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JOAN BANKS-SMITH
00:05 [music] This is Joan Banks-Smith, host for Kessler Foundation's newest podcast series, Life at Kessler Foundation. I have the opportunity to speak with employees from all of our centers who have diverse roles and passions that help change the lives of people with disabilities. Our research assistants and coordinators, engineers, scientists, technicians, fellows, physical therapists, and support staff all play a vital role in our research at the foundation. Today, I'm with Jacqueline Leddy. She's a research assistant in our Center for Traumatic Brain Injury Research and the Center for Neuropsychology and Neuroscience Research. Welcome to the show, Jacqueline.

JACQUELINE LEDDY
00:45 Hi. Thank you so much for having me.

BANKS-SMITH 00:47 I know you've been with the foundation now for a couple of years. Can you just tell us a little bit about your role here at the foundation?

LEDDY 00:55 I'm a research assistant, so I work on teams underneath research scientists, helping their study run by collecting data or giving interventions on studies. My end role includes recruiting participants, administering neuropsychological assessments, eye-tracking tasks, and fMRI tasks. We also score assessments, input data, and work with team members.

BANKS-SMITH 01:21 We had talked earlier. You had mentioned that you're doing some work with emotional processing, especially with children with traumatic brain injury. Can you talk to us a little more about what these studies involved and how parents can get children involved in this study?

LEDDY 01:38 A little background about the emotional processing studies. They've gone through many stages and have been running for a long time. I've worked on them since I started here. These studies are testing an intervention treatment that originally came from Germany, and it has been used successfully in schizophrenia to improve facial affect recognition. Scientists here combined that computerized treatment with mimicry exercises of the six universal emotions to treat facial affect recognition deficits, and now we're doing that with children who have sustained a traumatic brain injury. And that will be done completely virtually through Zoom, which is pretty great.

BANKS-SMITH 02:20 Because of the pandemic, many of our studies have gone virtual. What does it take to go from an in-person testing situation to virtual?

LEDDY 02:32 An in-person testing situation, many times, involves paper-pencil tasks. Many times we have stimuli books, so we use books in-person to maybe point things out or

redirect individuals. Moving all of these testing sessions virtual does take some work in the beginning, because many times it involves scanning images into our computers and going through copyright situations with companies. We also use document viewers if we need to do things live with paper-pencil tasks. So that means that we can have a live camera and put anything underneath the camera that we need to show our participants in order to do a task. We also use things like PowerPoint and other resources to do virtual testing. We've also taken advantage of Zoom, in that we can see our own faces on Zoom. And so for these emotional processing tasks, especially, we utilize that because we need to look at the facial expressions and the muscles that we move on our face to recognize different emotional expressions on the face.

- BANKS-SMITH 03:45 And if somebody wanted to be able to sign up for this study, what do they need to do?
- LEDDY 03:51 We collaborate with Children's Specialized Hospital, which have different locations across New Jersey. You can find information on any of their websites, as well as Kessler Foundation's website. And you can also email me, and I could send a flyer your way and give you more information about that study. We are currently recruiting children ages 9 to 18 for that study. And wherever you are located, we can participate because it's being done virtually now.
- BANKS-SMITH 04:24 So anybody from around the globe could actually participate.
- LEDDY 04:28 Sure, yeah, which is really amazing. Because many times in the past, children's studies, particularly, have been difficult to recruit because it involves not only scheduling with the children's schedules, but also family schedules and parents' schedules. And many of our participants come from different locations, like South Jersey. That was previously extremely difficult because it, many times, required traveling. But now there are almost no limitations to traveling or where we can recruit from. So it's really opened up a lot of possibilities for these studies.
- BANKS-SMITH 05:07 That's excellent to hear. And for those that are listening, we'll have links in our program notes. Let's circle back to a little more about you. What is your favorite part of the job?
- LEDDY 05:20 I love when participants say they got something out of taking part in a study and it's helped them in some way. It's great to know that this can improve cognitive rehabilitation in different populations of people. Even now, virtually, many people who join these studies are passionate about helping others like themselves through research, and I've heard some participants tell some amazing stories about themselves.

- BANKS-SMITH 05:44 How do you challenge yourself throughout the day?
- LEDDY 05:48 I would say I challenge myself by relaying any skills I have to other new research assistants. Our teams are constantly growing and changing, and we've all been learning to adapt. Especially in this new time right now, we've learned to adapt to do many parts of our roles virtually, and we've been doing it successfully.
- BANKS-SMITH 06:17 Well, that's certainly good to hear, because opening everything up virtually opens up a whole new world of research studies, research participants. What motivates you to come to work each day?
- LEDDY 06:29 Honestly, my team members and participants. And my friends and family motivate me in a lot of ways. And seeing that things I do at work every day could potentially change people's lives for the better absolutely motivates me.
- BANKS-SMITH 06:47 Well, that's good, because I get to see you just about every day, and I can see the passion in what you do here at the foundation. Well, we're going to wrap this up, and I'm going to ask you one last question. You've been a research assistant for the last couple of years. Where do you see yourself in the next, say, three to five years? Do you have plans for continuing your education or moving on to some other type of work?
- LEDDY 07:10 Working here has allowed me to explore how clinical trials are run and work with amazing other research assistants, neuropsychologists, and neuroscientists. I feel like I'm still learning and growing here and am not quite sure what the future holds. But I feel like I'm developing a good foundation here that will help me in whatever life brings in the future.
- BANKS-SMITH 07:33 Thank you so much, Jackie. That's a good, honest answer. The work that we do here at the foundation certainly has opened up many doors for many of our researchers. Some, of course, have gone on to higher education and have come back. So it's always nice to see our young folk diving into the research and making a difference in people's lives.
- LEDDY 07:58 Absolutely. I couldn't agree more.
- BANKS-SMITH 08:02 [music] Tuned into our podcast series lately? Join our listeners in 90 countries who enjoy learning about the work of Kessler Foundation. Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Listen to us on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, SoundCloud, or wherever you get your podcasts. This podcast was recorded remotely and was edited and produced by Joan Banks-Smith, creative producer for Kessler Foundation. Be sure to subscribe to our SoundCloud channel, Kessler Foundation, for more podcasts like this.