**Policy & Advocacy Summary**

Leadership Seminar 2

3/16/16

On March 2, 2016, Liz Healey, Executive Director of the Parent Education & Advocacy Leadership (PEAL) Center, led an engaging discussion about policy and activism. All LEND trainees were challenged to select an area in which they are passionate about igniting change. Ms. Healey’s talk explored several of the MCH Leadership Competencies, which are divided into three categories: self, others, and wider community.

The leadership process begins with a focus on self. Ms. Healey explained that as individuals, we should direct our actions towards specific goals. She encouraged us to use self-reflection, our knowledge of the issue, and critical thinking skills to identify the problem and state it in a clear and concise manner. Because of this focus on the self, a careful and thoughtful consideration of the ways in which we incorporate language, culture, and vision was required as we completed this activity.

The next sphere of the leadership process is focused on others. Trainees were tasked with developing a short “elevator speech” to briefly and clearly communicate their issue to an audience (the immediate audience being the class, and the broader audience being policymakers). Each student was then asked to share their issue with the class. We enjoyed listening to our peers reflect on issues that are important to them, such as the need to standardize early identification screenings in the fields of audiology, and speech pathology, topics in physical therapy, and student loan debt among many others. Ms. Healey asked us to identify obstacles we may face when advocating for change on our particular topic and then guided us through appropriate negotiation and conflict resolution techniques in several of these cases.

The final stage of the leadership process is centered upon spreading awareness among the wider community. Trainees were asked to identify the level on which we would like to advocate for change: national, state, local, or private sector. Ms. Healey emphasized the sheer number of stakeholders that can influence policy change in any given cause and advised that we fully understand the roles and relationships of these many groups to more effectively advocate for our cause. This presentation helped us see the importance of building our policy and advocacy skills. As future clinicians, we want to defend and advocate for resources that can positively impact the lives of our patients.

Ms. Healey made many important points throughout the lecture that helped us shape our knowledge of policy and activism.  Chief among these is the reminder that there are many barriers that need to be overcome when advocating for change in any cause.  People come from widely different backgrounds, cultures, and belief systems. Religion, political beliefs, geographic area, and generational differences all impact the way in which people see the world. As such, different issues will naturally appeal to different people, and it will be hard to impact everyone in the same way with the same message. With best practice, one’s “elevator speech” not only needs to be concise and convincing but also must be tailored to fit these different audiences as necessary.

In order to effect systems change, it is also important to realize that change does not happen overnight, and that the first step, even if small, is the most important.  It is essential to have a “roadmap” plan of where you envision the change to be within one day, one month, and so on. Starting small with simple steps and then working up to the community, state, and congressional levels can make even a seemingly impossible task manageable. Change takes one person to start and then a team to complete.

We enjoyed Ms. Healey’s presentation and found her techniques to be useful in breaking down lofty goals into tangible and practical steps. With thoughtful planning and diligent effort and perseverance, we can begin to lay the groundwork for achieving these goals as we move forward in our respective careers.