Stage for Success

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WHEN IT COMES TO BETTER PREPARING KIDS ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM FOR LEARNING and social environments, Kansas State University’s drama therapy program is showing how theatre techniques can have a starring role.

Graduate students in the K-State program, one of only five such university programs in the country, collaborated with a Kansas school district to offer six-week summer camps this year for three groups of kids from middle school to high school. One of the graduate students also delivered drama activities twice a week to attendees of the Flint Hills Summer Fun Camp, which offers summer activities designed to build social skills and compassion and maintain academic skills in kids both on and off the autism spectrum.

Sally Bailey, K-State professor of drama therapy, supervised second-year graduate students Mike Rogers, Sarah Edwards and Sherry Brown as they provided the camps for about 30 kids this summer. Bailey’s students also work with the school district’s after-school programs during the academic year.
The strength of this partnership helps draw graduates ago morphed into four separate camps in summer 2016. program’s success, one summer camp offered four years very beginning — have grown. Based on the after-school program, the school district and the parents from the District, is the only one of its kind in the country. The USD 383, the Manhattan-Ogden School Spectrum are able to practice social and communication “Drama helps kids express themselves vocally and anger management to drug rehabilitation. Bailey said experiences. Social and magical mystery camps, were centered around film-summer, Rogers’ high school and Edwards’ middle school All of these students, plus others working on creative students’ specific needs such as socializing or expressing of opinion, but it definitely more than that,” she said. Edwards and Brown also have gained perspective from their work. “I think I’ve realized how you can have all the skills in world as a facilitator, but the most important thing in the camp is for students who are nonverbal and lacking in the mental stress that causes,” Miller said. “Depres- “They are capable of doing things on their own,” she said. “Even if it takes 15 minutes for them to get a straw in their nice pouch, let them do it. If they don’t, they will never learn.” Helen Miller, autism coordinator for USD 383, says her own program because it is too painful. “They are too focal point of21st Century Magnet High School. The camps have a variety of grants and community support. 31