



Community Connections

A PUBLICATION OF THE CENTER FOR DISABILITIES

DECEMBER 2023

A University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service

Let's Talk Work

by Jon Wallner, M.S. CESP, Training Associate,
National Core Indicators Specialist

On November 7th, 2023, the 'Let's Talk Work' event was held at the Sanford Research Center in north Sioux Falls, South Dakota. This event was a one-day workshop designed specifically for high school students who have a disability and want to learn more about employment, employment skills, tools and resources to achieve their employment goals. A total of 103 students attended the event that featured mini-sessions on job interview skills, job applications, healthy relationships on the job, employment supports and reasonable accommodations. Students also had the opportunity to engage and interact with 16 community employers representing eight businesses. Let's Talk Work was made possible by a planning committee featuring members of the South Dakota Transition Services Liaison Project, South Dakota Division of Rehabilitation Services, South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation, Employment Disability Resources, and USD Center for Disabilities.

Jon Wallner led five recurring mini-sessions on job interview skills, providing students with helpful tips, common job interview questions and scenarios with role-play demonstrations. •



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at the University of South Dakota
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ADMINISTRATION

Eric Kurtz, Ph.D.
Executive Director

EDITORIAL STAFF

Kendra Gottsleben, B.A.
Editor

Eric Dalseide
Layout and Design

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Kendra Gottsleben
Amy Scepaniak
Jon Wallner

The Center for Disabilities at the USD Sanford School of Medicine is South Dakota's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research and Service (UCEDD). As the South Dakota UCEDD, the Center for Disabilities works with others to create opportunities that enhance the lives of people with disabilities and their families through training, services, information, research, and community education. The Center for Disabilities delivers activities across the lifespan from a community-based, family-centered and culturally-competent perspective.



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH DAKOTA
SANFORD SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Center for Disabilities

1400 West 22nd Street, Sioux Falls, SD 57105
1-800-658-3080 (Voice/TTY) • 605-357-1439
www.usd.edu/cd • cd@usd.edu



Center for Disabilities of SD



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This newsletter is available in alternate format upon request by contacting the Center for Disabilities.

New Team Members

We are excited to announce our three newest team members Chelsie Barnes Schulz, Nikki Eining and Whitney Jones. Please help us welcome them to the Center for Disabilities!



Chelsie Barnes Schulz has joined us as our Birth to Three Intake Associate. She has an associate degree in early childhood education and has worked in both the education and medical fields. Her career thus far has included head start, a preschool teacher and a youth care assistant with underprivileged youth. Chelsie's medical field experience has been in the NICU as a tech and for the past 6 years, she was with a telemedicine company doing credentialing, licensing and privileging for an internal medicine group.

Chelsie has been a foster parent for about 10 years. In her free time, she is a mother to 3 kiddos and loves spending time with her family. They camp, fish, hunt, snowmobile, ride Harleys and love to be outside.



Nikki Eining, MSW, CSW-PIP, QMHP has joined us as the new South Dakota Pediatric Mental Health Care Program Coordinator! In addition, Nikki will serve as a social worker and trainer in various clinical and educational settings within the Center's work.

She most recently served as an Outpatient Clinical Therapist for Avera Medical Group Behavioral Health in Brookings, South Dakota. Nikki brings sixteen years of experience in behavioral health systems, clinical mental health, education, research design, program development and trauma-informed care practices. She also serves on the board of the Center for the Prevention of Child Maltreatment. She has a master's degree in Social Work through the University of North Dakota, and a bachelor's degree in Human Development and Family Studies with minors in Nonprofit Leadership and Management and Spanish through South Dakota State University. Nikki is a licensed social worker through the state of South Dakota with a Private Independent Practice licensure. She is passionate about normalizing mental health, advocating for trauma-informed care, and helping shift our awareness and mindset regarding those who have experienced trauma and our collective ability to support resiliency opportunities.



Whitney Jones, BA, CDC is joining the Center for Disabilities' Oyáte Circle team as the Tribal Outreach Coordinator. He is a member of the Rosebud Sioux and lives in Mission, South Dakota, alongside his family. Whitney's primary focus will be collaborating with our Tribes and Urban Indians.

He brings a wealth of expertise to our organization. Whitney is a distinguished graduate of Sinte Gleska University, holding a Bachelor's degree in counseling with a specialized emphasis in chemical dependency. His dedication to professional development is evident through his participation as a Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) trainee at the Center of Disabilities from 2015 to 2016.

South Dakota DeafBlind Program

by Amy Scepaniak, M.S., TSVI/COMS®/CLVT®, DeafBlind Project Director

The South Dakota DeafBlind Program has begun work on their new five-year grant cycle 2023-2028 which started October 1. One of the most exciting and collaborative efforts happening this grant cycle is being able to work with the Minnesota DeafBlind Project by delivering innovative intervener training to South Dakota.

Minnesota has a long standing history of providing robust intervener trainings for schools. Nationally known and specialty speakers are brought in during a series of six weekends in a school year. South Dakota participants will be joining this training by meeting in-person at the Center for Disabilities and will connect with Minnesota through

the Zoom platform for presentations and to participate in group discussions.

Meeting in-person allows participants to be able to complete the hands-on activities and vision/hearing simulations which are extremely important when gaining an understanding of students with dual sensory needs and their access to the environment. The first weekend was a complete success and we look forward to the next five!!

Those interested in joining can do so at any point in the six weekend series. There are Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. (RID) credits for interpreters and university credit from University of South Dakota is also available.

For more information contact: Amy.Scepaniak@usd.edu, SD DeafBlind Project Director.



What is an Intervener?

An intervener is a trained paraprofessional staff member who works one-on-one with a child who has combined hearing and vision loss (deafblindness) to provide critical connections to other people and the environment. The intervener opens channels of communication between the child and others, provides access to information and the environment, and facilitates opportunities for learning and development.

What is the Importance of an Intervener?

Combined hearing and vision loss creates unique and complex challenges. These challenges are mainly in the areas of communication, concept development, and social and emotional access and development. An intervener responds to these challenges by serving as a bridge to the world for the child who has both hearing and vision loss (deafblindness). •

Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) Leadership Academy

This past summer, Dr. Aimee Deliramich was accepted into the Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) Leadership Academy! She joined participants selected from across the country for a week-long intensive experience, paired with a year of pre- and post-interactions designed to enhance the skills of current and emerging leaders from disability networks, and to build coalitions to improve systems of supports and services. The Leadership Academy engages participants from University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service (UCEDDs), Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LENDs), and the wider community of disability partners to come together to immerse themselves for a week of study, shared experiences, self-evaluation, and skill development. The Academy focuses on the exploration of shared values and commitments to civil and human rights, assessments of personal and leadership strengths, skills in building partnerships to achieve collective impact, and establishing personal and professional leadership goals. This is Dr. Deliramich's personal reflection about her time at the Academy.



From Amy Deliramich:

The beginning of June, before the southern summer heat hit Atlanta, I was invited to join 22 other emerging leaders for a weeklong leadership academy for AUCD. We each traveled from across the United States, some from as far as Alaska and American Samoa. Our days were filled with learning related to topics on power and privilege, storytelling, the civil and human rights movement, and strengths-based leadership. We also were encouraged to reflect on our own leadership challenges, and really consider the type of leaders we are and want to become. There was recognition that leadership has many forms and shapes, and no two leaders are really the same. By better understanding our own strengths we can recognize the strengths of others, and ensure we work to surround ourselves with different types of leaders.

One of the most impactful activities during my week in Atlanta was participating in Leadership Reflection Exercises. During these times, I was provided the opportunity to share my personal leadership challenge and have a small group of allies listen. They then took time to ask me open honest questions; questions that they could not anticipate the answer to, questions that did not demonstrate they could “fix” or “solve” my problem, but rather support me in listening to my inner teacher and apply leadership tools I had been learning. I truly feel I grew in my understanding of leadership by attending this academy and gained a clearer picture related to the different ways I want to lead within my position at Center for Disabilities. I started that week in June with 22 strangers and left with personal and professional connections I hope to maintain for my entire career. •

Dr. Kurtz at the White House

Our Executive Director, Dr. Eric Kurtz, was honored to be invited to the White House last month to attend Communities in Action: Building a Better America, a forum that features elected officials and community leaders working on behalf of their communities to create opportunities and improve people's everyday lives.

All attendees were from South Dakota, North Dakota and Nebraska. The meeting highlighted the investments and impacts in communities across South Dakota, North Dakota and Nebraska. Collaboration fostering was another large part of the day's activities.



It was a proud moment as Dr. Kurtz was able to share the significant impact that we and our partners are making in South Dakota and across the country. He discussed our efforts across health equity initiatives including mental health access, rural health, and the importance of addressing social determinants of health and health disparities for those with disabilities. •

Jim Warne at the Pentagon

Our Jim Warne was the keynote speaker at the 43rd Annual Secretary of Defense Disability Awards Ceremony in October at the Hall of Heroes within the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia.

Jim spoke about his family's Native American heritage on his mother's side and shared memories of his father's life before the Americans Disabilities Act (ADA) went into effect. His father, who had multiple sclerosis for 37 years and used a wheelchair, lost his job with the state of Arizona for having a disability.

He also talked about the importance of leaving behind prints for the next generation, whether that's footprints, wheel prints, cane prints or prosthetic prints. Jim said they all matter for the greater good of society as a whole. •



Under Secretary of Defense Personnel and Readiness, Mr. Ashish S. Vazirani and Jim Warne.

Upcoming Trainings

Stay up-to-date through [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Childhood Mental Health and Diagnoses Course

The purpose of this course is to provide training related to childhood mental health and review evidence-based treatments. Come prepared to challenge some of your notions related to mental health and better understand the impact of mental health on the children you support. This course will be offered virtually to accommodate everyone across the state.

* Three graduate credits pending approval from USD.

Join us Jan. 19 – Mar. 22, 2024

8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. CST

To register, click [here](#).

Educating Autistic Students

This course will introduce both practicing professionals and traditional University of South Dakota (USD) graduate students to the primary areas that must be considered and focused on when planning educational programs for autistic learners. Topics will include core characteristics, impact on education, family collaboration, structured teaching, functional and spontaneous communication, classroom management, social instruction, and strategies for dealing with challenging or problem behaviors.

*One graduate credit pending approval from USD.

This course is only offered online.

Dates and times for this course are:

Jan. 12, at 8 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Feb. 15, at 5 p.m. - 7 p.m.

Mar. 1, at 8 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Apr. 4, 11, 18, 25, at 5 p.m. - 7 p.m.

To register, click [here](#).

2024 South Dakota Special Education Conference

The annual Special Education Conference provides a unique experience to gather with South Dakota educators, related service providers, and parents. This in person event allows participants to learn about evidence-based innovations, educational trends leading towards best practices, and provide practical solutions for special education classrooms.

Early bird registration ends Jan. 11!

Join us Mar. 5 – 6, 2024

7 a.m. – 4 p.m. CST

Sioux Falls Convention Center, Sioux Falls, South Dakota

To register, click [here](#).

Previous Recordings of Dr. Barkley Educational Series

Have you missed some of our amazing Educational Series with Dr. Russell Barkley? Or, have you been able to join but wish others in your work setting or personal life could hear this same great information that Dr. Barkley has been sharing?

Participants are now able to access Series 1, Series 2, and/or Series 3 for the low cost of \$30/series. You can access each series for 12-days, selecting a start date that works best for you!

For more information about the videos in each series, and to register, click [here](#).

Autism Spectrum Education and Resources Training (ASERT)

Autism Spectrum Education and Resources Training (ASERT) is a NEW autism training that will be offered starting in the 2024-2025 school year. ASERT will be six days (three sessions of 2-days each). This will be a virtual training that will provide evidence-based practical strategies for autistic students and their IEP teams. We are currently seeking applicants to participate as mentors for ASERT.

Families and professionals interested in becoming mentors for ASERT should apply anytime through May 1, 2024, [here](#).