

Leading the Way

At least 11 established international schools can be found here in Shanghai, each with its own unique curriculum. But in the realm of special education, our schools are lagging behind. Christine Huang uncovers the city's only organization solely focused on serving children with special needs: The Shanghai Special Education Consulting Services.



"For most children with moderate or severe special needs, there were no options [in Shanghai] – up to now," explains Monte Rosen, managing director of the soon to be opened Shanghai Special Education Consulting Services, or SSECS. SSECS will be the city's first organization wholly devoted to serving international students with special needs. Monte's wife Shari, an educational consultant and speech therapist for several international schools, recognized this long-standing problem and wanted to do something to help. With a PhD in Speech and Language Pathology, Shari has committed much of her life to helping people with disabilities. Now she and Monte, along with principal and clinic director Dr Rodney Aho and senior advisor Andrew Hill, will be working together to create full and part-time educational programs for families and students with special needs.

"Our mission is to help children with special needs find the best and most appropriate services to help them succeed. For some children, this means offering full-time programs; for other children this means supplementing their international school experience with add-on services," explains Monte. SSECS's full-time special education programs include curriculum designed for students of differing needs (most under ten years old, initially) - typically those with Autism Spectrum Disorder, developmental disabilities, and other related conditions.

Among the several programs offered by SSECS will be the Building for Success Program, a full-time course geared toward students who are ready for an academic program on top of their social communication and self-regulation skill

building. Four major units will be covered over the course of a year in this program: 1) Who am I?, 2) Celebrations, 3) China, and 4) My Environment. "Subjects like math and reading will be explored under these topics," says Monte. "For example, under 'Who am I,' we might explore each individual and their relationships to their family, their community, their country."

Each program will be headed by a full-time program leader and leader assistant and will be limited to eight students each. These leaders will serve the students as mentors, teachers, and team members: "We want to create an environment for them to feel good about themselves and to build confidence in supportive surroundings," says Ingrid Peterson, program leader for the Building for Success group.

SSECS will also offer workshops and clinic services for groups and individuals, available to anyone in their programs or attending international schools. Their services include individual and family counseling sessions, along with assessments and therapies for Psychological Education, Speech and Language, and Occupational

Therapy. Writing workshops to help students with their essay-writing, homework assignments, and thought organization will be available to those with learning disabilities. For families with children with special needs, SSECS can help make the process simpler by reviewing assessments and providing information about special programs and services that will meet the specific needs of the new students.

No international schools in Shanghai have the resources to offer full special education programs on their campuses, and many services have also been difficult to integrate into the schools' budgeting. Funding is always an issue when it comes to education, and Shanghai's international

schools have limited outside support. While many people in the education field have recognized the need to improve options for special needs students, it has been difficult to implement changes without the proper resources. With SSECS's opening, a new and much-needed option will be available to all, something everyone is hopeful about. As Tom Queen, school psychologist/counselor for the Shanghai Community International Schools explains, "We have all been approached by parents [of children with special needs] who we don't have the resources to help...[SSECS] is responding to a need that hasn't been addressed up until now and giving students another option - which is good." ■

SSECS's two full-time programs will commence in September, with two additional programs added in January. (More full-time programs will be added as the need arises.) SSECS is currently open to foreign students only, though they hope to provide services for local Chinese students in the near future. The school will be located at 1188 Xinsongjiang Lu, Unit 161, in Songjiang University Town. For more information, email shanghaipecial@yaho.com, or call 6782 4412.



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