



Bonnyville speech-language pathologist Alaina Gamache works with five-year-old Abigail on some orofacial myofunctional exercises after receiving training on the speciality from an RhPAP-sponsored course. The therapy is used to retrain face, neck and tongue movements, which can have an impact on speech, breathing, chewing and swallowing.

Getting clients to successfully pronounce particular sounds was sometimes a challenge for rural speech-language pathologist Alaina Gamache.

It wasn't until the Bonnyville-based health professional took a course partially funded through [RhPAP's Rural Education and Advanced Learning \(REAL\) Program](#) that she could tackle some stubborn sounds with her clients.

The hybrid online/in-person Orofacial Myofunctional Therapy course expanded her treatment options for clients who previously travelled 3-1/2 hours to Edmonton to seek assistance.

“There were some sounds that I was really having a hard time remediating,” recalled Gamache, who had worked for more than a decade as a speech-language pathologist in both private practice and with Alberta Health Services.

Gamache set out to learn more about orofacial myology, a relatively new concept that studies how the face, neck, mouth and their coordinated movements play a role in how individuals speak, chew, swallow and breathe.

“If some of the muscles aren’t as strong, as developed or coordinated or they’re not resting in the right spot, then it’s going to be harder to get more success with getting the correct sound development,” she explained.

“Orofacial myofunctional therapy does focus on retraining those muscles to be in the correct position at rest, and to function together to have a positive impact on breathing, chewing, swallowing.

“It’s very individualized. It focuses on the correct oral posture having your tongue at the roof of your mouth, teeth slightly apart, breathing through your nose and oral habit elimination like thumb/finger sucking.”

Online courses were available for orofacial myology training, but Gamache felt it was important to take some of the class in-person with like-minded clinicians.

“I thought, ‘If I’m going to be looking in other people’s mouths, I need to start right and know what I’m looking for.’”

After 12 hours of online learning, Gamache travelled to Portland, Oregon, to spend a further 20 hours training in-person.

“The REAL funding was really important in my decision to take this course because it did cover a large portion of the tuition,” she said.

Clients are relieved they can now access the specialized therapy locally thanks to the course expanding Gamache's repertoire.

"I knew that in rural Alberta, especially in northeastern Alberta, there are very few, if any, speech-language pathologists who have any training in orofacial myology," Gamache explained.

"I thought it would be an excellent opportunity to expand my knowledge and my skill set in order to provide this specialized area of assessment and treatment for our local population."

[REAL funding](#) is available through RhPAP to help health professionals including nurses, midwives, nurse practitioners and other allied health professionals access continuing professional development and education opportunities that help enhance the healthcare services they offer in their communities.

Rural clinical nurse educators are now eligible to apply for REAL funding.