has been life-changing for our family. It is a lot of work and dedication, but extremely worth it. Now, in our home, there is a peacefulness knowing that my son feels complete and confident. He loves learning!”

For more information, please visit [www.wecurelearning-problems.com](http://www.wecurelearning-problems.com) or [www.flintsensorylearning.com](http://www.flintsensorylearning.com). The Flint Sensory Learning and Vision Therapy Center is located at 4091 Richfield Rd in Genesee Township. Appointments can be made by calling (810) 736-6673.

