



Campus Autism Program to Expand Thanks to Federal Grant

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EAU CLAIRE — A program at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire that provides behavior intervention services to young children who are diagnosed with autism will expand thanks to a \$263,340 grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Most of the grant funding will be used to renovate and equip the Campus Autism Program's space in the Human Sciences and Services building on lower campus. The renovation will include adding observation and therapy rooms as well as technical equipment and furnishings, said Dr. Kevin Klatt, associate professor of psychology and director of CAP.

"An expanded CAP is necessary to provide intervention to a greater number of children in western Wisconsin and to provide more opportunities for university students to engage in supervised clinical work in applied behavior analysis," Klatt said.

CAP — which was established by Klatt in 2002 — provides behavioral intervention for children ages 1-4 who have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders. Under the supervision of faculty, student behavior analysts work with children to improve behaviors, such as social and language skills, that enhance their lives. The program provides therapy until families secure a state waiver for in-home behavioral intervention.

"Applied behavioral analysis is extremely cost-effective, especially when it occurs in early childhood, as it leads to a substantial reduction in the need for specialized services later," Klatt said. "At CAP, we use only scientifically validated intervention and educate caregivers about how to help the child make progress."

Klatt created the program after a summer autism project made it clear that families in the area need behavior intervention services while they wait for the state to approve their in-home therapy requests. State approvals can take months, yet research shows children make the greatest progress the earlier intervention begins. The on-campus program fills the gap between the time a child is diagnosed with autism and when he or she is eligible for in-home therapy.

UW-Eau Claire's program has been extremely successful, with young children making incredible progress because of the early intervention, Klatt said. For example, the first child the program worked with is now excelling in elementary school, he said, adding that no one at the school is even aware that the child was diagnosed with autism as a toddler.

"It's incredible to see how far he has come," Klatt said. "He's an example of what can happen when children get the intervention they need at a young age. It can make a huge difference throughout their lifetime. We need to increase the number of professionals who are qualified to provide these kinds of services so we can help more families."

CAP currently serves four to seven families a semester, but just two children can be at the facility at any time because of space limitations, Klatt said. The new space will make it possible for students to work with three children in different rooms during the same timeframe, he said.

As a result, CAP will be able to serve more children with autism or provide services to children who have other diagnoses, such as brain injuries or Down's syndrome, Klatt said.

UW-Eau Claire's psychology department established an undergraduate behavior analysis emphasis in 2000, making it the only undergraduate program of its kind in the UW System.

As part of their program, behavior analysis students must complete a 500-hour supervised internship. Expanding CAP will allow more students to complete their internships on campus, Klatt said, noting that each semester 15-20 students are involved in the program.

Students who complete the program — and the required internship — can take the national certification exam to acquire the Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst credential. Many of the program's graduates also go on to graduate school, which allows them to then seek the highest level of certification, Board Certified Behavior Analyst, Klatt said.

Increasing the number of professionals with the BCaBA and BCBA certification is critical because the demand for services in Wisconsin is so great, Klatt said. For example, in 2004-05 there were 4,361 people in Wisconsin aged 3-12 identified as having autism and 19,086 people in the state identified as having other developmental disabilities, he said. Yet there are only nine people in Wisconsin with BCBA certification and just 12 people with BCaBA certification, he said. Two of those with BCBA certification are on UW-Eau Claire's faculty.

"Wisconsin is falling behind some other states in recognizing the field of behavior analysis and in training adequate numbers of behavior analysts to treat disabilities such as autism," Klatt said. "There is a huge need for people in this field— a bigger need than most

people realize. Our graduates are being snapped up by graduate schools and private companies around the country. The demand for behavior analysts is growing as people realize what their children can accomplish with early intervention."

For more information about the grant or the Campus Autism Program, contact Klatt at 715-836-3995 or klattkp@uwec.edu.

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