

Expanding Special Education Advocacy: Replication of the Volunteer Advocacy Project by Community-Based Family Support Organizations

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Agenda

Introduction to special education advocacy

Volunteer Advocacy Project (VAP) background

VAP replication

- Family Connection case study
- CIDA case study
- Research findings

Implications for PTIs

Q&A



Many barriers to parent advocacy...

How can we support
families in ensuring
their children receive
appropriate special
education services?

Volunteer Advocacy Project (VAP)

- Created by Dr. Meghan Burke at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center University Center on Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) in 2008 in collaboration with other disability agencies
- Established to fill the void of special education advocates in Nashville
- Modeled after two trainings: SEAT Training (USC-UCEDD and COPAA) and PLSP Training (P&A in Atlanta, Georgia)

VAP: What is it?

- 36-hour training (typically 12 3-hr sessions)
 - Each session includes assigned readings, didactic instruction, role playing, and/or case studies
- Covers content on special education law and non-adversarial advocacy
- Sites across the state with a range of expert presenters in person, in Nashville
- Participants primarily parents of students with disabilities, but not restricted
- Programs completers expected to volunteer as an advocate for at least four families
- Small registration fee to cover materials (\$30-75)
- Coordinated by master's and doctoral students

VAP: What are the outcomes?

- Participants improve in their special education knowledge and advocacy comfort (Burke, Goldman, et al., 2016; Goldman et al., 2020)
- Preliminary findings on increase in empowerment (Goldman et al., 2020)
- Most participants (>80%) are *very satisfied* with individual sessions (Burke, Mello, & Goldman, 2016)
- 89% report being *very satisfied* with the VAP overall at the end of the training and 81% are still *extremely* or *very satisfied* at least 6 months later (Burke, Mello, & Goldman, 2016)
- 64% of graduates advocate after training completion, supporting a median of 2 families in the last 6 months (Goldman et al., 2017)
 - 40% report advocating for 10 or more families since training completion

Preliminary Replication of the VAP

1. 2016: Collaboration between *Build Inclusion, Inc.* and Kentucky's UCEDD at the University of Kentucky Human Development Institute (HDI)
 - Provided with VAP manual and consultation from VAP coordinator
 - \$10,000 in funding from HDI Fund for Excellence Grant
 - Implemented with 18 participants
 - Program evaluation results showed similar positive outcomes
2. 2016 to present: Replications by Dr. Burke in Illinois (in English and Spanish)

Formal replication is needed!

Must consider feasibility and
goodness of fit

Volunteer Advocacy Project Replication

1. Procedures
2. Agency logistics (PTI and CPRC)
3. Quantitative findings

Procedures

Family Support Research and Training Center (FSRTC) at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) held RFP for agencies interested in adapting the VAP

Provided \$5000 in seed funding for community-based organizations that support people with disabilities and their families:

- ❖ **Family Connection of South Carolina (PTI)**
- ❖ **CIDA (CPRC) serving Korean families in New York and New Jersey**

One organization conducted the VAP without seed funding

- ❖ Illinois Guardianship & Advocacy Commission

Adaptation Support

- Provided with electronic access to VAP curriculum and measures
- Three webinars with basic information and suggestions for implementation
- Monthly, individual meetings with Dr. Burke to discuss adaptation
- Follow-up interviews with Dr. Goldman

Family Connection of South Carolina



Family Connection of South Carolina

SC's Parent Training and Information Center

**Implementation of the
“Volunteer Advocacy Project”**

**Amy Holbert, LISW-CP, MSW
Chief Executive Officer**



What is a Parent Training and Information Center (PTI)?

It is a nonprofit organization, (other than an institution of higher ed) that is defined by IDEA as a “parent organization”, that meets the *training and information needs* of parents of children with disabilities living in their state, ages birth to 26y/o, across all disabilities, with a Board of Directors the majority of whom are parents of children with disabilities ages birth through 26y/o.

How to Find Your PTI: Go to www.ParentCenterHub.org

About Family Connection



Parent-to-Parent USA

1990

Family-to-Family Health
Information Center/Family Voices

2009


Parent Training and Information Center

2015

Why the VAP?

- **New PTI**
- **Currently no standardized Parent Center training curricula**
- **Wanted an evidence-based/informed parent advocacy training**



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- **Added state specific information**
 - **Condensed the content**
 - **Added to our “Parent Leadership” training “Our Seat at the Table”**
 - **Recruited parent volunteers-screened carefully**
 - **Training was delivered over 2 days by FCSC Family Education Specialists (who are also parents).**
 - **Each ‘graduate’ would then be matched with up to 4 families to provide them support and information over the next school year.**

- **Trained 11 Parent Support Volunteers**
- **Graduates attended/provided support at a total of 117 school meetings, from August 2019-April 2020 (but with a trained staff person)**
- **Unintentional Consequence of the Project:**
The development of our current “Education Partner Program”

FCSC’s Education Partner Program:
One-on-one intensive peer support to assist a parent in understanding and navigating educational services for their child.

CIDA

<https://cidainfo.com/community-parent-resource-center/>

Logistics

- 12 participants
 - 100% Korean, 67% college graduates, 75% annual income >\$70,000
- Used funding primarily for facilitator compensation
 - Facilitation team = one primary facilitator and one project assistant
- Other than session on “discipline”, all content presented by agency staff
- 3-hr sessions each Wednesday over the course of 12 weeks, 3/20-6/5
 - 5 webinars, 7 in-person sessions
- Incorporated 5-item “quiz” for each session

Adaptations made to tailor VAP for Korean-Americans:

Translated all materials (Powerpoints, readings, supporting materials for each session)

Updated materials for NY/NJ (local area)

Incorporated technology (KaKao Talk, group chat for participation and responding)

Added group project and discussion on “Family Empowerment”

- Participants worked in groups of 3-4 (by location) to create a poster of their ideas about empowerment (themselves and other families), and presented to the full group the following week

“Most of the parents told me that they never thought about family empowerment and they even haven't heard of the family empowerment, the term empowerment... We revisited that, the family empowerment part. And then the parents said that at the beginning they thought that oh, this person in the project, we just learn the knowledge and then we just help more families. And that was, at the very beginning stage. But now they thought that, oh, this really changes the family's life, community's life. And they are also thinking about bringing their husbands, because they're all moms. That was just really powerful part there. Moving on to thinking about bringing in other family members, reaching out to the other families, their friends and neighbors that don't. So, we actually go in a really positive direction and hope this continues. Before the fever goes away, we want to keep all the heat inside.”

CIDA Implementation Summary

Unexpected outcome: sense of community

“This [sense of community] is the outcome that we really didn’t expect. We thought that, ‘Oh, we learned this knowledge, we’re gonna use this somewhere’. And I thought they’re [the participants are] just gonna go away with that... But they became a community. There is a possibility we can make it [the community] grow and expand out of this.”

Hope to continue program, but unsure about **financial and technical support** to do so (e.g., need to provide support for VAP grads advocating for others)

-Need more time for practice and application (due to training focus on content)

Questions about **cultural responsiveness** (translated measures and materials)

Quantitative Findings



Both agencies
implemented the VAP
with 100% fidelity

Effectiveness Across Adaptations (N=22)

	Pre: Mean (<i>SD</i>)	Post: Mean (<i>SD</i>)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>ES</i>
Knowledge	8.50 (3.18)	11.00 (1.96)	-4.05	.001	2.50
Empowerment	33.87 (6.49)	38.13 (8.44)	-3.35	.005	4.27
Comfort with Advocacy	36.53 (7.34)	42.87 (5.24)	-3.65	.003	6.33
Advocate Role Identity	19.60 (3.18)	21.87 (2.85)	-2.03	.061	.52
Insiderness	34.86 (8.96)	40.93 (9.58)	-3.77	.002	6.03
Grit					
Consistency	8.00 (3.48)	9.27 (3.43)	-1.44	.172	1.27
Perseverance	13.47 (4.60)	15.73 (4.18)	-2.08	.056	2.27

Formative and Summative Evaluations

- 97% *satisfied* or *very satisfied* with individual sessions
- 100% *satisfied* or *highly satisfied* with overall training

**Discussion and Implications
for Future Replication
by Community Based Agencies**



Summary

Findings showed it is feasible to adapt the VAP to meet the needs of individual communities!



Community agencies such as PTIs and CPRCs can effectively adapt and implement the VAP (and are logical partners that already offer parent advocacy programs)

Lessons Learned From Implementation Across Agencies

- Ensure content expertise on your team
- Plan sufficient time on front end for adaptation of materials
- Consider ongoing training and mentoring needs for VAP graduates
- Develop clear definitions for:
 - Trainee expectations
 - Scope of services/supports provided
 - Duties and roles

For example:

Role	Education Partner	What We are NOT Educational Advocate
Definition	A Support Partner	“One who pleads another’s case”
Pre-School Meeting	1:1 mtg to education and support	Gives advice on IEP plan and services.
During	Provides support and encouragement	Speaks on behalf of the parents/student.
Post School Meeting	Debrief to discuss results of meeting	Advise parents on further action that is needed.
Cost of service	No cost	Typically costs a parent

Future Recommendations

- **Funding for initial and ongoing implementation**
- **Further evaluation**
- **Consider national dissemination and/or technical assistance network**
- **More family-friendly content**
- **Consider literacy levels**
- **Develop competencies for staff/volunteers**
- **Ensure culturally sensitive**



Our Goal is to Empower Families

"So informational, supportive, and understanding. Her calls were often right when I needed encouragement."

"She was amazing- she guided us into success, was very supportive, understanding, and had wonderful suggestions. Could not have asked for a better outcome!"

"She listened without judgment and empathized with me as a mother. Just what I needed at the right time"

"I have a friend and a confidant even when I feel like giving up. I have not even seen her but she knows me. It was a welcoming voice on the other end who would say let's see what I can do. Not here you do this and that just to be told , can't help you."

"She was kind and thorough. In under an hour she was able to provide me with more helpful information than I had received in the entire 4 years since my daughter was born."

"Every parent needs this service when they have a special needs child from the migrant, homeless parents to the very affluent. ."

" She was very knowledgeable, honest and supportive. I felt like I had a tremendous coach and her advice and encouragement made me feel better equipped to face some challenges with advocating for school services. My son is about to turn 15 and it has been a long time since I have received and felt such support! "



Questions or
comments?



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Thank you!

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Paper currently in press in
Intellectual and
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