



About Watson Institute- WISCA Program

Located in Western Pennsylvania, The Watson Institute provides support to children with special needs ages 3 to 21 and their families through exceptional individualized special education school programming, resources, transition services and mental and behavioral health services.

The Watson Institute has five special education schools, one of which is the Watson Institute Social Center for Academic Achievement (WISCA) Program. WISCA is a special education school program designed to meet the individual needs of children and adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder who require therapeutic intervention and support that cannot be delivered in a traditional classroom setting.

“ *The Watson Institute WISCA program has fully embraced the use of Ukeru in our repertoire of techniques to assist our students in de-escalating. Since implementing Ukeru, our staff have a better understanding of the brain and trauma-informed care, as well as teaching our students how to safely express their emotions.*

Jennifer Do M.Ed., MA, LPC
WISCA Program Director



Challenges

The WISCA program recognized a need to strengthen staff's ability to de-escalate students, and also wanted to incorporate trauma-informed practices. The team identified the need for more education about the brain – how it works and how it responds to trauma – in order to institute a trauma-informed approach within the program. They were seeking a program that would address these needs in order for staff to better understand the students they serve, and adapt their educational milieu and respond accordingly. Ukeru's trauma-informed, hands-off approach appealed to them as a partner.

Working with Ukeru

WISCA began implementing Ukeru during the 2017/2018 school year. Prior to the roll-out of Ukeru, the team held discussions with staff and families to provide them with an overview of the program and how it would help the team to better support the needs of students.

“We are committed to innovation at the Watson Institute, and to providing an environment that fosters new ways of thinking about what we do and how we do it. We constantly strive to enhance the quality of the programs to help our students achieve the best outcomes,” shared WISCA Program Director, Jennifer Do, M.D., MA, LPC.

To provide a firm foundation for the Ukeru program, Watson held multiple Ukeru trainings, utilizing the Ukeru team for support.

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Jennifer Do M.Ed., MA, LPC
WISCA Program Director

Results

The WISCA program has demonstrated positive outcomes since implementing Ukeru. They have successfully incorporated de-escalation techniques and prioritized getting to the root cause of the behavior. As a result, they are able to support their students in a trauma-informed manner and students understand the purpose of Ukeru. Additionally, Ukeru’s trauma-informed, hands-off approach has given students the ability and time to self-regulate, resulting in a **50% decrease in challenging behaviors**. “It puts our team in a mindset to work on de-escalating first; to understand that our student reactions or difficulties are in response to trauma and their brain becoming flooded,” said Jennifer Do, M.Ed., MA, LPC.