Missing Our Friend Berna

Berna was a very special person. She made us all laugh with her wonderful sense of humor. She had strong emotions and felt things with all of her heart. She cared deeply about the children and families with whom she worked, and she was excited about being an RSA. She dreamed of continuing her education so that she could do even more for families. Unfortunately, those dreams did not come true for Berna, but she left behind a lot of love for each of us, and that will help us all survive without her.

Berna Mamreng, RSA, graduated from the RSA program in Pohnpei in 2000. She worked as an RSA for the special education department in Yap until last fall when she became ill. At that time she moved back to a school-based position, but was unable to work long. Berna passed away from her illness on March 9, 2003. She died in the hospital surrounded by her family and friends, and she was alert and aware until very close to the end.

Berna left behind her mother, adult children and one young child, Zinzin, who we got to know through Berna’s stories while she was in Pohnpei. Zinzin will continue to live in Yap with her grandmother.

We can remember her through the children.

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The 2003 Pacific Rim Conference on Disabilities

Twelve RSAs from all over the Pacific Basin came to Honolulu this year for the Pacific Rim Conference on Disabilities and the post-conference training for RSAs. Several other friends (hopeful RSAs?) from Palau, RMI, and Yap also attended the conference and the RSA training following.

Who Attended?

RSAs from Kosrae (Florina Esiel), Pohnpei (Maxcipa Harris, Sihter Santos and Maxson Mallarme), Chuuk (Manner Namelo), Yap: Paul Tapang, Henry Yangireitig, and Francesca Tinmad), American Samoa (Ipu Eliapo), CNMI (Elaine Cristostomo, and Erolene Reyes), and RMI (Romeo Harris) all attended the Pacific Rim Conference and the RSA training. Instructors included Kitty O’Reilly, Kathy Ratliffe, Irene Stetkevich, Darcy Nixon and Adrienne Mark.

What Was Taught?

Topics for the RSA Training included Autism, Working with Deaf children, Early Intervention, and Equipment for Postioning and Mobility. All of the participants did a ½ day observation at a site providing related services to children. The sites included two early intervention sites serving children under three years old and their families, and an elementary school site with self-contained classrooms. Comments about the site visits included amazement at the amount of equipment available to the teachers and children for positioning and activities, and the wonderful enthusiasm of the staff in the classrooms. RSAs remarked on the energy levels in the classrooms, no one was idle for even a minute- not the teachers or the children. RSAs were able to meet Lori Yee (used to be Lori Pang) who came to Pohnpei during the fateful cholera epidemic of 2000 to teach our RSA Summer Institute that ended up being cancelled. They also met Vibeke Steenberg, a physical therapist at Jefferson Elementary School. The therapists and teachers were impressed by the RSAs also. They appreciated the opportunity to learn about Micronesian cultures, and commented on how insightful some of the RSAs were on observing and working with the children.

The Yapese participants enjoyed the cool weather, the food, and the beaches in Honolulu.

Flowers on Peleliu

Photo Gallery

The RSAs who attended Pacific Rim Conference of 2003 had a two-day training after the main conference. In this photo we were all gathered outside Kathy’s office at the end of the training.
RSA Summer Institute 2003
Invitation to Participate

The FSM Special Education Office has initiated a contract with the Center on Disability Studies to hold a Related Services Assistant Summer Institute in Pohnpei from June 30 through July 11, 2003. I would like to invite you to send your RSAs and RSTs to attend. Airfare and a modest stipend for living expenses will be supplied for those RSAs from FSM. We will not be using the COM dormitories, RSAs will need to share hotel rooms in order to make their stipend last. RSAs and RSTs from Palau, American Samoa, CNMI and RMI are sincerely invited, but will need to pay their own way or be supported by their own jurisdictions. Please let me know as soon as possible which RSAs will be attending, so that we can help you arrange air travel and have stipend checks available in a timely manner.

The Summer Institute will address topics that the RSAs requested to be included. Topics are: Autism, communication and behavior; Early Intervention, assessment and intervention; and Transition, planning for transition and supporting families. RSAs will learn specific skills and strategies for promoting appropriate behavior and communication skills for children with autism and other social and communication disorders including the Picture Exchange System, Functional Behavior Assessment, and using Social Stories. They will learn how to include parents in developing and using these strategies and how to promote early literacy skills in children with social and communication disorders. They will learn to write transition plans, and how to work effectively with families. They will learn assessment procedures for infants and toddlers, and how to design and implement an intervention with very young children.

I will be teaching the Summer Institute along with a speech-language pathologist who is skilled in working with children with autism and other disabilities. I look forward to seeing the RSAs and working closely with them again. The RSAs in Pohnpei have promised to host us and help everyone find appropriate accommodations. I will be contacting you soon regarding where the training will be held and providing information regarding nearby hotels.

Kathy Ratliffe, 808-956-9502, ratliffe@hawaii.edu

Pacific Basin Interagency Leadership Conference

RSAs from Yap (Francesca Tinmad), and Pohnpei (Jolden Lebehn) participated in the Pacific Basin Interagency Leadership Conference in Palau on March 17-21, 2003.

Besides enjoying the panel discussions, keynote discussions, and other events, Jolden and Francesca assisted Kathy Ratliffe in presenting about the RSA programs across the Pacific Islands in a breakout session. They also participated in other educational sessions including visiting the dolphin facility on one of the outer islands. Children and others with disabilities are assisted to swim with the dolphins to aid in their rehabilitation.

Jason Nolan, PTA, and Roland Tangelbad, PTA, both former students of Kathy Ratliffe at the Kapiolani Community College Physical Therapist Assistant Program, worked tirelessly behind the scenes to make the conference a success. Jason has a successful accessible van service and works for Public Health to support the physical therapy needs of Palauans, and Roland works for special education, supporting students with related services needs from birth to 21 years of age.

A speaker enthralls the audience at the PBILC
Music Therapy

Music has been played for people to help them enjoy life, feel better, learn more, be more social, and communicate better since the beginning of time. Music means everything from beating on a rock with a stick in a rhythmic manner to complicated orchestral productions.

Music is an important part of every culture. From singing in church to listening to the radio to playing instruments with friends, everyone engages in music in some way. Have you ever noticed how people are drawn to rhythm and music? Listen to the rhythms of our daily lives, the waves lapping on the shore, the cars going by, the frog and the bird sounds.

How can we use music as RSAs to help the children we work with? First of all, rhythm is an important concept that helps children develop timing for movement, timing to take turns in communication, and to pay attention. When we use rhythm as part of an activity, it helps the child get used to moving, communicating, and thinking rhythmically.

You can help a child develop rhythm directly by teaching the child a song, teaching a rap song, teaching a pattern of tapping or clapping, encouraging a child to imitate you tapping or clapping, or encouraging the child to explore his or her own rhythms using a drum or a rock.

You can use rhythm indirectly by singing, tapping a stick or a rock, rapping (rap music), tapping your foot, or moving the child in a rhythmic way as you do an activity with the child. Activities where background rhythm is appropriate include swinging, walking, running, dancing, reading, writing, drawing, listening, talking, or rocking.

Make a drum with a child using a coffee can, a paper cup, a bucket, or another hollow tube. Stretch some heavy paper, leather, plastic, rubber (like inner tube material), or animal skin over the opening and secure it with rope, tape, elastic bands, or wire tightly wound. Make another drum of a different shape and size. See how the different drums make different sounds.

Encourage family members to sing, drum, or tap with the child. Make up simple rhythmic chants to go with movements you are trying to teach the child. Examples might be, “Get up, get up, get up, NOW!” Or, “Ready, set, GO!” Or even, “Step one, step two, step three,” or, “I pick my foot up, I put my foot down.”

Use rhythm and music in many of the things you do with children. They will respond to it, and your activities will be more effective and more fun.

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