



# Collaborating Beyond the VR-LEA Relationship:

## The Purposeful Life Model

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# Mission Statement



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A Purposeful Life is a community outreach project focused on increasing the capacity of self-advocates and family members to live a purposeful life.

We offer free monthly training events during the school year (Sept.-Dec. & Feb.-May.) These sessions cover a variety of topics that are not disability specific. The young self-advocate training parallels the adult training.

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# The Purposeful Life Model:



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Monthly workshop series for families of children with exceptionalities

- Adult training session
- Facilitated youth training session
- Facilitated sibling session
- Free childcare
- Free dinner

Community-wide Effort

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# Defining “Community-wide”

- Parents
  - Bryan ISD
  - College Station ISD
  - Texas Workforce Commission
  - Brazos Valley Center for Independent Living
  - FACETS parent support group
  - Easter Seals
  - Down Syndrome Association of the Brazos Valley
  - Texas A&M Center on Disability and Development
  - Project Sunshine (free childcare)
  - Central Church (free meeting space)
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# Community-Wide Speakers:



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NAMI of the Brazos Valley

Local mental health providers

MHMRA of the Brazos Valley

Parents

Individuals with disabilities

Teachers and specialists from the school districts

Partners Resource Network

Local attorneys

Behavior specialists

Healthcare workers

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# Why Collaborate?

- Joint efforts create consistency as attendance fluctuates in the different school districts and as staff turnover occurs
  - Great resource for families from surrounding districts
  - We were able to maintain engagement through the pandemic
  - Based on that success, sessions are now live streamed on Facebook
  - Purposeful Life works with a larger committee to present the annual Brazos Valley Disability Conference:
    - 17 sponsors
    - Over 50 exhibitors
    - Keynote and breakout sessions
    - Attendees from across the region
    - Community resource guide in English and Spanish
    - Early childhood screenings
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# Typical Annual Calendar

- September: Looking Ahead – Series Overview and Speaker Panel
  - October: Who is the I in IEP?
  - November: Sticks and Stones – Words Do Hurt (Bullying)
  - December: You Can't Pour from an Empty Cup (Wellness)
  - February: My Kid's Going to be a Grownup? Moving Toward Independence
  - March: Surviving Puberty
  - April: Behavior — What are You Trying to Tell Me?
  - May: No One Lives in Isolation — Teaching Social Skills
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# Committee Member Responsibilities

- Attend annual planning meetings in late spring and early fall
  - Attend planning meeting prior to each session
  - Select annual topics
  - Secure the location
  - Set dates and recruit speakers
  - Set up registration and surveys
  - Provide meals as scheduled
  - Publicize the sessions
  - Recruit volunteers
  - Setup and clean up
  - Secure translators and accommodations
  - Facilitate rooms/sessions
  - Monitor hallways and assist as needed
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# Family Training Session



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- Large-group parent/caregiver training with a guest speaker or panel
- Simultaneous translation using whisper systems
- ASL as needed
- Topics are selected via participant surveys
- Dinner is provided by a different organization each month
- Discussion time and satisfaction survey each month



# Youth Session



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- Focuses on self-determination and disability awareness
  - Facilitated by an experienced Special Education teacher
  - Topics mirror those of the adult training session
  - Activities are interactive, and communication supports and other accommodations are provided based on youth information forms
  - Volunteers are trained in accommodations, promoting independence, age-appropriate vocabulary, etc.
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# Sibling Group



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- Safe space for siblings to talk freely
  - Facilitated discussions and activities
  - Led by a graduate student in the school psychology program—could be led by school counselors, NAMI volunteers, social workers, LSSP interns or practicum students, or LSSPs from participating districts
  - Families and participants are aware that this is not group therapy
  - Good opportunity to talk about boundaries and disclosure
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# Childcare



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- Free childcare is provided for ages 2-11 by Project Sunshine, a student organization at TAMU.
  - It could also be provided by high school organizations with a sponsor present, local faith communities, district childcare teams, etc.
  - Information forms are required for all children, and reservations are encouraged.
  - Toys and activities are provided.
  - All children and youth are provided dinner (chicken nuggets and fruit every time).
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Thank you! Your work changes lives.

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