Continuing Services Through the RSA Mentorship Project

Although the RSA Mentorship Project, funded through the FSM National Government from October 1, 2002 through September 30, 2002, has ended it’s year-long project, we have received permission to continue what services we can with a no-cost extension. We will continue the bimonthly newsletter, the monthly televideo conferences, and continue to update the RSA website at least through February.

Televideo Conferences are scheduled for November and December on the following dates and times:

Hawaii:
Monday, Nov. 25, Dec. 16: 1:30 – 4:30 PM

Marshall Islands:
Tuesday, Nov. 26, Dec. 17: 11:30 – 2:30 PM

Pohnpei and Kosrae:
Tuesday, Nov. 26, Dec. 17: 10:30 – 1:30 PM

Chuuk and Yap:
Tuesday, Nov. 26, Dec. 17: 9:30 – 12:30 PM

Site Visits to Pohnpei, Kosrae, and Chuuk

Kitty O’Reilly and Deborah Van Buren visited Pohnpei and Kosrae in August. Kathy Ratliffe, and Mike Nelson visited Chuuk in August. The purpose of the visits was to consult around children being served by the RSAs and offer training in dressing and other activities of daily living. In Pohnpei and Kosrae, they learned how to build simple adaptations for positioning such as bolsters, wedges, and corner chairs. In Chuuk, additional training was given to homebound teachers in basic principles of working with children with special needs.

RSAs in Pohnpei and Kosrae remarked about the hard work involved in making equipment, and were grateful to have learned the skills they needed to make the equipment on their own once Deborah and Kitty headed back to Hawaii. The RSAs and the therapists went on a discovery shopping expedition in both states to find what was available in stores for positioning. They found laundry baskets to make special chairs, plastic wastebaskets to make standers for children, garden carts for mobility, and inflatable cushions for

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**Making Equipment in Chuuk**

Equipment was made in Chuuk as well. Kathy and Mike made a small pair of crutches for a boy on an outer lagoon island with spastic diplegia who was not able to walk without support. The crutches were made from 1" X 2" wood, and a leather belt that they found in the store for a few dollars. They measured the distance from the boy’s forearm to the ground (the length of the uprights), and then from his hand to the ground (the distance to the grip). Then they cut the wood. A cross piece was put near the top of the triangle as a grip, and the belt was screwed to the top of the uprights to make a cuff.

They also made a swing out of an old car tire for a boy who enjoyed moving, but could not move himself. The tire was cut (see picture to the right) per a design found in Disabled Village Children, then it was turned inside out. The swing was hung on an old swing set, and we had no shortage of children wanting to try it out!

**Site Visits, cont.**

positioning. All of these items could be easily adapted to help children be more included in their home and village life.

RSAs in Pohnpei and Kosrae took good care of the mentorship team. Kitty and Deborah enjoyed the coconuts and swimming on both islands, the lime juice and church in Kosrae, and Nan Madol on Pohnpei.

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**Photo Gallery**

Mike Nelson, COTA, works on building a pair of crutches with the help of staff from the Chuuk Star hotel in Chuuk. We used wood for the crutch, and a leather belt to make the cuffs.

It was not easy to cut this old tire into a swing, but with persistence and a sharp knife, Mike was able to do it. The design is from Disabled Village Children.

This young man agreed to try the crutches for us before we sent them out to another island to the boy for whom they were intended.

Editor’s Note: In an earlier edition of this newsletter, I got Patricia Seumanu’s last name wrong. Sorry Patricia! We appreciate all you do in American Samoa.
Saipan Video Projects
Jim Skouge spent two weeks in Saipan this summer with Kathy Ratliffe, Nancy Robinson (speech pathologist), and Robyn Wong (nutritionist) teaching the RSTs about inclusion and using video to document the projects the RSTs developed around the children they were serving. The RST students were divided up into five teams. Each team developed a project around a child one of their members was serving. The project was an “event,” some “happening” that the RST students planned and made happen. Each “event” was documented by Jim on video and still digital photos, and edited into a final product.

Events included an inclusive basketball game, a Carolinian dance performance, a group picnic, a retold Carolinian legend, and a puppet show.

Parents As Teachers
By Kitty O’Reilly, PT, MPH
Related Service Assistants started as teachers as a result of receiving special training. Did you ever think that parents might be considered teachers too? They may not have had special classes about education, but they teach their children all the time.

Children are with their parents more than anyone else over a lifetime. Parents are the child’s first teachers because babies learn by watching what the parents do and listening to what the parents say. Parents of children with special needs spend even more time with their children because the children may need extra help sometimes.

When parents are aware that they are important teachers, they can take advantage of everyday activities to help their child learn.

When a baby cries and the parent quickly picks her up, the baby learns that she has communicated to the parent. Eventually the baby’s cry will sound different for messages such as “I am hungry”, “Play with me”, “I am tired”, or “I am wet”. When the parent responds appropriately to meet the baby’s need, baby knows she has been understood in her communication. Baby has learned to develop trust that her parent loves and cares for her. As the parent talks to the baby, real words will develop to replace the cries. The parents are teaching the baby to talk.

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Top: Jerome takes the ball! Go all the way Jerome! Bottom: Own, Zachary, and Aida reenact a Carolinian Legend about a mother who dies.

Ricky in American Samoa, learns from his parents.
Parents as Teachers, cont.

When baby eats, he gets the nice feeling of a full stomach, but also learns about taste if Mommy says “Yum, that’s good.” Mommy might also say,” This banana is sweet” or “The lime juice is sour”. Then Mommy is teaching her baby about taste.

When baby takes a bath he feels the soothing water on his skin and gets to know what hot and cold, wet and dry, feel like. When Daddy uses language to describe these feelings, the baby is learning about sensations.

An older child might help the grandfather to pick fruit in the yard. Grandfather can talk about the difference between the green and yellow bananas and which one to choose for eating right now. The child is learning colors and concepts of ripeness of fruit. The child will learn things faster when he is told about the thoughts people are having as they make choices. Grandfather is teaching ways to make decisions.

Children learn some things best by doing it themselves. The parent/teacher at this time needs to allow the child to try activities by him or her self. Examples of practice activities are drinking from a cup, taking pants on and off, eating with fingers or a spoon. The parent needs patience to allow the child extra time to practice and also to allow the feeding and drinking activities to be messy. The parent’s role should be one of encouraging the activity and helping just a little if the child is really having trouble. The parent is teaching independence.

Older children love to imitate (copy) what they see Mommy or Daddy doing: sweeping the house, cutting fruit, weeding a garden or fishing. These are wonderful opportunities to incorporate teaching because the child is very interested in participating. The parent should talk about what he/she is doing, explain the different steps, and allow the child to participate with objects that are safe, such as a dull knife to cut a soft banana, or a fishing line without a hook on it. Children can learn the colors of the flowers in the garden, which vegetable is heavy and which is light, count the slices of fruit they cut, or which fish is larger and which is smaller. Parents are teaching colors and math concepts.

Looking at pictures in books or magazines is another important activity. Parents can describe actions, or tell a story to go with the pictures. Giving attention to books and making them exciting when a child is young, helps her want to learn to read when she goes to school. Parents are fostering a love of reading.

R.S.A.’s can help parents by encouraging them to use everyday activities as teaching experiences. Remind the parents that they are the most important teachers their children will ever have. 😊