**Occupational Therapy**

**Carla Johnson, Occupational Therapist, OTR**

Having the opportunity to work with Alexis as her occupational therapist during her weeklong intensive stay was definitely one of the most rewarding things I've done so far in my career.  The ability to go through the day to day activities with Alexis and her family in a real-time setting (not simulated like we usually do in therapies) made a world of difference in my ability to provide education, strategies, and techniques that could truly be individualized and result in real change in their everyday lives.  When I first met Alexis, I could tell she was smart right away and was very motivated to participate in her care and in family activities, but struggled to change from the set ways she and her family had established.

While parents of children with autism do their best to encourage their children to grow and become independent, it is often difficult to change from habits and routines that are known to work!  The opportunity to be with Alexis and her family allowed me to observe the methods they were using and tweak them in a way that would promote increased independence with gentle changes that Alexis embraced rather than avoiding!  Of course, there were some hiccups along the way, but some major changes were noticed by the end of the week.  For example, in Alexis’ participation in her morning routine…by the end of the week she required only one visual cue (schedule) and one verbal cue to stay on track and complete her own dressing, tooth-brushing, and hair-brushing tasks (prior she had required step by step cues for each part of the task and approximately double the amount of time to complete)!  Alexis also was able to increase her participation in preparing her meals and improved her ability to tolerate sitting at the table with her family and trying new foods and staying there until the meal was completed!

One huge challenge that Alexis and her parents had worked on in the past, but always resulted in more screaming/problems and no success was going to the bathroom on the toilet.  By working as a team with all the therapy staff and the family, we were able to derive a plan that resulted in Alexis urinating on the toilet for the first time ever!  By the end of the week Alexis had a greater than 50% success rate, which has improved even more since the Katterhagens’ return home!  Other improvements seen by Alexis and her family with our new strategies implemented include improved hand-writing (with new tools to work on in home-schooling), a decreased sensitivity to sound (like not running away from a blow dryer or screaming at the sound of a vacuum), and a greater interaction with people in the community (like ordering at a restaurant and paying for the bill)!

Overall the biggest change I believe we made during the week at Diane’s House is the evolution in Alexis’ family from fear at the thought of changing their routine that they knew worked to embracing the idea of challenging Alexis to grow with the new strategies and hope provided to the family.

**Speech Therapy**

**Becky Payne, Speech Therapist, MATCCC/SLP/HPCS**

When I first met Alexis, she avoided eye contact and screamed with any new transition, including myself coming into her “space.” She did not have any communication besides some “echolalia” and screaming to communicate her frustrations. I immediately initiated with picture symbols that were 2” colored and put them on a visual schedule for transitioning, identifying activities, items and events, and providing a colored picture symbol to implement “yes” and “no.”  She readily identified familiar sight words, common vocabulary in picture symbols, and followed conversational picture symbol scripts.

Alexis is very smart in that she can manipulate an IPhone/IPad to obtain her games (including initiating on and off and switching to new games and completing multiple games); knowing this we transitioned her to the IPad for the Proloque2go (augmentative voice output communication program) in which she had nearly 20 symbols per page that assisted with her speech.  We started with modeling responses, and then eliminating verbal cues and using visual cues to model initiation of requests.  She did excellent and started some initiation with very motivating items such as her swing, trampoline, and IPad games, and some for food.  We very much drilled her response for “yes” and “no.”

Over her entire week, she screamed (not very loud) twice in frustration, compared to the initial half an hour of meeting her with extreme anxiety at the hotel room during the PATH conference. Alexis also minimized her “echolalia” by having the visual/verbal augmentative communication of her own to use for functional communication.

Speech Therapy also addressed Alexis’s ability to follow one and two step directions as well as transition with a visual schedule and she did incredibly with this as well, each day progressing into functional tasks in community settings such as Bargain Bills, Casa Mexicana, McDonalds, and Church, as well as the families’ outing on the St. Croix Boat Tour, and the group pot luck.  Speech Therapy assisted in developing functional vocabulary, teaching initiation/responses, transitioning, learning/reading site words, following age appropriate spatial concepts (behind, under, in, on, over).

Alexis appeared to know that this week was “HER” week and she was very responsive to whatever we presented for her progression

**Physical Therapy**

**Ann Davis, Physical Therapist, PT**

During her physical therapy sessions Alexis worked on a number of areas.  Safety when going outside and being near a street were a big concern for her parents.  Alexis used a picture board to initiate going outside and also worked on safety with staying near her parents in busy environments.  During her evaluation Alexis showed deficits in sensory integration and a sensory diet was planned and practiced during the week to help integrate higher level movements that are challenging for her.  She also worked on posture and stretching for her ankles at an incline board while she played games on her iPad to help her be more independent in this at home.

**Physical Therapy**

**Nicole Wittmann, Physical Therapist, PT**

On the last day I thought that parent knowledge overall about avoiding "w" sitting, proper posture when squatting, how to properly stretch the Achilles' tendon, and low tone was greatly improved in regards to Alexis. As far as progress for Alexis she was able to complete the obstacle course better without crying and demonstrated improved dynamic balance on the balance beam.