PROGRAM OVERVIEW

GENERAL INFORMATION:

JCC Therapeutic Nursery
411 East Clinton Avenue
Tenafly, NJ 07670
201-569-7900 ext. 208

gweiss@jccotp.org

Director: Lois Mendelson, Ph.D.
Principal: Kenneth J. Monaco, MA

DESCRIPTION OF SCHOOL:

Number of Classes: Two half-day classes
(1) 9 – 11:30 am & (1) 12:30 – 3 pm

Special Education Categories Served: Preschool Handicapped

Age of Students Served: 3 - 5

Related Services Provided: Speech/Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Play Therapy

Other Services Provided: Parent Counseling, Parent Support Groups

Extended school year: 30-day session
Program Description:

The JCC Therapeutic Nursery is a unique program for preschool children with special needs, and their parents. This treatment model was created in 1978 at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx by Dr. Doris Allen, and was brought to the JCC in Tenafly, New Jersey in 1995. It is a developmental, multidisciplinary treatment center that addresses not only the cognitive, linguistic, behavioral, social and emotional needs of the children, but also the needs of the parents.

The Therapeutic Nursery is a NJ Department of Education approved private preschool for the handicapped for 3 – 5 year olds, and is a receiving school for many school districts. The program is a parent/child program and the curriculum is developmental and communication-based.

We serve preschool children who have language disorders, emotional disturbances, learning disabilities, attention deficits, or autistic behaviors (including PDD and Asperger’s Syndrome). Individual and small group language and occupational therapy services are provided as needed.

Uniqueness of the Therapeutic Nursery Program:

A. **Our Population:** We serve children of average to superior intelligence, with a variety of developmental, behavioral and emotional problems. We specialize in working with high functioning children on the autistic spectrum. These children can be particularly challenging, both at home and at school.

B. **We are a Developmental Program:** Our developmental approach, which is particularly effective for high functioning children on the autistic spectrum, provides a viable and appropriate alternative to ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis).

C. **We are a Parent/Child Program:** *To our knowledge, there are no other programs in the tri-state area, that offer the kind of intensive intervention for parents that we provide.* Because children with serious developmental disorders often present significant management and child-rearing difficulties, our program addresses the needs of the family, as well as the needs of the identified child. Parents through daily participation in the Nursery, and through individual and group counseling sessions with the staff, become collaborating partners in their children’s treatment. They are provided with strategies for dealing with language, social, emotional and behavioral problems, not only during the school day, but also at home and in the community. We have found that by extending the curriculum in this way; by creating, in fact, a twenty-four hour a day program, we can most effectively help each child reach optimal growth and development.

D. **We are a Therapeutic Program:** We address each child’s emotional growth along with other aspects of his/her development. When a child goes out of control, he/she certainly needs immediate and firm limits to be set. However, when that child is also helped to understand and express his underlying feelings, his overall development can proceed on a more solid foundation. Appropriate verbalizations begin to replace inappropriate and out-of-control behaviors, self-confidence is enhanced and learning becomes possible. When
parents are taught by the Nursery staff to use these principles consistently at home, the child’s capacity to develop expands still further.

E. **Our Classrooms are Language-Based:** Most of the children in our program have a history of delayed onset of language production and comprehension. In addition to providing individual and small group “pull-out” therapy, our speech/language pathologists work in the classroom, along with our special education teachers, to create a completely language-based curriculum.

F. **We Provide an Enriched Curriculum:** Since all of our children have at least average intelligence, and many are extremely bright, we provide a highly stimulating academic curriculum. The children respond well to interesting topics such as science and social studies, including astronomy and geography, presented at a level above what is expected for their age. By consistently stimulating their intelligence and curiosity, we not only advance their academic skills, but also harness their strengths in order to overcome the difficulties they often have in focusing, attending, listening, taking turns and making transitions. In this way we help prepare them to succeed in a kindergarten setting.

G. **We Provide a Rigorous, Structured Social Skills Program:** Virtually all of the children in our program have difficulty interacting appropriately with their peers. Therefore, we devote a significant part of our curriculum to helping the children expand their play skills and their capacity to socialize with other children. Although our classes are self-contained, our intensive social skills curriculum prepares our students to participate successfully, as they become ready, in mainstream settings at school, at home, and in the larger community.

a. Social rules are taught in simple and dramatic fashion, so that they can be understood and memorized by the children. Twice a week we present social skills “lessons” in the form of skits or puppet shows. Each session focuses on a specific social goal, such as how to greet appropriately, how to initiate play with another child, how to be a good sport or how to control yourself when you get upset. At the end of each skit, the children are asked to problem-solve about the social dilemma they have seen enacted, and then each gets a turn to act out the appropriate social behavior.

b. Our children are helped to generalize the social skills they learn in the structured lessons. Teachers facilitate such generalizations throughout the school day, and parents, since they attend all the lessons, are able to continue this process at home and in the community. (For example, they are taught how to plan successful, structured play dates with mainstream children.) This “around the clock” facilitation helps the children internalize and generalize the social skills.

c. We have recently set up an exciting new program to enhance the learning of social skills that uses weekly play sessions with the mainstream kindergarten class at the JCC. The kindergarten children are “coached” on how to be active “play buddies” for the Nursery children. The Nursery children gain an opportunity to practice their social skills with children who are able to encourage and facilitate play interactions. Both groups enjoy these sessions and benefit greatly from them.
Lastly, we encourage the participation of our students in a mainstream classroom, when it is appropriate. Our Nursery provides a half-day program. Most of our children attend mainstream classes during the other half of the day, with a shadow if necessary. We work closely with the mainstream teachers and the shadows to insure maximum success.

H. **We Provide a Strong Program for Teaching Behavioral Control:** A student’s future school placement is often determined by how well he or she is able to exert behavioral control in the classroom. Many of our children enter the Nursery with significant behavioral difficulties, despite high intelligence, or above average cognitive skills. We place a high priority on assisting these children to develop age appropriate behavioral control. To this end, we use the following strategies:

   a. We create a consistent, predictable, rule-governed environment.
   b. We break down rules and behavioral expectations into small, “bite-sized” steps and communicate them clearly, with the aid of visual or written cues.
   c. We help the children make transitions from one activity to another while maintaining self-control.
   d. We acknowledge the children’s feelings by labeling them orally, with pictures or with written words, to help them understand their feelings and the feelings of others. This helps to reduce acting-out behaviors.
   e. We provide alternatives and consequences for disruptive or out-of-control behavior by using supervised time-out or quiet-time procedures, to enable the affected child regain self-control.
   f. We teach all of these strategies to the parents, so that the children gradually learn to maintain age-appropriate self-control on a twenty-four hour a day basis.

I. **We Provide a Rich, Intensive Program for Staff Development and Staff Supervision:**

   a. We run two staff meetings each day. Some of these meetings are devoted to reviewing clinical and educational issues that come up during class time. Others are used to discuss specific topics that are relevant to our work in the Therapeutic Nursery.
   b. Senior staff members work alongside junior staff in the Nursery. Therefore, mentoring is an ongoing process, enriched by daily contact and the sharing of hands-on experience.
   c. Each staff member receives a stipend to be used to further his or her professional development. They routinely share what they learn at conferences or courses with the rest of the staff.

J. **Our Treatment Model has Produced Excellent Outcomes:** Many of the Nursery children - about 80% during the past three years --- have entered some form of mainstream setting upon graduation. Former graduates have completed college, are attending graduate or professional schools, or are gainfully employed. We believe that our model of intervention is a highly successful one.

For more information, please call 201-569-7900 ext. 337