

The SOAR Experience CIT Program

Counselor in Training (CIT) Program Information Sheet

West Bergen Mental Healthcare's Asperger's Related Services (ARS) Department is pleased to announce the continuation of its Counselor in Training (CIT) program for the summer of 2011. The CIT program is a vocational program in which adolescents and young adults experience job training and develop work skills while serving as a CIT attached to The SOAR Experience. The SOAR Experience is a therapeutic summer day program rich in social skills for children ages 6 – 16 with Asperger's and related disorders. In an effort to provide vocational training for teens and young adults, an intensive "CIT" program was developed 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. The CITs receive extensive training in how to effectively interact with children with Asperger's and related disorders. 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 assistance to children in the program. Many forge new friendships as well.

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. This goal includes objectives such as:

- CITs will acquire First Aid training. If they pass the test they will also receive First Aid certification
- CITs will acquire familiarity with CPR
- CITs will acquire knowledge and practice with job search skills
- CITs will gain experience in filling out an employment application
- CITs will gain experience in interviewing for a position
- CITs will gain knowledge of 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
- CITs will gain experience in following directions
- CITs will be a member of a team and experience the social culture of the work environment
- CITs will have opportunity to develop work place relationships
- CIT will increase their perspective-taking ability to help them effectively 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 opportunities to practice tolerance for diversity in others
- 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, task completion, interpersonal skills, 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 experience opportunities to be productive and contribute to the program hopefully leading to enhancement of their self confidence and self esteem
- CITs will be able to add this valuable work experience to their resumes, college applications, etc.
- CITs will generalize the vocational training to future employment situations

Formal Training Sessions

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

- The job search process, filling out applications, developing a resume, interviewing skills and mock interviews
- Expectations in the workplace, including how to handle feedback, appropriate dress code, punctuality, dependability, co-worker relations, relations with supervisors, submitting time sheets and more
- First aid and CPR Training
- Safety procedures
- Equipment and facility training (walkie-talkies, recreational equipment, etc.)
- Overview of the SOAR Experience and the SOAR Experience culture
- Understanding and working with children on the spectrum
- Supporting social skills among program participants including hands-on prompting and role playing

Supervision and Feedback

The CITs will be participating in regularly scheduled supervision and program team meetings throughout the six weeks of The SOAR Experience. The CITs will be provided feedback in these meetings as well as in formal feedback sessions during the course of the six week summer program. In addition, CITs will be working with a team that will teach, model, role play, reinforce 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 accepted to the program must attend pre-program training which involves a significant number of hours scheduled over the course of up to two weeks preceding the SOAR Experience sessions. Then beginning Monday, July 11 all CITs must be available from Monday through Friday for the full six weeks of the SOAR Experience program. The CITs will be working directly with children and teens (ages 6 – 16) and will assist the counselors and SOAR staff in preparing for, carrying out and cleaning up after the program's scheduled activities. CITs will be expected to accompany children on walking and bus trips and 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 lunches four days a week and their beverages and snacks five days a week. CITs must have reliable transportation to and from the SOAR Experience program site. A list of suggested items to assist the CIT in preparing for a successful experience as a CIT will be provided upon acceptance into the program. CITs are expected to be self motivated and prepared to engage in this rigorous and rewarding vocational experience.

CIT Application Process

In order to be considered for the CIT positions all candidates must complete the CIT application and return with requested documents, records and application fee. Please note this is a rather lengthy application. 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. Candidates will be interviewed prior to the final selection process. Application fees will be returned to those candidates not selected for this year's program. Please note, that there are a limited number of slots available and numerous applicants.

Thank you for your interest in our program! We look forward to meeting you!