

EXPANDING THE SENSORY DIET Aids Student Learning

When we think of our daily diet, we often think of how we nourish our body with food and drink. However, every day at Benedictine students are also fed a sensory diet. Much like food and drink, which nourish the body, the sensory diet helps nourish each student's seven senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, vestibular (movement), and proprioception (knowing where his or her body is in space).

A growing number of Benedictine School students exhibit Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD), a condition which impacts the way the nervous system receives messages from the senses and turns these messages into appropriate motor and behavioral responses.

A person with SPD, complicated by other developmental and intellectual disabilities and/or autism, finds it difficult to process and act upon information received through the senses. The disorder, which often occurs along with autism, can cause students to be over-responsive, under-responsive or sensory-seeking in any of the seven senses. Too much stimulation—bright lights, excessive noise, or clutter—can trigger a reaction

in individuals which interrupts their ability to participate in academic learning, as well as day to day life, in our very sensory-rich world.

Benedictine's special education teachers and therapists have long been recognized for their innovation in reaching students with multiple, profound disabilities and continually adapt their methods to meet students' increasingly complex needs. Using emerging technologies, teachers and therapists are helping students make progress that would have been unimaginable just a few years ago. Among the technologies being used successfully today are sensory rooms. With funding in part by the Freas Foundation, Benedictine School is creating a new

centrally-located Multi-Sensory Environment Center to further assist students with SPD.

The Center will be available for both school and residential programs seven days a week and managed by Benedictine's therapists. The students' experience in the Center will become part of their daily sensory diet. Equipment, such as water bubble columns, fiber optic curtains, color

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Pictured Lori Bennett, PT, Lead Physical Therapist and Clinical Coordinator at the Benedictine School with student Xavier in Benedictine's central "Pod," used for helping students with motor sensory issues. Benedictine's new Multi-Sensory Environment Center, opening next school year, will expand the opportunity for all students to receive sensory breaks throughout their day.

change projectors, aroma diffusers, weighted blankets, and vibrating rockers, will stimulate the children's senses in a safe, interactive setting. Benefits typically seen from a multi-sensory environment include decreased stress, increased communication, increased cooperation, and increased focus, which helps promote self-choice and enriches overall quality of life.

According to Lori Bennett, PT, Lead Physical Therapist and Clinical Coordinator at the Benedictine School, "a sensory environment provides an experience similar to how meditation works for the rest of us."

"Because our students may not be able to make decisions rationally on their own as to when they need to decompress, we can institute multi-sensory techniques to help them. Using these techniques proactively can help prevent aggressive behaviors in students, which are often a result of overstimulation, says Bennett."

Some Benedictine classrooms already provide sensory areas in which teachers use aromatherapy, music and other light sources to assist students in managing sensory stimulation. Benedictine's central "Pod" offers swings, a crash mat, and a trampoline for motor sensory issues before they can escalate into inappropriate behavior. Students use motor breaks throughout their day to stay on task. The new Center will expand these opportunities for all students to receive sensory breaks throughout their days.

Bennett states, "We are understanding more about autism every day. Research is showing us what works in stabilizing sensory systems. Students are more complex today and need more strategies."

She adds, "Choices are especially important for non-verbal students in giving them autonomy in decision-making. These methods offer other ways for students to have choices as to what will calm them."

Theresa Rainey, OTR, Lead Occupational Therapist at the Benedictine School, states that, "In order to develop the components of a sensory diet, we look at what works and what doesn't work for each child. We do a lot of analysis to tease out what causes the stimulation for a particular child—this involves observation and trial and error."

She comments, "We are teaching our students to tell us when they need a break. The nonverbal students use their devices and cards to show us what they are feeling and what they need. The Multi-Sensory Environment Room can help a child slow down and relax so that when he or she returns to the classroom they are better able to focus on learning."

Rainey adds that the length of time in the sensory room depends on the student's needs. Thirty minutes is a typical amount of time for most children. The sensory room experience is used before a behavior escalates. One or two therapists can be in the room at a time, depending on the child's personal needs. Benedictine staff will vary therapies to determine which works best for each student.

Multi-sensory strategies are just one tool in each student's behavioral intervention plan and are designed to help them maintain their bodies and brains for learning. Bennett describes a recent visit to another school's center where she observed a student interacting with sensory room equipment. "The most immediate change I saw was a look of pleasure and delight on the student's face when she walked into the room that provided sensory equipment like water bubble columns and fiber optic curtains."

Benedictine staff are currently evaluating the durability and effectiveness of equipment for the new Multi-Sensory Environment Center. Plans are underway to open the Center in the next school year. While the initial grant will pay for the fundamental pieces of equipment in the room, additional funding will be needed to complete the full expansion of the room. ★



Using emerging technologies, teachers and therapists *are helping students make progress* that would have been UNIMAGINABLE JUST A FEW YEARS AGO.

ADVANCED TRAINING FOR FRONTLINE STAFF

Ups the Game in Residential and Employment Services

Frontline staff are the face of Benedictine. Because these Direct Support Professionals have a greater than ever role in the community, hiring and evaluation standards are now based on a set of core-competencies and these staff members are enjoying enhanced professional development opportunities across both Residential and Employment Services.

Nic McMorris, recently promoted to Group Home Manager, comments, “It is important that we are confident in our roles. We have used the trainings provided by the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals (NADSP) as a resource to help us learn and deal with different scenarios that occur. NADSP training also helped us find the skills in the people we support and to develop more natural patience while understanding why the individuals do what they do.”

According to Director of Human Resources Maggie Prado, Benedictine will launch an advanced training pilot program this spring that will further support its Direct Support Professionals (DSP). The program will be based on an apprentice model for both school and adult settings. The eight-week classroom and hands-on training will include testing and certification along with project work.

Prado notes, “The training is designed to support quality care and address the community-based elements of each DSP’s job including behavior management techniques, daily living activities, medication management and CPR/First Aid, all in line with Benedictine job expectations and our philosophy and values.”

Other topics to be included in the DSP training program are techniques for arranging successful activities in the community; working with parents; collaboration and communication skills; incident and crisis management; abuse and neglect; professionalism; documentation and universal precautions.

Prado adds, “through this apprentice program, our new employees will be better prepared when they join us. These are stressful jobs made more stressful if we don’t hire people with the qualities we need. We can increase the longevity of our employees by paying attention to these details.”

Prado outlines the qualities required of Benedictine’s Direct Support Professionals. They must demonstrate good decision-making skills; have experience with people with disabilities (although this is not a pre-requisite); demonstrate a creative, compassionate, caring, optimistic and hospitable (not parental) nature; show dignity of work; embrace a sense of purpose in their jobs, and exhibit moral fiber. They should also have a trainable thirst for knowledge and a collaborative mindset; function independently; and have a sense of possibility. All



Pictured are Benedictine’s Nic McMorris, Group Home Manager, and Melissa Burk, Supportive Employment Specialist, both of whom have experienced new professional training to aid them in their more active roles in the community.

Direct Support Professionals undergo drug screenings and criminal background checks as part of the hiring process.

Beth Mathis, Director of Adult Services at Benedictine, comments, “Working with people is complex. We are moving into an environment that holds us to a new standard of more person-centered services.”

“It is complex because it has grown from caretaking and supervision of groups of individuals to now helping individuals connect with employers, community members, and other people with disabilities.”

This shift requires a focus on professional development for staff.

According to Mathis, adult services staff who have completed certain training and other steps are eligible to register as a Direct Support Professional through the National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals. Benedictine is supporting this effort and hopes that these staff may eventually decide to pursue additional NADSP certifications.

She adds, “We are offering frontline Direct Support Professionals opportunities to advance into management. Benedictine’s HR team is focused on equipping new supervisors with a different skill set that will help their staff be more effective.”



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Currently 38 of the more than 100 adults Benedictine supports during the day have some form of community employment.

McMorris adds, “We are looking past the disability and seeing the ability in the people we support. Being advocates, we help them advocate for themselves.”

Melissa Burk, Supportive Employment Specialist, comments, “The professional training has helped build my confidence to speak effectively in the community. Getting the individuals that we support out in the community is critical.”

McMorris states, “In the past the community would pigeon-hole the people into janitorial jobs. Now we are finding new roles for them and employers are seeing these new roles, too.”

Burk adds, “We also have to help families appreciate these new roles. We have to balance families’ care and concern while nudging them along to see their family members through different lenses. The trainings have helped with this as well.”

All Benedictine School residential staff are State of Maryland certified. Meghan Moore, Child Care Provider for the Benedictine Residential Program, cares for students ages 18 through 21. She has found that the more hands-on and interactive training is helping her handle certain daily situations.

She states, “Through role playing, I’m learning how to communicate better with students and give them support in their daily living activities without doing the activity for them.

“At my most recent training, I learned how to help one of my students get dressed independently without my help. This was a huge milestone for him. Plus, since he doesn’t have the dexterity to tie his shoes, we’ve gotten him Velcro shoes so that he can do it!”

Another key component of the overall initiative is the introduction of the small team approach for staff support and accountability.

Moore adds, “The Direct Support Professionals are becoming a part of the team that develops the plan of care for each student. Our experiences as residential providers are being considered more fully in the overall plan for each student.”

The result of these changes has been more community involvement for those that Benedictine serves. McMorris concludes, “Our community is built for the change that is occurring. It has improved the status of our community and how staff and community members interact with the people we support. The biggest reward is getting the people we support out there and doing the job. When I see the pride and the advocating they are doing for themselves, I am on fire!”★

Code of Ethics enhances the individual needs, wants, and preferences of the people we support

A key component of the recent training provided to Benedictine’s Adult Services staff by the National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals was the inclusion of the DSP Code of Ethics into the frame work of Benedictine’s Adult Services. Beginning in April, staff will be participating in monthly refresher sessions to help keep the code of ethics and competencies at top of mind as they ensure that our individuals are safe, healthy, and engaged in activities they enjoy.

On a daily basis, Direct Support Professionals are asked to navigate through a maze of ethical dilemmas and must often respond by using independent judgment and making critical decisions at a moment’s notice. The outcomes of these decisions can literally be a matter of life and death for the person who is receiving supports. Thus the code of ethics provides a framework of action and judgement as they help Benedictine individuals achieve their highest potential.

DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS CODE OF ETHICS

Person-Centered Supports: As a Direct Support Professional (DSP), my first allegiance is to the person I support; all other activities and functions I perform flow from this allegiance.

Promoting Physical and Emotional Well-Being: As a DSP, I am responsible for supporting the emotional, physical, and personal well-being of the individuals receiving support. I will encourage growth and recognize the autonomy of the individuals receiving support while being attentive and energetic in reducing their risk of harm.

Integrity and Responsibility: As a DSP, I will support the mission and vitality of my profession to assist people in leading self-directed lives and to foster a spirit of partnership with the people I support, other professionals, and the community.

Confidentiality: As a DSP, I will safeguard and respect the confidentiality and privacy of the people I support.

Justice, Fairness and Equity: As a DSP, I will promote and practice justice, fairness, and equity for the people I support and the community as a whole. I will affirm the human rights, civil rights, and responsibilities of the people I support.

Respect: As a DSP, I will respect the human dignity and uniqueness of the people I support. I will recognize each person I support as valuable and help others understand their value.

Relationships: As a DSP, I will assist the people I support to develop and maintain relationships.

Self-Determination: As a DSP, I will assist the people I support to direct the course of their own lives.

Advocacy: As a DSP, I will advocate with the people I support for justice, inclusion, and full community participation.

16th Annual



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410-634-2292 or benschool.org for more information

Registration & Rally Starting Point Locations

• Hitchcock Autoworks	7608 Investment Court, Owings, MD	8:00 – 8:45 a.m.
• Old Glory Harley Davidson	11800 Laurel Bowie Rd., Laurel, MD	8:15–9 a.m.
• Outback Steakhouse	Rt. 2 & Forest Dr., Annapolis, MD	9–10 a.m.
• The Greene Turtle	2318 N Salisbury Blvd., Salisbury, MD	9–10 a.m.
• Paul T. Ewing, Inc.	Westbound Rt. 50 (near airport), Easton, MD	9:30–10:30 a.m.
• Rommel Harley Davidson Delmarva	22586 Sussex Hwy., Seaford, DE	9:30–10:30 a.m.
• Benedictine School	14299 Benedictine Lane, Ridgely, MD	9:30–2 p.m.

Thanks to our Sponsors:



TRANSFORMING OUR ORGANIZATION and its People

Over the years, Benedictine has transformed several times and seen its many programs evolve as best practices changed how the organization provides vocational training, community living and meaningful employment services to older youth and adults across the Eastern Shore.

Most recently, Federal and State laws and initiatives have affected Benedictine's field of service with a major shift from supporting people in a segregated, facility-based service model to a more community-based, person-centered model. In particular is the philosophy of Maryland's Employment First initiative, developed in 2008, that all individuals with significant disabilities are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life.

Scott Evans, Executive Director of Benedictine, notes that "while this transformation may be in some way a response to new Federal and State guidelines, through it all, Benedictine has remained strongly committed to our mission to 'help children and adults to achieve their greatest potential.'" He adds, "They don't know what they don't know. Everyone is capable of achievement."

As Benedictine has begun to enhance its programs and focus on a stronger community-based model of service, every aspect of the organization, from the residential and educational branches of the School to the residential and work-based learning experiences of the Adult Open Community Program, are being transformed.

Evans adds, "The transformation is taking what we have and improving upon it. Our programs have always evolved to meet the needs of the people we serve. The changes underway are helping us move our program forward."

Evans and his staff thought that with the changes they needed it would be much tougher to get to this point. Instead, the organization has seen a renewed excitement and focus on its mission and vision. He notes, "It takes creativity to take us where we want to go—creativity, ingenuity, and a focus on the people we serve. The goal is to get them deeper into the community. We are going into a better place for everyone."

A key member of the transformation team is Robin McDuffie, Benedictine's Adult Services Project Manager, who in July 2016, began to facilitate all aspects of the transformation.



Pictured are Scott Evans, Executive Director of Benedictine, with Robin McDuffie, Adult Services Project Manager. The two are helping to facilitate all aspects of the transformation of Benedictine's programs and services as Benedictine enhances focuses on a stronger community-based model of service.

This has included organizational restructuring, especially in the area of supported employment services; transportation changes to address the growing need of community inclusion; and the creation of a person-centered discovery process to uncover each person's interests and goals and support them in achieving these goals. Also implemented has been a recruiting and hiring plan based on a revised set of core-competencies along with enhanced training and professional development of Direct Support Professionals in both residential and employment services in concert with overall program enhancements.

Community partners have become critical as the people served by Benedictine get deeper into neighboring communities. Today, Benedictine has over 75 community partners. McDuffie comments, "Anyone who supports inclusiveness in any way is considered a Benedictine partner."

Benedictine's partners hire qualified workers and participate in training programs and community development services, which help individuals develop their unique likes and interests. Partners also help individuals build skills through volunteer services and support specific program needs while spreading the word about Benedictine's skilled workforce. Many partners also help integrate Benedictine's young adults and

older individuals into community activities, involving them in recreation and leisure activities, classes, and clubs. Benedictine continues to look for new community settings in which individuals can live, work and play.

McDuffie adds, “Community partners benefit through their exposure to individuals with disabilities and often it is a learning experience for all involved and one that creates a team environment.”

Each Benedictine adult has a person-centered plan designed to help further integrate each individual into the community while providing supports at the highest level possible for the individual. Risk is discussed and how to support individuals with risk.

“Everything is about choice—what is important “TO the person” not “FOR the person” is the focus of the person-centered plan for the people supported,” says McDuffie.

Benedictine has also developed internal work groups to manage the change process and measure successes. According to McDuffie, success is occurring while Benedictine makes changes to its residential and employment programs. She comments, “The staff creativity and the level of professionalism we have reached with the people we support has been phenomenal. The people supported are asking for more work hours or for more jobs. In addition, our community partners are experiencing a sense of accomplishment and enrichment as they broaden their understanding.”

What began in Maryland in 2008 as a strategic plan to improve employment outcomes for people with developmental disabilities was refined by Benedictine in 2015 through its own strategic plan. A subsequent two-day planning retreat in 2016, “Moving MD Forward,” in which Benedictine participated, further unified the vision of person-centered services, in which each individual learns, works and lives as independently as possible while progressing towards integrated employment and community life.

Evans comments, “That retreat was instrumental in helping us move forward with our own goals and objectives. We are on track to meet the goals we set then.”

He adds, “Our next step is to work with families to help them understand transformation from the individual, staff and community points of view. We want parents to see that this is a positive experience. We are thrilled with how excited our individuals in the supportive employment program are about these opportunities before them. They feel they have control over the direction of their lives, which is in line with the mission we strive to accomplish each day.”★



CHRONOLOGY OF SIGNIFICANT DISABILITY INITIATIVES

Multiple Federal and State laws and Initiatives have affected Benedictine’s field of service including:

1990

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibited the discrimination of people with disabilities

1999

Olmstead Supreme Court Decision determined unjustified segregation of persons with disabilities was a violation of ADA

2008

In conjunction with Maryland’s Employment First initiative, the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration published a position statement on integrated employment being the primary focus and first option for all state supported services

2014–2015

U.S. Department of Justice settlements determined that individuals with disabilities who served in segregated workshops could work in community settings at competitive wages

2014

Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services released Home and Community-Based Services Settings Rule to ensure individuals receiving long-term services and supports would have full access to benefits from community living and to receive services in integrated settings with deadline of 2019

2015

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act created new vision for organizations, agencies and colleges to deliver a more job-driven approach to training and skills development

Maryland Employment First strategic plan is launched.

2016

Maryland Ken Capone Equal Employment Act was created to protect workers with disabilities from being paid less than minimum wage. By October 2020, entities that pay less than minimum wage are prohibited from obtaining State funds.

**“They don’t know what they don’t know.
EVERYONE IS CAPABLE OF ACHIEVEMENT.”**



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It's About the Kids – Gabby Fletcher is Honorary Chair of June 6, 2017 Benedictine Charity Golf Tournament

The **Benedictine Charity Golf Tournament**, on Tuesday, June 6, at the Country Club at Woodmore, is hosted by Benedictine parent and Trustee **Thad Fletcher**. Thad's daughter, Gabby, a student at Benedictine, is Honorary Chair of the tournament.

The tournament will help underwrite innovative, comprehensive special education opportunities for children and adults with developmental disabilities and autism.

Funds raised through the Tournament will provide scholarships to ensure that no child who needs our services is turned away due to lack of funding.

The tournament also supports the purchase of new equipment for on-campus vocational programs and for our Easton area training facility; improvements to our 18 independent living homes for adults in Maryland and computer technology and recreational equipment for school kids at the Ridgely, Md., campus.

To register contact Stacy Whewell at stacy.whewell@benschool.org or call 410-634-2292.



Gabby Fletcher

Honorary Chair