

# Parents Making Dreams out of Life's Hard Places – “Dealing with the Challenges of Raising a Child with 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 must adjust their hopes, dreams, and expectations. In addition to having the same issues and concerns of parents of typically developing children, parents of children with special needs must also deal with the additional challenges and demands of having a child with special needs. 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 workforce, or attending a parent meeting require a high degree of organization and juggling to meet family needs. Having a child with special needs can have a profound impact on the entire family. Helping families find the support they need to meet these challenges is essential if children with disabilities and their families are to reach their full potential.

## Program Objectives

Upon completion of this program, participants will be able to:

- 1) Demonstrate an understanding of the challenges of raising children with special needs from the perspective of families;
- 2) List strategies to better support families with children who have special needs;
- 3) Provide an overview of formal and informal services and supports available in North Carolina for families with children who have special needs;
- 4) Explain the roles of health care providers and other service providers in helping families to assess their needs and to identify sources of support and services to ensure family well-being.

## Program Agenda

- 9:00 AM Welcome and Introductions  
Changing Expectations  
*Warm Up Activity: Job Change*  
Welcome to Holland  
Sharing Our Stories/ Impact of a Diagnosis  
Steps to Acceptance  
*Activity: Brainstorming*  
Parental and Family Stress  
Long and Winding Road  
Reactions from other people in families' lives
- 10:45AM *BREAK*
- 11:00 AM Supporting Families with Children who have Special Needs  
Formal Supports

Navigating the Service System  
Central Directory of Resources

12:00 NOON *LUNCH*

1:00 PM Informal Supports  
*Video: Washington State Parent to Parent Program*  
Parent-to-Parent Support  
Sibling Support  
Community Support  
Local Family Support Network Programs

2:30PM *BREAK*

2:45 PM How Service Providers Make a Difference  
Activity: Small Groups  
*Activity: Problem Solving*

4:00PM Wrap Up

**Target Audience**

Human Service Professionals, School personnel, parents or caregivers and anyone interested in this topic.

**Credit Hours**

3.0 – 5.0 hours

**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.