



Virginia Board for People with Disabilities

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Contact: Benjamin Jarvela, Communications Director

Email: benjamin.jarvela@vbpd.virginia.gov

Phone: 804-786-1146

VIRGINIA BOARD FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AWARDS OVER \$380,000 IN GRANTS FOR IMPROVING HEALTHCARE RESOURCES

Richmond, Va. – The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities is excited to announce that it has awarded two grants, under its competitive grant program, totaling over \$380,000. The grants were awarded to the **Partnership for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University** and to **James Madison University**. Both are related to healthcare and respectively address effective communication with health care providers for people with developmental disabilities and the design and implementation of a collaborative, community wellness program in a rural part of the state.

The first grant for \$199,999 has been awarded to the **Partnership for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University** for its project “Communications and Health Advocacy (CHAT).” CHAT has been modeled after a successful previous Board grant award, Leadership for Empowerment and Abuse Prevention (LEAP) and will offer training session options to community disability providers to prepare them to teach the individuals they support about becoming more self-determined and making better informed about their own healthcare choices.

“We know from research that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) experience worse health outcomes than the general population and that communication issues are seen as an important aspect of this problem. To address this need, Project CHAT will work with people with disabilities and their families, physicians, and the Office of Integrated Health at the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) to develop a curriculum that teaches strategies for people with IDD to communicate more effectively with healthcare providers and direct support professionals about their healthcare needs and

priorities. CHAT trainings will be held across Central Virginia,” said **Dr. Parthy Dinora, Associate Director with the Partnership for People with Disabilities**. “The Partnership for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University is thrilled to receive funding from the VBPD to carry out this project. Health care is a critical issue for people with IDD and we think that Project CHAT will help to improve the health care experience for people with IDD in Virginia.”

James Madison University has also been awarded a grant of \$182,591 for its project to create a collaborative community-centered wellness program that serves individuals with disabilities across all demographics of the Shenandoah Valley Region. Through the creation of a wellness coalition and the development of online training modules, organizations will be able to acquire the knowledge, skills, support and resources to offer a spectrum of opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The collaboration, training and support developed and provided will enable individuals with DD to make significant gains in health, wellness, function and community integration.

“Currently, physical activity and wellness programs, either specialized or inclusive, are limited across the Shenandoah Valley. The proposed project is focused on change at a systems level. Our priority is to design and implement an infrastructure to identify, train, and support instructors and staff members, at established organizations throughout the Valley who will be able to provide a continuum of wellness opportunities for individuals with disabilities for years to come,” said **Dr. Thomas E. Moran of James Madison University**. “We want to thank the VA Board for People with Disabilities for supporting our vision and allowing us to create a model, which potentially will be replicated in communities across the commonwealth. This has the potential to make a life-changing impact for individuals with disabilities and their families!”

“The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities is excited to work with the Partnership for People with Disabilities and James Madison University on both of these exciting projects,” said **Heidi Lawyer, the Board’s Executive Director**. “We firmly believe these grants will have a direct impact on individuals with disabilities and their families and their ability to both access healthcare resources and make sound decisions regarding their often complex healthcare needs. We are looking forward to the changes both of these projects will bring.”

The VBPD serves as the Developmental Disabilities Council for the Commonwealth of Virginia. Both of these projects will help meet the goals set forth in its 2017-2021 Five-Year Federal State Plan.

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