

VITALITY REPORT

Experience a World Where All Individuals Flourish as Valued
Members of Their Community



Lloyd VanHooser, Editor



From the Director's Desk

Dear CEC Family and Friends,

Happy New Year! The new year brings much hope and expectation that we will get past the trials and tribulations brought by COVID-19. Despite the interruptions that were characteristic of 2020, CEC staff members were able to create remarkable and powerful experiences for our participants and families, as you will see in the pages that follow. The creativity, resilience, skill and grace demonstrated by staff throughout the past year are the fabric of the CEC experience.

Amazing innovations happen at the CEC each and every day. We are most thankful for your help and support as we chart new opportunities for learning, growth, and understanding. Please join us with renewed commitment as we move forward with conviction to the new possibilities that lie ahead for all of us.

Very best regards,

Mary Lloyd Moore, EdD, CCC-SLP

Executive Director, Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education
Complex

IN THIS ISSUE

*The COVID-19 Edition:
Spring 2021*

**LIFE AT THE CEC
DURING THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC**

A Theme of Perseverance

by Sarah McMaine-Render - Program Manager - Kelly Autism Program

The Fall 2020 Semester has flown by with the theme of perseverance woven through it. This term applies to our students as well as to our tutors, interns, speech clinicians and full-time staff who have helped to guide and navigate our students through this historical semester.

Here at the Circle of Support program, we were able to open our doors to face-to-face programming for our students during the fall semester. Many social opportunities took place as we followed the new guidelines while still allowing our students the ability to connect with one another. LifeWorks at WKU graciously allowed us to occupy their facility for weekly board game nights and an outdoor movie experience. Our counseling services also took place face-to-face with a virtual option if needed. KAP advisors met with students to outline their week, discuss situations as they arose, and communicate with WKU staff. The WKU speech clinic conducted multiple virtual career success and sustainability groups that created a safe space for students to discuss a variety of social learning skills.

In my 15 years of being a part of the Kelly Autism Program, I cannot think of a semester in which I have been more proud of our students and the incredible team who came together in serving them. This semester has truly encompassed one of my favorite quotes, “You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make.” It has been a privilege to witness this first hand and I am grateful for the opportunity to witness such perseverance and determination!



The Family Resource Program

by Shannon Sales, Ed.D. - Director - Family Resource Program

The Family Resource Program (FRP) started its fall semester completely virtually yet continued to provide services that would benefit those at the CEC. FRP has met with new families consistently while remaining connected to the more seasoned families that have been with us over the years. While doing everything online was not our first choice, it certainly helped us to maintain and grow in areas that were not expected and support our families at the same time. Here is one testimonial from a family that has remained committed to FRP and involved in much more.

Parent Testimonial (Hall Family):

"The Family Resource Center has been such a blessing to our family. Both our boys have benefited from the wealth of programs offered like Hanen Training, access to socialization programs like Big Red School, financial workshops, classes on navigating the school system, and behavior therapy workshops. The list goes on! We've met so many amazing families with great kiddos just like ours, too. I can honestly say we'd be lost without them. We're eternally grateful for the things they've done for our boys!"



Behavioral Series:

As we all know, many of our families have been challenged with homeschooling and juggling being parents, teachers, and employees, which is enough to make anyone's head spin. Our behavioral series focused on a sequence of topics to help parents who were learning a new skill in teaching. The transition our FRP families experienced being quarantined while homeschooling was beyond comprehension as parents learned to adjust to new structures and routines.

Renshaw Early Childhood Center Goes Virtual

by Haley Green - Assistant Program Manager - Renshaw Early Childhood Center



The Renshaw Early Childhood Center (RECC) went virtual during the Fall 2020 Semester! RECC teachers provided families with different enrollment options to best meet the needs of their child. Families were able to participate in virtual groups for their child, an interactive daily schedule called “on your own with Big Red School” and one-on-one tele-intervention services.

Virtual groups were offered three times per week and students were able to join as many times as they would like, based on their schedule and availability. Families were given a Zoom link in order to join virtual groups each week. During virtual groups, RECC implemented a daily schedule in order to provide a consistent routine for the children. RECC collaborated with Caroline Hudson and four Honors Augmentation WKU students who are currently pursuing a degree in Communication Disorders. They had the opportunity to lead a story time and activity each week. We also had WKU student observers join via Zoom to obtain field hours and experience in the IECE program and social work program. Each week we focused on the theme “all about trees” while naturally embedding learning opportunities and social engagement for all children.

Families who enrolled in the virtual groups also received a daily schedule each week through an interactive PDF document. Each week RECC teachers linked the stories of the week, songs, activity choice boards, yoga video, caring hearts (small chores around the house), and nature walks at various locations in Bowling Green. Families were able to follow the daily schedule with their child and complete the activities on their own time. This option was offered to provide a school routine at home to help supplement the virtual groups.

One-on-one tele-intervention services were provided for families through the coaching model or one-on-one with the child, based on the needs of the child. When using the coaching model, RECC teachers help provide parents with strategies and supports that help their child throughout their home routines. When using the one-on-one model, RECC teachers worked directly with the child on his/her goals each week. Tele-intervention services were scheduled once or twice per week, depending on the family’s preference. Each week we met with the family via Zoom and worked on their child’s individualized goals established during the family interview. During tele-intervention services, RECC collaborated with WKU students enrolled in the IECE program in order to gain field hours and experience working with young children and their families.



Family Resource Program: Coffee Hours

by Shannon Sales, Ed.D. - Director - Family Resource Program

FRP is known for its quarterly intimate workshops every academic year. The first one we did was an Autism & Anxiety workshop that focused on interventions for all ages to support parents with understanding and learning different strategies to use in helping their children. The objective was to ease our parents' stress levels with having to homeschool and implement new routines as they prepared for the start of a new school year. Michelle Antle, Field Training Coordinator for the Kentucky Autism Training Center, wanted to provide tactics that would help with this unexpected transition.

Next was an Emotion Code Energy Healing workshop. Joy Soleil was the presenter and practitioner, who shared the significance of this practice. We all know that self-care is vital and seems to be one area that many have failed to provide for themselves.

Therefore, FRP wanted to provide a small gift for 15 families with Ms. Joy that included a package of three free sessions per family to experiment and enjoy.

The final workshop for the semester focused on ways to grow wealth in a pandemic.

James Ramsey and Josh Gann, financial advisors, were the presenters for this amazing workshop, and both have an overabundance of expertise in this field of work. They have a strong desire to help families learn new ways to generate and structure financially more toward their future. The main reason for this workshop was to encourage families during a time of uncertainty while providing a beneficial opportunity.



A Great Semester at the Renshaw Early Childhood Center, Virtually Speaking

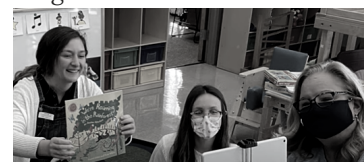
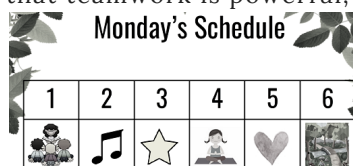
by Beth Schaeffer - Director - Renshaw Early Childhood Center

As with all CEC programs, the onset of the pandemic caused a startle alert: How could we continue to provide high quality services to our youngest students while keeping all safe and healthy? The RECC staff went into overdrive, researching best practice options for virtual learning, surveying child and family needs, considering the accessibility of necessary technology, and providing supports to our families in a world turned upside down.

We worked as a team, via Zoom, to plan and prepare and serve. As a teaching team, we masked up and spent time in our classroom preparing resources and an appropriate venue for early learning. We learned what a challenge it is to be that animated and engaging teacher in an empty classroom, performing for an electronic device. We learned not every child is able to engage virtually, even for a very short period of time. We learned that the needs of families are often dynamically different than those needs pre-pandemic and there was a great need for us to support and assist with daily routines and interactions within the home. We learned that parents were not always confident in their ability to be their child's first and best teacher. We learned that virtual fatigue is real for children, for families and for educators and therapists. Our goal as early interventionists was to understand each family's priorities, resources and concerns and to provide for the uniqueness of each family.

As we reflect with families on the last eight months, families are celebrating the growth of their child, despite the limitations placed on service delivery. Children achieved outcomes beyond measure and parents became much more confident. We celebrate a child who was potty trained, a child who willingly joins the family at the table for meals, a child who independently demonstrates safety skills, a child who is using sound and pictures to express wants and needs, a child who is actively engaged for the duration of the virtual group session, a child who demonstrates success with kindergarten readiness skills, a child who can appropriately identify feelings and respond appropriately and a child who uses descriptive language in full sentences as a part of social conversation.

The early interventionists at the Renshaw Early Intervention Center have the greatest appreciation for the parents of these children. Thank you for sharing your needs, frustrations and dreams. Thank you for singing and dancing with us and for making materials and learning space available for us to learn together, virtually. And most of all, thank you for trusting us with your precious children. We've learned that teamwork is powerful, and together we will make a difference for children and families.



The CEC Spotlight

By: Sarah Conder, MAE - Program Manager - Renshaw Early Childhood Center

“Of all the life skills available to us, communication is perhaps the most empowering.” – Bret Morrison
As working professionals here at the Suzanne Vitale CEC, we strive to have open and continuous communication with the children, young adults, and families we serve. Providing connection is the simplest way we hope to strengthen our communication, which is why the CEC Spotlight was created.



The CEC Spotlight is a monthly newsletter that goes out to all the families who are waiting to be enrolled into a program at the Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex. The letter is delivered via e-mail, as well as Facebook, in hopes of reaching all families. The CEC Spotlight contains events, reminders, and other important information from the CEC which includes the Renshaw Early Childhood Center, Family Resource Program, Kelly Autism Program, and the Communication Disorders Clinic here at Western Kentucky University. The goal behind the CEC Spotlight is to keep families connected while providing multiple opportunities for them to stay engaged with upcoming events and announcements. It is also the goal to help close the gap, so communication is not lost while families wait for their child to be enrolled into a program. The CEC Spotlight opens the door to communication and delivers invitations to all events to remind families that they are accepted, valued, and have unlimited access to continuous support.

The CEC Spotlight officially launched in January 2020, and continues to roll out the beginning of each month.



Kelly Autism Program: Primetime and Adult Services

by Michelle Elkins, Ed.D , CCC-SLP - Director - Kelly Autism Program



KAP Primetime and adult services have been a major component of the Kelly Autism program from inception. Although evolution and change have occurred over the years, no one would have expected that circumstances would require changes as significant as this semester dictated. With the help of the Communications Sciences and Disorders (CSD) clinic, specifically Clinic Director Caroline Hudson, two amazing graduate assistants (GAs), and willing participants, the program transitioned to completely virtual services. We were able to offer five groups in different age categories ranging from our six-seven year-old participants to our adults, led by interns from the CSD department and our own GAs. The groups met once per week via Zoom, focusing on social language skill building and interaction. The lessons were consistent and lively using the technology to the fullest. Those who participated were all extremely positive and the clients commented that it was the “best part of the week” and “I love getting to meet with my friends.” In a time when social interaction can be elusive, we were thrilled to be able to offer this format and facilitate our clients' continuing growth even during the most difficult of times. Although initially it may have been thought virtual services were not ideal, I think we have all learned that we can be productive, learn, and continue to grow in this virtual format.



Family Resource Program: Parent Testimonials

by Shannon Sales, Ed.D. - Director - Family Resource Program



Parent Testimonial (Bullington Family):

"The Family Resource Program virtual events have been a welcomed bit of familiarity and security during these unprecedented times. The behavioral series with Ericka and Bailey was tremendously helpful for my family with all the newfound time to work on behavior at home. I got wonderful personalized advice and instruction. It was a great refresher course, and I had several 'aha' moments as well."

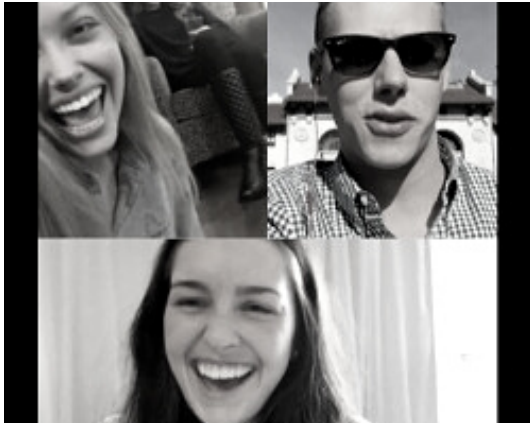
Parent Testimonial (Mallory Family):

"My children and I have been involved with the CEC for six years now, since before preschool, and in that time we, but especially me, have been supported, educated, and loved by everyone in the Family Resource Program. The FRP has been a constant in our lives. Whenever there has been an issue, concern, or a new quirk to explore, the FRP has always been enthusiastic about helping. I know who to turn to when I have a question or am in need. Since the pandemic, quarantine, and classes were canceled for the children, the FRP has stayed in close contact, checking on our wellbeing and whether our needs are being met. This has helped to know we are supported and cared about in our daily life. The FRP has also kept us informed, and the families connected with Zoom meetings and providing recorded presentations of experts and professionals from the Coffee Hours we can no longer enjoy together.

Recently, Shannon Sales, director of FRP, set up a series about Emotion Code Energy Healing and introduced us to Joy Soleil. I have had four sessions with Joy and have plans for two more. I have also decided my children should work with her. Emotion Code Healing is about releasing negative emotions that build up inside us over time like "baggage". These stored negative emotions can cause health problems and physical pain. With all we have endured since March being quarantined, worried about our families' safety, financial concerns, and shortages of all kinds, there is no doubt of built-up negative emotions. This has been a traumatic time for many of us and has undoubtedly been overwhelming for our children. Joy has helped me release current and past negative emotions that have prevented me from having a healthy lifestyle and living my true self. Joy's therapy has a basis in Christian values, and she blends these elements seamlessly with the Emotion Code Healing techniques. I feel lighter, stronger, more capable, and cleansed. I am hoping for a greater sense of peace for myself and my children. Thanks to both the FRP and Joy for their genuine care for my emotional and spiritual health."

The Career Success and Sustainability Program (CSSP)

by Caroline Hudson, MS, CCC-SLP - Director
- Speech Language Pathology Services



Alex, a Tuesday afternoon CSSP participant, said, "I am now more aware of the things I am saying. I believe having competent social skills will be very appealing to an employer. I can't summarize the value of this work."

Lizzy, an intern from the CSD department, said, "It was awesome to be able to help people understand the value of social skills and to see the participants open up and share and grow. It made this clinical experience an awesome experience."

The CSSP program is scheduled to resume in February of 2021.

Being able to form and maintain connections with others can be challenging for many people. The primary focus of the Career Success and Sustainability Program (CSSP) at the Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex is to increase each Circle of Support (COS) participant's pragmatic skills and provide them the tools necessary to build stronger connections. Pragmatics is the use of language in social context that helps us communicate and facilitate social interactions.

The CSSP program helps COS students be career-ready after college graduation by having stronger social language skills. CSSP was designed by Dr. Frank Kersting, and it utilizes ScenicView Academy's Bridges We Build: The Art of Making Friends guide book. The CSSP framework is based on the established skills training paradigm, establishment, transfer, and maintenance. Seventy-six CSSP sessions were offered this Fall 2020 Semester. Student interns from the Communication Sciences and Disorders program led the groups, and each group was supervised by a nationally certified and state licensed speech-language pathologist. Groups met for 30-minute sessions to practice specific communication skills to help participants improve their ability to connect, relate, and socialize with others. There were a total of 10 different social skills lessons highlighted this fall: greetings/introductions, initiating small talk, body language, respecting others' points of view, personal space, showing empathy, reflective listening, use of humor, entering others' conversations, and maintaining and ending conversations.



Communication Disorders Clinic

by Caroline Hudson, MS, CCC-SLP- Director - Speech Language Pathology Services



Those who attend or work at WKU typically feel a sense of excitement at the beginning of each fall semester. Like most everyone on the Hill, the CDC staff truly expected things to be back to “normal” by the start of the Fall 2020 Semester.

However, the coronavirus had other plans, and we had to develop a reinvented normal. On an unexpected note, COVID-19 also prompted the CDC to roll out telepractice services, and we are consistently improving our competency and confidence in this area of practice. In an effort to ensure safety, 75% of our clinical services were provided via telepractice services and 25% through in-person services this fall.

We had to take the painful steps to dramatically reduce the number of clients we served in-person. In addition, we restructured our physical treatment spaces to accommodate for social distancing, and we mandated masks and implemented temperature checks and COVID screenings. The Communication Disorders Clinic’s team of devoted clinical supervisors worked tirelessly to ensure student interns were appropriately trained and presented with clinical learning opportunities to allow them to thrive and grow as student clinicians. Our theme this fall has been the power of staying positive. We will continue to build on this growth mindset attitude. While this pandemic has been frustrating, scary, and disruptive, it has also really stretched our ability and our creativity in how we support and serve clients and educate WKU student clinicians. Therefore, we will continue to persevere, grow, and learn from our failures and successes and, most importantly, continue to be resilient as we look forward with hope to a healthier and happier 2021.



Brinkley Student Employment Fellowship Program

by Molly Swietek - Director of Public Relations - LifeWorks @ WKU



WKU Public Broadcasting's fellowship program continues to provide unique employment opportunities in the areas of public television and radio operations for WKU students with autism spectrum disorder.

During its inaugural year (2019-2020), the program awarded five employment fellowships. Students gained valuable work experience in creating news content for radio, assisting with video productions for television, and supporting the organization through outreach efforts and administrative tasks.

In the spring of 2020, as the University transitioned to remote learning to reduce the spread of COVID-19, the Brinkley Fellows continued their employment by participating in online training tutorials and independent learning. Each student showed tremendous commitment to his or her job by continuing to participate remotely - demonstrating flexibility and responsibility.

As the fall semester began, three of the inaugural Brinkley Fellows returned to work following WKU's Healthy on the Hill guidelines (the remaining two graduated and/or transitioned to other opportunities). The students' cooperation with and adherence to the health safety guidelines demonstrate their commitment to following operational norms and looking out for their fellow co-workers.

Also during the fall semester, WKU Public Broadcasting interviewed and hired two additional students, bringing the total of employed Brinkley Fellows back up to five again.

The fellowship students are also participating in WKU Public Broadcasting's current grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting titled, "Embracing Differences, Finding Strengths: A Public Broadcasting Model for Autism Inclusion."

Each student is providing critical feedback on his or her work experiences through interviews and surveys conducted by faculty evaluators. The feedback will help establish guidance for WKU Public Broadcasting to assist other businesses and organizations in establishing their own autism inclusion hiring programs.



Mental Health Matters

by Peyton Collins, CSW - Mental Health Counselor - Kelly Autism Program



Serving as an assistant program manager for the past four years, Peyton Collins has recently accepted the position of Mental Health Counselor with the Circle of Support (COS) Program.

Peyton recently graduated from WKU with a Master's Degree in Social Work. He also served as a graduate intern with the Suzanne Vitale Clinical Education Complex for two years. During this time, he counseled numerous students who were enrolled in the Circle of Support program. He has a strong passion for working with young adults on the autism spectrum particularly as they pursue independence and emotional growth.

He is also a member of the Special Needs Expo Committee and enjoys advocating for the rights of individuals with disabilities. Peyton is very excited for the opportunity to serve COS students in a therapeutic capacity.

While he will offer individual counseling services to Circle of Support participants, Peyton also hopes to further develop and utilize group therapy as a means for mental health support and socialization. Being socially engaged on campus can be a challenge for many COS students. Therapy conducted in groups can help these students see that others share the same hurdles, as well as give them the opportunity to improve their leadership capabilities by sharing advice or encouragement.

Given the added stress of the pandemic coupled with the natural rigors of pursuing a college degree, Peyton hopes to provide COS students a space to positively develop and grow. He is excited to begin seeing students in 2021!



We are Nothing if not Flexible

by Kim Minton - Assistant Program Manager - Kelly Autism Program



Fall 2020! A challenging yet amazing experience! Like the rest of the WKU campus, the Circle of Support students have been working so hard this semester. Many have experienced their course platforms at a whole new level and have been troopers through it all! Following the procedures of wearing masks and following social distancing has been a successful journey. As well, many have bonded and developed friendships with some of their peers. Overall, they genuinely want to continue thriving socially as well as academically. As for the KAP staff, we were able to make sure this was not depleted from our program. Our students have thrived through these connections and have proven to be essential for their overall well-being.

Even though things are not the same as our previous semesters and do look different, the staff have worked diligently to create multiple social opportunities throughout this semester. We made sure to schedule a smaller number of individuals in each session to comply with social distancing guidelines. We doubled the activities schedule so everyone had multiple opportunities to be involved as little or as much as they want. These socials included a weekly board game night at the LifeWorks building, Friday video game nights, movie nights at the CEC, walks to downtown Bowling Green to Spencer’s Coffee and even an opportunity for dinner at Mellow Mushroom. We also made sure to find some fun ways to celebrate the fall season with some pumpkin paintings and Coke floats! A prevalent saying among the CEC family: “We are nothing, if not flexible.” This semester has been an excellent example of this statement.



STOP THE SPREAD



WASH YOUR HANDS FREQUENTLY

Regularly and thoroughly clean your hands with an alcohol-based hand rub or wash them with soap and water.



MAINTAIN PHYSICAL DISTANCING

Maintain at least 2 meters (6 feet) distance between yourself and anyone who is coughing or sneezing.



AVOID TOUCHING EYES, NOSE AND MOUTH

Hands touch many surfaces and can pick up viruses. Once contaminated, hands can transfer the virus to your eyes, nose or mouth.



IF YOU HAVE A FEVER, COUGH AND DIFFICULTY BREATHING, SEEK MEDICAL CARE EARLY

Stay home if you feel unwell. If you have a fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical attention and call in advance.

Source: World Health Organization

