



Going Full *CIRCLE*

PROJECT CIRCLE—

Creating Innovative, Responsive, and Consistent Learning Environments

—by SESA staff

When SESA Specialist Patricia McDaid, Ed.D. applied for a federal grant more than three years ago, she had one central focus—supporting teachers. McDaid, who has been an autism and positive behavioral intervention and supports specialist with SESA for 7 years, completed the final phase of Project CIRCLE this fall. The goal of Project CIRCLE was to develop a culturally respectful and appropriate training and technical assistance model for Alaskan Native Head Start teachers and combine it with evidenced-based curriculum.

Project CIRCLE was funded by an Innovations grant awarded to SESA by the Federal Office of Head Start in Washington D.C. The intention of the grant was to develop and promote innovative Head Start programming. Project CIRCLE was designed specifically for Head Start programs that were operated by Alaskan Native corporations. “The purpose of the grant was two-fold,” McDaid said, “to increase the use of evidence based positive behavioral support practices in Head Start programs, and to modify evidence-based training materials and classroom materials to be appropriate for use in Alaskan Native villages.”

McDaid used an evidence-based, comprehensive curriculum model, known as the “Pyramid Model” training curriculum from The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL), a national center for resources in early child development located at Vanderbilt University. Next came the task of modifying the CSEFEL curriculum so that it would be culturally appropriate and culturally relevant in rural Alaska. The goal was to accommodate the cultural integrity of Alaskan Native villages while preserving the fidelity of the evidence-based curriculum.

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Village Head Start schools using CIRCLE strategies and materials in the classroom.

To achieve this goal, McDaid used the Kumpfer model (Kumpfer et. al, 2008), which provides a systematic method of cultural adaptation. “It was done in a very systematic way, with the goal of preserving the fidelity of the intervention,” she said. “The research question from my prospective was how do we provide something that is culturally appropriate and relevant without having an impact on the fidelity of the evidenced based practice.”

After the curriculum was developed, McDaid built relationships with four different Alaskan Native corporations and began working with them to deliver Project CIRCLE. Seventeen Alaskan Native Head Start programs from four regional hubs participated in the program. More than two hundred Head Start teachers were trained in several sessions, each lasting two days. Additionally, each Alaskan Native corporation chose five sites to receive subsequent on-site coaching. The results of the training showed improvement in all 17 classrooms, with the vast majority reaching the CSEFEL criteria for fidelity of implementation. In addition to training and coaching, each classroom also received a variety of teaching resources and classroom materials to support the social-emotional development of the children.

“Much of the research literature regarding early childhood education cites a lack of behavioral management training for teachers,” McDaid said. She is certain that if early childhood teachers are better prepared to deal with behavioral challenges in the classroom, over time teachers will see growth in student achievement. “I started to think of all of the kids who could benefit from having a more structured environment and a more systemic approach to their behavior challenges. My thought was maybe we would see an impact on the kids as they get older.”

Alaskan Native corporations provide many programs for their members. One of the community projects they provide is early childhood development programming in areas where services are not available through school districts. In addition, they also administer the Head Start programs in their particular regions. The teachers in

these programs are of Alaskan Native heritage, which provided McDaid a wealth of information regarding adult Alaskan Native learning styles. She said the training process was reciprocal; it was a collaborative and interactive process between the teachers and herself.

“I incorporated adult learning theory to modify the training materials so that they were culturally appropriate to native ways of knowing—based on feedback I got about Alaskan Native adult learning styles,” she said.

The work of Project CIRCLE will be continued with a 5-year grant from the Alaska Department of Education to continue project work in pre-school classrooms operated by school districts across the state.

McDaid was invited to present at The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which included members from the Tribal and Indigenous Early Childhood Network (TIECN). She also presented her work to the Center for Social Emotional Foundations of Early Learning (CSEFEL) National Training Institute where she presented her findings



Training Kowerak staff in Nome.

on the cultural modification of the CSEFEL curriculum. ■

Kumpfer, Pinyuchon, de Meio, & Witeside (2008). Cultural adaptation process for international dissemination of the strengthening families program. *Evaluation and the Health Professions*, Jun 31 (2), 226-239.

Welcome New Staff

WILLIAM BRADSHAW is SESA’s new Program Director and oversees the LID, GAINS, BTKH programs and the SESA Library. William has many years of educational experience in districts throughout Alaska. He has worked as a School Psychologist for Bering Strait School District, Site Administrator and School Psychologist for the Copper River School District, and Teacher, Counselor, Principal, School Psychologist for the Lower Yukon School District. Additionally, he worked as the Director of Special Education and the Assistant Superintendent for Yukon Flats School District. Prior to his career in education, William provided clinical services to children with profound emotional and behavioral needs. In his spare time, William enjoys the nature of Alaska with his wife Pia, who is also his “sunshine.” They especially enjoy fishing and being out on the water.

MARY CALISTI joined SESA last spring as new Executive Assistant. She works with the Executive Director and the SESA Board of Directors. Mary came to SESA with many years of experience as an executive assistant and as an office

manager. Mary moved to Anchorage and with her husband in 1990. She was immediately hired at the University of Alaska, Anchorage Governance Office, followed by a position in the Advising and Counseling Center and remained there for nine years. Mary has also held the positions of Executive Assistant and Office Administrator with the Anchorage Municipality’s Department of Health and Human Services, Providence Alaska Health Systems, and Delta Western, a petroleum products distributor.

Mary has been married for 30 years and has two stepchildren, and three grandchildren. Among her family members is her sister Sharon, who is an adult with autism. Mary said she feels honored to be working for SESA. Although she is not helping her sister directly, she feels a sense of gratitude that her efforts touch the lives of people with disabilities.

PAMELA CAMPBELL started working for SESA in July as a Program Assistant and Travel Coordinator. She earned her undergraduate degree in Biology and has taught physical

science at the high school level. Most recently, she worked at the University of Mississippi, School of Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction assisting the graduate coordinator with all aspects of the advanced degree program. She moved with her husband, who is based (U.S. Army) out of Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson (JBER), to Alaska in May of this year. She loves being a mom and really likes living in Alaska.

KIRA LEVEY is a new PBIS Specialist for SESA. She has worked as an Intererant School Counselor with Bering Strait School District for 3 years, where she served schools in Unalakleet, Shaktoolik, Koyuk, and Wales. She received her undergraduate degree in Sociology and Anthropology from Roger Williams University in Bristol, Rhode Island and in 2008 earned a M.Ed. in School Counseling from the College of St. Joseph in Rutland, Vermont.

Kira developed a love for travel when she was young and went on family excursions to places as varied as Germany, Maine and South Dakota. During college she studied abroad in Florence, Italy. While there, she traveled to Paris, Barcelona, and various other cities throughout Europe. In her 20s, she volunteered at a school in Ciudad Quesada, Costa Rica. She and a few friends also visited Ireland.

When, in 2008, Kira announced that she would be moving to Alaska, it came as no surprise to family and friends. Now, as a PBIS Specialist, she is looking forward to new adventures and is excited to support schools and community efforts in creating and maintaining positive learning environments.

CHANDA LIV joined SESA this summer as the Agency Operations Assistant. She attended the University of Hawaii, Hilo, and will be finishing her degree in Occupational Therapy at the University of Alaska, Anchorage. Among her professional experiences, she has fond memories of working full-time at a nursing home in Hawaii, where she put some of her OT training into good practice.

Chanda was born in Fresno, California, and moved to Anchorage when she was 10 years-old. She stays pretty busy at SESA, but when she has free time, she likes to sleep in, watch movies, fish, swim and hike. In addition, she is planning on snowboarding this winter and biking next summer. She also has a large family, including her dogs, that she enjoys spending time with, "I pretty much enjoy doing most, if not all of the things that an average 'Joe' likes to do," she said.

JENNIFER ROMER is a new PBIS Specialist at SESA. Jennifer was born and raised in Alaska and is Alaskan Native on both sides of her family; of both Yup'ik and Athabaskan descent. Before joining SESA, Jennifer taught high school social studies at Effie Kokrine Early College Charter School, where she also coached basketball and volleyball. Additionally, Jennifer has had experience as a classroom teacher in multiple subject areas and special education case management experience in rural Alaska and inner-city Washington D.C. Jennifer holds a B.A. in History and Political Science from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks and a M.Ed. in Secondary Social Studies with an endorsement in Transition Special Education from George Washington University.

REYNA SIGURDSON is a new Autism Specialist with SESA. She has worked as a preschool teacher, life-skills teacher at the elementary level and as a special education assistant. She received a M.Ed. from Southern Oregon University in 2004 and Master of Special Education, Preparing Autism Specialists for Schools, (Project PASS) from The University of Oregon in 2011. She received her undergraduate degree in English and Writing from Southern Oregon University in 2003.

Reyna was raised in Pelican, Alaska, where her father worked as a crab fisherman, and her mother worked as a special education teacher, librarian, waitress, and bartender. At age eleven, her family moved to Oregon where she stayed until she joined the Peace Corps as a teacher in the Philippines. "I got to do something different every day. I traveled to different SPED centers on my bike, by bus and by tricycle and provided Filipino teachers with trainings – all done by hand on huge yellow sheets of paper," she said. Reyna feels that she has found her ideal career at SESA. One of her favorite mottos: "All paths lead to the same place, so you may as well take the path with heart."

TERRA SWARTZBACKER is a new SESA Program Assistant. Currently, she is a full-time student attending the University of Alaska, Anchorage. She enjoys school and is presently working on her degree pre-requisites for the Dental Hygiene Program.

Terra also enjoys hiking, swimming, and attending car races in the summer. She was born in Palmer, Alaska and raised in Wasilla, where she had many opportunities to enjoy the Alaskan outdoors. Additionally, she has two dogs, that are more like children, and they go with Terra just about everywhere. When asked how she feels about working for SESA. She said, "I love every minute of it!" ■

*"...They teach the younger generations and that generation will teach the next.
Without Elders, nothing would be the same."*

— Whittier Burns from Noatak, *Courtesy of the Alaska Native Heritage Center*

“Dad, Where’s the Plunger?”

—by Richard Holloway

From the Editor of Future Reflections: It is often said that 80 percent of all learning is visual. For a totally blind child, however, 100 percent of learning occurs nonvisually. Given plenty of opportunities for hands-on exploration, a blind child can acquire most of the information about the world that sighted children possess. In this article, Richard Holloway describes how he helped his blind daughter, Kendra, fill in some important information gaps.

“Dad, do we have a plunger?” my daughter asked one afternoon. “Where’s the plunger?”

I was a little concerned. Why would my eight-year-old daughter possibly need a plunger, after all? This just couldn’t be good!

“I want to know what a plunger feels like!” she explained.

Wow! I had done it again. I pride myself on describing the visual world to my blind daughter, but there it was—another little hole in her understanding. Did we have a plunger? Sure. Was I going to let her explore it with her hands? Well, no, that didn’t seem the best plan. You might find ours to be as well-washed as any slightly used plunger anywhere, but I’m not going to put it into a child’s hands for tactile exploration. “I’m sorry,” I said, “we don’t have a plunger that you can touch. It isn’t clean enough. But what if I take you to the store and let you explore a new, clean plunger?”

Kendra was delighted with the idea. That’s how I came to take her on her first Home Depot expedition.

Adventures at Home Depot

There was nothing I needed to buy. This was an outing of exploration, a true quest for knowledge. We made our way to Home Depot’s plumbing aisle. Not only did Kendra get to look at a plunger. She soon learned that there are different styles of plungers, made from different materials, and that they come in various sizes. She was fascinated and full of questions.

After a while we moved on. I had blocked several hours of the day for this outing, just in case. Where should we head next? Toilet seats! There was an entire wall of them only a few feet away. Standard length, elongated, with lids, without lids, plastic, wooden, hard, padded, even some with a cutout in front—which prompted another whole discussion! The greatest fascination for my daughter was why the seats were arranged vertically on the wall that way. I began to realize how much information she was missing, information that most kids pick

up without any special effort on anyone’s part.

What about whole toilets? We have never encouraged Kendra to explore toilets with her hands, but brand-new ones are as clean as anything else in a store. We checked out the toilets, then moved on to tubs and showers. Next we found sinks for both the bathroom and the kitchen.

Before long, we had examined all the plumbing supplies we could find. We began to roam the store’s other aisles. Appliances, Carpet and Flooring, Lumber, Fencing, Landscape. Kendra hates the noise of lawnmowers and other loud machines. In the store she understood that they were turned off and would make no frightening sounds, so she explored them freely.

Kendra seemed to enjoy hardware a lot, too. She was fascinated to learn how small and how large nuts and bolts can be. Tools were also fun. The many shapes and sizes of hand tools and power tools were quite new to her.

Shoes, Balls, Motors

The Home Depot outing left me exhausted. It involved several hours of intense describing and explaining, but the effort was well worthwhile. Not long after that Kendra had a question about shoes for sports. The concept of cleats seemed bizarre to her. We headed to Sports Authority and went straight to the shoe racks. I showed her baseball cleats, soccer cleats, football cleats, turf shoes, golf shoes, and any other unusual shoes I could find. I also let her explore more conventional tennis shoes so she could compare them to basketball shoes and running shoes.

Many questions followed, and ideas started popping into my head. Did Kendra have any idea that a baseball glove is a giant oversized thing nothing like the gloves she’d seen before? Did she know that there are different kinds of gloves for baseball and softball? Had she ever heard of a catcher’s mitt? Did she know what a wooden bat was like compared to an aluminum bat?

We explored baseballs, softballs, and footballs. Kendra was surprised to learn that some balls aren’t even round! She wondered why some balls have laces or seams. How many



kinds of balls were there? We found tennis balls, soccer balls, golf balls, and bowling balls. We compared inline skates with roller skates. We noticed that skateboard wheels felt a lot like skate wheels. We compared different kinds of life preservers and various wet suits. We found the weights department and felt weights from one pound up to twenty pounds or more, one pound at a time. We compared the shapes of the weights and how hard they were to lift. We examined barbells, dumbbells, ankle weights, and free weights. Who knew there were so many kinds of weights to choose from? I could sense the wheels turning in Kendra's mind. Pieces were coming together for her about a lot of things.

Since then, we've made trips to a lot of different stores. Bass Pro Shops was especially interesting, with row after row of boating and camping supplies. In the boating area Kendra learned what an anchor is like. She discovered that anchors come in assorted designs and sizes. Outboard motors, too, come in a wide range of sizes. We examined little electric motors and gas engines from two horsepower up to 350. My five-year-old son could just about lift the smallest engines, but the big ones are over seven feet tall and weigh over 800 pounds. Fortunately, the store had a rack with at least a dozen engines of various sizes for Kendra to touch and compare. I took her to the back of a boat with a 350-HP engine. She studied it from the ground up. It was taller than she could reach, so I lifted her on my shoulders until she could touch the very top.

We've searched the auto parts store for all things automotive. We've compared many wheels and tires at a tire store. They come in lots of sizes, but the different tread patterns on tires seem to be the most interesting feature. We've explored all sorts of electronics at stores such as Best Buy and Fry's, though feeling the internal parts of an old junk computer at home seemed to be more interesting than exploring new machines on display.

It may be easier and faster to get through the supermarket if we don't discuss every item on each shelf. However, when time allows, grocery shopping certainly can be a fascinating opportunity. We've found a lot to explore in the produce section--that's one part of the store where most of the products are out in the open, not encased in plastic wrappings or cardboard boxes.

Up on the Roof

When Kendra was six years old, we took her with us to pick out a Christmas tree. Kendra helped us make our selection, so she knew what the tree looked like. As we drove home, Kendra wondered aloud where we had put the tree; she knew there was no room for it inside our van. Where did the tree go? How did it fit?

"We put the tree on the roof of the van," I explained. I

showed her the roof from the inside and said the tree was on top of that.

My answer didn't seem to help much. "How can it be outside the car?" Kendra asked.

As soon as we got home, I grabbed a ladder. I invited Kendra to climb up as I stood behind her. Standing on the top rung didn't help a lot either. A sighted person can easily see the entire roof of a van from a ladder, but only a small portion was within Kendra's reach.

Finally I guided Kendra to move from the ladder onto the roof of the van. She sat and explored all she wanted. The tree was still tied to the roof rack, so she could find out



how it stayed on in the wind. I remembered the little pocket camera on my belt and snapped a quick photo. I still smile when I see that picture, thinking of that day and that moment of learning.

Perhaps my daughter is not quite old enough yet, but I think we're not far from a walk on the roof of our house. A model of a house would be a great learning tool, of course. But if she can explore the roof safely, there's nothing like firsthand experience!

Closer to the ground, we've examined a lot of plants over the years. As a gardening enthusiast, I've maintained a sensory garden with interesting plants that have distinctive textures and scents. When she was quite young, Kendra enjoyed having a number of interesting (and relatively safe) plants to explore. They were all within reach from one location that she thought of as hers.

Surprises from Santa

Since Kendra came into our lives, Santa seems to bring us more things to explore, such as extra musical instruments. We have acquired a variety of ukuleles, guitars, keyboards, synthesizers, a small harp, and even a drum set. We also have some unusual pieces, such as a Native American flute; a jaw harp; and a kalimba, or African thumb piano. We even have a Theremin, the only electronic instrument you play without touching it. You vary the sounds by moving your hands closer or further from a pair of antennae.

I've bought these instruments because nothing beats unlimited exploration time. We've also taken quite a few trips to large music stores such as Guitar Center, where we can roam the aisles for free. In a music store you can explore hundreds of instruments under one roof. They also have plenty of recording gear and PA equipment, always a great fascination to my child. She especially loves all the faders

and knobs on audio consoles.

Last summer, on the way to the NFB convention in Dallas, we stopped overnight in Vicksburg, Mississippi. As we headed out in the morning, I saw some Civil War cannons in front of the hotel. Kendra was curious. We didn't hesitate to delay our departure. She got out of the car and felt all the parts of a cannon or two.

Close to Home

Chances to supply missing information are almost everywhere. We've found many of them close to home. Not long ago Kendra's cane bumped into a guy wire at the edge of our front yard. We had passed within inches of that wire hundreds of times. Actually, we made a pointed effort to avoid it. It was a trip hazard, after all. Kendra had no idea that the wire was there, but one day she found it with her cane. What was it for? "It helps hold up the phone pole," I explained. I anticipated the next question, "What's a phone pole?" There it was again, information that Kendra's sighted peers took for granted. My explanation led to details about how electricity and cable TV, phone service and the Internet get into our home. "What about water?" No, water comes through pipes underground. In some places, power and phone lines also run underground, and there are no poles.

On a drive soon after this discussion, I spent several minutes telling Kendra every time we passed a phone pole. She couldn't believe there were so many of them. I realized how many other things we passed while she was unaware. From time to time I'd pick something else to tell her about in quantity as well as specific details--houses and traffic lights, for example.

Some things, such as traffic lights, are hard to explore hands-on. I've bought some decommissioned traffic lights for a playhouse I built, so they were available for Kendra to touch. As parents we've had to be creative and proactive to provide Kendra with opportunities to examine things tactilely. Still, hands-on exploration is so valuable that it is truly worth the effort. We have learned a lot together, but a great deal remains for us to explore. This learning process is never really finished.

What, you may ask, does Kendra consider the most meaningful of all these adventures? Home Depot, she will say, without a doubt. At the end of that first adventure she talked me into buying her--you guessed it--her very own plunger! It is a joy to watch our daughter discover the world in her own unique style! ■

Reprinted with permission from the Summer 2011 issue of Future Reflections, a National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Jernigan Institute publication. www.nfb.org/nfb/Future_Reflections.asp?SnID=1143418651

Conferences & Workshops

Alaska

■ Alaska Statewide Special Education Conference

The 21st Annual Alaska Statewide Special Education Conference
February 18-24, 2012
Sheraton Anchorage Hotel
<http://www.assec.org/>

■ Alaska Society for Technology in Education

February 25-28, 2012
Captain Cook Hotel
<http://www.aste.org/>

National

■ National Association of African American Studies & Affiliates

20th Annual National Conference
February 13-18, 2012
Crowne Plaza Executive Center, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Contact
<http://www.naaas.org>

■ Assistive Technology Industry Association 2012 Conference

January 25-28, 2012
Caribe Royale All-Suites Hotel and Convention Center
Orlando, Florida
<http://www.atia.org/>

■ National Association for Bilingual Education

40th Annual Conference
February, 15-17, 2012
Hilton Anatole Hotel
Dallas, Texas
<http://www.nabe.org/>

■ National Association of School Psychologists

Annual Convention
February 21-24, 2012
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
<http://www.nasponline.org/>

■ United Cerebral Palsy Conference

April 25-28, 2012
Grand Hyatt
Washington DC.
<http://www.ucp.org/get-involved/events/2012-annual-conference>

■ Council for Exceptional Children 2012 Convention and Expo

April 11-14, 2012
Colorado Convention Center
Denver, Colorado
<http://www.cec.sped.org/content/navigationmenu/professionaldevelopmentconvention-expo/registernow/default.htm>

■ 2012 Autism Society National Conference and Expo

July 25-28, 2012
Town and Country Resort and Convention Center
San Diego, California
<http://www.autism-society.org/>

■ 2012 Disability Policy Seminar

April 23-25, 2012
Washington, D.C.
www.disabilityseminar.org

■ American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

June 19-20, 2012
Charlotte, North Carolina
www.aaid.org

■ National Alliance on Mental Illness

June 22-30, 2012
Seattle, Washington
www.nami.org

■ 9th International Conference on Positive Behavior Support

March 15-17, 2012
Hyatt Regency Atlanta
Atlanta, Georgia
<http://www.apbs.org/conference/atlanta/index.aspx>

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