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Working with Deaf Individuals with Mental Illness

What's New at NDA

January 2009 was a historical month for the United States of America, and NDA residents and staff had a front row seat to witness President Barack Obama's inauguration. Gathered around the big screen TV during a break from school, NDA residents, therapists, and administration all came together in a moment of pride to see our new President sworn into office.

NDA residents all had the opportunity to learn more about the relevance of this year's election as the Charter School focused on the Martin Luther King Holiday in January. As we moved into February, the Martin Luther King Holiday and Presidential Inauguration provided a great forum for NDA residents to learn more about Black History Month. Valentine's Day was celebrated with residents dressed to impress for a Valentine's Day Dance held by NDA staff. A staff member said, "It was a great opportunity for the residents to have a good time, dance and enjoy the social environment!"

The NDA Deaf Culture Committee held Silent Lunch during the month of March. The Adolescent Boys of the Hoy Group participated in the first Silent Lunch held at NDA. The experience was shared by members of the Clinical team as well as administration. "The event was a great success, an educational experience in cross cultural communication and socializing," said a member of the NDA Administrative Staff.

Hands are moving and homework is being worked on diligently by staff members of all disciplines who are taking part in the weekly ASL courses being offered at NDA. The program has recently been enhanced in an effort to strengthen ASL fluency and communication throughout the campus.

NDA is excited to announce its upcoming conference, **Connections: Culture, Collaboration and Creativity** to be held June 11-12, 2009. Presenters from throughout the United States will come together to present and discuss issues surrounding the specialized and unique needs of Deaf individuals dealing with mental health issues. Workshops include a variety of topics like therapeutic approaches, health literacy, court ordered assessment and treatment for Deaf defendants, Applied Behavior Analysis among others. Featured presentations include: Neil Glickman, PhD, author of the book *Cognitive behavioral therapy for Deaf and hearing persons with language and learning challenge*; Elizabeth Hill, Chairman of the Mental health Subcommittee for the National Association of the Deaf; and Robert Pollard Jr., PhD, Director of the Deaf Wellness Center and Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Rochester School of Medicine in New York. For further information please visit our website at www.nda.com.

NDA will continue to publish updated information in monthly newsletters, please check back often for What's New at NDA!

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Employee of the Month

Renee Carll, Mental Health Tech II

National Deaf Academy's Employee of the Month is Renee Carll. Renee began her career at NDA in November 2000, shortly after we opened the facility. She was hired as a MHT I and several years later was promoted to MHT II. Her leadership and positive attitude earned her promotion to MHT II.

Through the years, Renee has worked with some very challenging residents and believes that team work among the staff is what makes her successful. She loves working with the residents and acting as a positive role model for them. Her peers value her great sense of humor and encouragement during difficult situations.

Renee thinks of herself as a "home body" and prefers staying in the comfort of her home watching TV and using her computer.

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Inner Views: A Resident's Perspective

A male resident was asked the question, "What does Positive Behavioral Support mean to you, and how has it improved your experience at NDA?"

"Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) means that staff at NDA and residents have a

mutual respect and understanding of the environment we are in and work together to make sure we are successful in treatment. For example, if I am having a bad day and staff notices that I am acting out, instead of confronting me in a negative way, they will give support and try to help me work through that moment so that it doesn't turn into something worse. PBS has improved my experience by allowing me to trust the staff at NDA and allow them to help me in my treatment. I prefer seeing staff that are experienced in PBS."

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Ask a Clinician

Q: Are there any current statistics, and/or references in professional and research literature related to effective strategies, interventions, supports and accommodations across environments pertaining to deafness and autism? - Dottie N.

A: Currently there is a very limited research base for individuals diagnosed with the dual disabilities of Deafness and Autism, however, this is a growing area of study. According to a study in 1999 (Rosenthal), Autistic individuals are 10 times more likely to have hearing impairments over the general population. More recently, the Annual Survey of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Youth in 2004-2005 found that one in 106 Deaf children fall on the Autism Spectrum. Here at the National Deaf Academy, 44% of our Deaf students fell within the Autism Spectrum Range (10/2008). These statistics show that there is an increasing need to look at strategies to support individuals that have both Deafness and Autism.

Deafness and Autism are both disorders that affect an individual's communication and social development. When the two disabilities are combined, they become multipliers. Deaf individuals depend on facial expressions and body language for meaning. Autistic individuals have difficulty interpreting these subtleties. One of the characteristics of Autism is an aversion for eye contact, a key component to language comprehension for the Deaf. When both of these disorders are present, the challenges for socialization and communication are extraordinary.

There are a variety of methods that are used for instructing Deaf children and multiple schools of thought for addressing the needs of Autistic individuals. While philosophies may differ, the common factor that all professionals agree on is access to early communication is the key. With children who are both deaf and autistic, a variety of modalities are needed to help them succeed. At the National Deaf Academy, we use pictures, voice, and sign simultaneously in order to give the students the maximum opportunity to acquire language. Like typical autistic individuals, Deaf-Autistic individuals can show echolalic (repetitive) signing and frequently reverse sign structures and pronouns. By pairing signs with pictures, objects, and voice in a high level of structure, they are able to acquire meaningful signs and picture exchange for communication to express needs, wants, and begin to develop social communication with staff.

To support the development of language, a predictable routine that is filled with rich language experiences is necessary. Structure provides the foundation for security, while

also providing opportunities to practice familiar and new words on a daily basis. It gives a concrete way to help the students practice and use language to predict their own routines. As communication develops through predictable routines, we see reduced levels of frustration and behaviors that often accompany the inability to express oneself to others or comprehend everyday activities.

The need for ongoing research and information for this population is continuing to grow. I recently had the privilege of going to the first conference dedicated to learning more about Deaf-Autistic individuals and their needs at the Learning Center in Massachusetts. While there, I had the chance to listen to a panel of parents with Deaf-Autistic children. While they shared their life lessons with the group, there was one need that was voiced multiple times. While they had both good and bad experiences with professionals, school districts, and services, the greatest need was how to bridge learning between the school and home environments. The parents agreed that while the child may be successful in either home or school, they may fall apart in the other area. The desire that was expressed is to have an environment where professionals and parents can learn from each other so that the strategies can cross over, either from home to school, or home from school.

We are now learning more than ever about the unique disability of Deafness and Autism and we still have a ways to go. Structured routines, ongoing access to visual communication, and open communication between professionals and parents are key ingredients to helping this population gain the skills necessary for life.

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Job Postings

Certified Recreation Therapist (CTRS)

Responsibilities include planning, directing and organizing recreational programs, assessments and documentation. Fluent in American Sign Language preferred, however willing to train the right candidate. BA in Therapeutic Recreation or related field & current CTRS required.

Competitive salary and excellent benefit package. Send resume to: Director of Human Resources, National Deaf Academy 19650 US Hwy 441 Mt. Dora, FL 32757

Mental Health Technicians

Individuals holding the MHT position are responsible for implementing and assisting in the daily management of our resident population. MHTs work on an ongoing basis to improve the residents' social, communication and personal hygiene skills. They engage the residents in activities, help implement their treatment programs and maintain a safe living environment while providing close supervision and observation.

This job is often referred to as Psychiatric Assistant, Group Advisor, Dorm Counselor, CAN or Youth Leader. Prefer the candidate to be fluent in American Sign Language, however we will train the right individual.

Working at the National Deaf Academy

National Deaf Academy offers a wide range of deafness and mental health employment opportunities. More than 60 percent of our direct-care staff members are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing. Though we actively seek individuals who are fluent in American Sign Language, many of our current employees have developed fluency both on the job and through classes available on campus. Employees enjoy an excellent benefits package that includes medical, dental, vision and a choice of electives such as short- and long-term disability. We offer a paid-time-off (PTO) plan that is generous and allows for flexibility. In addition, employees can participate in NDA's 401(k) plan and enhance their professional growth through tuition reimbursement. National Deaf Academy also serves as an internship site for therapists, social workers, educators, interpreters and other professional disciplines.

How to Apply

Send resume to:
Director of Human Resources
National Deaf Academy
19650 US Hwy 441
Mt. Dora, FL 32757
Email: btashlein@nda.com
Phone: 352-735-9500
Fax: 352-735-4939

Quote of the Month

"Do not fear the winds of adversity. Remember: A kite rises against the wind rather than with it."

- Author Unknown

If you would like to receive our print publication, the SignPost, please reply to this email and send us your mailing address.

- Residential Mental Health Care for Deaf Children, Adolescents and Adults -

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