

Optometrist Mixes Faith With Medicine at Delaware Clinic

Dr. Alton A. Williams says children with ADHD are being 'healed' through treatment known as vision therapy

Dr. Alton A. Williams made history in 1974 when he became the first African American optometrist in Delaware. Last year he was recognized as one of the state's 100 most influential African Americans. But these days, Williams doesn't boast about those things.

Instead, the 55-year-old talks about the 4,000 patients who he says have come to Christ in the 12 years since he prayed the sinner's prayer himself, and about the children who he claims have been "healed" of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) after receiving vision therapy at his Newark clinic.

Vision therapy, an eye-focusing technique that Williams first learned about 30 years ago at the Pennsylvania College of Optometry, is designed to improve the brain's ability to control eye alignment, movement, teamwork and focusing ability. Williams said the therapy remained dormant in his practice until 2003, when he says the Holy Spirit impressed him to use it as a tool to reverse the effects of ADHD in youngsters.

"Many children who have the signs and symptoms of [attention deficit disorder] actually have undiagnosed vision problems," said Dr. Stephen Miller, executive director of the College of Optometrists in Vision Development, which offers board certification in vision therapy. "If the vision problem is ... treated, many of these symptoms [go away]."

Williams views the therapy as an alternative to drugs and their harmful side effects. He said he felt the Lord telling him, "Bring the children to Me, and I will use what is in your hand."

Williams claims the therapy works on other conditions, from learning disabilities to bipolarity. "From my perspective, these conditions all have spiritual roots to them," he said. Before he begins treatment he asks parents, "What traumatic event has this child experienced that has caused their life and eyes and every aspect of their being to go out of focus?" He said some children were born addicted to crack, others witnessed their parents' divorce, others experienced abuse.

An ordained minister and pastor of All Nations Christian Center (ANCC) in Wilmington, Del., Williams said a traumatic experience in his own life brought him to Christ in 1992. After 20 years of marriage, his wife, Bonita, suddenly announced that she was leaving him and taking their two sons with her. Williams faced his cozy family, affluent lifestyle and social prestige being blown apart. "All I could see was me sliding into a deep, dark hole," he said.

He said God intervened through his sister's testimony and her badgering him to read Romans 10:9-10. Sitting at his desk, he prayed Romans 10:9. "In the twinkling of an eye I was saved," he said. "I never had that level of peace."

His wife, an attorney, still moved to Virginia and divorced him. But two years later she yielded her life to Jesus. They remarried in February 1995 and have been serving the Lord together ever since.

Williams said the vision-therapy program is based on test results following a rigorous eye examination and an assessment of the patient's needs. He said most suffer from convergence insufficiency, which is the inability to focus on a target at close range.

A typical treatment regimen consists of visual exercises lasting from several weeks to several months. With parental permission, Bible verses are integrated into the exercises. Williams said this is where spiritual healing begins. Many patients receive scholarships to make the therapy affordable.

Mildred Muñoz has four children in the program. "It's helping my boys tremendously," she said, adding that it also helps her stay focused spiritually.

Julianne Lin, an ophthalmologist and associate of Williams', was initially skeptical of the treatment. But she has witnessed the results firsthand and supports him. "The spiritual aspects incorporated into the treatment help the whole family," she said.

Officials from the Christiana school district in New Castle, Del., have expressed interest in vision therapy for the special-education program. "The Lord is going to use this technique to bring His Word back into the schools," Williams said.

Williams is working to increase awareness of the effectiveness of vision therapy in treating learning and reading disorders. He also is raising funds to establish five regional vision-therapy centers through the Vision Plus Foundation (), a subsidiary of ANCC.

Peter K. Johnson in Newark, Del.