

Would You Like to Help Train the Professionals Who Work With Families Like Yours?

Va-LEND Family Mentorship Experience

The Family Mentorship Experience is a program in which families like yours help train professionals who work with children with disabilities and their families. The students chosen for this program are being trained to work in family-centered, interdisciplinary ways and to be leaders in their fields. These professionals may be physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, psychologists, social workers, nurses, pediatricians, dentists, nutritionists, audiologists, or special education teachers.

The Family Mentorship Experience is a component of the Virginia Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities Program (Va-LEND), which is part of the Partnership for People with Disabilities at VCU.

How does the Family Mentorship Experience work?

Each mentoring family is assigned a Va-LEND trainee. The trainee will visit with your family five times during the school year and will stay in touch with you by telephone or email between visits. The visits will be scheduled by you and the trainee together. Visits may take place at your home, your child's school, a medical or therapy appointment, the playground, or anywhere else that you feel is important in your child's life. The trainee's goal is to learn from you and your family about the day-to-day activities, challenges, and joys of living as a family with a child who has a disability or special health care needs.

Your job will be to show the trainee what it is really like to have a child with a disability or special health care needs. We hope that you will share your feelings and experiences, including the good times and bad times, so that your trainee can see "the whole picture" of your life as a family. Your trainee will always respect your family's confidentiality and privacy and will not share information that may identify your family to others.

Before participating in the program, your family will first meet with a member of the Va-LEND team so you can ask questions and decide whether you would like to participate. Once you agree to be part of the program, you will be invited to attend an orientation picnic in September where you will meet your trainee as well as other families and trainees in the program. Elaine Ogburn, the Family Mentorship Specialist, will stay in touch with your family throughout the year to make sure the experience is going well. As a parent of a child with a disability and a former mentoring parent with Va-LEND, Elaine is sensitive to the issues families may face as they share their experiences with trainees.

How long is the commitment?

We would like your family and your trainee to stay together for the academic year or until your trainee finishes his or her studies. However, your family may leave the program earlier if you feel you need to do so due to unforeseen changes in your life.

What do I do if I am interested?

If you want to know more about this opportunity, please contact Elaine Ogburn in Richmond at (804) 320-4514 or esogburn@mail2.vcu.edu.