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**Emily
Worth's**
work looks like
child's play

CLIP + SAVE
Judy a la Carte's Handy
Herb and Spice Chart

TATTOOS + PIERCINGS
How much is *too much?*

Emily Worth

Makes Therapy Seem Like Child's Play

Deciding to move back to Omaha to start her own business was a huge step for Emily Worth, but she was convinced she had something special to offer Omaha families.

Her office is indeed unique, with rooms filled with crawling tunnels, swings, and even a ball pit. It wouldn't be unusual to find a child riding a bike through the halls.

At Stones Worth Stepping, Worth uses her occupational therapy degree to help kids with big challenges master everyday tasks. Kids work their muscles and learn to feed themselves, to socialize and even to ride bikes.

"We help with the functional activities of daily life," Worth says.

Much of the time, the kids are unaware they're learning.

"They think they are playing, but they are really working those muscles," Worth says.

"We get a lot of 'Do I have to leave now Mom?'," the therapist says. "They always remember the good things, so it must not be too torturous to try new things."

Part of the fun is the equipment, whether it be the tunnels and swings, computer programs or simple toys. Worth was adamant she wouldn't open her clinic – which took a year to plan and is in its fourth month of operation – without all the new types of equipment she knew would best treat her clients.

Those clients face varied challenges. Worth treats children with developmental delays, autism, sensory integration dysfunction, dyspraxia, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, hypotonia, oral motor dysfunction, fine motor delays, and hyperactivity.

Children who have problems with sensory integration may withdraw from touch or refuse certain types of clothing and food. They may fear climbing, sliding, or walking on uneven surfaces.

Melissa Burns brings her two-year-old son Brayden to see Worth. Brayden has the connective tissue disorder Ehlers-Danlos, in which the joints are unusually flexible and the tissue is fragile.

Brayden also has "tactile" issues, disliking the feel of sand and foam.



Luke and Emily Worth

Worth with client Mark Vanderloo, 7

His pediatrician recommended occupational therapy, and the doctor even used her free time to accompany the boy and his mom to their first therapy visits.

Melissa Burns was sold when Worth got right down on the floor to befriend Brayden.

"That just said it," Burns says. "If you don't get the acceptance of the child, you aren't going to get anywhere."

"Emily was awesome right from the beginning," Burns says.

From the beginning was only four months ago for Worth. She opened the clinic then, but planned for it for much longer.

The Holdrege, Neb. native earned her occupational therapy degree in 2003 from Creighton University. An internship focusing on mental health therapy took her to Maryland. Two internships in pediatric therapy led her to Fullerton, California and Boston, Massachusetts.

The pediatric specialty won her over and she focused on the one-on-one work sessions. She took a full-time therapy job in Boston for two years and enjoyed it, but was frustrated by a lack of some equipment she

felt could help kids reach their full potential.

She knew she wanted to open her own clinic. She also knew who she planned to spend the rest of her life with – her fiancé, Luke Worth, who had moved from Nebraska to Boston to be with her.

The two decided to move back to Nebraska to start their married life and Emily's clinic. It was December 2005.

The next year was all about wedding and business planning. Initially, husband-to-be Luke was tentative about the entrepreneurial part.

"I knew it would be a lot of hard work, time and energy and I wasn't sure if we were prepared for how much of a task it would be to undergo something like this," he says.

"The more we talked about it, the more I saw Emily's drive behind the business idea and that ultimately led to my change of heart."

The therapist knew from her Boston work experience how she wanted to run her clinic. She developed the idea further at a Boston seminar about opening occupational therapy practices.

The seminar confirmed Worth's plans



Worth with client Kayla Lehigh, 10

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and instincts were sound. She tweaked her business plan further and in Omaha, found a commercial realtor.

It didn't work out. Worth wasn't finding suitable properties and the realtor-client relationship wasn't working well.

She found another realtor. Together, they found her clinic space.

Stones Worth Stepping is located just off 90th Street and West Center near the interstate, making it easily accessible from all parts of town. The meandering office complex houses a pediatrician a few doors down and another therapist next door.

Worth was able to order equipment and spread out in 2,300-square-feet of space. She has a gross motor skills room, a strengthening room, a fine motor skills room, and even a room in which to practice dining skills. She designed her waiting room to be a comfortable and welcoming to both kids and their parents. The long hallways of course, are long enough for bike riding.

The therapist began marketing the clinic well before it opened. She met with more than 30 local pediatricians to research what they felt

was lacking in area occupational therapy offerings. She's since received patient referrals.

Even more clients find her via word of mouth and through her visits with autism support groups.

Worth handles her own office management with insurance advice from her husband, who works for Blue Cross Blue Shield. As business grows, she may hire an office manager and additional therapists.

Worth finds balance between work and play by making sure she leaves the office at the office.

"Once I leave work, I'm done for the night," she says.

Her down time includes golf, volleyball, and attending her husband's performances as the guitarist of the classic rock band Losing Lincoln.

Luke is certain Emily's new venture will be a success.

"Emily is a giving, caring, take-action individual," her husband says. "If she believes in something and is passionate about what she is doing, there is no stopping her. She believes she can make an impact in the lives of children and help them reach their goals and – personally – I know she will." 🚀

Occupational Therapy and Autism

Occupational therapy focuses on enhancing the client's performance of daily activities – like eating, dressing and socializing. Autism affects the brain functions that control social behavior and communication skills. When working with autistic clients, therapists:

- Evaluate the child to determine if he or she has accomplished developmentally appropriate grooming and play skills.
- Intervene to help kids respond to sensory information.
- Facilitate play that will aid in communicating with others.
- Devise strategies to handle the transitions which can be difficult for autistic kids – changes in people, settings, and life phases.
- Develop and adapt activities that increase quality of life.

From The American Occupational Therapy Association.