

Special DDNJ Issue Highlights DD Network Impacts

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Last summer, the Developmental Disabilities Network Journal put out a call for submissions on a special issue highlighting the DD Network. The [resulting issue](#) offers a revealing look into the network's critical impact on society. It includes perspectives from university centers for excellence on developmental disabilities (UCEDDs), developmental disability councils, protection and advocacy (P&E) agencies, and Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) programs.

These members of the disability network coordinate to improve services, research, training and policy in every state.

"DD Councils have driven policy innovations that changed how states support independence," wrote DDNJ Executive Editor Matthew Wappett, in ["Preserving Progress: Why the DD Network Matters Now More Than Ever."](#)

"In Washington, the Council's advocacy helped establish one of the nation's first statewide supported decision-making laws, ensuring adults with disabilities can retain autonomy while receiving appropriate supports. Across multiple states, DD Councils have funded pilot projects that became Medicaid waivers or employment first initiatives, embedding the principle of community-based, integrated employment into state systems."

"As Disability Rights West Virginia's Executive Director noted, 'Every ramp we build, every IEP we revise, every job we help secure – those are not small wins. They're

how we change the story of what's possible in West Virginia,'" wrote authors Lesley Cottrell, Susan Given and Christina E. Wiseman in ["The Indispensable Role of the Sister Disability Agencies: Safeguarding Progress and Enhancing Outcomes through Collaboration."](#)

"Over the course of an academic year, trainees are required to visit their mentoring family

at least five times (in-person, virtually, or a combination of both), maintain contact between visits, and record four self-reflective journal entries about their experiences," wrote authors Matthew Bogenschultz, Sarah Lineberry, Jackie Robinson Brock, Flip Grey and Kathryn Flinn. Their article, ["Evaluating the Impact of a LEND-based Family Mentorship Program for Pre-Service Professionals,"](#) looked at the impact of a Family Mentorship Experience on LEND trainees. "Visits can be as varied as going trick or treating with the family for Halloween, having dinner with the family in their home, observing their FME child in a therapy session, joining the family for a playdate, "hanging out" in the backyard, attending a church service with the family, or anything else the family and the trainee decide will offer insight into the family's routines and experiences.

"...When I went to the house I was like, Oh, My gosh! You've got a lot going on," the authors quoted one trainee as saying. "I think that gave me a lot more compassion for families ... realizing they have a whole life going on."

"UCEDDs have been instrumental in advancing inclusive early childhood practices, accessible healthcare, and community living models across states," Wappett wrote. "The Think College initiative—rooted in UCEDD-led research—has expanded opportunities for postsecondary education, with more than 300 higher education programs now available across the U.S."

Read these accounts, and so much more, in the [latest issue of the DDNJ](#).