

AN INTERVIEW WITH

Sue Finney

By Kimberly Paetzold, Editor

Sue Finney is the assistant pediatric brain injury program director at Rainbow's Pediatric Center. She has a bachelor of science degree in psychology and a minor in sociology from Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Sue has extensive experience in the field of traumatic brain injury serving adult and pediatric populations since 1992. She has held the following positions at Rainbow: rehabilitation assistant, residential program manager and assistant pediatric program director & school liaison. Additional experience includes behavioral management and work with geriatric, developmentally disabled and domestic violence populations.

Hello, Sue. Recently, Rainbow entered a partnership with the Farmington Public School System to help support and re-integrate some of our teens into the public school setting. Could you tell us about the transitional-style classroom partnership program?

January 16, 2007 marked the first day of our new transitional-style classroom at Rainbow's Oakland Treatment Center. While located at our Center, the classroom is operated by the Farmington Public Schools with a maximum of five students. The Farmington School district provides a certified special education teacher and a para-professional for the classroom. Rainbow provides two staff to



also assist so there is a high student-to-staff ratio. The classroom is set up just like the high school, with students attending full days every week, but they do have very individualized classes. Their class load follows a typical school day with math, English, science and social studies – the core curriculum – but it's individualized because you have an age range from middle school to high school. The classes are geared toward meeting individual needs and graduation requirements.

Is the transitional classroom the same as other special education classrooms?

Yes. As a specialized placement classroom, there are accommodations and modifications to the curriculum and grades just like high school. Electives are offered such as physical



Rainbow's Oakland Treatment Center (pictured right) is located in downtown Farmington, Michigan.





LaShante Turner and Sue Finney playing in the sandbox

education (taught by a PE instructor), which is held three times a week in our gym here in the treatment center. The teacher instructs an art class (fundamental designs), and our students do have the opportunity to attend the high school for assemblies and classes as a reward. Our teens are offered the same opportunity to attend events like the senior party or prom.

What is the goal of this Program?

The goal is to transition students back into the public school system and get them involved in the community. It's so important for teens to graduate. Without the right support, this is not possible or realistic for many children and teens with brain injuries. We set up this classroom because many of our students have behavioral challenges. If they cannot be successful in a public school setting or if they came from a restricted placement prior to admission into Rainbow's Program, we find that smaller classes and fewer daily transitions help them become successful.

What criteria is established so students can transition back into the public schools?

The idea is that each student in the program must demonstrate compliance and meet the established criteria for five consecutive weeks. Criteria includes the following:

- The student must be a Rainbow residential client.
- Demonstrate perfect attendance (unless excused.)
- Remain in the classroom without unexcused departures due to behavioral reasons or non-compliance.
- Complete negative drug screens.
- Earn 95 percent of total points possible per day. (Our classroom operates on a points system where students earn points for good/positive behavior.)
- Have zero suspensions from the program.

When a student transitions to the high school, they are supported with a similar program and must still meet the outlined criteria, which is individualized, so that

they can succeed in their new environment. We also schedule follow up meetings to make sure they are doing well.

How are classroom behaviors monitored?

The teacher utilizes a points-based reward system in the classroom, and the same program goes home with the student. The residential program manager looks at their report every day, signs it and returns it to the classroom for points. Our Pediatric Program uses the points system, which offers rewards and consequences. When teens accumulate points, they can save them or turn them in for store purchases or gift cards.

How successful has the transitional classroom been so far?

We are still working out the fine details and making adjustments as we go along, but overall, the result has been very positive. Our teacher is outstanding, and the students really respect her. We already have had one student who met the criteria and transitioned to North Farmington High School after his first five weeks. He met his goal of getting to the high school because he was interested in athletics and wanted to participate on a team. His accomplishment was outstanding, and he's now on one of the sports teams and doing quite well. Other students are doing equally well, and I anticipate this being a good addition to our Pediatric Program for a long time to come.



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