

Developing a continuum of care:

Teamwork helps Jessica achieve therapy goals

By Diane Dekkers, RN, and Linda Abernethy

Theresa Meininger-Sanders' goals for her daughter Jessica might seem like nothing out of the ordinary. She wants to see Jessica walk, learn to speak, and feed herself. However, these are challenging goals for the four-year-old, who has developmental delays, multiple physical disabilities and challenges with feeding.

CLIENT:

Four-year-old female

CONDITION:

Developmental delays, multiple physical disabilities, feeding concerns

TREATMENT FACILITY:

Single plan of care with Children's Treatment Network of Simcoe York

Since birth, Jessica has had a complex schedule of therapeutic support services including case management, early intervention, and nutrition services as well as physio, occupational and speech therapy. As

of this year, Jessica became one of the first children to have these services coordinated and integrated through the Children's Treatment Network of Simcoe York's single plan of care initiative. Before the Network came into being, establishing a long-term care plan had its challenges.

A rocky road

It has been a rocky road for this diminutive girl who strives to keep up with her twin brother, Alex. At the age of six months, Jessica's parents and paediatrician noticed that she was not meeting her developmental milestones. At the time, Simcoe Community Services Infant

Development referred her to occupational and speech therapists from Royal Victoria Hospital in Barrie, Ontario. Jessica was also referred for physiotherapy and dietary support from Southlake Regional Health Centre in Newmarket. Through

a concerted effort on everyone's part, Jessica was able to take her first steps by the age of two.

Things looked promising, but just as she began to progress, Jessica suffered a grand mal seizure while the family was travelling in the U.S.—an event that caused significant regression. Not only could she no longer walk, stand or sit on her own, she also had paralysis on the left side of her body. She had also stopped speaking and eating.

Jessica spent six-weeks in hospitals, first in the U.S., then at McMaster University Hospital in Hamilton and finally at Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto. Jessica's intensive rehab program was then transitioned to the North Simcoe Muskoka Community Care Access Centre (CCAC), who assumed responsibility for coordinating her physiotherapy and occupational therapy in conjunction with continued visits with her dietitian.

A number of challenges

Through the CCAC, physiotherapist Barb Wenzel from Closing the Gap

Jessica (right) and classmate Jaclyn get their creative juices flowing at Rotodale Nursery School.



Healthcare Group in Barrie visited the home regularly to work with Jessica on a number of fronts. When Barb first met Jessica, the toddler was unable to sit or crawl and had very limited mobility. "There was also a sensory component," she explains. "Jessica was tactile defensive since birth and couldn't stand anyone touching her feet. Her left side was also very sensitive to touch."

Jessica was also wary of strangers, so it took time to build rapport. An added challenge was that Jessica had a feeding tube that limited the ability to perform activities on her stomach. "Even when the tube was removed, we had to be sensitive to the site where it was. That was a whole extra challenge from the start."

Given the mobility and paralysis issues, Barb has focused on exercises to strengthen Jessica's trunk and stretch her hamstring muscles and her Achilles tendons. In terms of her gross motor development, Jessica can now crawl and kneel, and can move from a sit to a stand position with the help of a stool, as well as take reciprocal steps with support. Jessica now has rigid foot braces called ankle-foot orthosis (AFOs), which help to control her ankle and knee movements and support her in a standing position.

Occupational therapist Laurie Rife, also with Closing the Gap Healthcare Group, has continued to provide in-home services. She spends time teaching Jessica to feed herself, while increasing the textures of foods, and encouraging her to use her left arm to engage in two-handed activities. Given her tactile sensitivities, Laurie has Jessica experience different stimuli through water play, experiencing textures on her skin, and letting her play with rice and macaroni.

Since the age of three, Jessica has attended Rotodale Nursery School, where she is supported by resource teacher Linda Abernethy. Home phys-

iotherapy and occupational therapy services have continued. Dietitian Fiona Pearce from Southlake Regional Health Centre continues to support Jessica's feeding and growth development. In addition, Jessica's occupational and physiotherapists go to the nursery school every six to eight weeks to work with Jessica's mother and her resource teacher to discuss equipment requirements and integrate the appropriate therapies into her regular school activities and day-to-day life. Her speech therapist, Cheryl Warnica with Simcoe County Pre-School Speech and Language Services Royal Victoria Hospital, also visits the school occasionally.

An integrated approach

Establishing and maintaining consistent connections with all her caregivers has been integral to Jessica's continued progress, especially given the myriad of mobility challenges and her difficulty in adapting to new situations and people.

However, in accordance with standard procedure following the provision of acute services, Jessica's care was set to be transferred from the CCAC back to Simcoe Community Services Pre-School Services. This meant Jessica's services could be scaled back given funding and service capacity constraints.

This fate was avoided in January 2007 when Jessica became one of the first children with complex needs to be supported by the Children's Treatment Network of Simcoe York. The Network's services delivery model focuses on providing an integrated single plan of care for children with multiple disabilities in Simcoe County and York Region in Ontario. It links over 40 health care, education, recreation and community service organizations so they can take a team approach to each child's care. A shared electronic record helps

therapists from multiple agencies monitor each child's progress through all the phases of their development, from birth to age 19.

Collaborative care

Although some case conferences had been held for Jessica in the past, the Network's single plan of care allows everyone to work more collaboratively. More importantly, strategies centre on the parent's visions and goals. For example, Jessica's mother wanted to focus on walking and speech first, and then address issues related to improving left side mobility. In addition, rather than working parallel with each other, all the therapists look for opportunities to integrate efforts and support each other's work through the various therapies and treatments that Jessica needs. The approach has become more trans-disciplinary in nature.

Network funding has also allowed Jessica to retain the same level of care with the same therapists—a commitment that will continue even after she registers for senior kindergarten next year. There have been some good breakthroughs made over the past few months, and the ability to maintain a team approach will help everyone continue to meet Jessica's and her family's goals. In addition, the family has been relieved of the stress of having to start over with new services, supports and personnel as Jessica transitions through the system. As Jessica's mother says, "Having a team that's working together and focused on Jessica is helping us meet goals faster. She's at a critical stage in her development. The timing of her single plan of care couldn't be better." ❖

***Diane Dekkers, RN**, is with the North Simcoe Muskoka Community Care Access Centre, and **Linda Abernethy**, is a resource teacher with Simcoe Community Services.*

CLIENT: Jessica, 4 years old

TREATMENT PROCESS: Single Plan of Care
Children's Treatment Network of Simcoe York

CARE TEAM:

PT: Barb Wenzel, Closing the Gap Healthcare Group

OT: Laurie Rife, Closing the Gap Healthcare Group

SLP: Cheryl Warnica, Simcoe County Pre-School Speech & Language Services
Royal Victoria Hospital

Dietician: Fiona Pearce, Southlake Regional Hospital

Resource

Teacher: Linda Abernethy, Simcoe Community Services

Service

Coordination: Dianne Dekkers, North Simcoe Muskoka CCAC

TREATMENT FACILITY: At home, at school, at play



Members of Jessica's Care Team, Resource Teacher Linda Abernethy (left), OT Laurie Rife (centre) and PT Barb Wenzel (right), work together at her nursery school to integrate therapy activities into Jessica's day-to-day life.



PT Barb Wenzel (right) and Resource Teacher Linda Abernethy (back) work on Jessica's balance and foot preparation to prepare her for standing and walking using a therapy ball as part of her school day at Rotodale Nursery School.



**Children's
Treatment Network**