New RST Cohort in CNMI

Northern Marianas College and the Public School System in CNMI have been working with the Center on Disability Studies to set up the next RST cohort to begin training in January, 2004. In CNMI, RSAs (Related Services Assistants) have been renamed RSTs (Related Services Technicians) in order to comply with official language in the CNMI administrative rules for physical therapists. These rules have legal language dictating supervision requirements for physical therapists and supportive personnel like RSTs.

Twenty-two new RST students began their training with Kathy Ratliffe from January 5-14, and are continuing via televideo weekly using a Peacesat connection. Contracted physical therapists, occupational therapists and speech-language pathologists in CNMI are also participating in the curriculum both by teaching specific topic areas and through functioning as mentors to the RST students during their practicum activities. The program in CNMI will continue for three semesters, and end in November, 2004.

WELCOME new RST students!

RSA Televideo Conference

Schedule for 2004

Televideo conferences have been scheduled through July, 2004. They are scheduled for Tuesdays in Hawaii and Wednesdays in the Pacific at the following dates and times:

- February 3/4, 2004
- April 20/21 2004
- May 25/26, 2004
- July 20/21, 2004

Hawaii time: 1:30 PM – 4:00 PM
Majuro time: 11:30 AM – 2:00 PM
Pohnpei/Kosrae time: 10:30 AM – 1:00 PM
Chuuk/Yap time: 9:30 AM – 12:00 noon.

New RST students in CNMI include:

Tessa Aguon, Ray Clamor, Nora Fujihira, Terese Hizon, Clare Joab, Chris Joab, Gary Lashley, Linus Mizutani, Dorcia Mullican, Rita Olopai, Winni Paras, Cathleen Peter, Kidean Peter, Chris Romolor, Joe Sablan, Maranda Smith, Margaret Soalablai, Lucille Tenorio, Shirley Terrobias, Del Rubin, and Jerry Diaz.
RSA Mentorship Visit to Pohnpei

Kitty O’Reilly and Kathy Ratliffe traveled to Pohnpei in December, 2003 to provide consultation around children with severe disabilities. They led a workshop for the RSAs, Head Start teachers, and parents on mobility skills using wedges, bolsters and other simple equipment. They also worked with the RSAs on making adaptations for specific children using woodworking and sewing skills. Together they were able to make straps for a stander, a ground-level mobility device (with the help of a welder!), a corner seat, and other devices. The RSAs were left to put the finishing touches on these adaptations and teach the children how to use them.

The Pohnpei RSAs proudly showed Kitty and Kathy some building modifications they made at several rural schools. Not only do RSAs in Pohnpei have sewing and woodworking skills, but they can pour cement also! They have build ramps and extended sidewalks at two schools. One of the schools is the neighborhood school for Taylor, a boy who participated in the RSA training program in 2000. Taylor is now in the first grade. His mother attends school with him daily, and according to his mother, Taylor is keeping up with the academic work in the classroom.

Taylor is in the first grade at his neighborhood school. RSAs extended the sidewalk and built a ramp so Taylor can get to the bathroom.

Pohnpei RSAs proudly stand on a new sidewalk and ramp they built between the classroom and the bathroom at a school in Madolenihmw to support a student who uses a wheelchair.

Maxcipa, Jolden and Rensper come up with activities to do with a child on a wedge during the RSA inservice.

Kitty, Maxson and Maxcipa work to cut foam to size as they build a corner chair.
RSA Mentorship Visit to Kosrae

Kitty O’Reilly and Irene Stetkevich traveled to Kosrae in December for the first site visit of the year to that state. It was Irene’s first visit to Kosrae. Unfortunately Irene caught the flu, but she persevered. Irene led a workshop on hearing and language development for parents with 22 participants. Parents made books and noisy toys for their children. Kitty led a workshop for the RSAs on mobility skills that was incorporated into their home visits with children. They also interviewed both parents and RSAs about the RSA program to compare how the program is doing in each state and to get ideas on how to improve the program on a national and on a state scale.

The Kosrae RSAs kept Kitty and Irene busy during their time on Kosrae. There were opportunities to work with extended team members including the school nurse and the Maternal and Child Health staff. It was clear to the therapists that the RSAs in all states are becoming more efficient about using therapist time on site visits!

Success Stories: Ahlacy in Kosrae

Ahlacy is a 3 1/2 year old boy with cerebral palsy who is also visually impaired. When he was first seen by the RSA mentorship team at a little over one year of age, he was medically fragile with beginning skin breakdown from lying in one position on the floor. He was very small for his age, and was not giving much eye contact or communication.

The Kosrae RSAs feel that Ahlacy is the most improved student that they are following. When seen most recently by the mentorship team of Kitty and Irene, Ahlacy had gained a lot of weight. He had improved head control and could scoot on his back to get around. His grandparents were taking care of him sometimes, and along with other relatives were making sure that he had enough food. The nutritionist from the Land Grant program, one of the interdisciplinary team members following Ahlacy, assisted in improving his diet. With the improved nutrition, Ahlacy’s developmental skills were improving and he was much healthier. The benefits of a collaborative team working with an involved family are clearly seen in this little boy. Good Job Kosrae RSAs and team!

Upcoming Conferences and Workshops for RSAs and RSTs

(The following dates are to the best of our knowledge and may change. Please check with the conference or workshop providers prior to the dates listed to make sure the information is correct.)


March 31 – April 1, 2004. Two-day Post Pac Rim RSA training (www.rsa.hawaii.edu)

Plans for the RSA Summer Institute in the summer of 2004 have been cancelled due to not enough funds this year. We will continue to try to find funds to bring ongoing training to RSAs and RSTs across the Pacific.

Arney gets down with the kids and has fun in Kosrae!

Ahlacy shows his determination!
Teaching Children Who Are Blind

Parents are the experts about their children. Many of these ideas can help all children learn.

1. **Let the child take the lead.** If the child shows interest in an object, person, or activity, use his play to help him learn new skills. Letting him take the lead helps him learn that his choices are important and that he has some control over what happens. But it does not mean that everything is unplanned. You need to think about the skills the child needs to learn, and the kinds of activities and objects that can help him learn these skills.

2. **Adapt activities for the child.** A child can learn a certain skill in many different ways. You can adapt the activities to best suit the child, the family, and the community. As you do activities with the child, you will find ways of doing things that interest her and make her want to do something, and you will learn what upsets her or makes her want to stop. You can adapt activities to make use of materials you already have. For example, if an activity is usually done using a specific toy, you do not need to buy or make that toy. Instead, use whatever is readily available. Also, adapt activities so they fit in with the family’s daily work and activities.

3. **Try activities yourself first.** As you prepare to teach the child, try each activity yourself, thinking about each step. This will help you think of the best way to teach the child.

4. **Work from behind the child.** When you are showing the child how to do a new activity, like feeding or dressing herself, it may be easier for her to understand your movements if you are behind her. Sometimes it works well to put your hands over hers. But be sure to ask her first if it is okay.

5. **Be consistent.** Try to teach a skill in the same way each time, using the same words and steps. You will need to do different kinds of activities because children do not stay interested in one thing for very long. But try not to change the way you talk about and teach each skill. It also helps to begin and end activities with the same words or actions. This way a child will know that the activity is changing.

6. **Allow the child enough time.** A child who has difficulty seeing takes longer to do things, at least at first. He needs time to think about what you have asked him to do and about how he will respond. So be sure to give him enough time to be successful at what he does.
