

# CommuniPix Helps Non-Verbal Children Communicate

Stacy Sallinen



Pictured are James and Rori Lockman with their autistic son Zeke, for whom CommuniPix was created for.

As the owners of Working Words and Graphics in Gorham, James and Rori Lockman, also of Gorham, decided to take full advantage of their business resources when their toddler son, Zeke, two-years-old, was diagnosed with Autism at 18-months-old. A family friend suggested using pictures of Zeke's favorite things to help alleviate his frustration with his inability to communicate. They started printing digital pictures onto magnets, and as a result, developed the CommuniPix system, which recently won the Pinnacle Award at the Printing Industry of New England's Award of Excellence Program in the Digital Printing category.

Initially, the magnets were placed on the refrigerator for things that Zeke wanted in the kitchen - a cup, cookie, or other foods. The pictures then expanded to include items such as his toothbrush and toys. As the magnet collection grew, they were placed strategically around the entire house. At first, Zeke learned to communicate what he wanted by pointing to a picture. With the help of his parents and his speech therapist, Janice Boyko of Gorham, Zeke started to sign the word, while pointing to the picture, and then handing the picture to a family member. Utilizing the magnets, he now communicates what he wants or notices (e.g. "Daddy home!" when his dad walks through the door in the evening). For Zeke, the system worked very well and he now has the ability to say many words and sentences.

For the Lockmans, "seeing how well speech therapy and this system have worked for Zeke, there is no reason why any child couldn't benefit from this system," said James. Boyko currently uses the magnets in different ways at her clinic.

She uses them, Bokyo explains, as a "communication system for kids who have limited or no expressive language," which is the case with a few autistic clients she has. She also uses them as a "visual schedule with preschoolers who have a general speech and language delay. It helps the child transition from one activity to another, sometimes preventing a tantrum when a child is asked to end one activity and start another. For kids who have trouble understanding or remembering

directions, it allows the adult to keep speech and directions very simple, because the magnetic picture provides another clue about the directions or what is happening next," said Boyko. The CommuniPix system is also being used by some of the children attending Zeke's school in the Woodfords Family Services Preschool Program.

James and Rori designed the magnets to be easy to remove from the magnetic strip so they could be readily exchanged (handed to a communication partner) for what the child wanted, as well as durable. The magnets have no words printed on them, making them multi-lingual and preventing an autistic child from becoming distracted by the letters of the word.

Under development since fall of '07, the product and website were initially launched in April '08 under the name MagnaTalk, but recently changed to CommuniPix. James felt the name change was necessary to "better reflect how people are using the system; because it's more than just speaking with pictures, it's having a conversation with these pictures." The website, launched in April, coincided with Autism Awareness Month.

One of the Lockman's goals in launching CommuniPix is to get speech therapists and other early intervention therapists "to be thinking of alternative methods to what has been standard behavior for the last 25 years, and to look at new and personalized ways to provide information," said James. For Zeke, pictures of his things were important to him because he recognized them as his own. They also credit early intervention as key to his success, as is the case with any child with a developmental delay.

James has a B.S. in Physics from Yale and has been working in the family business since 1995. Rori has a B.A. in Art, also from Yale. She previously taught art at White Rock and Narragansett Schools, but is now home with Zeke. They have lived in North Gorham for 13 years and have two older children, Arthur, 13, and Teddy, 9, who also take part in utilizing the magnets. FMI about CommuniPix, visit [www.communipix.com](http://www.communipix.com) or call (207) 839-3831.

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