Speech-Language Pathologist Passionate About Treating Kids with Brain Trauma

Hometown: Atlanta, GA
Education: M.S. ‘13, Communication Sciences and Disorders, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA
B.S. ‘11, Communication Sciences and Disorders, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL
Job Title: Speech-Language Pathologist
Employer: Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta (CHOA)

“Becoming a speech-language pathologist at CHOA is my dream job. I work with children with brain injuries in in-patient rehab so they can get better before returning to school or home.”

Kristen Ethridge, M.S.‘13

Family experiences sparked my interest in the field
After completing my bachelor’s degree in Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD) at the University of Alabama, I immediately enrolled in Georgia State University's CSD master's degree program. My motivation to pursue a career as a speech-language pathologist was fueled by an interest in special education. Some of my family members have children with special needs and they’d gone through speech and occupational therapy. Based on these experiences, I became interested in speech and how much communication means to all of us, so I decided to go into a field that helped kids and adults with a variety of communication disorders.

Atlanta is an amazing place to be a graduate student
Since Georgia State is in downtown Atlanta, it offered me numerous practicum experiences in healthcare systems, private practices, and outpatient facilities. Towards the end of my last year while interning at a school, I met the head speech therapist of Fulton County and she offered me a job as a clinical fellow at an elementary school. I had to be supervised for 10-15 hours per month, but I was able to perform all the duties of a speech-language pathologist.

Achieving my dream job has been extremely rewarding
Once my clinical fellowship ended after two years, I realized I didn’t want to continue my career in schools because I wanted to have more experiences with newly diagnosed children. Becoming a speech-language pathologist for CHOA is my dream job. Most of the children I work with have brain injuries and are recovering in Inpatient Recovery before returning to school or home, and every child I’ve had an experience with has been rewarding. All the kids come to us functioning on a low level, so being able to train them on how to swallow and communicate with their families and peers is amazing and well worth the degree.