

# ***Surviving and Thriving: Strategies to Support for Families with Children who have Special Needs***

## **Program Description**

Families face a wide range of issues and concerns as they strive to provide the best care for their children with special needs. Parents are often overwhelmed when they discover that their child has a special need and they must adjust their hopes, dreams, and expectations. Besides the concerns common when having children, parents of children with special needs must also deal with additional challenges and demands. Children with special needs can require an overwhelming amount of time, energy, attention, and finances. For some, the ordinary activities of life, including participating in the work force or attending a parent meeting, require a high degree of organization and juggling. Having a child with special needs can have a profound impact on the entire family. Having the support to meet these challenges is essential if children with disabilities and their families are to reach their full potential. This workshop explores the stages of adjustment that families often experience and identifies types of services and resources that strengthen and support families with children who have special needs.

## **Learning Objectives:**

Upon completion of this workshop, participants should be able to:

- Explain the impact of having a child with special needs on the caregiver and family unit;
- Identify and access informal and formal supports for families;
- List strategies to better support families with children who have special needs.

## **Target Audience**

Service providers, clinicians, teachers, families, community members

## **Contact Hours**

3.0 to 6.0 hours

## **Program Agenda**

- Welcome and Introductions
- Changing Expectations/Parental and Family Stress
- Break
- Supporting Families with Children who have Special Needs
- How Service Providers Make a Difference
- Adjourn

## **Faculty**

**Tamara Norris, MSSW, MPA** is Clinical Associate Professor and Director of the Family Support Program and the Family Support Network™ University Office at the UNC School of Social Work. Ms. Norris has over 25 years of experience developing innovative approaches to improving outcomes for families and children and promoting family support services for families with children who have special healthcare needs. Her passion is building the capacity of communities, organizations, and families to enable children who have disabilities to

grow to live the lives they envision. She has administered family support initiatives with state and federal funding in the areas of family navigation; child maltreatment prevention; family support for military families; and emergency preparedness for individuals who have disabilities and their families. Ms. Norris has Master of Science in Social Work and Master of Public Administration degrees from Columbia University.

**Barbara Leach** is a Family Support Specialist and Special Projects Coordinator. She joined the Family Support Program at UNC, School of Social Work in 2005. She has over 30 years of experience as a child and family advocate for families with children who have mental illnesses, developmental disabilities, and other special needs. In addition to providing information and referral for families and providers, Ms. Leach serves as a family advisor on multiple state and national committees that work collaboratively to transform systems so that they better meet the needs of children with disabilities and their families. She presents extensively on topics relating to supporting families, family advocacy, family engagement, family/provider partnership, cultural competence, and systems change. Ms. Leach is passionate about lifting the voices of diverse families and to promoting families as partners to co-create and develop services and systems that improve outcomes so that individuals with disabilities can live their best lives – healthy, independent, and self-determined.