

Diversity Paper

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Describing the concept of diversity contributes to the distinct factors associated with “ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, sex, gender identity, religion, age, and abilities of members in society” (Humanit, 2012). Diversity can be numerous components which shows the need for attention to fix issues surrounding diversity instead of it being seen as a barrier. Within early intervention services provide support to infants and toddler's birth to three years old who have developmental delays, health diagnoses, or atypical development. Within early intervention services, if a child is eligible for services, which is determined at the assessment, then the family and child would be working with a service coordinator and a therapist specific to their needs such as physical, occupational, or speech therapist. Within the agency and the population, it serves, there are various diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. Due to bias and stereotypes of others, the perception of what different socioeconomic statuses may look like is what creates these issues.

Within the early intervention services, there are some mechanisms in which clients may feel oppressed or discriminated against. The Infant and Toddler Connection of the Heartland serves 7 counties, both rural and urban. The therapist does monthly sessions with the clients in their natural environment which usually consist of home visits. Service coordinators meet with the families and clients during 6-month reviews, transition plans, and annuals typically during one therapy sessions. Since early intervention consists of numerous socioeconomic statuses, places of living can differ from each family. Since Medicaid insurance is associated with

low-income families, this can lead to bias and discrimination with these services. When therapist receive clients on their case load, specifically Medicaid insurance, some may be biased towards their socioeconomic status and look up the address of houses to see if it is a “safe place” for them to go to. There have been times where therapist would ask to not have specific clients on their caseload because of their place of residence. In terms of priority, families may be treated differently depending on who they know. For example, if one of the client's family members work at Longwood University and know individuals in early intervention services and theirs another family that cannot be contacted, the family with the connection to early intervention services may become more of a priority than the other family.

As a social worker within the agency, one could advocate for social and economic justice by addressing issues, proving resources, and facilitating IFSP meetings. Addressing issues with providers that have arisen with providers can address the social and economic injustice that has been brought upon the services. For example, if a therapist does not want to have specific clients on their caseload because of where they live, this concern needs to be addressed and be looked at from a distinct perspective. Determining the disconnects in the program consisting of the lack of communication between the service providers within early intervention can address the areas of concern and identify ways to improve the system and protect the clients being served in early intervention. Providing resources for low-income families can be beneficial because this can

create a stronger bond between the providers and families, in addition to solving problems that may conflict with their ability to fully participate in services. Low-income families may have limited resources that can prohibit their ability to have stable housing, reliable transportation, dependable phone and internet services and financial services. Since there are times in early intervention where families and clients will have to come into the office for specific services such as the assessment, the lack of resources can prohibit their abilities to do so. This is why it is important for providers to communicate with clients and ask what their needs are to address problem areas and find the best possible solution. An example may be if the family does not have reliable transportation, service coordinators can work with families to accommodate their needs by offering zoom if applicable or meeting the family at their home. If families are having socioeconomic issues and are unable to pay for services, one of the policies associated with early intervention is the family cost share policy which says no family can be turned down from services due to the inability to pay. This shows the importance of working with families, specifically low-income families, to provide support to families as much as possible.

Engaging in social justice to advocate for change within early intervention will help navigate problem areas associated with discrimination, in addition to preventing these incidences from happening again. Advocating for changes means voicing issues and concerns within a community or organization to see progress. Participating in trainings about diversity

and differences amongst individuals in society will help give people an understanding of the diverse cultures, backgrounds, lifestyles, races, and social experiences individuals may have but how people should not be treated differently because of it. This will help train providers into recognizing oppression and discrimination along with acknowledging their own bias. Another way is to reiterate the purpose of early intervention services and the significance of the family cost share policy. This policy shows the importance of treating families within services with the same amount of respect as the policy states “the inability to pay will not prevent your child or your family from receiving early intervention services” (NRSF, 2015).

Lastly, providing an extra layer of support for low-income families as needed. This can pertain to creating new policy and procedures to help advocate for low-income families and within services to prevent stereotypes and discrimination. This may include working with the families to coordinate the best times for them to receive services, make sure medical needs are met, and advocate for their needs.

From a micro, mezzo, and macro level change can be addressed and implemented and The Infant and Toddler Connection of the Heartland. When looking at services from a micro level, validating their feelings and empowering the families to show they are the right place for services and assist them with their needs will show the importance of early intervention for infants and toddlers with delays, health diagnoses, or atypical development. This type of

communication will “develop relationships that may produce meaningful contributions and growth for individuals and society” (Humanit, 2012). From a mezzo standpoint, creating team efforts such as the assessments, IFSP reviews, and transition process will help connect the families and providers to ensure the family's needs are being met and assist families with resources necessary for the child to succeed. Creating policies and procedures more a macro standpoint can help advocate for families in early intervention services. Participating in other organizations to reach a boarder audience to address issues such as school board meetings and collaborating with other organizations to increase the knowledge of discrimination within a workplace and educate individuals with treating everyone with the same respect.

In conclusion, The Infant and Toddler Connection of the Heartland, also known as early intervention services, provides resources for children in need of services to make developmental milestones and progress in all developmental areas. Addressing diversity, and the importance of equity in early intervention can help individuals become more knowledgeable about the subject and how to prevent discrimination and ensure the needs of the clients and families are being met.

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<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacodefull/title2.2/chapter53/>

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