



The NEAT Podcast, Episode Seven

[Podcast intro plays]

Adam

Hello and welcome to the NEAT podcast. Today we will hear from Meeks, Director of AT services, Nicole Feeney. Stay tuned to get an update about how NEAT is continuing to provide important services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, here's the host of the neat podcast. Steve Famiglietti.

Steve

Hello everyone and welcome to another edition of the NEAT podcast. It is wonderful to be here today. I hope everyone is well and staying safe with this COVID-19 crisis. And I have a very special guest with me today, someone who was here, I think, our very first guest on the podcast. Nicole Feeney. And welcome Nicole. How are you?

Nicole

I'm good. Steve, thank you so much for having me back. I'm really excited to be here.

Steve

Well, it's our distinct pleasure to have you back on the podcast. And I really thought that it would be a great idea to have you back on the podcast, especially right now, because of everything going on with COVID-19. And I really wanted our listeners to get a flavor for what's happening at NEAT in these times. So, if you wouldn't mind, could you give us kind of a summary of what's happening at NEAT for folks?

Nicole

Yeah, I'm happy to. Well, we're in this like everyone else. And we all are now working virtually from our homes. We're still collaborating like we always have. We're not unfamiliar to distance working. This is something that we've taken on several years ago and so this fortunately for us was kind of an easier transition. We really have been using the technology to stay connected to each other for quite some time. And so, what we feel like right now is our role in the community is now helping other programs, agencies and schools really learn how to incorporate the technology into their daily lives. It's so important to stay socially connected, but also to find ways to work from home and to learn from home. A lot of these things can and shouldn't be done. We don't have to kind of let the social distancing keep us from staying virtually connected to each other, and so many school districts and people are trying to do that now you see people connecting over platforms such as Zoom and Google Meet. So, it's a really exciting time in technology, even while people are struggling to really kind of find the positives of having

to stay home. It's an interesting time to see technology support. So, some of the things that we've done to help people while they're home is, we've tripled our webinar offerings. People can find a long list of a variety of webinars on our website that include webinars, from technologies for people who are blind, who have learning disabilities... We just released a series of webinars for special education and how to keep students who are home with different learning needs connected and learning. We've also released a hotline. So, it's basically an email that people can reach out to describe a little bit about what they're struggling with in terms of distance working or learning. Or if they have students with special needs. You know, is there concern or resource that we can provide them or connect them to. When that email comes in, we decipher what Assistive Technology Specialist might have an area of expertise that could match that. And then our AT specialist will reach out to them and help them troubleshoot, develop and... change with the times. So, this is giving us a really great opportunity to teach people about assistive technology with the use of technology. It's a very interesting time. We're hoping that our skills and our experience can, you know, help improve the lives of others in any capacity at this time.

Steve

It's interesting because there's so much happening right now in the world and it's a stressful time for people, it's anxiety provoking yet... Here we are trying to-well we're not trying to, we are-turning something that is probably seen from a lot of people's perspective as a negative, and here we are kind of moving forward hitting the ground running, turning it into a positive.

Nicole

Yeah, I mean, I think that's what I hope, especially at this time where it's really, it's hard to find positives right now. And this is impacting people's lives, on our team in other programs that we know and so if we can bring any good use of the technology or any good information and resources to people this time, I really do I see that as a positive. And so, you know, we are really working hard to get resources and information to people that who need it and needs to be socially connected. Even though our in-person services have been suspended at this time because we're closely following the guidelines from CDC and Oak Hill as a whole, we're trying to get people to recognize that virtual consultations can be done. We can really help people get started with the use of assistive technology even if you can't see them or be with them in person. And so that's a really great service that we can provide to them too, as like tele-consultations. So, I just wanted to let you know about that as well.

Steve

So, in terms of the email hotline that we have now, and the webinars that are up on the website, who is eligible to take advantage of those services? Is that everyone, or are their limitations?

Nicole

There are no limitations. We've extended that to everyone at this time. We really want to make sure that we can build capacity, wherever people are, this is not just a Hartford or Connecticut, or a national thing. Frankly, this is worldwide, and we're all struggling to deal with our emotions and stress. When technology comes into place, we want to make sure that that's not a trigger-emotional trigger-for people that the technology is supporting them and not adding stress to their plate. And so, it's really available to anyone and everyone, all they have to do is email or register on the website and we will connect them to the information that they need. No strings attached.

Steve

That's so awesome. What's the website where people can go to find all of this great information?

Nicole

Sure. So, for information about NEAT as a whole and the services that we provide, you can go to our website at AssistiveTechnology.OakHillCT.org. And that's going to provide you with a lot of information about assistive technology, AAC or communicate supports. It will also tell you a little bit about our Smart Home On Wheels and what we're doing help people who might be socially isolated right now and stay connected through smart tech. We have been involved with video game accessibility, and so we're able to do that virtually. We've got a lot going on! And so, if you want more information about our services, or the free webinars that we've got going on, you can go there. If you're looking to connect with us through our hotline, you can email us at CentersConnect@OakHillCT.org.

Steve

That's so awesome. And it sounds quite simple and like everything is sort of contained in one easy place for people and you know, we like it simple like that, don't we?

Nicole

We really do.

Steve

Is there anything that you think is important that our listeners know right now in this time...Anything that you want to say to folks?

Nicole

I think just that we're here. We are ready to receive your inquiries and your requests. And even if it's not something that we can directly help you with, even if you're not from Connecticut and you're outside of the state, you can still connect and reach out to us. And we will help provide you with any resources or information that we have to help you successfully kind of go down that path of assistive technology and finding the tools that you need in the area that you need it as quickly as possible.

Steve

That is so awesome. I would like to thank you so much for coming back on our podcast, especially in the time that we're in right now. And I hope we can get you back again soon.

Nicole

I would love that, and I wouldn't mind giving a shout out if you don't mind.

Steve

Sure!

Nicole

So, at the NEAT Center, we're trying to stay connected with people virtually and I think a lot of people in the community know that this is something we could do prior to. And I just wanted to make sure that they were also aware that Oak Hill's Adaptive Sports and Fitness program is also conducting a lot of their

fitness classes virtually so they can be found on Facebook, or through the website at Oak Hill. And then people can kind of work out with them at home. So, if they have disabilities or loved ones with disabilities or anyone really, they can connect with this very special team and continue to focus on their health and their fitness.

Steve

That's really awesome. And in fact, I had Coach Paul on a podcast recently and that one is going to be being released to the public in the coming weeks as well. So, folks are going to be able to hear all about the exciting things that Adaptive Sports and Fitness has been doing since this COVID crisis began. So, I'm so glad you shouted out to them.

Nicole

Oh, that's great. And you know, Steve, if you don't mind, I'm also going to just share that our Adaptive Equipment Services where people can donate or purchase durable medical equipment has been suspended at this time. We want to make sure that the wheelchairs, the walkers, the equipment that we receive is appropriately sanitized. And that it's ready to go to people when the time is safe, and the environment is healthy. And so though, that's been suspended right now, people can still call and check in and see how we might be able to help them in the future.

Steve

I'm really glad that you brought that to listeners attention as well. That's great information.

Nicole

Thank you.

Steve

Well, thank you again, so much for coming on the podcast again in this new virtual world of ours and I hope to get you back on the podcast soon again for more updates.

Nicole

Now I'd like to come back and talk about all of the exciting things that are happening in technology right now.

Adam

[Podcast outro music plays]

For more information or to subscribe to our newsletter, please visit us at AssistiveTechnology.OakHillCT.org. Or hit us up on Twitter @TheNEATPodcast. Today's podcast was posted by Steve Famiglietti and produced by Kris Thompson and Adam Kosakowski. Our theme music was composed by Andrew Pergiovanni. Tune in next time for another episode and thanks for listening.