New RSA Cohort at COM

Twenty-three new RSA students began their RSA program at the College of Micronesia in Pohnpei in March, 2006. Students are from Pohnpei (9), RMI (7), Kosrae (3), Chuuk (2), and Yap (2). The RSA program will stay at COM for the final two years of the project.

The purpose of keeping the project in Pohnpei is so that COM faculty can feel ownership of the program, and will be able to take over the administration and teaching once federal grant funding ends at the end of 2008. When the current cohort of students graduates in November, the RSA program will have certified 150 people across the Pacific. Another 50 are expected to be certified in 2007 and 2008 for an expected total of 200 RSAs.

RSA Fun Fairs in Pohnpei and Palau This Summer

RSA students in Pohnpei held the first Children’s Fun Fair in Pohnpei on July 8, 2006 at the COM gym. Approximately 20 of the children with disabilities who are participating in this year’s RSA program came to the fun fair with their families. Approximately 125 people attended all together. The RSA students provided delicious food and fun games. Games included a wheelchair race, “Pass the Ball,” “Ball Toss,” a bubble chasing game, and other inclusive activities. All children were weighed so their nutrition assessments could be completed, and all got wonderful prizes. Thanks to the many individuals and organizations that supported this first Fun Fair. We hope there will be many more to come.

RSAs in Palau took the initiative to hold a second Children’s Fun Fair. Approximately 300 people attended the day-long event that was held at the PCC track. Music, games, and activities kept all participants very busy. Thank you to all of the business sponsors, and others in Palau who helped make this fair a success for the second year in a row. And congratulations to the RSAs in Palau for using your RSA skills and energy to benefit the children and the community, yet again!

RSA Website

The RSA website has been updated. Please visit the site at www.rsa.hawaii.edu to find the latest resources and information about the RSA program.

Inside This Issue

1 New RSA Cohort at COM-FSM
1 RSA Fun Fairs in Pohnpei and Palau
2 Picture Gallery 2 Who Are The RSA Faculty?
3 Working with Children Who Are Blind
4 Kalangan 4 Educational Opportunities 2006/2007
Above: RSAs, children, and family members enjoy the arts and crafts at the Pohnpei fun fair. Below: RSAs work together to prepare the food and play games at the PCC track during the Palau fun fair.

Who Are The RSA Faculty?

Kathy Ratcliffe is the Principal Investigator of the RSA Project. She is a physical therapist with a specialty in working with children. She is also an assistant professor in educational psychology and is affiliated with the Center on Disability Studies (CDS) at the University of Hawai‘i (UH). She has been working with the RSA project since 1999. She is seen here with Raynard in Pohnpei.

Mellanie Lee has been involved with the RSA program since its first days in 1994. She is a special educator, and works on a variety of projects for CDS at the UH. She is seen here with Eric from Palau, grandson to Natalia Rekemesis.

Kelly Roberts joined the RSA project in 2006. She is a special educator and has been working with CDS at UH on a number of grant projects. Her specialties are assistive technology and learning disabilities. She is seen here climbing Sokehs mountain.

Christine Hughes is a doctoral student in clinical psychology at Argosy University in Hawai‘i. She volunteered to come to Pohnpei this summer to help with the RSA program. She is interested in Micronesian cultures, and in working with children. She is seen here with Caster in Pohnpei.
Teaching Babies Who Are Blind

Mellanie Lee

One of the most important things you can do when working with blind babies is to get them to move and explore their environment. Movement and exploration help them to understand and make sense of what is around them and where they are in the world. Typical babies learn by seeing, hearing and doing. Since blind babies cannot see, we need to provide them experiences that will help them learn to move and to grow to their fullest potential.

In the area of motor, research has shown that blind babies are behind in pushing up on their arms while in prone position (on their stomachs). They are also behind typically developing babies in their ability to reach across their bodies to the opposite side, such as when they reach for a toy. These are important milestones in development for learning to crawl and sit and walk.

Good activities for babies are to put them in prone position with a rolled up towel propping their chest so they can use they can be encouraged to use their hands flat on the floor, they can pat the floor then be assisted to push up. Talk to them and tell them what they are doing. Move toys to the side so they have to reach across their body, and move their hand to the toy so they learn to explore across their body. When they do push up or reach across midline, tell the child that is what you want to see, “good for you!”

Music, songs and games with hand play are natural activities for babies to participate in and good for developing motor, communication, and learning experiences. Music is good for both listening and moving. It is important to pick meaningful songs that encourage language and growth. For example, Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes teaches about body parts and where they are. The song When You Are Happy And You Know It teaches about using gestures to express emotions. One, Two, Buckle My Shoe teaches about counting and names of objects in the environment. You can use real objects too.

Games like Simon Says teach following directions. The ABC song teaches early academic skills, and if you pair it with learning alphabet signs, the child can also learn fine motor skills.

to the baby and the family what you are doing. You are modeling for the family and also teaching the child.

Whatever activity you choose to teach, make it fun and be creative! So, go for it RSAs and enjoy!

This information was adapted from Wonderbaby.org and blindchildren.org Issues in O&M: Early Intervention, Preschool, Transition to Kindergarten. Reprinted from In Touch, the newsletter of Parents of Blind Children-NJ

Other useful websites are:
http://www.nfb.org/fr/fr14/fr04se13.htm
http://www.ncbi.ie/information/babies_and_toddlers/print_all.php
http://www.blindchildrensfund.org/articles/cortical.asp
http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/talktobaby/listening.html

Above: Alexson, who is deaf and blind, explores Christine’s face at the Pohnpei Fun Fair.

Below: Children and parents enjoy “Passing the Ball” at the Pohnpei Fun Fair
The COM-FSM RSA Third year certificate program got off to a successful start, thanks to the hard work and support of many people we would like to recognize. A big Mahalo to Mr. Benson Moses, Chair of the Department of Education, for numerous hours of overtime, excellent communication and overall coordination in setting the program up. Additional thanks goes to Ms. Senry Eldridge, Administrative Assistant for her quick response to copying requests and availability to the students. More mahalos to President Spensin James, Vice Presidents Ringlen Ringlen & Jean Thoulag and Acting Vice President Karen Simion for continuous support of the program. We don’t want to forget the wonderful job Maintenance did to get the room ready for us too! To the staff at MITC, Joe, Luciano and Carlyene, mega kalahngan for strategically planning VTCs and helping to network with other sites for our Saturday classes. Thank you to Makir Keller, Arthur Albert, Acting National Coordinator and CSPD Data Coordinator for supporting trainees from the jurisdictions and continuous vision and direction. A big thank you to each of the Special Education Coordinators for supporting the program and selecting a wonderful cohort this year. A very special thanks to Pohnpei Special Education Coordinator Emrick Lebehn for supporting us with transportation to Practicum sites and RSA Veteran staff who worked tirelessly in logistics, especially Rensper Liwy. We would also like to acknowledge the students and families who share with us their invaluable knowledge, Kalahngan lapalap to all and the many more who we undoubtedly left out.

“We will surely get to our destination if we join hands.” (Kyi Aung San Suu)

Left: RSA students Carlos and Merihner show their felt boards.

Right: Karsy works with Jolina on a home visit in Pohnpei.

2006/2007 Educational Opportunities

Pacific Rim Conference

The Pacific Rim Conference on Disabilities will be held from March 12 - 14, 2007.

Veteran RSA Program

Mellanie Lee has been working hard with Makir Keller and Arthur Albert to plan a program for Veteran RSA support that will be funded by the national office of special education in FSM. The program will include site visits and workshops for RSAs and others in each of the four FSM states and will run through Sept. 30, 2007. The first state visit was already made to Yap in August.

Transition Training

Mellanie has also been working with Makir on developing a program for transition training for FSM. We’ll let you know when more details become available.

2007 RSA Certification Program

Special Education Coordinators are already planning for the 2007 cohort of RSA students. This training will follow in the footsteps of the 2006 training at COM-FSM in Pohnpei. It is a third year certificate, and requires an AA or AS degree to be admitted. It will be the next to last year of federally funded program. People who want to take the training should be working hard to get your AA or AS degree so that you can enter the RSA training in 2007 or 2008.