

## Rotary Vocational Training Team Exchange in the USA-State of Connecticut

### Rotary Vocational Training Team Schedule (7 May 2018 – 20 May 2018)

| Date            | Venue & Activity  |
|-----------------|---|
| 7 May 2018      | <b>Hartford Hospital:</b> Overview of NAS/FAS Programs, Efforts to decrease C Section Rates<br><b>Rushford Middletown:</b> Tour and education on detox & residential programs, treating pregnant women with OUD, NAS, Post-partum |
| 8 May 2018      | <b>Midstate Medical Centre:</b> Nursing Education for Addiction-Care of the patient not judgement-Trauma Informed Care<br><b>Rushford Meridin: Community based Medication Assisted Treatment</b>                                  |
| 9 May 2018      | <b>Hospital of Central Connecticut:</b> Peer Support: Mitigating the Emotional Toll of Medical Errors, Prenatal Care for women and substance abuse  |
| 10 May 2018     | <b>Institute of Living:</b> Tour and Meetings   |
| 11 May 2018     | <b>UCONN Health Centre:</b> Opioid use disorders among pregnant mothers, Opioid Addiction in Pregnancy: Psychosocial Issues and Treatment Implications  |
| 14 May 2018     | <b>Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services:</b> Pregnancy Intention Screening, Prevention Programs   |
| 15 May 2018     | <b>Department of Children and Families:</b> Child Welfare System, Child Welfare practice overview, Child Welfare & Substance use national perspective<br><b>Coventry House:</b> Tour  |
| 16 May 2018     | <b>Department of Children and Families:</b> Workforce Development and Training Overview<br>Yale New Haven Hospital: NAS Program   |
| 17 May 2018     | <b>Connecticut Hospital Association:</b> Conference   |
| 18- 20 May 2018 | <b>Rotary District 7890 Conference</b>  |

As the schedule above shows, we had an intensive 2 weeks of training. We visited various institutions and held meetings and discussions with professionals in the health sector who focus on maternal and child health specialising in substance abuse.

It was a great learning opportunity for all parties involved with the South African exchange group sharing information about the experiences they have had in the programs they are currently working in.

The highlight of the trip was the Care of Mother and Baby with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome Conference that was held at the Connecticut Hospital Association. Professionals from the various healthcare departments of the state of Connecticut presented well researched topics. Speakers presented on the following topics: Prenatal Care of Mothers with Substance Abuse, Prenatal Care of Mothers with Alcoholism and Best Practices for Mother with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Tersius Lambrechts and I presented on the work FARR has been doing for the past 20years.

## **Impact of Trip**

The VTT exchange had a huge impact on me, both on a personal and professional level. I work in an isolated small town in Burgersdorp and do not always get opportunities to meet and interact with other organisations that focus on maternal health and substance abuse. This opportunity allowed me to see the various programs offered by other organisations on an international level and also within South Africa. I had the opportunity to meet Tamzyn Vanderheever from FASfacts and we had discussions about the work that they are doing to reduce the prevalence of FAS. This has given me insight on how we can adapt our programmes for greater efficiency. It was an opportunity to reflect on the programs that we are currently offering and realise the weaknesses and think of ways to strengthen them. There was also a huge impact in realising how important it is for our policy makers to engage in such exchange programs, because of this reason it attributed me to improve my professional's skills and has inspired me to start my journey towards being a policy maker.

## **Lessons Learnt**

- Job satisfaction and good working conditions are vital for any employee and especially employees in the public health sector in order to create a welcoming and caring environment for the patients. The hospitals we visited in the US were in the process of implementing a program that changes the culture of how health care professionals treat substance abuse patients with the main goal of encouraging patients to seek help without the fear of being judged. The program is being implemented effectively and they are already seeing results and I believe this is working because they have invested in their staff and have created a good working environment with good working conditions. FARR has always tried as an organisation to train nurses in the public health antenatal clinics and the reason why some of the training has not been effective is the dire conditions and under resourced facilities our nurses work in. They get frustrated and sometimes take it out on patients and we hope to highlight this in the relevant platforms.
- Interdepartmental cooperation is vital in order to implement effective programs. Departments should work hand in hand in dealing with cases for example the Department of Health in Connecticut works hand in hand with the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Social Services in dealing with the various cases of substance abuse. We have had many cases where departments toss around clients, the Department of Health saying the client should be assisted by the Department of Education/Department of Social Development and vice-versa. In order to combat FASD, Government Departments should work together because the issue of FASD is multi-faceted and affects different aspects of patient's lives.
- America faces the same challenges we face in South Africa on substance abuse with the only difference being the resources available to combat this disease. There is need to come together (for inter sectorial collaboration) as Non-Profits, Cooperates and Government to combine resources and combat this disease of substance abuse.

## **Challenges**

- I felt I could have better prepared for the trip with regard to the presentation and knowledge on the South African Health System. My research for the trip focussed on the organisation I work for and not South Africa as a whole. Current information (data) (statistics) would have been beneficial in the discussions I had during our meetings. In future I suggest participants are given more detailed information about expectations and the kind of audience they are going to be doing presentations on.

## **How you will use what you have learnt in your professional career**

- The institutions we visited have implemented a lot of successful evidence-based programs on prevention and managing substance abuse that I would like to propose to FARR to incorporate in our future project proposals to funders. The most relevant to the work we do being the “Family-Based Recovery” program. An innovative In-Home Substance Abuse treatment model for families with young children. FARR program currently focuses on the client and not the family unit as whole. I think it would be most beneficial if we could implement a program that trains and empowers family members to give support to pregnant mothers in ensuring they do not consume alcohol during pregnancy. The majority of clients I currently work with are not necessarily abused victims or chronic alcohol users with underlying issues but binge drinkers who are just exposed to alcohol because of the environment they live in. Drinking alcohol is a social norm in South Africa and I believe engaging families in our programs could make a huge difference in reducing the prevalence of FASD.
- The VTT gave me the great opportunity to engage and rub shoulders with well experienced (majority more than 20years experience in health care and maternal health) and educated professionals. They gave me great insight of my professional future if I put in the work. This motivated me to continue with my journey in improving my education so that one day I can make a huge mark in improving the work that I do.

## **Conclusion**

I would like to thank Rotary, FARR and all parties involved who gave me the great opportunity to participate in this program that will impact on my personal and professional life for a lifetime. Special thank you goes to our Rotary Team leader Leandri Hattingh who ensured we were all comfortable and well taken care of. My host family Michael and Linda Bannet for accommodating me for the 2 weeks and Kate Sims for coming up with an interesting and relevant schedule.

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