



By Chris Horn

A CAREER BUILT ON SERVICE

David Rotholz keeps his focus on helping those with disabilities

Tucked in a nondescript building several miles from campus, staff at the Center for Disability Resources work in relative obscurity — but with an important mission.

“Every day we strive to enhance the skills and abilities of those who provide services to South Carolinians with developmental disabilities,” said David Rotholz, director of the center, which is affiliated with the School of Medicine’s Department of Pediatrics.

Those disabilities include autism, traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, severe intellectual disabilities and other related conditions.

The center, a federally designated University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, one of 67 of its kind across the nation, has become a highly sought-after graduate student training site and accepts students from many departments. Current students are from USC’s College of Social Work, Department of Psychology, Genetic Counseling Program, School of Library and Information Science, and Arnold School of Public Health, as well as S.C. State University.

“We also collaborate with MUSC and the Greenville Hospital System, and we’re already working with the new School of Medicine site in Greenville,” Rotholz said.

Rotholz has worked for the center since 1996 and focused the first 15 years of his professional career on autism, first as a classroom teacher and later as clinical director of a residential program.

“At first it’s overwhelming working in a classroom full of kids with autism and severe behavioral issues,” he said. “But then you get to know them as kids, and you see the person and not the disability. That makes all the difference.”

Since his early days in the classroom, Rotholz has taken on ever-increasing levels of responsibility in managing developmental disability programs. He’s especially proud of the center’s current programs that assist large numbers of South Carolinians, including:

- a project that works with BabyNet, which provides intervention and respite services for high-risk infants and their families
- an assistive technology project that evaluates individuals for assistive devices and holds an annual AT Expo for a statewide audience
- a diverse training effort with the Department of Disabilities and Special Needs that spans the areas of positive behavioral supports, screening for services and community living for adults with intellectual and related disabilities
- a collaboration with the Department of Social Services that provides training and consultation for inclusion of children with special needs in child-care settings
- an attendant care project with the Department of Health and Human Services that facilitates in-home attendant care for those receiving community long-term care.

“We can help push the envelope for S.C. service providers, helping them get better training and resources,” Rotholz said.

Above: Center for Disability Resources assistant director Meghan Trowbridge, left, confers with David Rotholz, center director, and Karen Irick, the center’s parent and consumer liaison.