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A SERVANT'S HEART

Dr. Sarah Friend

Fourth-year dental student Rachael Marley has been helping those with special needs since high school. As a swim instructor and lifeguard at a local city pool in St. Petersburg, FL, Rachael came in contact with children, teens, and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs). Rachael enjoyed coaching these individuals to develop survival swimming skills and learned a lot about the needs of people with disabilities. Rachael holds a special place in her heart for those with IDDs and wants to continue to help them however she can. As a dental student, Rachael found a way to educate and involve her fellow students in providing friendship, support, advocacy, and exceptional dental care to those with IDDs.

In 2022, Rachael learned about the American Academy of Developmental Medicine and Dentistry (AADMD) from a friend who had attended the AADMD's One Voice annual conference. According to the AADMD's website (<https://www.aadmd.org>), they are "a non-profit organization of interdisciplinary medical professionals including physicians, dentists, optometrists, neurologists, and other clinicians committed to improving the quality of healthcare for people with IDD. Since 2002, the AADMD has connected clinicians across the world and prepared them to face the unique challenges in caring for people with IDD. The organization provides curriculum to schools, IDD training for clinicians and specialized information to families and caretakers in language that is easy to understand. Above all, AADMD aims to make sure that no person with IDD is left without access to quality health services."

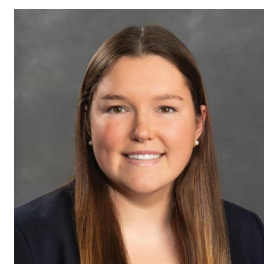
With the help of Dr. Elizabeth Bortell, who teaches a special care dentistry class, Rachael launched a VCU School of Dentistry Chapter of the American

Academy of Developmental Medicine and Dentistry. Forming this organization was no small feat considering the time and work involved outside of the challenges of attending dental school full-time. The vetting and approval process for the organization's formation was not simple, and finding the funds to support it wasn't, either. The group held a fundraiser selling customized VCU School of Dentistry socks in coordination with the Locks of Socks campaign for Down Syndrome Day to kickstart their efforts.

The VCU School of Dentistry Chapter of the AADMD aims to educate and advocate while actively engaging with those with special needs. The member students volunteer with several community service events, such as Special Olympics VA basketball tournaments and swim meets. Rachael explained that the group is very involved with the Tim Tebow Foundation's Night to Shine™. Dental students will accompany a special needs person to the dance during this event, act as their date, and dance and eat dinner with them. Their chapter also volunteers at The Virginia Home, which is a private nursing, therapeutic, and residential care facility for individuals with IDDs. The dental students play trivia and bingo with the residents and accompany them on the annual 5k Walk 'n Roll.

Rachael stated that their organization has provided lunch and learns to all dental students interested in learning about persons with IDDs. They invited students to hear from both professional speakers and parents of children with irreversible, physical, and developmental disabilities. Hearing from parents helps dental providers to understand what parents want and need from us. Before the 2024 graduation, there were 106 official student members of this organization at

the VCU School of Dentistry. Through the organization's educational efforts, Rachael feels like all students at VCU School of Dentistry have been positively impacted, even if they haven't been directly involved with AADMD.



Rachael Marley

Thanks to a generous grant from the Verhalen Family Foundation, twelve VCU School of Dentistry AADMD members attended the national One Voice conference in Chicago, IL, this past June. The students attended over twenty-seven hours of presentations for four days and learned about the barriers different subgroups of individuals with IDDs face. The students compiled everything they learned during the conference and presented suggestions that could be implemented at VCU Dental School to help with dental visits. Some of those things included weighted blankets, avoiding certain smells, earplugs, fidget spinners, and adding more portable nitrous oxide delivery units.

The VCU School of Dentistry AADMD organization is a beautiful example of kindness and advocacy in the dental community. I encourage all our readers to visit the AADMD website and learn more about how we can help those who need us most.

Editor's Note: Rachael Marley plans to pursue a career in pediatric dentistry, where she can provide expert dental care to children with special needs and complex medical histories.



ONE VOICE CONFERENCE LECTURE FACTS SHARED BY STUDENT ATTENDEES:

1. Social determinants of health affect **30-55%** of the neurotypical population. This percentage is unknown for those with IDD.
2. The average waitlist time for dental appointments in the OR for someone with IDDS is **2-3 years**.
3. In 1984, the average life expectancy of a person with Trisomy 21 was 26 years. It is 60 years today—that is a lot more dental cleanings!
4. **Disabilities are not a health outcome - they are a population.**
5. Up to **95% of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder** will have sensory processing disorder.
6. 80% of learning information comes from vision.
7. **70-80% of patients with IDDs can be seen in a normal dental office with minor accommodation.**
8. Women with Trisomy 21 are:
 - a. less likely to receive vaccinations.
 - b. less likely to be able to express discomfort adequately; this may come across as irritability.
 - c. more likely to have GI upset with NSAIDs.
 - d. at a higher risk for blood clots.
 - e. less likely to experience solid tumor cancers, including HPV-related oropharyngeal cancers.
 - f. experience menopause earlier than those without IDD.
 - g. more likely to experience osteoporosis.

References:

<https://aadmd.org>

<https://aadmdconference.com/about>