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Va-LEND

## Leveling the Playing Fields

- ❖ Va-LEND recognizes that all trainees and fellows are equal in what they can learn, contribute, and participate. But is this true in every situation with every trainee? Yes and no.
- ❖ Family member trainees who come into the LEND training with a professional background or community work experience are usually seamlessly integrated into the training cohort i.e., the playing field is level. They find the resources they need to participate, and advocate for themselves when arrangements are needed for missed classes, extension of time in the program, and alternative clinical experiences.
- ❖ Family members who have never been in the workforce, or who have not for quite some time, need encouragement to identify resources and other needs with their advisors and instructors when challenged with coursework or assignments. We need to remove the aura of intimidation – especially in regards to academics so the “field” can remain level..

## A More Natural Integration of the Family Perspective

- ❖ There is an issue as to whether to use current trainees as instructors in a didactic training/instructional setting. And if you use one group of trainee expertise, is it fair to others not to use theirs?
- ❖ What Va-LEND is striving for is for everyone to learn more from family member trainees in natural classroom discussions than when we have outside guest lecturers who also are family members.
- ❖ There are, though, situations where families have had a negative experience with providers from a specific discipline, and bring this strong negative bias into the LEND classroom. Sometimes gentle reminders are needed regarding teamwork principles. Perceived conflict can prove to be an ideal in situ teaching experience.

## Families Mentoring Families

- ❖ Va-LEND has experienced push-back from family member trainees who cannot understand why they are required to participate in the Family Mentorship Experience.
- ❖ What has been the greatest resource is for former trainees to explain how much they have gained from the experience – not only learning about how the FME family is handling their life with their child or children, but also there is eye opening self-reflection that can take place.



## Background

In 2015, Va-LEND was the recipient of a small ITAC grant award aimed at increasing family member involvement throughout the program. Efforts were primarily focused on having additional family members participate as long term family discipline trainees alongside trainees who were concurrently enrolled in graduate degree programs or were professionals from the community. There were numerous benefits for both family and other discipline trainees, such as development of strong personal relationships needed for in-depth class projects, and learning from a variety of “real” family experiences which differ from what is found in the literature. There were also some stumbling blocks that needed to be addressed. We knew from the recommendations that evolved from the ITAC grant that there needed to be flexibility built into the training, but we did not realize the need for the degree of individualization of the curriculum and increased time needed for completion of course and practicum requirements. Nor did we anticipate the degree of faculty support that two of the trainees required in order to be on a “level playing field” with the others in the training co-hort. Family member trainees have been welcomed and treated as equals by their peers, but faculty have voiced concerns which Va-LEND staff continue to address. The presentation provides an honest discussion of what the faculty and trainees learned during the past academic year.

## To Modify or Not

- ❖ It’s relatively easy to make accommodations that allow full participation by family members, but sometimes accommodations are not enough.
- ❖ Va-LEND has had many discussions among faculty as to whether we were going to decrease the rigor of our curriculum if we changed the requirements for any individual assignment. It proves to be an academic dilemma challenging our University’s Honor Code when a trainee cannot complete a requirement without a high degree of assistance.
- ❖ The struggle continues as to whether to modify assignments for Family Discipline trainees who, despite support, just cannot keep up with the other trainees.
- ❖ This is one of the reasons that Va-LEND has decided to develop a non-academic track for long term and medium term trainees.

## Recommendations

- ❖ Clarify expectations! Interview prospective family discipline trainees before they submit their application (if possible), and provide a realistic explanation of program requirements. This is not meant to counsel potential trainees out of the program. It is to provide information to them and to identify the supports that may be needed for them to complete the LEND training.
- ❖ Be prepared for major life changing events (e.g., military moves, hospitalizations, new jobs, divorce) that can affect participation.
- ❖ Make sure family member trainees are technology savvy or offer hands on training and access to devices that they can use at home.
- ❖ Build in strategies for trainees to get didactic information that they do not have coming into LEND (e.g., Arizona LEND toolbox); make arrangements to allow them to catch-up from missed classes/sessions.
- ❖ Use the unique perspective of former and current Family Discipline trainees in all levels of a LEND project.
- ❖ If your LEND is primarily academic, i.e., all trainees take credit earning coursework needed for completion of the training, consider adding a non-academic track.
- ❖ **EXPECT GREATNESS AND HIGH ACHIEVEMENT FROM FAMILY MEMBER TRAINEES IN THEIR LEADERSHIP OUTCOMES!**