**Doing What She Loves**

*Sara Rusk '05 is integrating theory, research and practice into the field of clinical psychology*

Nothing matched earning my first paycheck for doing what I loved,” said Sara Rusk ’05, who after graduating from Cazenovia College with a bachelor’s degree in Psychology, and earning her master’s degree in Counseling Psychology at the State University of New York at Albany, moved to Connecticut for her first clinical job. “I spent nearly one year counseling adult female inmates, before working in a residential treatment facility for three years, where I developed a passion for working with children and adolescents.”

Today you will find Sara pursuing her doctorate in Clinical Psychology at The Illinois School of Professional Psychology at Argosy University. Her education includes treating youth who struggle with severe emotional and behavioral disorders, and conducting diagnostic assessment, clinical research and program development. Rusk added “I started my pre-doctoral internship this past August where I am training in a disease specific certified program treating adolescents and young adults struggling with self-injurious behaviors.”

Over the next two years, Rusk plans to finish her post-doctoral training and sit for her licensing exam in Illinois. “During this time I hope to continue honing my skills in assessment and treatment of children, adolescents and young adults in acute care settings. I have been recruited to help develop and train clinicians in a parent-training curriculum for which I hope to eventually collect outcome data.” She ultimately sees herself maintaining a clinical practice while teaching and providing clinical training to graduate students. “Having had some superb training throughout my master’s and doctoral programs, I hope to be a source of inspiration for other graduate students,” stressed Rusk.

While her clinical concentration is in child and adolescent development, her foci range from research and treatment of attachment to providing services using Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). In her first year of doctoral studies, she joined a research group to study attachment theory and interpersonal neurobiology. She used this research in developing an innovative program to train Residential Childcare Workers to recognize and work with attachment-related behaviors. “I studied how interpersonal interactions influence our brain chemistry and how the development of social skills, empathy, and healthy relationships begin with positive, safe interactions with others,” shared Rusk, who added that in the following year, she began working with adolescents and young adults with severe mood, anxiety and eating disorders.

Her desire to study Psychology grew significantly during her time at Caz but it was a semester-long internship at Hutchings Psychiatric Center in Syracuse, during which her interest in clinical work was solidified. “Being able to start applying what I learned in the field was priceless.”

Sara credits Cazenovia College, particularly the freshman seminar, internship opportunities and senior project, for her early growth. “I don’t think I would have felt nearly as confident pursuing teaching and research opportunities had I not been willing to feel completely uncomfortable trying these things at Cazenovia.”

She urges others to create opportunities for themselves. “If the opportunity doesn’t exist, be the first to ask about it and make it happen. How I think about and integrate theory is unique in the field of clinical psychology, and I’m still figuring it out. That’s why I am so passionate about what I do; there’s always another question to answer.”

“Going to a smaller school like Caz allowed me to form a close connection to the school, faculty and students.”

- Sara Rusk ’05