

LEND Community Integration Project

The Ohio State University Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) program at the Nisonger Center is participating in a project regarding how community integration is defined and applied in Ohio. The perspective of County Boards of Developmental Disabilities was sought as part of the project. The Champaign and Shelby County Boards of DD were selected from among twenty applicants to be part of this project. Additional participants are the Stark County Board of DD, the Pickaway County Board of DD and the Clearwater Council of Governments (COG).

The project is being led by Dr. Jennifer Walton, MD, MPH - Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics at Nationwide Children's Hospital. Dr. Walton is also an Assistant Professor of Pediatrics and LEND Faculty Member at The Nisonger Center at OSU. A team of our staff from both counties recently had the opportunity to meet with Jill Crane from the OSU LEND program.

In addition to providing demographic information about our counties, we had the opportunity to address the following questions:

1. What does community integration look like in your county? How would you define or describe it?
2. What are the specific barriers you face as a county in regard to community integration?
3. Where do most people in your county live and work?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of our counties size when compared with smaller and larger counties?

We then had a lengthy discussion focused on opportunities for people with developmental disabilities to connect with others in our communities. Local providers are an instrumental part of this work as they locate volunteer options for people they support that foster inclusion and community awareness. Both county boards have hired Community Connections Facilitators who work to know the community and then link people with opportunities based on their interests.

Transportation was identified as a barrier in counties of our size. Also fees to belong to groups or join groups can be a challenge. Being outside of one's home costs money! Also, as our counties are now no longer providing direct services for adults as required by federal regulations, we are working in both counties to identify the best ways to provide support for private providers of residential and day services.

We spent time talking about success stories and concluded that being part of the community is all about developing relationships. We try to ask ourselves: How would we do this in our own lives? We are committed to helping people make connections in our communities and then working toward as much independence as possible for each person.

Information gathered from all participating organizations will be compiled and shared with legislators in Washington DC at an upcoming conference. We were honored to be selected for this project and proud to be part of communities so accepting of including people with developmental disabilities in all aspects of community life.