



The SOAR Experience

Counselor in Training (CIT) Program Information Sheet

Building on the great success of last year's program, for summer 2010, West Bergen Mental Healthcare's Asperger's Related Services (ARS) Department is providing a therapeutic social skills program in a summer day camp-like environment rich in social skills for children ages 6 – 16 with Asperger's and related disorders. In an effort to provide models for the children and vocational experience for teens and young adults with Asperger's, a "Counselor In Training" or "CIT" program will be provided for 14 – 24 year olds with Asperger's, HFA, PDDNOS, Nonverbal learning disability or other disorders affecting social communication and interpersonal skills.

The CIT program will offer teens and young adults an opportunity to develop valuable life and workplace skills through the training, guidance and support of a highly talented staff experienced in working with individuals on the spectrum. Currently, there are no other summer programs like The SOAR Experience for children with Asperger's in Bergen County. Teens and young adults on the spectrum are rarely, if ever, offered vocational opportunities. Having CITs whose lives have been affected by Asperger's makes this summer program unique. It allows for children to have positive models of individuals with whom they share something in common. These individuals have received extensive training on how to effectively interact with children with Aspergers' and related disorders. Such models are likely to be scarce in children's experience and will give participants in the program a higher standard to which they can aspire.

In addition to gaining valuable resume-worthy workplace experience from the comprehensive vocational training, CITs will further develop their interpersonal skills and perspective taking ability through their role in providing some of the direct care to children in the program.

Vocational and Interpersonal Skill Development

It is our goal that the CIT participants will learn and experience a wide range of skills and activities in a workplace setting. These goals include:

- CITs will generalize the vocational training to future employment situations
- CITs will acquire First Aid/CPR skills
- CITs will gain experience in filling out an employment application
- CITs will gain experience in interviewing for a position
- CITs will experience work culture expectations and responsibilities (i.e. being reliable/dependable, taking responsibility, following through on tasks, reporting to team, learning to anticipate needs of the program or of a child, taking initiative, etc.)
- CITs will gain familiarity with work place protocols and experience in following directions
- CITs will experience the social culture of the work environment
- CIT will be a member of a team
- CITs will learn perspective-taking to help them care for and interact with children in the program
- CITs will enhance their own social communication skills
- CITs will learn how to ask for and offer assistance
- CITs will gain experience in coping
- CITs will have opportunities to practice flexibility
- CITs will have opportunity to develop work place relationships
- CITs will receive feedback and develop appropriate responses and incorporation of feedback into their daily counselor routine
- CITs will gain experience with self-advocacy

- CITs will learn to be attentive to their self presentation via feedback on appearance, hygiene, behavior, etc.
- CITs will experience the positive aspects of being a role model to others
- CITs will experience the confidence that comes with being well-trained and well-supported in their effort to be good counselors in training
- CITs will be able to add this valuable work experience to their resumes

Formal Training Sessions

Specific training sessions on the following topics will occur **prior** to the start of the summer program:

- Spectrum diagnosis and features – understanding how Asperger’s or a related disorder affects the children and perhaps themselves will assist the CITs to effectively interact with the children, their fellow CITs, and The SOAR Experience staff.
- Expectations in the workplace, including how to handle feedback, appropriate dress code, punctuality, dependability, co-worker relations, relations with supervisors, submitting time sheets
- Equipment training including use of walkie-talkies and recreational equipment
- Supporting social skills among program participants including hands-on prompting and role playing
- First aid and CPR Training

Supervision and Feedback

The CIT will be participating in regularly scheduled supervision and program team meetings throughout the six weeks of The SOAR Experience. The counselors will be provided feedback in these meetings as well as in a formal feedback session after the initial training, during the course of the six week summer program and at the end of the program. In addition, CITs will be working with a team that will teach, model, role play, and provide feedback regarding the CITs performance on an ongoing basis. All CITs will receive a certificate at the completion of the CIT program.

Expectations

All CITs must be available for the full six weeks of the vocational program at The SOAR Experience in addition to at least twelve to fifteen hours of formal pre-camp training (see Formal Training Sessions above). Upon being accepted to the program, the CITs will be provided training in completing applications and job interviewing skills as part of the comprehensive vocational experience. They will complete a separate (and much shorter) mock application. The CIT will then be provided the experience of being called for an interview, scheduling a time and coming in for a mock interview. All CITs will be provided feedback on these experiences. The CIT will be working directly with children (ages 6 – 16) and assist the senior and junior counselors in carrying out the program’s scheduled activities. CITs will be expected to accompany children on walking and van/bus trips during camp hours. They are expected to assist with all activities including swimming. If there is a specific activity that the applicant might need accommodations to accomplish, this must be noted on the initial CIT application form. CITs or their families are responsible for their own beverages/food/lunches during the program hours and transportation to and from the program site.

CIT Application Process

In order to be considered for the CIT positions all candidates must complete the CIT application with accompanying \$200 fee and return with requested documents and records. Please note this is a rather lengthy application with a lot of information required. Those who are minors or adults with guardianship need to complete the application with their parent or guardian. For adults, it is suggested that you consider having a trusted person look it over with you. Please note there are a number of initials and signatures required throughout the application. Applicants may be invited for an interview prior to the final selection process. Once all interested applicants have been interviewed and selected candidates are accepted into the CIT program, the CIT will notified as to the various dates for the vocational training aspects of the program described above.

Thank you for your interest in our program!