

Integrated Center for Child Development

Narrative

The Integrated Center for Child Development (ICCD) is a multi-disciplinary center offering neuropsychological, behavioral, medical, and educational services to individuals with special needs. ICCD offers evaluative and treatment options to individuals presenting with a variety of developmental challenges. These include autism and autism spectrum disorders; learning disabilities; genetic disorders and developmental disabilities; ADD/ADHD; psychiatric disorders; and neurological injuries.

The ICCD mission is to provide high quality clinical services to clients and their families; to offer post-graduate training for professionals in pediatric neuropsychology, applied behavior analysis, and related fields; and to educate the community in the identification and management of learning and developmental disorders. In addition to direct assessment, all clinicians at ICCD are available to collaborate with families for ongoing care. A family might choose to bring the clinician into the special education process by inviting them to observe the child in school or to participate in a team meeting. They may also wish for the clinician to consult with other professionals involved in the care of the child: teachers, therapists, advocates, and health care professionals.

The ICCD is managed by the partnership of Rafael Castro, PhD, Joseph Moldover, PsyD, and Mariela Vargas-Irwin, PsyD, BCBA. Our staff has grown to nearly 70 individuals and includes professionals with backgrounds in neuropsychology and child psychology; pediatric medicine and neurogenetics; applied behavior analysis; special education; speech-language pathology; assistive technologies; and family and group therapy.

Services

ICCD offers psychological, behavioral, medical, educational, speech and language, assistive technology and family therapy services in a highly integrated manner to children ranging in age from infancy to late adolescence who are confronted with many types of developmental, medical and learning issues, such as: autism spectrum disorders, learning disabilities, attention disorders, mood and anxiety disorders, and neurological disorders. Evaluations are conducted in order to determine an appropriate diagnosis, to plan treatment, to monitor progress, or to guide decision making with respect to eligibility determinations. Many of these children would traditionally be seen in a hospital or other institutional settings but by working in a community-based setting, we believe that it is possible to achieve both a higher degree of individualized care and interdisciplinary integration. The center also offers families a high level of expertise with regard to educational planning and management of children with special educational needs. ICCD strives to build long-term relationships with families so that guidance and support are provided throughout a child's development; in addition, ICCD is always available to provide ongoing consultation with a range of professionals involved with our clients and their families.

Professionals at ICCD provide a range of evaluation services that include neuropsychological evaluations, neurodevelopmental assessments, medical evaluation, functional behavioral assessments (FBA), speech/language evaluation and educational program evaluation.

Clinicians at ICCD provide treatment services for children who have been evaluated at ICCD and those who have not. Specially trained graduate level behaviorists design treatment plans for children with developmental disabilities such as autism; implementation of these programs by ICCD behavioral tutors at home and school help children with significant disabilities to gain more functional skills by improving self-regulation of behavior, social skills, and daily living skills. Educational consultants work with children who have unusual learning styles to help them develop compensatory strategies so that they can succeed in school more independently, medical staff develop psychopharmacologic interventions, speech/language pathologists work with children who have a wide range of disabilities, teaching them to use verbal skills to communicate more effectively and enhance social skills. Our family therapist may work with clients and/or families to cope with the challenges that face them currently and in the future.

Neuropsychological Evaluations

Neuropsychological evaluations use the assessment techniques of clinical psychology and neuropsychology to assess learning and developmental challenges; to identify their underpinnings; to offer a diagnosis; and to make recommendations for treatment and management.

Neuropsychological-Assistive Technology Evaluations provide a comprehensive assessment of a child's learning and development with a critical eye toward the physical and sensory deficits that interfere with the ability to access or to convey information or language. Recommendations specifically target the barriers to successful performance with an emphasis on tools and strategies that promote independence.

Team Evaluations

Multidisciplinary evaluations at the ICCD offer a unique opportunity to bring professionals together around complex clinical issues. Teams may include neuropsychologists, developmental pediatricians and neurogeneticists, behaviorists, speech-language therapists and special educators.

These evaluations are designed to quickly bring multiple clinicians together around specific clinical questions, often of an acute nature, and to offer prompt feedback and interventions.

Behavioral Services

Applied Behavior Analysis is used to develop data-based individualized programs to teach communication, social skills, and self-care. Traditional behavioral instructional methods, such as discrete trials, are combined with research-based neo-behavioral techniques (e.g., incidental teaching and precision teaching) to create a program that meets the needs of each child. Programs focus on the acquisition of skills and the generalization of these skills to natural

environments. A systematic, data-driven approach to generalization is used to ensure that skills become part of the child's functional behavior repertoire.

Applied Behavioral Learning Services believes that in order to provide high quality services for children, it is important to attend to the specific needs of families and their particular circumstances. In keeping with this philosophy, services are provided primarily in the child's home or community school and tailored to fit the unique profile of each child and his/her family. Parent consultation is provided weekly or bi-weekly to foster the development of cooperative relationships with families. Goals for parent consultation include helping parents understand their child's challenges and educational needs, assisting them in the implementation of behavioral interventions to address feeding problems, sleep disturbances, and other behavioral concerns, and guiding the generalization of gains across environments.

The highest standards are set for each individual child. For some children, our goal is to reduce or even eliminate the symptomatology of autism and eventually decrease the supports required in the natural environment. For other students, the program focuses on the development of functional skills that will increase the chances of success in the least restrictive environment. Regardless of functioning level, the educational team strives to fulfill each student's full potential.

At ICCD, assessment and educational specialists work closely to ensure that educational and clinical intervention is informed and guided by specialized assessment. This interface between different disciplines is an essential component of treatment planning at ICCD.

Medical Services

Medical Services at the Integrated Center for Child Development offers a comprehensive medical approach to special needs. Dr. Susan Manea, our Medical Director is a board certified pediatrician and pediatric neurogeneticist specializing in the diagnosis and treatment of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, as well as genetic, neurologic, and developmental disabilities.

A variety of services are provided including diagnostics and treatment for a variety of genetic and developmental disabilities as well as comprehensive evaluations for Autism Spectrum disorders. A full neurodevelopmental evaluation will define possible underlying medical etiologies and determine appropriate laboratory studies and evaluations. Comprehensive medical care includes extensive recommendations for treatment and educational programming that can be utilized to advocate for therapeutic needs. Follow up care will address specific patient needs in the realm of behavior, sleep, nutrition, and general health with monitoring of developmental progress and continued recommendations for educational programming and home based interventions.

Psychopharmacologic modalities can be utilized as needed in patients whose family function is significantly altered and in children whose developmental progress or well being is impacted heavily by behaviors. A number of strategies are utilized to address these behaviors including ruling out underlying medical etiologies such as seizures or gastrointestinal symptoms, outlining behavioral strategies, maximizing educational programming, and helping families establish home

based strategies. Once these strategies are in place, pharmacologic agents can then be considered if the patient's overall function does not improve. The number of medications and options that are available to families can be overwhelming and Dr. Manea feels it is important to take time to talk with families, observe children, and target specific aspects of behavior that may benefit from psychopharmacologic intervention. More importantly when prescribing medications open lines of communication and accessibility must be established to prevent untoward effects and determine efficacy.

Educational Services

Educational Services is a developing segment of the practice and is directed by Kathleen G. Burek, M.Ed. a special education teacher with 30 years of experience in public and private schools. Services include direct tutorial in individual and group formats; program evaluation and consultation; and parent and community education. We offer Saturday tutorial groups, individual tutoring, and at home tutoring. In addition, staff from educational services provide program evaluations of public and provide school programs and consult with teachers.

Assistive Technology Services

Children with developmental and learning challenges sometimes need assistive technology devices or services in order to benefit fully from social and academic placements and programs, and to participate with the greatest success and independence. Evaluations begin with communication with the family and individuals working with the child to identify the physical, neurological, cognitive, language, and behavioral needs which impact functioning in school and/or at home. Observations of the child's performance in a natural setting clarify the demands of the environment and highlight precisely what the individual needs to do but is unable to do. A hands-on exploration of a continuum of technology based supports, from low tech to high tech, leads to identification of those that represent the best fit between the child's goals, needs, learning style, and features of the various assistive or universal learning technologies. The evaluation report includes a comprehensive implementation plan with a suggested timeline, a description of required training, the identification of resources, and an outline of steps that need to be taken to ensure coordination of AT with other services, supports and providers.

The Assistive Technology Specialist provides essential follow up training and support in the implementation of assistive and universal learning technologies to individuals, families, educators and school districts. With an extensive Special Education background, the Assistive Technology Specialist is able to identify effective strategies for integrating assistive technologies into the IEP to support the goal for students to receive the maximum benefit from their individual educational program.

Speech-Language Services

ICCD also offers speech-language assessment and therapy for children from pre-school through adolescence. Speech-language therapy is offered to children with both fundamental communication difficulties and to children with more subtle language challenges that may undermine verbal expression or the development of written language.

Adult Assessment Program (AAP)

AAP has been developed in response to the gaps in service delivery for adults with learning, attention, and developmental disorders. The AAP serves young adults with identified needs who are transitioning out of the public school special education system; college, graduate school, and professional school students with learning needs; and adults who have struggled with attention, task management, learning or socialization but who have never been formally assessed.

Family Therapy

ICCD recently developed a Family Therapy Program. Family therapy is used as a means to involve all members of a family in understanding and coping with the challenges facing it. It helps families to understand and improve the way that each member interacts and resolves conflicts with one another. Family roles, rules, and behavior patterns are also often explored as a way to identify issues that contribute to conflict or distress. Family strengths are identified as well, and used when establishing appropriate, productive goals for the family. It is a positive intervention that allows families to harness and strengthen existing resources while simultaneously helping each person work collaboratively toward solutions to various conflicts.

Consultation

Clinical staff at ICCD routinely consult to a range of professionals, including attorneys, pediatricians, psychologists, psychiatrists, special educators, teachers, and school administrators.

Behavioral staffs are contracted annually by a number of public school systems to provide on-going consultation and support to teachers and parents of children with developmental disorders. ICCD also maintains contracts to design and manage substantially separate classrooms within public school systems for children with developmental disorders.

Fellowship Training Program

ICCD is committed to providing exceptional post-doctoral training for post-doctoral fellows seeking specialization in pediatric neuropsychology and in applied behavioral analysis. Our apprenticeship training model is unique; in most training sites, the post-doctoral fellow sees clients independently and then meets for supervision with a neuropsychologist who typically has not observed the child or met the parents. In order to provide the consistently excellent care that ICCD is known for, we believe that it is essential for a more experienced neuropsychologist to take the lead in all evaluations aided by the aspiring neuropsychologist in order to yield a much richer and broader training experience in terms of developing both clinical and professional skills.

Clinical expertise is acquired through exposure to a wide range of cases with support in integrating the data so that a clear view of the child's learning style and needs emerges. In order to accomplish this goal, the post-doctoral fellow works side-by-side with an experienced clinician. The fellow observes the intake session, assists the clinician in testing the child, joins

the clinician in the feedback and drafts the report with the supervisor. In addition to the time spent with the supervisor in clinical activities, the post-doctoral fellow has regular weekly supervision as well as informal supervisory experiences, such as “debriefing” after a feedback session and didactic seminars. Our Apprenticeship training program facilitates both modeling and direct teaching of clinical skills and professional compartment. As the post-doctoral fellow becomes more experienced and demonstrates consistently the skills required for high quality neuropsychological assessment, a greater degree of independent practice is facilitated.

Areas of Concentration

ICCD neuropsychology post-doctoral fellows will concentrate in one of two areas. One area focuses on evaluation of young children with autism spectrum disorders and developmental disabilities. Alternatively, fellows may focus on work with older children and adolescents presenting with learning disabilities, executive functioning disorder, and neuropsychiatric disabilities. An extended fellowship combining both elements is possible.

A third possibility is in our Applied Behavioral Learning Services Department where post-doctoral fellows work closely with senior level behaviorists providing both home and school based services to children with autism.

Parent and Professional Education and Community Outreach

Dr. Moldover and other staff regularly conduct seminars for parents and professional groups on a wide variety of topics. Our staff is considered authorities in their fields and are accomplished, informative and entertaining public speakers. In addition, ICCD collaborates with other organizations such as the Asperger’s Association of New England to provide seminars of interest to both clients, families and professionals.

The ICCD is also approved by the American Psychological Association to offer continuing education credits for psychologists.

Staff from the ICCD has worked with Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MAC) which provides legal representation pro bono to children with disabilities who are from disadvantaged backgrounds. One of the significant obstacles that MAC faces in this endeavor is the lack of accessibility to high quality neuropsychological evaluations. MAC is unable to advocate for services without a comprehensive evaluation. By providing evaluations at no charge to these families, ICCD enhances MAC’s ability to carry out its mission.