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Communication Sciences and Disorders students Ashley Makins, Brittany Howell and Emmie Davis working with stroke survivors.

AASU Graduate Students Engaged in Service Projects

(May 20, 2010) A group of graduate students in Armstrong Atlantic State University's [Communication Sciences and Disorders](#) program have been volunteering with the Savannah Speech and Hearing Center to support stroke survivors on the road to recovery.

Over the past year, a group of 13 students has met every Friday with about a dozen survivors struggling to regain speech and other faculties lost to stroke.

“The students are engaging the patients and helping them to speak and write again,” said Ann Curry, volunteer coordinator with the Savannah Speech and Hearing Center, where the meetings have been held.

The service-learning project dubbed AASU CHATS (Communication Help for Adults After Stroke) is required for students prior to graduation and provides experience that can't be obtained in the classroom.

“The students bring their classroom training and work one-on-one with patients in a social setting to help them rebuild some of the skills lost to stroke,” said April Garrity, AASU assistant professor of communication sciences and disorders and director of the CHATS project. “It is an amazing experience for the students that has a real impact on their understanding of their role as therapists.”

The students organize and conduct activities for the survivors like Jeopardy-style games and other activities that facilitate functional communication and social interaction.

Eric Hunt, a second-year graduate student who retired from the Army to return to school, served as one of the student-therapists through the end of last fall semester. “I was given the opportunity to come up with a functional therapy plan focused on cognitive, language, math and other skills,” he said. “Each week we tried to give them different activities to work on different deficits.”

The therapy provided by the students comes at no cost to the stroke survivors. The cost for the same type of services can run \$100 per hour or more. Another group of students will rejoin the stroke support group in the spring of 2011.

Also during the spring semester, the same group of students spent 12 weeks at St. Mary's Community Center in Savannah as part of the PALS program (Promoting Academics through Language-Literacy Skills). Through this program, the students developed and presented caregiver-training modules for parents and teachers of children at risk for speech and language

delays. Caregivers were given information regarding typical speech and language development, as well as development of early literacy skills for academic readiness. In addition to working with caregivers, students also interacted with the children enrolled in the St. Mary's preschool program, facilitating communication, social interaction, and literacy skills directly.

Maya Clark, AASU assistant professor of communication sciences and disorders, is coordinator of the PALS program. She said, "This project fills a real need for the community by empowering caregivers to assist their children with speech, language, and literacy development. It also allows our students to understand and appreciate the role of speech-language pathologists in prevention of language and literacy deficits."

The PALS program culminated at the end of the spring semester with the distribution of literacy bags to the families involved. The literacy bags were provided by the National Student Speech-Language Hearing Association at AASU, and contained books, flash cards, crayons, and healthy snacks.



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