

Helena Headlines

Quarterly news and updates

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Family Experience

What should Helena Keep Doing?

“Being patient and have faith in these children



Family Experience

“I am extremely pleased with [my child’s] progress & the service he is receiving. The staff and services [my child] receives have changed his & our lives. The impact is huge and so appreciated.”

Family Experience

“Keep up the good work and thanks for all you do.”

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Updates from Quarter 4:

We Hired a Billing Specialist

In November, we hired a part time billing specialist, Connie Winters, to help us with our billing. Connie has years of experience with medical billing and will be a great addition to our team!

Reorganization of Lobby and Learner Cubbies

In the beginning of last quarter, we decided to take the cubbies from the lobby and move them to designated areas around the center. This was done to help eliminate the issues of our learners personal items going missing. Instead of having 3 different cubby spaces (in the lobby, bathroom, and cafeteria). Now all of our learners have their cubbies near their assigned rooms and in the cafeteria. This has helped keep the lobby and the bathroom significantly cleaner and we have gotten better at sending all of our learners items home when they should be. Bear with us, this is a work in progress and we are working our hardest at making sure nothing gets left behind.

Merge with Helena Family Support

In December, our parent company, Helena Family Support, joined us at our location in Fridley. Helena Family Support offers in clinic and/or home-based treatment for children, adolescents, and adults suffering from a variety of diagnoses and other behavioral problems.



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Provider Spotlight:

Jake Maruska, MA, Administrative Site Supervisor

Jake coordinates the intakes and discharges of the in-home clientele. He provides support to Trent Peterson, LADC, LMFT, in-home supervisor to provide consistent and effective treatment to these children and adolescents.

Jake completed his Master's degree in Counseling and Psychotherapy at Bowie State in Maryland in 2007. He provided skills training services to individuals and families in inner city Washington DC from 2004-2007. Jake was a school counselor at Qatar Academy in Doha, Qatar in 2007 and 2008. Jake has been working with children and families since returning back to Minnesota in 2009.

Areas of practice include: Outpatient psychotherapy - individual, couple, and family therapy for all age ranges. Individual and family skills training.

In his free time, Jake enjoys spending time with his wife and nieces. He also enjoys the outdoors and travelling.

Brittany Lahr, MA, CCC-SLP

Brittany is our new Speech-Language Pathologist here at Helena Autism Therapy Center! She received her BA in Speech-Language-Hearing-Sciences and her MA in Speech-Language Pathology from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Brittany has spent the last 5 years of her professional career working in early intervention with children who have Autism. She is extremely passionate about working with young children and helping them find various ways to use and understand language!

When she is not at work, Brittany enjoys spending time with her husband, 2 ½ year old son, and 4-month old baby girl. Brittany is excited to have the opportunity to build relationships with the learners at Helena as well as help them grow in their communication abilities.

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Welcoming New Staff:

Emily Wharton, BS

Emily graduated from the U of M, Rochester with a BS in Health Sciences. Her major allowed for a broad education tailored to her passions of learning in psychology, neuroscience, human anatomy & physiology, holistic health & healing techniques, environmental health, and cultural diversity. She has a love for making learning fun and exciting, and using her creativity to make everyday tasks more enjoyable. Kids have a special spot in her heart, and she may be a giant high energy child herself at times. She enjoys exercising and being active all seasons of the year, and exploring new places with her lab, AJ, and dachshund, Snickers. Her future plans are to obtain her Master's degree in Occupational Therapy working with children who have special needs, and she is excited to be a part of the Helena team.

Michael Schram, BA

Michael is very excited to work with all of the lovely children. In his past, he has worked as a behavioral health therapist with an autism department in Janesville, WI (his hometown) and as a teacher for low-income first-generation students seeking to attend college in Portland, OR. Michael really enjoys helping others and traveling. He has spent a year of his life exploring Australia. His most recent trip was around the USA out of a tiny home he build in the bed of his truck. Michael can't wait to start working with all of your children.

Janna George, BA

Janna graduated from the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University with a major in Psychology and a minor in Hispanic Studies. Jana plays the flute, loves painting and art, and enjoys spending time outside. She also loves to cook and spend time with her family. Janna is very excited to get to know the learners. She believes that every child has their own unique talents and strengths that can help them grow and be successful. She can't wait to see your child reach their full potential.

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Lisa Xiong, BS

Lisa completed her Bachelor of Science in Human Services at Metropolitan State University. Her decision to work as a mental health practitioner is driven by an innate passion to positively impact others. Lisa has a strong passion to help children meet their full potential and participate in daily living activities, and doing what they love and enjoy. Outside of work, Lisa enjoys traveling the world and exploring new places.

Johnette Tarr

Johnette graduated from St. Cloud State University, with a major in Gender and Women Studies and a minor in Global Studies. Acquiring her education in Liberia, Ghana, United States, Cambodia, South Africa, Lao, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore has allowed her to know diversity on a whole new level. Her path of working in this field started when she worked with a brilliant 11 year old child with an autism diagnosis. She believes that one of the most rewarding parts of working in this field is teaching and learning (reciprocity).

Jordan Westberg, BS

Jordan graduated from the University of Wisconsin, River Falls in 2013 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Marketing Communications. During her four years of college, she worked at a group home with people who had Prader Willi Syndrome – which was a job that she truly fell in love with. After graduation, she went on to pursue the corporate life and spent two years working on the Fixture Procurement team at Target Headquarters. During those two years, she learned a lot of useful skills, but most importantly, she learned a lot about herself; at the end of the day, she knew where her heart belonged. This is what led her to her employment at Helena and she is so very grateful that it did. Jordan loves to read and write, and the majority of her free time is spent hanging out with her puppy, Ralph. She is so excited for this opportunity and cannot wait to continue growing with the team at Helena.

Kali Kearns, BS

Kali joined Helena in November of 2017. She graduated from the University of Nebraska, Kearney, with a degree in Elementary Education and Special Education. She is excited to be working here at Helena!

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Upcoming Events:

January 1st: Helena Closed for New Year holiday

February 14th: Valentines Day Party!

March 16th: Dress up in green for St Patrick's Day

Cold Weather Information:

We usually follow the Anoka-Hennepin School District (AHSD) policy on closing:

If AHSD is closed due to snow:

- If there is a late opening for AHSD, **we will also open late**
- If AHSD **closes early and before 3:30pm**, we will try to send clients home as early as family and/or transportation can pick them up
- If the AHSD **closes after 3:30 pm**, **we will NOT be closing early**

If AHSD is closed due to cold:

- If AHSD closes for cold weather, **we will NOT be closing** our center as our children are door to door drop off and pick up

We will post all weather-related decisions on our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/HelenaAutismTherapyCenter).

There will also be a notification on WCCO if there will be closings (look for AHSD). If you decide to keep your learner home and Helena is NOT closed, please contact us at our main number, 763-432-3926.

Wait List Information:

Our wait list for diagnostic assessments is only 2 weeks long. Our current wait list for center-based services is about 6-7 months long (with start dates around July/August). We can start in-homes sooner for families that are on our wait list so they are able to get services during the time that they are waiting.

If you know of anyone in need of services that fit our criteria, please have them give Sam a call at the front desk (763-432-3926). Sam can help with the intake process, schedule a tour of our center, and get them onto our wait list.

Thank you!

