An Innovative Approach to Interprofessional Training Through a Medical-Legal Partnership

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Background

Project HEAL (Health, Education, Advocacy, and Law) is a comprehensive medical-legal partnership (MLP) staffed by two attorneys within the Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities (MCDD) at Kennedy Krieger Institute in Baltimore, Maryland. Project HEAL provides quality advocacy and legal services to low- and moderate-income families raising children with intellectual and developmental disabilities who receive clinical services at Kennedy Krieger Institute.

Project HEAL hosts trainees predominantly from schools of law, as well as trainees in the fields of public health, special education, and other disciplines. The recent Institute of Medicine (IOM) report—"Interprofessional Education for Collaboration: Learning How to Improve Health from Interprofessional Models Across the Continuum of Education to Practice"—emphasizes the importance of engaging students in interprofessional education and experiential learning and the value it adds to the existing workforce (Cuff, 2013). According to the World Health Organization, "interprofessional education occurs when students from two or more professions learn about, from, and with each other to enable effective collaboration" (Baker, 2010). Project HEAL trainees have the opportunity to work collaboratively with other students and professionals from various disciplines to develop and implement clients' plans for legal and medical care in concert with the family.

Pre-service Training Program

One unique feature of Project HEAL is its pre-service training program, designed to build capacity in serving more children and families who are in need of advocacy and legal services. The interdisciplinary pre-service training provides degree-seeking students with an experiential and instructional program aimed at preparing future leaders across disciplines to integrate disability-related care and services and special education advocacy, law, and policy into their future practice.

Pre-service Project HEAL trainees at the MCDD participate in various training activities to achieve competency in special education advocacy, law, and policy; knowledge about the impact of education on the health and well-being of children with disabilities; awareness of challenges and issues related to families raising children with disabilities; and experience in interprofessionalism.

Project HEAL Pre-Service Training Logic Model

Context/Situation

The pre-service training program provides an experiential and instructional program aimed at preparing future leaders across multiple disciplines to integrate disability-related care and services into their practice.

Inputs

- Funding
- MCDD staff
- Trainees
- Training curriculum
- Technology
- Space

Activities

- Conduct client intakes
- Participate in internal and external meetings
- Draft letters to opposing counsel and school systems
- Attend case consultations with professionals in various disciplines
- Visit schools and other programs serving individuals with disabilities
- Join in panel discussions with families raising children with disabilities
- Prepare presentations and materials for professional and community trainings
- Engage in research and evaluation activities

Outputs

- Client intakes obtained
- Internal and external meetings attended
- Letters to opposing counsel and school systems drafted
- Case consultations with professionals in various disciplines attended
- Schools and other programs serving individuals with disabilities visited
- Panel discussions with families raising children with disabilities joined
- Presentations and materials for professional and community trainings and events prepared
- Research and evaluation activities conducted

Outcomes

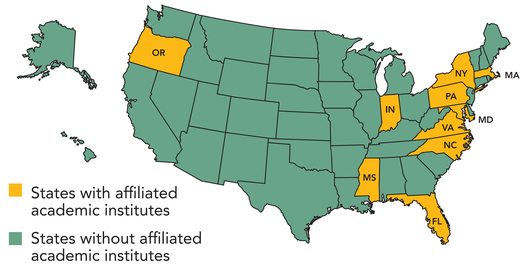
- Increased numbers of pre-service trainees with knowledge about special education law
- Increased numbers of pre-service trainees with understanding of the disability perspective
- Increased numbers of pre-service trainees with insight into future professional plans
- Increased numbers of pre-service trainees with knowledge of the impact of education and other social determinants on health outcomes

Impact

- Increased numbers of professionals that directly and indirectly work with individuals with disabilities

Trainee Academic Institution Affiliation by State

State	Academic Institution
FL	University of Florida
IN	Ball State University
MA	Gordon College Harvard University
MD	City Neighbors High School Dulaney High School Institute of Notre Dame High School Morgan State University Sojourner-Douglass College The Johns Hopkins University Towson University University of Baltimore University of Maryland
MS	University of Southern Mississippi
NC	University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
NY	University of Albany, State University of New York
OR	University of Oregon
PA	Dickinson College
VA	University of Virginia

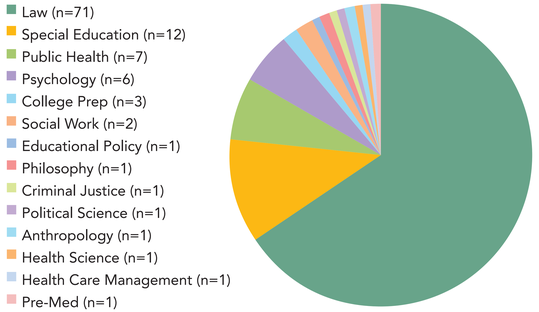


Data and Proposed Outcomes

Since the spring of 2008, a total of 108 trainees have participated in the Project HEAL pre-service training program, contributing over 12,900 hours of work. Trainees are affiliated with various academic institutions across the country, and represent a diverse group of individuals at different stages in their academic career (high school through doctoral programs). The majority of trainees are law students (comprising 71 of the 108 trainees), 17 of whom returned for more than one semester.

The main objectives of the program are to expose trainees to the diverse opportunities in the field of special education advocacy, law, and policy; to allow them to connect their experiences to their current academic career; and to provide them with direction in exploring potential future professional careers. The proposed short-term outcomes of the pre-service training program are: (1) to increase the number of pre-service trainees with knowledge about special education advocacy, law, and policy; (2) to increase the number of pre-service trainees with knowledge of the impact of education and other social determinants on health; (3) to increase the number of pre-service trainees with understanding of the "Disability Perspective Experience"; and (4) to increase the number of pre-service trainees with insight into future professional plans. The proposed long-term outcome is to increase the number of professionals that directly and indirectly work with individuals with disabilities.

Number of Trainees by Discipline



Discussion

The training program is both essential for supporting the work of Project HEAL and beneficial for trainees by providing them with professional development opportunities. The major strengths of the program include its diverse curriculum and trainees. Trainees contribute varied knowledge and skills to the work of Project HEAL, as they concentrate in different disciplines in a number of academic institutions across the country. They have undoubtedly increased Project HEAL's capacity to meet the legal needs of Kennedy Krieger Institute patients and their families.

The main limitation to establishing the effectiveness of the training program is the difficulty in measuring the short-term and long-term outcomes of the program, due to a deficit in data collection efforts. Challenges in measuring the short-term outcomes stem from a lack of baseline data collection and standardized measurement instruments. Measuring long-term outcomes is currently unattainable due to a lack of long-term follow-up of the trainees. Future efforts should focus on data collection, specifically the development and utilization of standardized measurement instruments and a follow-up framework.

In conclusion, trainees are critical assets of Project HEAL. The adoption and replication of Project HEAL's innovative approach to interprofessional education would be beneficial for other MLPs with limited resources.

References:

Baker, P. G. (2010). Framework for action on interprofessional education and collaborative practice. World Health Organisation Press.

Cuff, P. A. (Ed.). (2013). Interprofessional Education for Collaboration: Learning How to Improve Health from Interprofessional Models Across the Continuum of Education to Practice: Workshop Summary. National Academies Press.

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