



## Planting Acorns: An Interview with Dr. Rob Siegel, JPA's New Clinical Director

Therapy at JPA embodies a commitment to making a better future for Chicago's children and neighborhoods. Whether dealing with the youngest client or the schools and teachers we support, a dedication to helping individuals and communities heal from trauma and move confidently into the future marks everything we do. JPA's new Clinical Director, Rob Siegel, has spent his career devoted to working with and healing those most in need.

Prior to joining JPA as the Clinical Director, Rob was on the medical staff at Chicago Lakeshore Hospital (CLSH, a psychiatric hospital)—Children's Pavilion. He supervised their diagnostic testing program and was the behaviorist helping the staff develop their ability to connect with, understand, and help an often-misunderstood population. He received his Bachelor's degree from the University of Colorado, his Master's in Forensic Psychology from the Chicago School of Professional Psychology, and his Doctorate in Clinical Psychology from the Illinois School of Professional Psychology.

Although this role marks a new phase for Rob at JPA, he's worked with us as a consultant since April 2016, serving on our permanency team, which helps DCFS evaluate the best interests of children in foster care. He also brings fourteen years of experience in child welfare as a forensic

psychologist, lending his expertise "wherever law and psychology intersect."

He's attended court hearings with children, worked with kids on probation, and has been a consulting psychologist for youth in care.

Rob's depth of experience at both the clinical and

administrative levels is a big plus for JPA. He'll oversee our team of therapists and program directors to ensure that our clinical services continue to be delivered seamlessly and effectively. "JPA's therapists are our best resource," he says. "They have such devotion to a population that's really underserved." He's clearly excited at being part of the JPA team: "Therapists here are heroic...They are willing to do everything they can to help their clients."

Although dealing with students affected by trauma presents a huge challenge, Rob speaks

---

**Therapists here  
are heroic...  
They are willing to  
do everything to  
help their clients.**

---



optimistically and from experience when he says, “The amount of resiliency and strength in these kids is amazing.” He knows JPA’s therapists understand this characteristic and put their best into their work.

“When you come to JPA there’s an atmosphere of enthusiasm and wanting to grow as people.”

Although therapy may begin with what’s immediately apparent, such as acting out in class, it also requires a faith in the future. Rob pinpoints one of the major tenets of JPA’s philosophy: “We may be referred to help a child make a behavioral change, but we focus on our relationship and helping the child have a safe space so we can support their development so they can make positive choices.” Their progress can be a long time coming. It can even be marked by an increase in symptoms like aggression. “Therapy’s not a straight line,” Rob comments. “The intangibles are important. You never know what acorn will grow into an oak.”

Rob is also conscious of the struggles teachers have with students who have been traumatized. Schools are not really designed to be therapeutic, he notes; they’re focused on the academics. Poor behaviors present as barriers.

JPA’s therapists help teachers deal with the intangibles affecting students’ behavior so they can form positive relationships with the

children in their classrooms. “Eighty percent of communication is nonverbal. We help teachers attend to nonverbal cues so they can be more proactive and equipped at identifying students who may be struggling and learn how to help them.”

For example, teachers are concerned with maintaining order in their classrooms so they can complete lessons. However, students who struggle emotionally often express their struggles behaviorally. Teachers can fall into a power struggle with students quite easily. Helping teachers focus on their relationships with students allows them to have a bigger influence in their students’ choices. In the long run, everyone benefits.

And it’s the long run we’re focused on, Rob says. “Each interaction makes a difference. We often do not get to see the extent of the impact we’ve made.” It is hard for outsiders to understand the work of therapy and how children make progress. He wants to change that by helping “educate others about therapy and growth and how to see the growth. If effective, people will rely less on the myth of the ‘quick fix.’”

Rob discusses the “parallel process”: trauma affects children, families, professionals, schools, and the community as well as the therapists. A child may be the identified client; however, trauma impacts all of us. He knows we cannot undo or eradicate the harm caused by trauma but we can help support each other and heal. He’s also conscious of JPA’s need to communicate with other constituencies to gain their support for its work. Therapy can strike outsiders as “soft” or not really addressing the issues involved. “People want to see the magic,” he notes. However, when we can help support and understand the teachers and the schools, then they can become a part of the magic too.

As Rob talks about therapy and JPA, he grows more intense. Discussing the complications and intangibles of therapy seems to energize him. It’s clear he’s fully committed to his life’s work, ready and eager to lead JPA’s dynamic team of therapists as they carry on the work Jane Addams began nearly 100 years ago, a work more essential than ever. [JPA](#)