

Spotlight on Success

Virginia EHDI Learning Communities

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(reviewed by Daphne Miller, VA EHDI Program)

The Center for Family Involvement at VCU and the Virginia EHDI Program have been working hand in hand to establish EHDI Learning Communities (LC) within 6 regions across the state since September 2017. From the beginning, a key factor to success would be identifying parents within each region who were ready to explore and enhance their leadership skills to serve in a co-facilitator role for the LC in their area, with the goal that eventually each group would become independent and locally run.

Parents need to feel that their presence, their experience, their choices and their voice are not only heard, but valued by those in a position to make the future better for other families sharing a similar journey. Giving parents an opportunity to understand how they were, and perhaps still are, connected to a larger picture - how all along EHDI was invested in the successful outcome for their child - improves the chances that a family wants to remain engaged in the mission and vision of EHDI.

Over the last two years, meetings have been well attended by a wide variety of professionals and parents of children of all ages under local leadership. This is evidence that the topics and discussions continue to be of interest, members reach out to each other for help, and networking opportunities make these meetings worthwhile.

Parents and caregivers of children who are D/HH have the opportunity to look back and understand what was happening behind the scenes between the time their child was screened and the time they were diagnosed and enrolled in early intervention. Parents of those who were diagnosed later, either because of loss to follow up or delayed onset hearing loss, were able to see what could have or should have happened. Parents also find the LCs to be an opportunity to be connected in a new way.

We have paid attention to the varying leadership styles and skills of those asked to co-lead LC meetings. Some have a lot of leadership experience, through various volunteer organizations or employment opportunities. Others have very little. As each LC has been handed off to local leadership, we always look back on how previous groups were handed off and ask ourselves "How might we do things differently this time and why?" And, "What worked well for the last handoff and should we do that again?" We ensure a mentor from the Center for Family Involvement is always available as we know offering guidance and support when parents step up to help or lead, and being enthusiastic over their contributions or leadership, improves the chance of long-term engagement and investment. When parents feel invested in improving outcomes for children other than their own, then EHDI has a new pipeline of parents ready to spread the word, improve awareness, support other families and impact the goals of early hearing detection and intervention.