



SEVA

Special Education Volunteer Advocates

Supporting & Empowering
Parent Leaders
on their Advocacy Journey

Presentation to
National Disability Rights Network Annual Conference
Baltimore, Maryland
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Who We Are



Mary Ciccone, Managing Attorney
Disability Rights New Jersey

Rebekah Novemsky, Family Support Liason
NJ Council on Developmental Disabilities

Jeannette Mejias, SEVA Project Director
Carolyn Hayer, Director Family & Professional Development
SPAN Parent Advocacy Network

How We Got Started



- DRNJ Educational Priority states:
 - Ensuring that children with disabilities receive equal educational opportunities in the least restrictive setting appropriate for their needs
- DRNJ was swamped with special education cases
- Most cases were not in need of an attorney

How We Got Started



- NJCDD 5 year plan's Special Education Advocacy goal states:
 - Enable students and families to exercise their rights within the Special Education system.
- This goal was not being addressed to the Councils satisfaction
- NJDDC wanted to do more to address the needs of children

How We Got Started



- DRNJ & NJCDD Executive Directors met to discuss funding a project to address these issues
- DRNJ & NJDDC collaboratively developed an RFP
- RFP released – SPAN applied and was successful

How We Stay Connected



- DRNJ & NJCDD are "sister" organizations
- DRNJ serves on SPAN Advisory Board
- NJCDD serves on SPAN Advisory Board
- SPAN serves on DRNJ Board of Directors
- SPAN staff person member of NJ DD Council

"Perfect Together"



What is SEVA?



SEVA means
"selfless service"

"collective uplifting through understanding the needs of, and a genuine desire to uplift, others; service infused with kindness and respect for those served"

Why SEVA?



SEVA'S Long-Term Purpose

- To facilitate systemic change by enhancing supports available to families seeking quality **inclusion** and effective **transition** to adulthood services
- To assist children and youth with disabilities to become more independent, productive, contributing and included members of their community.
- To help families become effective advocates for their children

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The project targets the full range of children with developmental disabilities in New Jersey.



SEVA OBJECTIVES:



Focus on Inclusion and Transition to help families:

1. Develop skills
2. Increase knowledge
3. Build capacity
4. Create agreement

PROJECT FOCUS: Training & Supporting



Training SEVAs

- Recruit & Train 200 Volunteers
- Partner with NJ advocates
- Provide Regional Trainings across NJ in English & Spanish

Support & Development

- Access to extensive online Resource Collection
- Monthly group calls for support
- Ongoing Training via Google Classroom platform

Supporting Families

- Match SEVAs to 400 families
- Prioritize by need
- Engagement with family:
 - Stage 1: Initial contact
 - Stage 2: IEP Meeting
 - Stage 3: Next Steps
 - Stage 4: Close & Evaluate
- Data collected at every level
- Families can be referred back to DRNJ, if necessary



TRAINING VOLUNTEERS: SEVA CURRICULUM

■ Deepening knowledge

- Legal requirements re: LRE and transition; emerging issues for special populations; and research/best practices

■ Building skills

- Family assistance/support strategies – effective communication and building leadership capacity
- Problem solving strategies – creating agreement and conflict resolution

■ Providing Support

- Advocacy, empowerment, & problem-solving strategies & skills

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Trained Diverse SEVA Volunteers



Special Education Volunteer Advocates - Cohort 1

SUPPORTING FAMILIES: MATCHING PROTOCOLS



WHY SEVA?

- ✓ Need support at your IEP meeting?
- ✓ Want to improve your advocacy skills?
- ✓ Have a student in need of transition to adult life services?
- ✓ Seeking a more inclusive setting for your child?



SEVA Provides

- ✓ Trained volunteers to support families at IEP and related meetings.
- ✓ Coaching to assist families in developing their advocacy skills.
- ✓ Information & resources for families.



Contact Jeannette to learn more:
jmejias@spanadvocacy.org



- Signed Partner Agreements with disability organizations across the state
- Preference given to DRNJ referrals
- Families prioritized based on need
- Stages of Engagement:
 1. Initial Contact
 2. IEP Meeting
 3. Action Planning

SEVA – Project Evaluation



The SEVA Project uses an external evaluator to assess:

- Training curriculum
- Training outcomes
- SEVA experience with training and matching
- Assistance provided to families
- Family outcomes
- Family experience with SEVA support

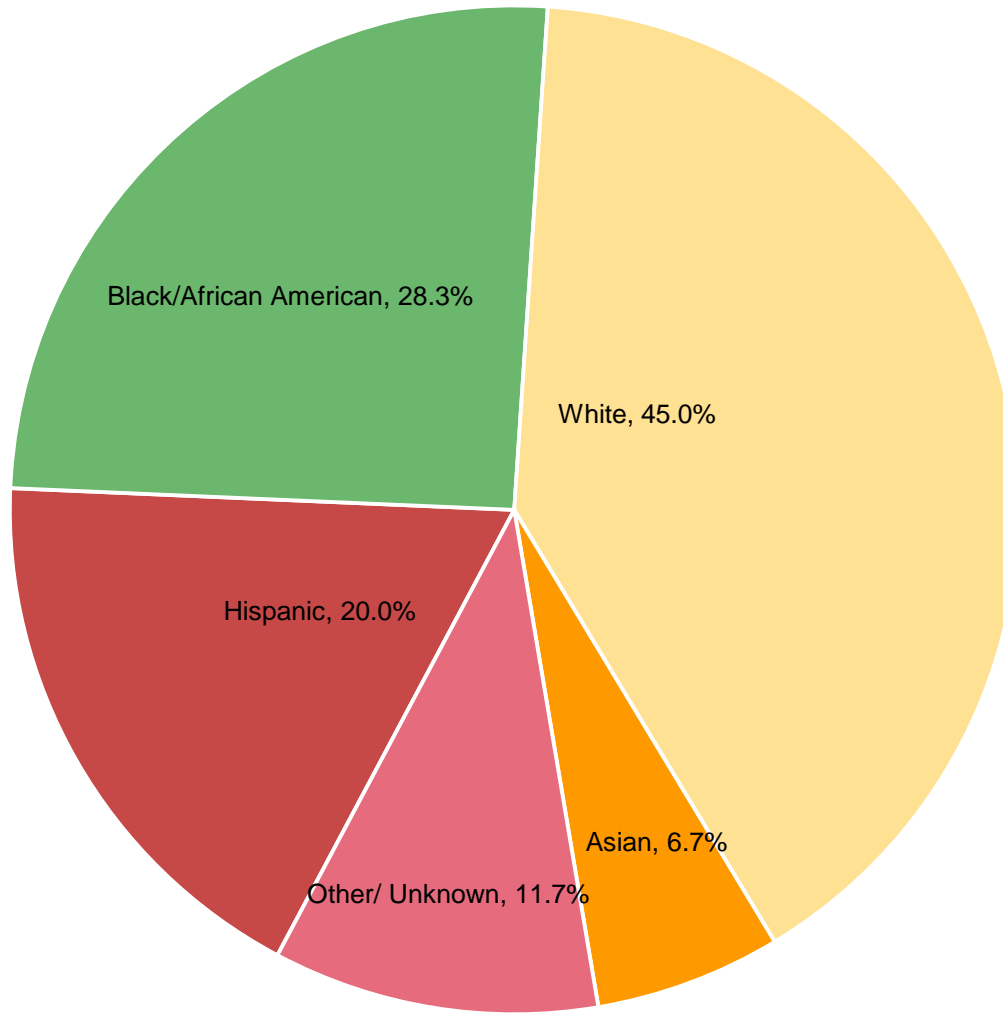
Goals:

- 75% of assisted parents rate the experience helpful
- 2/3 will indicate it led to improved results

SEVA YEAR 1: Evaluation of Training



SEVA Training Enrollees: Race and Ethnicity (N=67)



SEVA – Project Evaluation



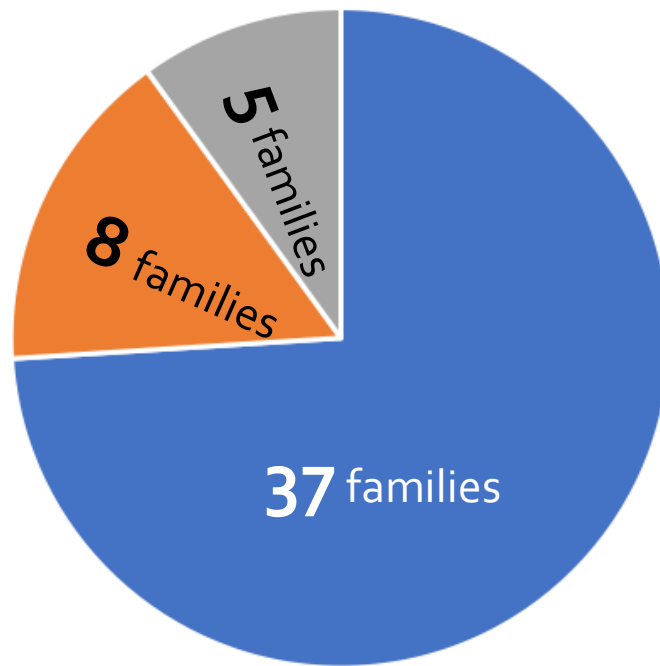
Notable Quotes from trainees:

- *My most valuable takeaway was to be open, to listen with my heart and be able to offer to support to families.*
- *I really liked the session around conflict resolution and problem solving skills.*
- *My most valuable takeaway was the handouts, as I can review them at any time to refresh me when I feel "stuck."*
- *My most valuable takeaway was hearing the stories, opinions, and advice from others.*

SEVA YEAR 1: Data on Supporting Families



Family Matches
as of 6/30/2018



■ Initial Contact ■ IEP Meeting ■ Next Steps

SEVA – Project Evaluation



Notable Quotes from families:

- Your help really made a difference for my family. Thank you!*
- The SEVA I had was excellent. She helped me at a very critical time. I would definitely use your services again.*
- This type of program is very necessary. Even though the team at my son's school are very helpful with him, the administration from the district were extremely counterproductive. He has benefited from his time with general education classes tremendously. I hope for him to one day be able to be 100% included with support where he needs it.*

SEVA – Project Impact



“ I was so grateful when you called and told me about your project. It was like a prayer answered. I never imagined that I would have to fight so hard for my son to be included in the general education classroom. Maybe I was naive. Many parents who have children with special needs don't have the resources to attain this type of help. This is why your project is so incredibly important.”

~Parent supported by a SEVA

SEVA – Project Replication



- Conditions that brought us together exist in other states
- Relationships between P&A, DD Council, Parent Centers
- Upcoming presentations: National DD Council Conference July 2019 & National Parent Center Conference July 2020

**Discussion
Questions**

SEVA TEAM



- Lauren Agoratus, Curriculum Developer | Technical Assistance
- Diana Autin, SPAN Co-Director/PTI Co-Director
- Martha Brecher, Education Advocate, Consultant | Trainer
- Maria Docherty, PTI Co-Director
- Carolyn Hayer, PTI Co-Director
- Pam Kelley, Kelley Analytics, External Evaluator
- Jeannette Mejias, Project Director
- Mercedes Rosa, Bilingual Family Engagement Facilitator
- Michele Tyler, Administrative Coordinator & Family Engagement Facilitator
- Renay Zamloot, Education Advocate, Consultant | Trainer

THANK YOU



Thank You

For more information, contact
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