

Testing the Efficacy of Leadership for Empowerment and Abuse Prevention (LEAP): A Healthy Relationship Training Intervention for People with Intellectual Disability

Matthew Wappett

Hi everybody, we just wanted to provide a brief content warning at the beginning of this podcast episode. This episode of the podcast talks about issues of sexuality, relationships, and abuse among people with disabilities and a training program specifically designed to help address these issues. It is important to note that sexual assault and abuse of people with disabilities often goes unreported. And people with disabilities frequently have higher rates of abuse--both sexual, physical, and financial, than many other populations.

Everyone has a right to safety. If you or someone you know with a disability has experienced sexual assault or abuse, there is support available. If you know of or suspect sexual assault or abuse, you should report it. Call your local police station or 911 to contact law enforcement. If the person being abused is considered a vulnerable adult under your state laws, you may also be able to contact your local Department of Human Services or Department of Social Services or Department of Health depending upon how your state is structured. There are important resources on seeking help on rainn.org. That's rainn.org, and we will link to some of these resources in the show notes for this episode. So anyway, we hope you enjoy this conversation and find it educational and helpful.

Hey, everybody, welcome to the DDNJ Author Insights Podcast. I am Dr. Matthew Wappett, the DDNJ editor-in-chief and the Executive Director of the Utah State University Institute for Disability Research, Policy and Practice. It is my privilege to host this podcast. Today, we are excited to have a conversation with Dr. Parthenia Dinorah, the UCEDD Director at Virginia Commonwealth University, and Molly Dellinger-Wray, a project coordinator at the VCU UCEDD. Today's conversation is about a relationship program developed at the VCU UCEDD and there are some really important nuggets of wisdom scattered throughout this episode. I really, really enjoyed this conversation and I learned so much and I hope that you will too.

Before we jump into the conversation, however, I just wanted to do a little bit of housekeeping. Just remind you that this podcast is an activity that we have started to do with the *Developmental Disabilities Network Journal* in the hopes of expanding the accessibility of the content in the journal. We are trying to put this out monthly and include interviews with the authors from the latest issue of the journal. Each episode of this podcast is structured as a conversation with the authors and provides us with a more informal opportunity to explore the author's article, but then to also have some conversations about fun, behind-the-scenes stuff that happens in the process of research, and writing, and all that other stuff that we do in our

day job. We also want to provide an opportunity for you to meet some of the people who are working in the field. I know I said this on the last episode, but, prior to COVID, we were going to conferences, and we were seeing each other in person at meetings and everything else. And that has really all gone away. Some of those informal opportunities to learn about people and their research and what they're doing have just disappeared. They don't happen over Zoom. We started this podcast as a chance for you, and for us actually, for all intents and purposes to get to learn about the people who are working in the field today. Hopefully this is a service to you. Hopefully this is a chance for you to learn more, to make some new connections and potentially develop some new collaborations. I think, however, the most important reason that we launched this podcast was to increase the accessibility of the articles in the journal. Many academic journals are very inaccessible and difficult to get to. The launch of this podcast is part of our ongoing commitment to increasing the accessibility of the journal and the content in the journal for a wider readership and for this listenership. Not everybody has time to sit down and read an entire article these days and more and more people are choosing to access their information through podcasts and audiobooks. I know I listen to audiobooks--several of them every month. They're just a new way of getting information out there. The launch of this podcast means that you can access DDNJ's content while you're on the go. You can share it more easily across social media and other online platforms. We really hope that this is a service to you and that this is something that is useful for you.

Before I jump into the bios, and introducing you to our interviewees today, I want to encourage you to go to wherever it is that you find your podcasts--Apple, Spotify, Overcast, Stitcher--make sure that you follow us, make sure that you like us, send us feedback, send us your thoughts, send us ideas to make this podcast better. We are always trying to get better. If you have any feedback, you can shoot that to us at our main email that's editor.ddnj@aggies.usu.edu. So that's editor.ddnj@aggies.usu.edu. Feedback thoughts--we're always wanting to hear from the folks who are listening to the podcast, so please send us those when and if you have time.

This episode of our podcast is an important conversation with Dr. Parthenia Dinorah and her co-author, Molly Dellinger-Wray, about their article entitled "*Testing the Efficacy of the LEAP Program, or the Leadership for Empowerment and Abuse Prevention: A Healthy Relationship Training Intervention for People with Intellectual Disability.*" This article can be found in the most recent issue of *DDNJ*, Volume Two, Issue One, on the journal website, which, as always, is open access and available to everybody. On the podcast today we have with us Dr. Parthenia Dinorah, also known as Parthy. Dr. Dinorah has been employed in the disability field for over 24 years. In her earlier years, she helped administer direct service projects focused on community participation for individuals with IDD and over the past 20 years, has been conducting research and evaluation on disability supports and services. She is currently the Executive Director of Virginia's UCEDD at Virginia Commonwealth University, which operates over 40 projects that support people with IDD and their families in living full lives in the

community. She has served as the principal investigator on multiple federal research grants examining the outcomes of people with IDD and intervention-based studies examining health and wellbeing for people with IDD. In all of these projects, people with disabilities and their families provide strategic direction and serve in leadership roles. Also, Dr. Dinorah is the parent of a child with a developmental disability. She is fully committed to shared leadership and alliances with people with disabilities and their families. That commitment certainly comes out in this interview.

We're also joined today by Molly Dellinger-Wray. Molly is a project manager at the Partnership for People with Disabilities, the UCEDD at Virginia Commonwealth University. Molly is a special educator and also a parent who has sat on both sides of the IEP table and has more than 30 years of experience supporting children and adults with disabilities in schools, homes, and community settings. Molly is an endorsed Positive Behavior Support Facilitator and a certified instructor in person-centered thinking and stewards of children. Molly's professional goal is to help improve the quality of life for everyone through developing healthy relationships. Again, I think that commitment and Molly's experience as a parent and as a practitioner certainly shines through in this conversation. So, without further ado, we'd like to welcome Dr. Parthia Dinorah and Molly Dellinger-Wray.

Thanks for joining us today, Parthy and Molly. Could we just go ahead and start and have you tell us a little bit about your background and the path that brought you to this project? Why don't we start with you, Parthy?

Parthenia Dinora

Sure, love to talk. So, I am kind of a long timer at our UCEDD. I've been at the Partnership for about 20 years and I have done a lot of work in research and evaluation and intervention development. When we started LEAP, we were really interested in kind of upping our game in research and evaluation. We have wonderful interventions and we've done a lot of program evaluation, but we haven't done as much research on our interventions. We were interested in kind of getting a little bit more sophisticated and exact about what we were implementing, and wanted to do a really good job of making sure our outcomes were what we wanted them to be for the people that were participating. So, we were really interested in just expanding our research and making our intervention a little bit more sophisticated and knowing our outcomes. I say, the other big piece is I am a parent of a child with a disability. So, the issues around abuse and neglect and knowing what to do when you're in an unhealthy relationship are very near and dear to my heart. And I want to make sure we're doing all we can to keep people healthy and safe and living great lives in the community.

Matthew Wappett

Perfect. Thanks, Parthy. So, Molly, why don't you tell us a little bit about your background and the path that brought you to this project?

Molly Dellinger-Wray

Well, Parthy mentioned that she was a long timer, which makes me feel like I am really a long timer. I have been with The Partnership for People with Disabilities for more years than I want to count, but prior to that I was a special educator. The Partnership for People with Disabilities began to address the problem of abuse and neglect of people with disabilities way back in 2000 and really established that as a priority area that they felt like was important to address. This really was way before the "Me too Movement"--way before a lot of public acknowledgements that abuse was so prevalent among people with disabilities. There were many projects that I helped with that trained teachers, law enforcement, school guidance counselors, and people about what to do, how to recognize and respond to abuse. That that was pretty much the focus of what we had. But as a special educator, and also a parent of a child with a disability who went through special education, I felt like it was really important that we bring that information directly to the people who needed it. We were always looking for opportunities to expand that work, in a much more boots-on-the-ground way. So, a way to prevent victimization. So that was what really drew me to seeking out funding and going for this project.

Matthew Wappett

That's great. And it sounds like both of you have a background as a parent and so you've kind of lived this experience and have seen the importance of it. In your article, you're covering a training program, it's called LEAP, or Leadership for Empowerment and Abuse Prevention. Molly, tell us a little bit about the LEAP training that you discussed in your article--where was it developed and what does it cover?

Molly Dellinger-Wray

Well, the LEAF training is a four-session training that is led by a person with a disability and a co-trainer. We spent a long-time researching LEAP prior to developing the curriculum. We had a really wonderful team of people who supported us in developing the curriculum with family members and people with intellectual disability on the ground floor. So, they were in every meeting and every decision that was made. We had people with disabilities and their family members. We learned a lot in developing LEAP. We had representatives from Social Work, from the Virginia Department of Health, from several domestic violence agencies, from disability support advocacy agencies, and child abuse agencies who really helped us figure out a lot about the dynamics of abuse and how to address this the right way.

LEAP is four sessions. The first session really defines like what is a friend--what does it mean to be a friend? The second session talks about relationships, like what is a relationship? What does a healthy relationship look like? What does an unhealthy relationship look like? The third session takes that knowledge about what's healthy and what's unhealthy, and says, "Now let's talk about touch." "What's a healthy touch?" "What's an unhealthy touch?" "What do you do if you experience an unhealthy touch?" "Or how do you stop?" "What's a way that's saying 'No,' that works for you"? It's really person centered, and I think having people explore "What are you comfortable with?" "What is a way that you can get out of the situation"? And then the last session is really focused on how to get help. Because we're special educators and had special educators on our team, every session reviews the previous sessions. Session Two builds upon Session One, and then a little new information. By the time you get to Session Four, you're reviewing everything that you've had in the four sessions, and then just a little bit of new information about how to get help.

Matthew Wappett

So how long does it take somebody to go through the curriculum?

Molly Dellinger-Wray

It's four sessions, and each session is 90 minutes long. My specialty area was really working with kids who had severe support needs and severe disabilities. We really wanted LEAP to include everyone. If you weren't a person who communicated with words, we wanted you to still be able to participate in the LEAP program and make those accommodations available for people. We've piloted it with a group with very significant support needs. So we knew we're good to go.

Matthew Wappett

Is there a particular age range that it's targeted at?

Molly Dellinger-Wray

We geared LEAP for adults. We are in the process now, I don't know if you want me to get into this now Parthy, we're in the process of adapting LEAP for a teen audience for young teens, to be able to bring it into some school settings or with some young adults. It is 90 minutes long. We had a lot of people saying 90 minutes is a really long time...I don't know if the people who I work with are going to be able to do that. That was never a problem. It's very engaging, it's very hands on, it's a lot of experience, it's really, you know, for an abuse prevention curriculum, it's a lot of fun, it really is.

Matthew Wappett

Interesting. That's kind of the structure of it. So kind of switching to you Parthy, why are training programs like LEAP so important, and how is LEAP different from other training programs out there?

Parthenia Dinora

Sure. And I can start this off and Molly can chime in. First of all, the statistics around abuse of adults with intellectual disability are just so sobering and scary. There's a very compelling need and that's how we got this work funded over and over again, is because it's just such a great need that people need to do more work in this area. Everybody has acknowledged that. Molly had mentioned that LEAP is four sessions. There are other interventions that have been developed that are much more involved. So they're longer. Part of our advisory group's concerns were that we'd have a lot of problems with people not being able to go to a 10-session program--we needed something that was more manageable in people's lives. Our LEAP intervention is a little bit shorter than some of the others. Molly also mentioned that it is for a variety of support needs. It's not just targeted to people with mild disability. We really developed the curriculum for everybody. Research kind of drew a little bit of a circle around who could participate in some of the measurement pieces of it. But LEAP as an intervention was developed for a really wide audience of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The last piece was that piece around the amplification of the research side, that we worked very hard to do rigorous research around this intervention. A lot of the interventions that are out there on abuse prevention have not been researched. This is an evidence-based intervention after we received the research grants and did the more rigorous evaluation of the intervention.

Matthew Wappett

Great. Molly, do you have anything to add?

Molly Dellinger-Wray

I don't think I do. I think Parthy hit all the high points.

Matthew Wappett

That's awesome. Your article is really discussing your testing the efficacy of the LEAP program. Can you give us a quick summary of your article in DDNJ in just 2 minutes. I know that's hard, but I think that's you, Parthy, right?

Parthenia Dinora

Yeah, sure. I'm happy to do that. So what we found we, as I said, kind of tested our intervention, we found that people really did a very good job and came into the LEAP sessions knowing the difference at face value between healthy and unhealthy relationships. After we did the training, what people really gained skills in is describing why something was healthy or unhealthy. They got a language to describe relationships in greater detail. Then they could describe better what to do if they were in an unhealthy relationship after the intervention. We helped people have a language to talk to other people about the relationships they were in. If it was an unhealthy relationship, they better knew how to get themselves out of an unhealthy relationship and seek support.

Matthew Wappett

I find that to be so incredibly empowering, you know, in that power of language--having the language and the ability to describe something to say, "yes" and "no" and consent and everything that goes along with that language. We assume, in many cases that people get that. But even for people without disabilities, this language and sort of this knowledge frequently needs to be explicitly trained. I think for many, many years, we've overlooked that and just assumed, ah, people will just pick this up. But it's not something.

Parthenia Dinora

And it becomes kind of critical in these conversations, when they need to describe to people who aren't necessarily people who know people with intellectual disability. So if they don't have that vocabulary down and don't know how to describe it to somebody else, they can't get the help that they need. Just having some of the that exposure to the language and key people that they need to talk to, and write down on their trust card, who their person is and their life that they can have these conversations with. It was a really important win. We learned so much in this research, and there are things that worked really well and things that didn't work well. But that one piece of people having a greater ability to connect the dots and get help was why we were doing this in the first place. So we were so excited about those results.

Matthew Wappett

Yeah. Molly, kind of in a nutshell, what's the take-home message from the DDNJ article? What do you want readers to remember?

Molly Dellinger-Wray

Well, as Parthy said, you know, we learned a lot when we were doing this. I learned a lot about abuse prevention. One of the things that I think is so important is that people who are

disability support providers, people who support people with disabilities don't know a lot about what the red flags are. They're not aware about this whole other world and so oftentimes, abuse is missed, because it's just not in our repertoire of go to's. So when people are conducting a functional behavior assessment, for example, looking into someone's trauma history is often frequently overlooked, which is, you know, just not acceptable when we know the extreme high rates of abuse and how often it occurs. So it's really, you know, for me, now, of course, we all have our biases, but it's my go to is like, look at that first before you look at other things. The other thing is that a lot of these concepts are so important as Parthy mentioned, you know, they're important for everyone, including people with disabilities. It is possible to learn these techniques and these strategies, regardless of your disability or your cognitive strengths or weaknesses. So I think that's really important. And I think that we, as disability support providers, we just need to be a little bit more brave in confronting this. I think it takes a lot of courage and we need to have the courage so that we can help others.

Matthew Wappett

Yeah. And that's the one place where a curriculum like this, and a training program like this makes it easier, I think, because it takes courage. And because these are in many cases, uncomfortable conversations, having a structure and somebody who's thought through that, and a guide, and especially an evidence-based structuring guide to help with those conversations, I think really does remove some of the obstacles to this knowledge in this important information.

Parthenia Dinora

I have one other thing kind of kind of a call to our network, on issues related to this, and it's about measurement. We were really challenged to do good measurement for people with intellectual disability and we originally did a pre and posttest that was paper based that we interviewed people. They were extremely uncomfortable, they felt like they were being tested, they felt like they were in school. So we adapted that to video vignettes. It was so much more accessible. People enjoyed it. It was a fun measurement, and we were kind thrilled to use people with disabilities as actors and paid them to do the vignettes. So it became kind of a critical component of the research. And we had some measurement issues with them. We continue to work on refining those measurement issues. But that balance between accessibility and measurement and how we as a field need to kind of move along and get a little bit better at that, and how we can reach out to other disciplines to really help us. We are furiously working on that right now to get measurement that works for people with ID that they feel comfortable with that meets kind of the standards of rigor. I would love to partner with anybody who's doing that kind of work and really want to just kind of be dedicated towards doing better in that area.

Matthew Wappett

Yeah, that's also a personal interest of mine is how do we make this research process more inclusive and accessible? Because I think you're right, a lot of times, we just take things that have worked in a traditional sense and try to just overlay them on this population that we work with and frequently it doesn't work. It doesn't work for many typically developing people.

Parthenia Dinora

It was almost like they had hearkened back to school where they were uncomfortable, and they, they shared that with us. We had to change, you know, we were not going to put people in that position. We just need to up our game on the other side of how do we get this as tight and how can we describe it in a way that the research community embraces it? So you know, that I just think that there's a lot of work to be done there.

Matthew Wappett

Well, so one thing that doesn't come through in these academic articles is some of the work and the funny stories and just the experiences as you're working through these problems and implementing these programs. One of the things that we like to do here is kind of ask people to share a memorable story or event that occurred as you worked on this project. So why don't we go back to you, Molly, for this? Is there a memorable event or something that occurred as you were doing this that would really, I think, bring some life to this more academic article?

Molly Dellinger-Wray

It did. You know, we developed this training for a reason, because we know they're very high rates of abuse among people with disabilities. And one thing that we expected but didn't expect, I would say, is that when you start having these conversations with people about relationships, and about healthy relationships, and unhealthy relationships, and trying to have these conversations, people are going to disclose abuse that's happened to them in the past, or that's happening now. I was at a training, it was the second you know, we had done the first session, we were on the second session, and we were talking about ways to say "no," all the different ways there are to say "no." And one of the participants passed me a note and said, "I'm afraid to tell my boyfriend 'No,' because he gets angry with me." So, you know, here it is this big disclosure, and I said, "You know, let's talk afterwards." But I really, I didn't have a relationship with this young lady. I liked her. She was fun. She was a very engaging person. I always like to describe people by their strengths first. She was very engaging, and she was, you know, kind of cute. She always had like a matching hair tied to her socks, and you know, just really a fun person to be around and participated in the class a lot. She had a job where she worked as a housekeeper at a hotel. She lived in an apartment complex that was where she got drop-in assistance. There were several people who use services who live at the same

apartment complex. And so I went to the residential support agency that had asked us to come in and do the training and said, "We just want you to know, you know, something going on with Bethany." I'm calling her Bethany for the story--it's not her real name. "And I just want to make you aware of it." And she said, "That's interesting, because I wasn't aware that Bethany had a boyfriend." So she did some research and some follow up and she got back to me and said that the man that Bethany was calling her "boyfriend" was actually a staff member. He was a staff member that was very popular among the people who use their services and their staff--that he was always the person who would take the shift that nobody else wanted and would come in on the snow days and it was always available. What they discovered when they followed up with that is that he was not only having nonconsensual sex with Bethany, but that he was also having sex with at least two other women and one other guy who were using services. So he was a serial predator with multiple victims--that was happening, you know, just under everyone's noses. So it taught me a lot of things. That particular incident taught me a lot of things that I took away. And one of them is the importance of when people talk about secondary trauma, and how important it is to acknowledge that when people are telling you stories--if you have these conversations with people, they will tell you stories--and that secondary trauma is real. When the executive director of that agency called me and told me what had happened, that the guy had been fired, and so on, you know, I was absolutely gutted. I was just devastated and I carried it around with me for a long time. And one of the first things I did was I went into the office of a guy who helped develop LEAF with us, and we worked together really closely on several projects, and we had a good relationship, and I went into his office, and he is a person with a disability. And I, you know, said, "Oh, I just can't believe this happened, and I'm so upset." And he sort of said, like, "What did you expect? You know, we knew this was a problem, we knew this was going to happen." But I think you have to be prepared for how to support yourself when someone does disclose that there's abuse that's happening, and it could be happening right now. So that was the first thing. And the other thing is, and this is something that you will learn as you go along is that, you know, basically, because of our actions, we removed this predator from this organization. But when the woman came back to the training the third week, rather than saying like, "Wow, thank you so much for removing this predator from our lives." She said, "Why did you get my boyfriend fired?" You know, she was really not happy about it, and certainly not happy with me. And so I think, when people are in relationships that are abusive, very often they care deeply about that person. It is not right for us to think that we're going to come in here and make everything right for people, and they're going to appreciate us for it. She didn't appreciate me at all, I think she's probably still mad at me. But I hope she has a better life because of it.

Matthew Wappett

That's an incredibly depressing but powerful story about how important this is. Because I think you're exactly right. We work in this field, and we hear about it. But a lot of times, it's really hard to know what do you do about it? I think this is a great example of the power of a training

like this, it opens up those opportunities for people to say, "Hey, this is happening." And you know, it had an impact. I mean, you have a serious, measurable impact on the lives of at least a few people there who are now safer because of it. Thank you so much for sharing that. That must have been an incredibly difficult time to navigate--I can't even imagine.

Molly Dellinger-Wray

It was really hard. That's what I go back to saying like you have to have courage to address this. But we need to have the courage. We can't expect people with disabilities to do this on their own. Nobody can do this on their own. Even people without disabilities need help with this.

Matthew Wappett

No, you're exactly right. So Parthy, did you want to share a memorable story or event or should I move to the next question?

Parthenia Dinora

You can move to the next question. I think Molly's story really stands.

Matthew Wappett

Yeah. I don't I don't want to devalue anything you might say, but that's a pretty hard one to top. Yeah. Everybody who works in this field typically has a story. There's very personal motivations for people who are working in the disability field. As you both mentioned at the beginning, you're both parents, but I'm just kind of curious for both of you and we'll start with you first, Parthy. What motivates you to do this work? Why do you do what you do?

Parthenia Dinora

Well, I think Molly's story is again, kind of like the explanation in a nutshell that you know, we want people with we've always wanted people even before we had our own kids wanted people with have disabilities to live good lives. They shouldn't have to deal with the barriers that the world puts in front of them. We want to kind of concretely move the needle. That's where projects like LEAP are awesome. Because you develop something--you're in front of people, you're measuring if it's working, and you're seeing changes in people's lives, and I think it's a luxury in our work to see that. I think there's an awful lot that we do where you don't get that concrete payoff. But LEAP is just one of those projects that is a delight to work on. It's a horrible reality. But it's a delight to be with people and to see them engaging and feeling like they've come to a different place because of the teeny contribution that you've made. There is that bigger picture of we want people to live good lives and community. And then that really specific thing about LEAP is, it's a concrete specific of starting from "A" and getting to "C" and,

and that's great work to be in--it's fun. Of course, we've had, you know, the other piece of this. There's a team that works on LEAP. Molly and I are only a couple of people. We have an interdisciplinary team, our School of Social Work is really involved with the work, and it's an awesome team to work with, too, so I'm motivated by my fellow professionals that are 100% committed, they're all in and that's always great to work with people that are all in.

Matthew Wappett

What about you, Molly? What motivates you to do this work?

Molly Dellinger-Wray

No, I think pretty much I'm like Parthy. But I but I also feel like, you know, when you are a person who is a special educator like I am, you know how to teach stuff. And when you have this knowledge about how to really make an improvement on someone's quality of life, you can't really put the genie back in the bottle. You know, you have these tools and resources, and you just want to use them all the time. Like so many things in our life, you know, the other thing that I work on at The Partnership that I'm very involved with is positive behavior support. And you find that you're using positive behavior support and every aspect of your life with your family members and your pets and your community. It is the same thing with healthy relationships. It's not something that's contained to just a work setting. I think we all benefit so much from this knowledge and this information. The other thing is that our team of people who teach LEAP have been just the most wonderful group of people with disabilities and co-trainers, who are also just equally committed and great to talk to. We have a really supportive community of people who we learn together and work together. As Parthy mentioned, we have representatives from the VCU School of Social Work who were instrumental in starting this project with us. That team has really evolved and become supportive to one another in so many different ways. So that's been a pleasure.

Matthew Wappett

Well, thank you both for sharing this personal aspect of your life and just for the work that you have done. We like to end the podcast here with asking everybody the same question and one of our commitments at the *Developmental Disabilities Network Journal* is trying to make research and particularly the dissemination of research more inclusive and accessible, so that it's not just a targeted audience of researchers that you know, these ideas and this information is getting out to a broader population. I'm just curious, for both of you, what's one thing that you've been doing to make your work more inclusive and accessible? Why don't we start with you, Parthy?

Parthenia Dinora

Sure. I talked a little about this already. I mean, I'm really working hard on the measurement side. I'm trying to partner with as many people as I can to get the way that we look at impact to work for people with disabilities to work in kind of co-leadership with people with disabilities to do a better job of research that's about them. So, you know, definitely the measurement side. I will say the other side really quickly, you said one, but I'm going to cram in two is on dissemination that we've really worked hard with LEAP. We've certainly written articles for journals, but we also have talked to as many families as we can. We've talked to people with disabilities, trying to really connect this to their lives and make sure that they know that this is available to them if they're interested. So, trying to work on dissemination from multiple angles and not just going for academic journals, but really trying to get to people and families.

Matthew Wappett

Kind of as a follow up to that before we switch over to Molly, but is LEAP a program that folks that other UCEDD's, or DD Councils, or Independent Living Centers or whatever could reach out to you and get access to?

Parthenia Dinora

It is copyrighted, but we are definitely in conversations with people about next steps. We are still modifying pieces of it. People can absolutely reach out to us and we can have those conversations. It's not as quick and easy as we want it to be. There are pieces about the university that you have to work through. But we want this in people's hands. And so yeah, always can reach out to us and have that conversation.

Matthew Wappett

That's great. Molly, let's go over to you. What's one thing that you've been doing to make your work more inclusive and accessible?

Molly Dellinger-Wray

Well, I think Parthy mentioned that we feel like this information is so important for people with disabilities to know. We have included people with disabilities, really in every aspect of this project. In terms of the curriculum design, and how it's delivered, our trainers have come back to us, when we had multiple pilots of how this was going to work, and they would say like, you know, this really doesn't work, people aren't getting this. We had many versions that we had their input on. I think also, as Parthy mentioned, we think it's important to be in academic journals and love the opportunity to do podcasts like this, which I think makes the information

of LEAP a lot more accessible. But we have also really made it accessible to families, through *Parenting Special Needs* magazine and a series of articles that we've done for them about what we've learned about healthy relationships and how important it is for people to know about them.

Matthew Wappett

Perfect. Well, we, like I mentioned earlier, I think the work that you're doing is genuinely important, and it really was a privilege to review and then to publish your article because not enough work is being done in this area. Again, there is work out there, but it's not always evidence based. And so really your efforts, I think to create an inclusive curriculum, and then gather the evidence and really do that in an inclusive and accessible way is noteworthy and laudable. I just want to thank both of you for taking the time to visit with us today. Any last thoughts?

Parthenia Dinora

You know, one thing that I definitely want to make sure that we communicate is that people with disabilities were integral to the development of LEAP and are co-trainers at every LEAP training. This is an intervention that was developed side by side and it is at the very core of LEAP. I want to make sure we make that really explicit that we couldn't have done it without people. The intervention is about people with disabilities developed alongside with people with disabilities. I just want to make sure we're really clear on that--that it's not just to them, they are creators of this. It's really important to our UCEDD that we do that. We try to do justice by that. We have varying levels of success sometimes. And this is one of those success stories where we legitimately included people in every stage of this and modified it based on their input. That's something that we continue to work on for everything that we do.

Matthew Wappett

I appreciate you bringing that up, because I think that's a good example of some things that are mentioned in the article but maybe not highlighted to the extent that you have here. Although in the article, you do mention the involvement of people with disabilities, I think just highlighting it here and just how integral that was to the success, the design, and the delivery of this is something. That's why we have these conversations to really say, "this is model work that's being done out there. This is inclusive and accessible work that's happening in the field." Like I said, just hats off to you for your time and effort and for the work that you've put into this. Thank you.

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