



SEVA

Special Education
Volunteer Advocates

SPAN Parent Advocacy
Network

Presentation to
CADRE Symposium
October 27, 2022

Who We Are



STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

 **The New Jersey Council
on Developmental Disabilities**



*Diana Autin, Executive Director
Co-Director, FV Leadership In Family Professional Partnerships*

Jeannette Mejias, SEVA Project Director

Michele Tyler, Co-Director NE-PACT/Region A Parent TA Center.

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's 5 year plan's Special Education Advocacy goal stated:
 - Enable students and families to exercise their rights within the Special Education system.
- This goal was not being addressed to the Council's satisfaction
- NJCDD 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"



Project evolution



- NJCDD funded the project for four years
- The NJ DOE supplemented our START project with additional funds to take over funding SEVA for the last two years
- We added two components: talking with families about the benefits of mediation, and providing “Creating Agreement” training in districts with high levels of conflict



STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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, especially those 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 more effective advocates for their children

SEVA



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



SEVA OBJECTIVES:



Focus is to help families:

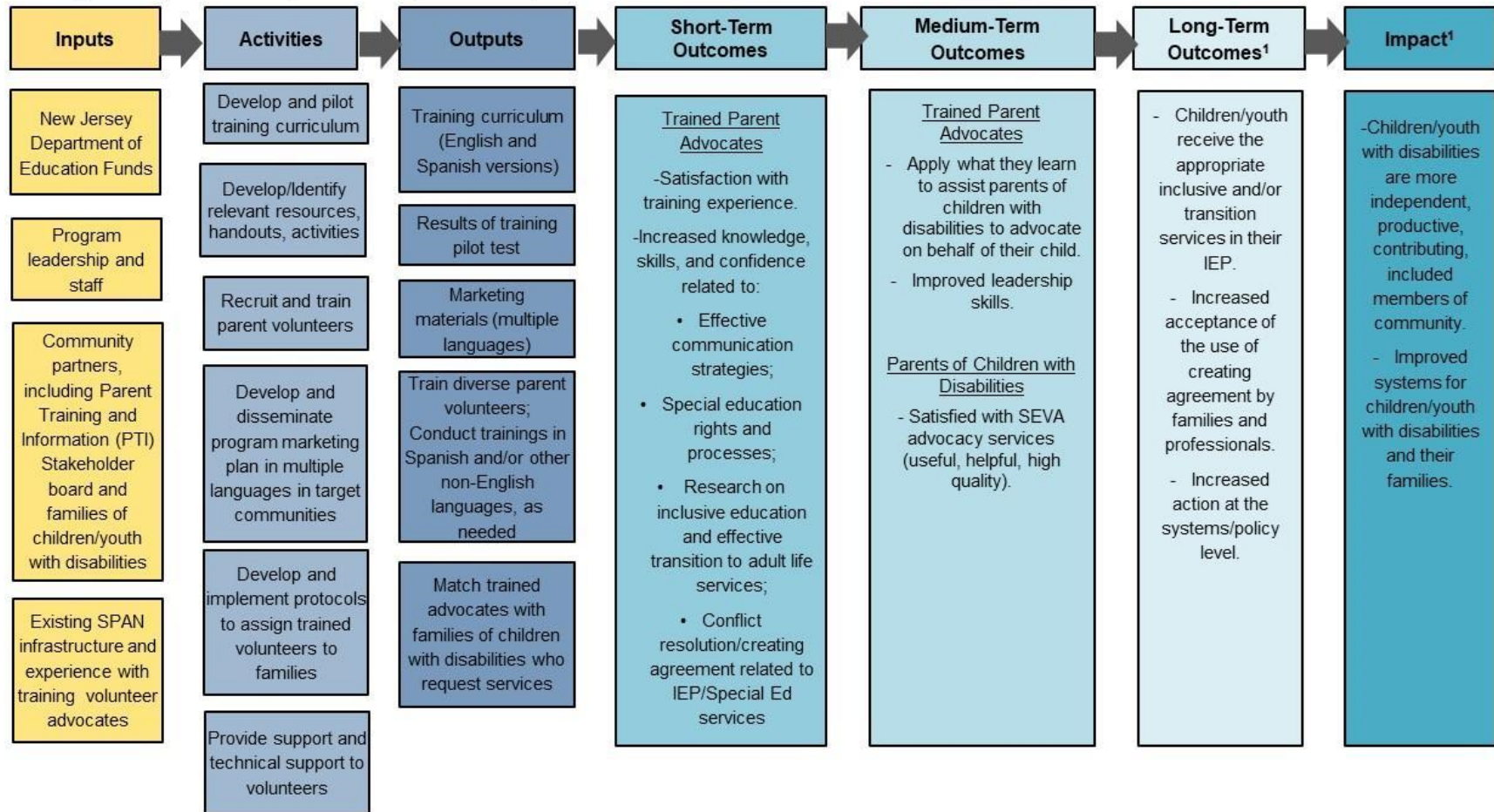
1. Develop Skills
2. Increase Knowledge
3. Build Capacity
4. Create Agreement

Special Education Volunteer Advocates (SEVA)

Logic Model



Goal: to train parents of children/youth with disabilities to become leaders by helping other families secure more inclusive services and more effective transition services and to promote systems change for children/youth with disabilities and their families through creating agreement among families, educational professionals, and other system stakeholders.



¹ Long term outcomes and impact will not be evaluated in the current project but are included in the logic model for completeness.

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 including 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

SEVA



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

How it works/what we do



- Match a referred parent to an appropriate SEVA
- Initial meeting – what are the issues? What are the blockages? What are the parent's needs for preparation and engagement?
Developing an IEP meeting agenda
- IEP meeting – role of the SEVA
- Follow up meeting & action planning
- Evaluation

- SEVA under COVID-19 protocols
 - Virtual training
 - Virtual support
 - Addressing issues related to learning loss due to COVID
- Re-emerging from COVID back to in-person training and support

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 – Evaluation Results



- SEVA training curriculum was highly effective, with pre-post test scores showing **significant increases of between 50% and 107% on average in all eight of the program's key competency areas**, with large effects.
- Over **90%** of participants reported feeling **“somewhat well-prepared” or “very well-prepared” to provide assistance to families as a SEVA** as a result of the training.
- Participants **rated their training experience highly**, as measured by six indicator statements with a score of **4.9** on a 5-point scale.
- The most valuable takeaways from the training reported by participants included **learning how to manage IEP meetings; skills for listening and empowering parents; using data; useful resources; and appreciation for the passion and professionalism of the trainers.**
- Participants requested additional trainings focused on **IEPs; helping families develop IEP goals; and understanding relevant laws and NJAC**; and suggested improvements for the future, such as **longer training sessions and more role plays.**

SEVA – Evaluation Results



- **100%** of respondents reported the **SEVA volunteer's assistance was either Very helpful or Helpful.**
- **96%** of parent/caregiver respondents reported that the SEVA volunteer **understood their concerns either Moderately well or Very well.**
- **96%** of parent/caregiver respondents reported the **resources provided by the SEVA volunteer were either Useful or Very useful.**
- **96%** of parent/caregiver respondents reported that the SEVA volunteer **prepared them to communicate their concerns to the school representative/s during the IEP meeting either Moderately well or Very well.**
- **86%** of parent/caregiver respondents reported that having the SEVA's assistance **improved the IEP meeting outcome.**
- **81%** of parent/caregiver respondents reported that their **knowledge and confidence to use New Jersey's special education system improved either moderately or a great deal,** as a result of their participation in the SEVA program
- **40%** of parent/caregiver respondents reported that the pandemic has had a **negative or harmful impact on the IEP meeting and/or the IEP meeting outcome** for their family.

SEVA – Project Evaluation



Notable Quotes from trainees:

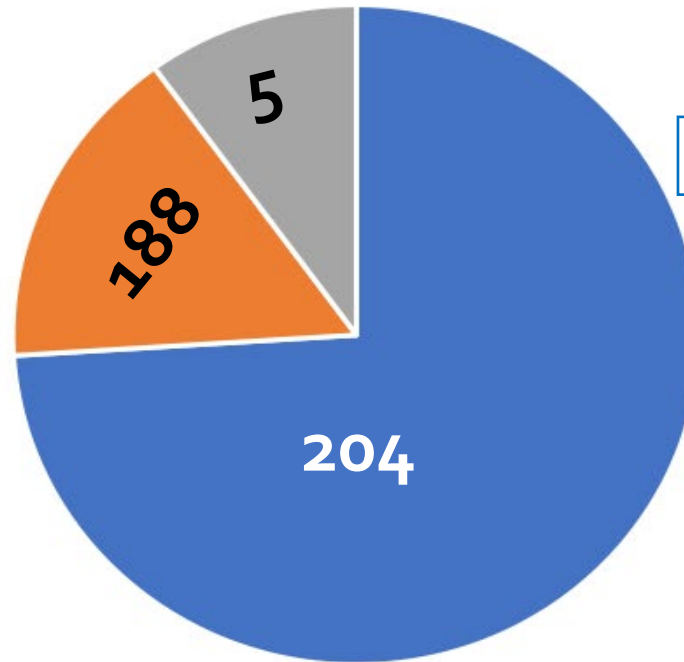
- *My most valuable takeaway was to be open, to listen with my heart and be able to offer support to families.*
- *I really liked the session around conflict resolution and problem-solving skills.*
- *My most valuable takeaway was the handouts, as I can review them at any time to refresh me when I feel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

SEVA YEAR 5: Data on Supporting Families



Family Matches
As of 9/30/2022

204 Total
Matches



188 Completed

■ 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 Evaluation



Figure 2. SEVA Training Enrollees: Race and Ethnicity (N=67)

Notable Quotes from families:

- *Always good to have SEVA for helping our kids with disabilities.*
- *The program is excellent - good for those with little knowledge and extremely helpful to those of no knowledge*
- *Very grateful to the SEVA program*

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 Impact



“It made a difference for little Josie”

SEVA – Project Replication



- Conditions that brought us together exist in other states
- Relationships between P&A, DD Council, Parent Centers
- Past presentations: Disability Rights National Conference; National DD Council Conference; National Parent Center Conference in 2019
- Opportunity to provide train-the-trainer to other parent centers



**Discussion
Questions**

SEVA TEAM



- Lauren Agoratus, Curriculum Developer | Technical Assistance
- Diana Autin, SPAN Executive Director
- Martha Brecher, Education Advocate, Consultant | Trainer
- Jeannine Brinkley, Director of Family and Professional Development
- Maria Docherty, PTI Director
- Tammi Kaminski, Administrative Coordinator & SEVA Educator
- Pam Kelley, Kelley Analytics, External Evaluator
- Jeannette Mejias, Project Director
- Tara Szymanek , SEVA Educator
- Renay Zamloot, Education Advocate, Consultant | Trainer

THANK YOU



Thank You

For more information, contact
Jeannette Mejias, Director - SEVA
jmejias@spanadvocacy.org