

# Including People with Disabilities in LEND Programs

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### Rationale

Recently, Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) programs have begun to include trainees with disabilities in their training programs. The 52 LEND Programs receive funding from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB). Based on the MCHB's last grant cycle (2015), it was highly encouraged that LEND Programs increase the inclusion of people with disabilities as faculty, trainees, and in various other capacities within the programs.

This is important because children with neurodevelopmental disabilities grow up to be adults with neurodevelopmental disabilities; and they should always be included in programs that are about them. The Va-LEND program has begun including trainees with disabilities. As a Va-LEND trainee with a disability, I know that including people with disabilities in the program is imperative and has benefits for everyone involved.

Based on conversations with LEND trainees with disabilities from other programs, I informally learned that inclusion functions differently across universities. I wanted to systematically learn more about the inclusion of people with disabilities in LEND programs and what skills they gain through the experience. This exploratory study seeks to answer the following research question:

### How are LEND programs including people with disabilities?

### Background

Due to the recent inclusion of people with disabilities, there was no literature on what inclusion looked like in LEND programs. Therefore, I sought literature focused on the inclusion of students with disabilities in post-secondary education programs. The following have emerged as best-practices on how to include students with disabilities in post-secondary education programs:

- ❖ Provide individual supports for each students (Lynch & Getzel, 2013; Plotner and Marshall, 2015)
  - ❖ Use person-centered planning in the curricula (Lynch & Getzel, 2013; Thoma, 2013)
- Furthermore, as a result of inclusion in post-secondary education programs, students with disabilities:
- ❖ Have an increase in social and academic skills (Lynch and Getzel, 2013; Thomas, 2013)
  - ❖ Are more likely to get a higher paying job (Lynch & Getzel, 2013)
  - ❖ Have an increase in independence (Lynch & Getzel, 2013)



### Results

#### Research Method:

Five different LENDs across the country were contacted and the following questions were asked:

1. What are the interactions between trainees with disabilities and trainees without?
2. What accommodations does the LEND program provide to trainees with disabilities?
3. What skills has the trainee acquired by the time they leave the LEND program?

The graph below represents my findings from the responses of three LEND programs and the feedback<sup>44</sup> from three faculty at each program:

Question	Illinois LEND	Virginia LEND	Florida LEND
Q1: What are the interactions between trainees with disabilities and trainees without?	People with disabilities are included as trainees in two ways; they are included in the program as representatives of the self advocacy discipline and as other disciplines. People with disabilities are also included as guest speakers.	People with disabilities and their family members are included in a variety of ways. They are included as long term trainees representing various disciplines and as Disability Advocacy Trainees. We also include people with disabilities and their family members on our interdisciplinary faculty.	Trainees with disabilities interact with trainees without disabilities during a four week rotation called Understanding the Family Perspective.
Q2: What accommodations does the LEND Programs provide trainees with disabilities?	Any accommodations that are requested by trainees with disabilities are provided based on their individual needs. These are provided throughout the program in interactive seminars, clinical experiences, interdisciplinary group activities, a leadership project, system and policy training, and care coordination.	VA LEND is very focused on active participation of all LEND trainees including those with disabilities. Accommodations are based on individualized need, and we strive for accessibility of all program components by incorporating principles of Universal Design throughout our curriculum. All sessions are audio recorded, so that trainees can go back and access the content at a later time.	The accommodations are tailored to each trainees individual needs. Some accommodations include; assistance with writing, and understanding blackboard (online classroom management) modules.
Q3: What skills has the trainee acquired by the time they leave the LEND Program?	The trainee has gained skills in the following domains: leadership, interdisciplinary clinical training and practice, cultural competence, family centered care, and research.	The VA-LEND program looks to enhance trainees skills across the <a href="#">12 Maternal and Child Health Competencies</a> . Specifically we focus on leadership, interdisciplinary team work, family centered care, cultural competence and diversity, policy and research.	The trainee has improved confidence as a leader and increased advocacy skills.

### Conclusion

Including people with disabilities in LEND would follow the standards set by the MCH Leadership Competencies. Upon completion of the program, trainees have increased self confidence, an understanding of interdisciplinary teamwork, policy and research, advocacy, leadership, and cultural competence. With all of the knowledge that is gained through the program, each trainee has acquired the skills to become a better leader and advocate within their communities and beyond. Additionally, one of the greatest benefits of including people with disabilities in the LEND programs is the perspective that they bring to the classes that they are in. People with disabilities are experts in their own right, about the conditions that they live with. The insight that they provide their fellow trainees is invaluable.

### Implications for Practice

In an effort to continue to implement people with disabilities in the LEND programs, here are some suggestions on what to do. PWD acquire skills in policy, research, clinical, group activities and work on a leadership projects.

**Seminar classes** - Include trainees/PWD as guest speakers during the classes. Their lived experience as a person with a disability is insight that you cannot get from anyone else. It's so important for everyone to hear our voice. Provide the necessary accommodations that each trainee needs to participate in class. Caption all videos that are being presented with subtitles and image descriptions. Allow trainees who cannot attend class in person to participate via video call.

**Clinical experience** - Hold clinics at an accessible location. Make sure the rooms are accessible/big enough to accommodate equipment that the trainee might use (walker/wheelchair/cane). Ensure necessary accommodations are provided during clinics as well (an interpreter etc.)

**Family Mentor Experience (FME)** - Having a trainee with a disability participate in the (FME) experience is very valuable. It gives us a chance to see life with a disability outside of our scope. When paring trainees/families together it is best to not pair a trainee and family who have the same disability together. Make sure that trainee and family have adequate support to complete the visit.

**LEND faculty** - As trainees with disabilities graduate LEND program, they should be given the opportunity to become LEND faculty. Use the disabled LEND fellows insight in what to include in your sessions; and give them opportunities to present during the classes.



### References

Lynch, K. B., & Getzel, E. E. (2013). Practice Brief: Assessing Impact of Inclusive Postsecondary Education Using the Think College Standards. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 26(4), 385-393.

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Thoma, C. A. (2013). Postsecondary Education for Students with Intellectual Disability (ID): Complex Layers. *Journal of postsecondary education and disability*, 26(4), 285-302.-69.