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Reaching Local Community with the Message of Developmental Milestones and Early Identification of Autism

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INTRODUCTION

As part of my leadership project in NH-ME LEND, I worked with the Maine Developmental Disabilities Council (Maine DDC) to share the Learn the Signs, Act Early material with the Gray-New Gloucester community. The Maine DDC is an organization that aims to foster advocacy and increase public awareness about disabilities, decreasing the barriers for people with disabilities. The Learn the Signs materials were created with the objective of educating families, medical professionals and child care providers about childhood developmental milestones and the early signs of autism. This relates to the mission of LEND by addressing the Maternal Child Health (MCH) populations and the desire to diagnose delays and identify needs of children early in development.



PROJECT ACTIVITIES

- Pilot a program for effectively distributing Learn the Signs, Act Early materials, starting with a small study group in the Gray-New Gloucester community.
- Organize materials into packets for distribution.
- Distribute materials to local child care and preschool facilities.
- Engage in conversations with directors and staff to explain the materials and the benefits of using them in their facilities.
- Educate directors that Learn the Signs, Act Early offers free trainings for staff, including continuing education credits (CEUs) at no cost.
- Compile research questionnaire to gain feedback from directors.



LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

I was able to get a better grasp on how to network and also gained confidence in speaking with others about the importance of early detection. I was able to use my knowledge base and share it with others to better impact the lives of families and children and also help child care facilities communicate with the MCH populations. I also gained a working knowledge of how to collaborate with other professionals in the field and distribute information in a manner that opens the door for conversation and education about important issues.

RESULTS

I found that center directors were very interested in the materials provided to them and they were excited about sharing them with families. Directors reported that they were able to share the information with their staff and appreciated that there were free CEUs available. The materials also gave staff talking points and examples to use in helping parents understand whether they need to follow up on concerns that may have about their children's development. I feel that given more time with the materials, center employees would be able to aid in the process of early identification of delays.

ACT EARLY MATERIALS

- Inform parents, caregivers and medical professionals of developmental milestones
- Provide child care workers tips on how to approach red flags with parents of children
- Provide visual supports to help guide and educate
- Provide Continuing Education Credits for medical professionals and child care workers
- Provide organized forms for parents to track child's development and medical screenings
- Provides training modules and videos for interactive learning