Children with disabilities and their families: Interdisciplinary partnerships to enhance service delivery in rural and remote Alaska

Virginia Miller, DrPH, MS, MPH and Karen Ward, EdD

LEND programs offer training at the master’s, doctoral, and postdoctoral level, with emphasis on:

- Neurodevelopmental and related disabilities, including autism
- Family-centered, culturally competent care
- Interdisciplinary and leadership skills

Key elements of the Alaska LEND Without Walls include:

- Building on existing community services
- Maximizing distance-delivered educational resources
- Strengthening community and academic partnerships to expand statewide capacity

This project is/was supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under grant number: T73MC20663, Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disorders Training Program, for $516,217.00 of federal funding (07/01/2016–06/30/2017). This information or content and conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.

The Alaska LEND Without Walls (Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and related Disabilities) aims to improve the health of children who experience disabilities and their families by preparing professionals to assume interdisciplinary roles.

**Program Impact**

Since the Alaska LEND began in 2011, 59 LEND fellows have successfully completed the program.

**Sustaining & Strengthening Robust Partnerships**

- Engaging in statewide leadership activities addressing children with disabilities (e.g., 2015 Autism Services Planning Summit)
- Continuing in LEND Program activities (e.g., offering clinical experiences, presenting at seminars, resource sharing and dissemination, and informal recruitment)
- Collaborating with LEND faculty, including input and evaluation on LEND curriculum and affiliate faculty appointments
- Celebrating collaborations (e.g., Camp Yes in Fairbanks)
- Fostering a community of practice for services for children and their families

**Future Directions**

- Maintain Alaska LEND as a coordinating hub for interdisciplinary partnerships statewide
- Promote faculty involvement in service and research projects
- Strengthen a community of practice with alumni reunion meetings targeting state and local initiatives for improving services for families

**LEND alumni currently serve in leadership positions across the state in settings such as infant learning programs, tribal organizations, school districts, universities, medical centers, pediatric clinics, and community organizations.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISCIPLINE</th>
<th>COMMUNITY (Number of Fellows)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Palmer (1), Juneau (1), Eagle River (2), Seward (1), Anchorage (5), Fairbanks (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>Juneau (2), Anchorage (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Dillingham (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>Craig (1), Fairbanks (2), Anchorage (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Therapy</td>
<td>Arctic Village (1), Homer (1), Sitka (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Fairbanks (1), Bethel (1), Homer (1), Seward (1), Eagle River (2), Anchorage (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Work</td>
<td>Wasilla (1), Wrangell (1), Anchorage (5), Fairbanks (1), Juneau (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Barrow (1), Fairbanks (3), Nome (1), Kotzebue (1), Homer (1), Wasilla (1), Anchorage (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech Language Pathology</td>
<td>Fairbanks (1), Sitka (2), Bethel (1), Anchorage (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Therapy</td>
<td>Anchorage (1), Barrow (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-advocate</td>
<td>Anchorage (1), Kenai (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Faculty** from nine disciplines mentor LEND fellows during all aspects of the LEND Program, including weekly seminars and clinical and field experiences focusing on family-centered, culturally component care.

**Program Disciplines include:**

- Psychology
- Speech Language Pathology
- Special Education
- Social Work
- Family
- Medicine
- Occupational Therapy
- Public Health
- Nursing

Faculty from nine disciplines mentor LEND fellows during all aspects of the LEND Program, including weekly seminars and clinical and field experiences focusing on family-centered, culturally component care.