Background
Project HEAL is an innovative approach to interprofessional training through a medical-legal partnership. It aims to prepare future leaders across multiple disciplines to integrate disability-related care and services into their practice.

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.

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

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Project HEAL Pre-Service Training Logic Model

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.

Data and Proposed Outcomes
Since the spring of 2008, a total of 101 trainees have participated in the Project HEAL pre-service training program, contributing over 12,000 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 68 of the 101 trainees), 15 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.

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:

For more information, visit our website at KennedyKrieger.org/ProjectHEAL

Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities