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Specialized Addiction Treatment Program at John L. Norris ATC

Contributed by Lisa Butler

Alcoholism and drug abuse among deaf people is just as common as addictions among hearing people. The John L. Norris Addiction Treatment Center is a unique agency that has been providing hope and help to deaf people struggling with this disease for almost twenty years. A special program within our facility provides culturally sensitive services to deaf and hard of hearing people. The program is designed to serve a vast array of communication needs. It requires one common thread: that a deaf person wants to change their life. There are daily deaf groups as well as access to off-site deaf self-help meetings and religious services. At times the deaf group joins the hearing population with the support of sign language interpreters. For the majority of their treatment time, the deaf patients are in a separate program, able to share their emotions and feelings with other deaf people. The JLNATC serves not only the addict, but offers support to families, friends, and loved ones affected by the disease of addiction. For many deaf people entering JLNATC, it is the first time that they have had adequate access to clear communication in a treatment setting. Our flexible length of stay allows deaf patients to stay in treatment to capitalize on this unique opportunity to express him or herself to someone who can speak their language and be understood.

The JLNATC staff urges the Rochester Community to continue to spread the news that we are here for those deaf and hard of hearing persons who may need help. All too often, deaf people shy away from entering this treatment center in fear that they may be stigmatized or “labeled” in the deaf community. Assurance of confidentiality is of the utmost importance in our facility.

The Program of services at Norris covers addiction needs, mental health issues, family concerns, and health needs. Programming includes individual and group therapy, educational lectures, mental health assessment, health assessment, and recreation therapy. The Program is operated by the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services. No one is ever refused treatment because of an inability to pay.

Our atmosphere is supportive and accessible. You may know someone who is afraid to take the first step in asking for help. If so, the JLNATC staff can guide you in finding proper assistance for anyone needing help for addictions. Additionally, the JLNATC program works side by side with the Rochester Institute of Technology’s Substance Abuse Intervention Services for the Deaf to deliver a full and effective program. This increases our ability to provide the deaf with specialized services and effective clinical communication. The JLNATC team is proud of our relationship with SAISD and is grateful for the hard work and dedication that they provide our deaf patients.

The JLNATC is available to you if you have questions about addiction and services for the deaf. We can provide, in conjunction with SAISD, consultations, presentations, training or support.

Remember – early intervention and treatment can save lives. If you need help or want to get information about the program, please feel free to contact me: Lisa Butler, MS at (TTY) 585-461-4253 or (Voice) 585-461-0410. (Email) <LisaButler@oasas.state.ny.us>. You may also contact SAISD at 585-475-4978.