



SPECTRUM
EDUCATION CENTER

SPRING 2021 NEWSLETTER

THE SPECTRUM EDUCATION CENTER

The Spectrum Education Center provides educational opportunities for people who want to learn about autism intervention and advocacy, while developing personal strengths, interpersonal awareness, and sensitivity. The Spectrum Education Center embodies the mission of the University of Mount Union, to prepare students for fulfilling lives, meaningful work, and responsible citizenship. The Spectrum Education Center is rooted in the practice of providing meaningful opportunities for people to engage in autism intervention and advocacy.



Higher Education

The Center serves the growing interest of highly motivated undergraduate students who want to engage in valuable work that benefits their long-term goals, while benefitting the community at large. The Center offers a variety of programs and courses for undergraduate students, including: The Spectrum Internship Program, the Peers Program, the RBT Training program, and courses related to developmental disabilities.



Professional Development

Professionals in Northeast Ohio benefit from access to the professional development services offered through the Spectrum Education Center. Professional development sessions inspire those in the field of disability services to consider new approaches and strategies to support individuals with special needs. The Center also offers community workshops. Community members are eligible to participate in the RBT training program offered through the Center.



Autism Intervention

Assessment and intervention services are offered for members of the community with autism. Individualized Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) treatment plans incorporate socialization, play, adaptive behavior and communications skills. Plans are designed and supervised by a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), while being implemented by a Registered Behavior Technician (RBT). The Spectrum Education Center also offers the PEERS® Program. PEERS® is world-renowned for providing evidence-based social skills treatment.

ABOUT THE SPECTRUM EDUCATION CENTER

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR




Dr. Kristine Turko

It is with great excitement that I write this letter to the friends of the Spectrum Education Center at the University of Mount Union. As we begin the new year, we bid 2020 a hearty farewell. Paulo Coelho wrote, "If you are brave enough to say goodbye, life will reward you with a new hello." I think we are all feeling brave and ready for what a new year has in store!

The Spectrum Education Center is embarking on a two-year strategic plan. The plan is rooted in Spectrum's education-centered foundation and cultivates opportunities to engage with the greater community.

The Spectrum Education Center will move towards the future with transformational programming, leadership in educational opportunities, and high-impact intervention services. As we prepare for the future, we will be nimble and responsive in our approach to delivering the best services possible to our stakeholders.

This newsletter is written with the goal of informing the community about the programs and services that the Spectrum Education Center offers. We are excited to share information about the work being done:

-  • to support undergraduate exploration in autism advocacy and intervention,
-  • to promote continued education in the field of autism services, and
-  • to provide intervention services to community members with autism

Please share this information with those who would like to learn more about autism, autism intervention, and ways to advocate for people with autism. If you would like more information about the Center, please contact us at spectrum@mountunion.edu.


We look forward to continuing our services and finding meaningful ways to engage with the community.

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AUTISM AWARENESS



ASD affects one in 68 children



1.5 million Americans are diagnosed with ASD



Boys are five times more likely to be diagnosed with ASD



1,000 families in Stark County need ASD support

POSITIVE OUTCOMES

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Mary (Vallinger '11) Brown

**Co-Owner/Supervisor at Progressive ABA Therapy Group
Adjunct Faculty at Youngstown State University**

As a psychology student at Mount Union, I participated in a summer internship program (now the Spectrum Internship Program) where I gained valuable experience working with students with autism at the Cleveland Clinic Center for Autism. This was my first experience working with students with special needs. This experience shaped my interest in behavior therapy and paved the way for me to pursue a graduate education in Applied Behavior Analysis. This internship experience allowed me to be a competitive candidate for graduate school and job placements in the field.

I love the community atmosphere and the education and opportunities that Mount Union afforded me. I don't think I would be where I am now in my professional career without my experiences and education at Mount. I enjoy returning to campus for visits and have presented to current psychology students on opportunities available upon graduation in the field of autism and behavior therapy.

As a practicing behavior analyst, I supervise direct care staff who provide one on one behavioral interventions to children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders. In this role I conduct assessments, develop curriculum and programs, write behavior intervention plans, and provide training to parents, schools, and other stakeholders.

I am also an adjunct faculty member in the psychology department at Youngstown State University. In this role, I teach coursework in the Master's program in Applied Behavior Analysis. I also provide supervision to students for the practicum/fieldwork hours requirement.



The best part of my job is that I get the opportunity to help improve the lives of individuals with special needs and their families. Working as a behavior analyst can be challenging but is extremely rewarding when we get to be a part of moments like helping a child to communicate for the first time. I am grateful to have a job where I can help to create such meaningful outcomes for children and their families.

I would like to pursue my doctorate degree in the field of psychology in the near future. I hope to continue to work as a clinician and researcher in the field of psychology and Applied Behavior Analysis.

REGISTERED BEHAVIOR TECHNICIAN© (RBT) PROGRAM

An RBT is a credentialed paraprofessional who practices under the close, ongoing supervision of a Board Certified Behavior Analyst. The RBT is primarily responsible for the direct implementation of behavior-analytic services and provides one-on-one therapy to children in their home environment, in the school community, and in the office.

The RBT Training Program provides practical working knowledge of the basic principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). Training includes 40 hours of core curriculum, supervision, and credentialing preparation. Mount Union students and community members are eligible to enroll.

Contact Dr. Kristine Turko at spectrum@mountunion.edu or (330) 829-2830 for more information.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS



Alyssa Adams '20

Doctoral Student in Clinical Psychology at Spalding University

Getting my RBT was incredibly influential and gave me great insight on what comes after an autism diagnosis. Because of my certification, I was able to provide direct services to kids on the autism spectrum while building my resume to apply to graduate programs. My experience as an RBT gave me a solid foundation to build on as a future clinical psychologist.



Caitlynn Conner '20

Masters Student at Ball State University

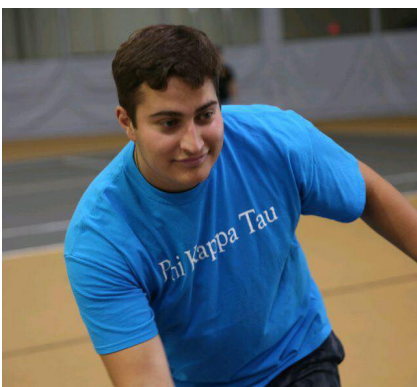
Working as an RBT has impacted me in so many ways. I love the work that I am doing as it is meaningful and I know that I am making a difference in someone else's life. It also allows me to be an advocate for those whose voice isn't always heard. Currently, I am pursuing my master's degree to become a BCBA from Ball State University while also working as an RBT. As an RBT, I teach everything from basic social skills to teaching a child how to communicate! If it wasn't for Dr. Turko and the Spectrum Internship Program, I am not sure that I would be in the field that I am in now. I am so thankful for the opportunities the internship gave me!



Lauren Skulina '20

Peace Corps

The Registered Behavior Technician certification gave me the opportunity to grow professionally by using the skills I was learning in training hands on at my internship site. I gained practical experience in identifying behaviors, collecting and analyzing data, and developing social skills. After completing my RBT certification, I received a job almost immediately as a behavior technician. My professional development through the RBT Training prepared me to implement behavior plans in a workplace setting; and gave me professional experience to discuss in graduate school interviews.



Lou Marich '19

Outpatient Behavior Therapist at Cleveland Clinic Center for Autism

The RBT program is a great choice for those pursuing a career in ABA therapy. Learning the core concepts and techniques of ABA with the ability to discuss and practice with classmates was extremely helpful understanding the curriculum. The online modules allow you to complete the course at your own pace and truly retain the material. This in-depth approach solidified ABA as my career and got me ready to begin treatment! After completing the course, I had an advantage over other job applicants. I was certified and ready to start working as a behavior therapist, without a lot of onboarding by my employer. I was able to secure a position after graduation, skip the usual RBT training and begin treating patients all because of Mount Union's RBT Training.

PEERS[®] PROGRAM

Topics of Instruction:

- Using appropriate conversational skills
- Finding common interests by trading information
- Appropriately using humor
- How to enter and exit conversations between peers
- Being a good host during get-togethers
- Making phone calls to friends
- Choosing appropriate friends
- Being a good sport
- Handling arguments and disagreements
- Changing a bad reputation
- Handling rejection, teasing, and bullying

Pre-requisites:

- Have friendship problems
- Teens in middle or high school
- Teens must be interested in attending the program voluntarily
- Parent must be willing to participate

Apply:

Contact Dr. Kristine Turko, a certified PEERS[®] provider, at 330-829-2830 or spectrum@mountunion.edu to complete a 15-minute phone screen and request an enrollment packet.



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The PEERS[®] program is an evidence-based social skills intervention for motivated adolescents in middle school or high school who are interested in learning ways to help them make and keep friends.

MOUNT UNION STUDENT MENTORS

The success of the PEERS[®] Program depends on the hard work of UMU student mentors. Mentors learn ways to successfully interact with people who have autism and encourage their development of appropriate social skills. PEERS[®] mentors are enrolled in SPE 210, a 2-credit course. Students enrolled in the class meet with the PEERS[®] group for 90 minutes each week, in addition to attending the weekly class meeting. Mount Union students interested in enrolling in SPE 210 should contact Dr. Kristine Turko at spectrum@mountunion.edu.

CLIENT SUCCESS

"Thank you for the opportunity for my son to partake in the PEERS[®] program offered at the University of Mount Union. He loves the color purple and he also loves working with his mentor on his social skills. I was unsure if my son who is ten years old and has Autism along with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder would handle the campus life. I was particularly impressed by how welcoming the staff and students were to my son as he is unique in so many ways. Without this program that your school has offered, he would never of been able to in his eyes, have experienced a college life."

COMMUNITY PARTNER AND INTERNSHIP SITE SPOTLIGHT

GOLDEN KEY CENTER FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN



The Golden Key Center for Exceptional Children Inc. is a 501(c)3 organization. This specialized school is an ODE-accredited, non-public charter school. Its mission is to provide quality education and intervention services for children with autism and developmental disabilities. The school provides a school program for classes kindergarten through 8th grade. Additionally, it offers a preschool program that provides the ever-important early intervention to those on the autism spectrum ages three to five years old.

A family, student, center approach is utilized by the The Golden Key. The low student to teacher ratio is purposely done to allow for a personal and individualized education. It provides educational services specific to a student's grade level, based upon Ohio Common Core Content Standards; Direct intervention specific to a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP); Additional individualized services offering cognitive skill development and required therapy and a year 'round for student in our Preschool and PreK Intervention Programs.

The Golden Key is an approved provider of the Jon Peterson Scholarship and the Autism Scholarship. These scholarships are provided to students with certain educational eligibilities. The Golden Key has no out of pocket expenses for its families for tuition, education and any therapies dictated under the students Individual Education Plan. The Golden Key works with the school district of residence to ensure the student customized plan is being fulfilled.

Highly qualified staff at The Golden Key include eight intervention specialists for its 100 students. In addition, professional educators lead classrooms to meet educational standards. Therapists are contracted by the organization to provide onsite services for students in need of occupational, physical and speech and language therapies. In the Academic

Year of 2020-2021, three of the organization's classrooms are undergoing a certification in Pyramid Approach to Education. This approach is provided by Pyramid Educational Consultants is based in the principles of functional applied behavior analysis that coincide with education, work and home settings needed skills.

Outside of education and intervention services The Golden Key has also formed several "extra-curricular" programs for both the students and the community. Two of its primary extra programs – The Golden Key Food School & the social-emotional program - are found within each classroom on a daily basis.

The Food School is overseen by a certified Food School Specialist in the SOS Food School Program. This is a sensory oral processing method this involves a total body approach to eating. This approach is proven to be most beneficial to people on the autism spectrum. The social-emotional program is a hands-on social behavior-based program to allow for the students to utilize appropriate social skills and emotions. This program is led by a certified instructor in Social Thinking.

The Golden Key is governed by a Board of Directors and licensed under Ohio Department of Education and Ohio Department of Job and Family Services. The organization's executive director is co-founder, Terry Frank. Frank had 30 –plus years in the community creating autism programs for the Stark County Board of Developmental Disabilities and other such organizations. After retiring from DD she decided to create a school dedicated to those who are need of intervention and specialized services not often found in other schools.

The Golden Key owns its building thanks to the generosity of supporters and donors and is centrally located in Canton, Ohio off of I-77 and US-62.





HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

Rachel Ricchiuto '22

Mount Union feels like a second home because of the professors and students that I have the pleasure to work with. For me personally, the psychology department has gone above and beyond to make me feel valued and listened to. I am truly so thankful to be able to attend this school.

I chose psychology as my major because mental health awareness is the thing that I am the most passionate about in my life. I am a huge advocate for those with mental illnesses as well as developmental disabilities. I believe God put me on this earth to help someone the way my family and support system has helped me.

The best experiential learning opportunity that I have had at Mount Union is my internship at The Golden Key School for Exceptional Children. I actually love it there so much that I applied for a job there when my internship ends. I am happy to say I was hired as well! Its always a pleasure to be able to work with the boys in my classroom, they never fail to brighten my day. They are all so unique and wonderful and seeing the way their minds work has been beyond educational. It always puts a smile on my face to go to Golden Key because I get to work with some wonderful kids!

My ultimate career goal is to obtain my Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology and open up my own practice to work with children and teenagers with mental illnesses and developmental disabilities. Mount Union is preparing me for my dream through the coursework I am able to learn from as well as the professional relationships I am able to have with my professors. I know that my professors will be able to support me and guide me on my way to this goal. The most important way that Mount Union is preparing me is through my internship experience. Being able to work in the field I want to go in is more educational than any textbook could ever be.

SPECTRUM INTERNSHIP

The Spectrum Internship Program provides professional training and education related to autism intervention and advocacy in the form of a semester-long immersive experience. The program provides unique experiential learning opportunities for undergraduate students and is unlike any other program in the country. Students accepted into the Spectrum Program gain applied experience through placement in internships, while taking complementary coursework and earning credits towards graduation. Students work approximately 24 hours per week in their internship positions at highly respected clinical sites and receive valuable onsite training from clinical staff. Additionally, interns complete rigorous coursework focusing on theoretical content related to developmental disorders.

Students enrolled in the internship program have the opportunity to take the following courses:

- SPE 200 – Introduction to Developmental Disorders (4 credits)
- SPE 205 -Registered Behavior Technician Training (2 credits)
- SPE 210 – PEERS Mentoring (2 credits)
- SPE 499 - Internship (2-8 credits)

The internship is open to students every fall and spring semester. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis, and can be submitted at mountunion.edu/spectrum.





Spectrum Education Center
1972 Clark Ave.
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SUPPORT THE SPECTRUM EDUCATION CENTER

Your gift to the University of Mount Union's Spectrum Education Center helps provide training and education for those interested in autism intervention and advocacy.

Visit giving.mountunion.edu today to make your gift quickly and securely. Be sure to select "Spectrum Education Center" under "View all giving opportunities."

Want to support Spectrum with a different type of gift? Visit mountunion.edu/giving/ways-to-give to see all the ways you can support your favorite cause or contact Mount Union's Advancement Office at 330-823-2286 for more information.

Contact us at:

Phone: (330) 829-2830

Email: spectrum@mountunion.edu
mountunion.edu/spectrum

