CPD Brown Bag Discussion: Wish You Were Here!

Center for Persons With Disabilities

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CPD staff who attended the latest Brown Bag Discussion went on an “International Journey,” thanks to Eduardo Ortiz, Gina Cook, and Vonda Jump, part of the Research and Evaluation Division.

It was a great journey as we traveled thousands of miles with them, sharing the wonderful work that they are doing and will do in the future in many countries in the world.

Eduardo told of he and Gina’s and visits to Ecuador via a development initiative grant focused on creating collaborations between Ecuador’s Department of Education and Minister of Education and the CPD to support their work with infants and children with disabilities. Ecuador happens to be Eduardo’s native country and he shared that there are 15 million people of 25 different nationalities within 172 square miles (about the size of Nevada). Many of the challenges that they face include understanding the culture, the language, and the politics, as well as working within a very complex organizational system. The biggest challenge is to build a foundation of trust and understanding so that these two countries can work together. In Eduardo’s words, “Long partnerships take time”

All together, Gina and Eduardo drafted five proposals, two of which are being considered for funding.

Vonda next shared with us her impressive work with orphanages. Vonda has taken her research and work with infant massage and its positive impact on the health of babies, particularly those in orphanages, to such far away places as Russia, India, Jordan, Haiti, and Ecuador. She has helped orphanage staff understand the importance of providing not only a safe and clean environment, but also a stimulating and nurturing environment for the babies and children to develop properly. As Vonda introduced infant massage and other nurturing techniques to the staff, they could see a great change in the children and their ability to respond and communicate with the caregivers.

Vonda has found that one of the great benefits of using infant massage with the babies was an increase in their physical health. The babies that were massaged were less likely to get as sick as the ones that weren’t. The massaged babies were half as likely to have diarrhea, which is the biggest killer of babies in the world. As she implemented a “train-the-trainer” format for orphanage caregivers, Vonda could see a great improvement in the health and happiness of the children.

The work that is being done by these dedicated people is opening doors for future collaborations and projects that will all lead to the improvement of the lives of babies, children, and adults with or without disabilities around the world.