

---

---

## CHAPTER 4

# What Is My Role?

*Janet Bates*

In this chapter you will find information on the following topics:

- Individual staff roles-What might I expect?
- Team roles-What might WE expect?
- Collaboration and consultation: How might it work?
- Resource list

### Individual Staff Roles

It is virtually impossible to specifically define each and every role one might experience in an inclusive early childhood program. Consequently, what is presented in this chapter is a possible framework of roles one might encounter when working with children with disabilities in community preschool settings.

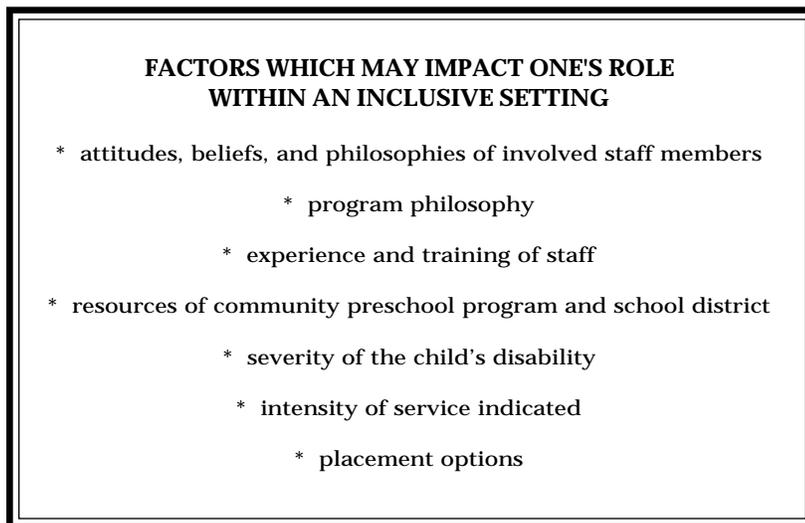
It is safe to say there are a multitude of factors which might impact any one role within a community early childhood program. The commitment on the part of the individual early childhood program as well as the various service providers may help or hinder the inclusion process. The experience and training of the community preschool staff impacts not only how comfortable they are with inclusion, but also how the related service providers feel providing special services within that setting. Differing opinions, ideas, and amount of time or flexibility on the part of staff members, as well as differing personalities are just a few of the factors which can play a role in whether or not the inclusion process will be a positive one and in effect, how each one's role will be determined. Keeping some of these various factors in mind, the possible definitions of what one's role might entail are further described in this chapter.

Factors which influence who does what and how in a community early childhood setting include the philosophy of the community early childhood program regarding how special services are delivered and the financial resources of individual programs in regard to the amount of materials or supplies available. The placement options available to the family and child (described in Chapter 2) within the community and the comfort level of all staff (community and related services) regarding the provision of services within that setting are factors for consideration. The number of staff members, their level of training, the numbers of children, and the severity of the disability of the children being included also affect the roles and responsibilities of providers.

Just as each child is unique, so are the various programs and teachers that one will encounter working within the community setting. The uniqueness of each program should be viewed as a positive aspect of working with community early childhood programs. Too many times, however, it is viewed as a negative issue to be dealt with, "if only we could just go in and do our own thing." The special educator will notice that because of the differences from one setting to another, one's role changes from setting to setting.

In one classroom, the early childhood special education teacher may function as a co-teacher, assisting in the classroom by running a center activity, helping with activity planning, etc. In another classroom, the ECSE teacher's role might be to observe while in the classroom and not to directly interact with the children. In yet another classroom, one child might need more direct one-on-one intervention and the early childhood special education teacher's role could be to work directly with that child on behavior, social skills, academic skills, etc. However, while all of these possible roles occur, the most important roles across every situation is that of collaborator with and supporter of the early childhood staff. Sharing of information, demon-

stration of strategies, and problem solving so that the community classroom teachers and staff learn to effectively work with the child with disabilities is crucial for successful inclusion.



### **Community Preschool Staff**

Administrative and teaching staff members of the participating early childhood program are crucial team members in the planning and successful implementation of any inclusion program. Administrators and directors can impact community preschool staff responses to inclusion in a variety of ways. Addressing identified staff needs through inservice training is one way to alleviate concerns surrounding the inclusion of a child with disabilities. The director's attendance and participation in team meetings in which cooperation and joint planning between special services and early childhood staff occurs indicates support for a collaborative process. The program director influences the inclusion process most by supporting the early childhood staff when concerns, questions, and problems arise and by taking an active role in helping the staff address those issues. The involvement of the parents and family members of a child with disabilities in the same school functions and ac-

tivities as other parents and families of the center demonstrates to participating staff the worth and contributions all families have to offer.

One of the most important stakeholders in the inclusion process is the early childhood classroom teacher. The success of inclusion relies on the belief of the early childhood teacher that the child with a disability is a valued member of the classroom with the same rights and needs as their typically developing peers. It is the early childhood teacher who is in the classroom on a daily basis and whose contributions include addressing the child's goals, objectives and needs throughout ongoing classroom activities. It is important to remember that the early childhood teacher is working on the strengths and needs of the child with disabilities, as well as the strengths and needs of all children in the classroom.

The early childhood teacher is the teacher of the classroom, and related services are provided in order to support the child with disabilities within that particular setting. It is not be the intent of the related services staff to "take over" the classroom and modify it to suit their individual needs in regard to the delivery of services. However, this is easier said than done in many instances. The early childhood staff will find that they need to learn new skills and strategies for working with children with disabilities. Related service providers will be spending time in the classroom, providing input with regard to activities and possible need for activity modification, assisting with planning and preparation, developing behavior programs, and so forth. Early childhood staff might at times feel as though their classroom has been invaded by related services personnel, with their every move being observed and evaluated. Issues surrounding differing philosophies and approaches in regard to working with young children are likely to arise and should be addressed at team meetings, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

## **Inclusion Coordinator**

The role of the inclusion coordinator may be a novel concept for some early childhood special education programs which are progressively moving toward an inclusive model for delivery of special services. Because of the many issues one might encounter regarding inclusion in early childhood programs, it is necessary to describe the role of the inclusion coordinator and to encourage programs moving toward the inclusive service delivery model to consider utilizing such a role. The coordinator is responsible for the overall operation of the inclusion program and ensures that specified procedures are understood and followed, that problems are addressed, and that the child is indeed receiving appropriate services.

One of the most important roles of the inclusion coordinator is to oversee the enrollment of children with disabilities in community early childhood programs. This includes, but is not limited to, exploring and securing a variety of placement options for families of children with disabilities and assisting families and programs with the various forms of financing that might be needed to maintain these options and placements.

The inclusion coordinator is also responsible for informing community early childhood and special services staff regarding any necessary public school district policies and procedures to be followed or implemented. The coordinator's role includes coordinating inservice training activities for personnel participating in inclusion programs including the community early childhood staff as well as related services staff and paraprofessional staff. Another important aspect of the coordinator role involves public relations, whereby additional community programs are recruited to become involved in the inclusion of children with disabilities. Within this public relations framework, the coordinator will also provide information to any interested parties regarding the observation of inclusive early childhood programs and facilitate the scheduling of those observations.

The inclusion coordinator's role is integral to the successful inclusion of a child. It provides a necessary link between the community and the school district. The coordinator, in effect, serves as a liaison between the community early childhood staff and related service providers, while ensuring the administrative obligations of the school district are being fulfilled. It is the responsibility of the coordinator to ensure that options for service delivery within community settings are available, are financially feasible for participating families, and that appropriate services are being provided in these settings.

### **Itinerant Early Childhood and Related Service Providers**

In providing services for children with disabilities in community early childhood programs those who will experience the biggest role change are the early childhood special education teachers and related service providers. Service providers may experience a shift from a "special education classroom" where the majority of children (if not all) have disabilities to working in a classroom where the majority of the children are typically developing. Special education teachers may move from having their "own classroom" to working on a collaborative and consultative basis with community early childhood staff. Related service providers roles may be altered from that of direct service to the child to any combination of direct service, consultation, monitoring, and staff training. If a number of early childhood sites are involved with the inclusive model, more staff time will be spent traveling to the different centers. Unique issues and problems arise that will need to be addressed from one center to another.

Related service providers will experience a shift in their role from program to program. Similar to the early childhood special education (ECSE) teacher, the related service providers may help to plan and run center activities which address objectives specific to their discipline (i.e., the occupational therapist plans and imple-

ments a cutting activity, the speech therapist plans and implements a language activity). The service providers may also observe and provide feedback to the classroom staff regarding strategies to use, adaptations to be made, and so forth. The related service providers will also be working directly with the child with disabilities during ongoing classroom activities.

It cannot be stressed enough that the most important role of the special services staff is that of consultation with the community early childhood staff to ensure that the child's goals and objectives are addressed on an ongoing basis throughout the classroom day. Peterson (1988) described role release as not only the cooperative interchange of professional expertise, but also the flexibility of the team members to relinquish certain roles and teach their specialized skills to others whenever possible. This philosophy is especially important for related service providers within the inclusive early childhood program.

### **Paraprofessional**

Another very important role in the inclusive early childhood classroom is the paraprofessional or para-educator. As with the ECSE teacher's and related service provider's, the paraprofessional's role will vary from program to program. The paraprofessional may function as an assistant in the classroom, helping the classroom teacher with daily routines and activities. The paraprofessional may also be given particular duties, such as leading a circle time or center activity, assisting with material preparation, and so on. The paraprofessional may assist in more than one classroom, depending upon the needs of the children and staff. The paraprofessional may also function as a "facilitator," working directly with one child who needs that additional support to be able to participate in classroom activities. When a paraprofessional is placed in the facilitator role, all staff in the classroom share or rotate that role as to prevent that child's dependency on one particular person. Ro-

tating the facilitator role also is extremely helpful when an unexpected staff absence occurs. All staff members have learned the facilitator role and can take over as needed.

## **Team Roles**

### **Defining the Team**

For the purpose of this manual, the team is defined as including those persons directly involved with the child with disabilities within the inclusive setting. This is the child's "core team." The child's core team might include but is not limited to: 1) community early childhood staff (classroom teachers, the director, volunteers, etc.); 2) related services staff working with the child (ECSE teacher, occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech therapist, inclusion coordinator, psychologist, social worker, nurse, paraprofessional, etc.); and, 3) the child's family members.

Teams will not look the same or function exactly alike. Core teams may be as small as 2 to 3 members, or as large as 6 to 10 members. Parents and family members of the child with disabilities may or may not be able to attend all core team meetings, but they should be informed of all meetings and it should not be assumed that they are not interested in what is being discussed at the meetings when they are unable to attend. The scheduling of team meetings that allow for maximum parent and community staff participation is sometimes challenging and necessitates flexibility on the part of all the team members. Some teams will feel the need to meet weekly, others bi-weekly, and some monthly. Some meetings will have a 30 minute time limit, others will take longer. Some team meetings will be devoted specifically to one child, while other team meetings may address the progress and needs of several different children. In other words, the function and form of team meetings will be defined from program to program depending upon the needs of the individual

children and the staff members involved.

### **Developing an Effective Team**

When establishing core teams at community early childhood programs, it is important to remember that an effective team must be developed. It does not just happen. Working within a consultative model requires a framework of trust. All participants are valued members of the team and in order to function as such their views, opinions, skills, and information must be acknowledged and respected. However, when there are several different opinions and viewpoints, it is difficult to accommodate everybody. Therefore one of the functions of a core team is to collaborate with one another. Swan and Morgan (1992) define collaboration as “efforts to unite people and/or organizations for the purpose of achieving common goals that could not be accomplished by any single individual or organization.” If responsibilities are shared, individual team members are more likely to have a vested interest in the outcome of the decisions being made. An especially effective means of collaboration is for the community early childhood staff and special services staff to jointly plan activities, programs, strategies, and adaptations on a regularly scheduled basis. It is much more motivating to implement a program that one has helped to plan and develop for a child. It is more likely to be a positive experience if one plans an activity jointly to address a child’s individual needs rather than being told what to do. Team members are more likely to accept new suggestions and strategies if their own suggestions and strategies are acknowledged. The great thing about collaboration is that everyone learns from each other because each has something to offer, regardless of their particular role.

**STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING  
COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS**

- \* involve community preschool staff as valued team members in meetings, conferences, and IEP meetings
- \* involve community preschool staff in decision-making issues
  - \* share responsibilities
  - \* utilize the concept of planning as a team
  - \* be aware of program philosophy and methodology
- \* avoid discussing program and child related issues within the classroom setting
  - \* use understandable terminology and explain jargon and acronyms
  - \* give feedback regarding effective strategies and practices

**Collaboration and Consultation**

One of the most important roles of the special services team members is that of collaborating and consulting with community preschool staff involved with the inclusion of a child with disabilities. In fact, it is not uncommon to feel that more time is spent interacting with adults and in team meetings than actually having direct contact with the child with disabilities. Some team members might have feelings of anxiety regarding diminished direct service time and increased consultation time. The feeling might be that to be truly doing my job, "I need to have my hands on the child." An important aspect of inclusion to remember is that consultation with classroom staff is serving a very important purpose and through collaboration, consultation, and ultimately role release, the child's needs are being addressed and met within the community preschool setting all the time—not just when the special education service providers are available.

In examining service provision to children with disabilities within community early childhood programs, one of the first steps in the process of collaboration and consultation is to address training and inservice issues. It might be helpful to survey or interview all participating staff regarding what types of skills, knowledge, and information they would like to have prior to beginning the inclusion process. Training

is an ongoing process, and the needs of the child as well as the needs of the participating staff will dictate what issues and topics should be addressed.

Team meetings are the foundation of the consultative model. It is important that core team members meet on a regular basis to address concerns, issues, and progress toward the child's IEP goals and objectives. Meetings are an appropriate time to develop and discuss programs, share new information, and talk about needed adaptations for materials, projects, etc. Ideally all persons involved with the inclusion of the child in the community preschool setting are present at the core team meeting. When all team members are present, issues and concerns can be discussed and addressed immediately.

Although it is preferred that all core team members be present at meetings, it will happen that some members will miss a meeting. All interested parties need to be aware of issues that have been discussed so it is important to keep minutes or notes of the meeting and distribute them to team members (see chapter 4 appendix). This is especially important when an item on the meeting agenda specifically relates to the person absent or when a task is assigned. Keeping minutes of the meetings in a safe place accessible to all of the team members and distributing copies to those who were absent helps to ensure that tasks and responsibilities delegated will be completed.

### **Making Collaboration and Consultation Work**

The consultative model can only exist when there is a mutual sharing of information between the special services staff and the community early childhood staff. One of the most important pieces of information to be shared is that of the child's Individualized Educational Program (IEP) or Individualized Family Services Plan (IFSP). In order for goals and objectives to be carried out within the inclusive setting, all staff working with the child must be aware of and understand goals, objec-

tives, programs and data collection procedures. The language written on the IFSP/IEP and used in discussing the IFSP/IEP must be understood by everyone on the team. Ideally, when the IFSP or IEP is developed for the child with disabilities, the community early childhood staff are included as active participants in that process. Specific issues and strategies around developing IFSP's/IEP's for children in inclusive settings will be addressed in Chapter 7.

Consultation not only involves the sharing of IFSP/IEP information, but also the sharing of actual service delivery and data collection. Inservice training and ongoing staff training will keep everyone working with the child up-to-date on strategies and methods to be employed with that specific child. Because inservice training and staff training imply out-of-classroom time, there are also some simple strategies that can be implemented which will address the day-to-day issues as they arise in the classroom. For example, it might be useful to keep a photo album in the classroom that contains pictures of a child with motor impairment in appropriate positions for the classroom day. The photos can serve as a visual reminder to the staff working with the child and serve as a guide for a substitute or new staff member. It is also important to have available specific procedures or programs which have been developed for the child. It is best if those programs are in written format and kept in a place which is accessible to classroom staff. Data collection, which will be discussed further in Chapter 7, should also be a responsibility shared with the community early childhood staff. After all, it is the classroom staff that is working with the child on a daily basis and their input is invaluable.

In establishing a good consultative relationship, it is important to have information, materials, paperwork, forms, and so forth available to all persons involved. One way to do this is to have a designated place where any needed information and materials are stored for the child(ren) at the early childhood center. Something that we have found helpful is to have a plastic crate with hanging files or notebooks con-

taining information such as the child's IEP, specific child programs, data collection forms, minutes of team meetings, and so on. Of course, it is very important that any confidential information regarding a child is stored in a place which is safe and can be kept locked when not in use by designated staff members. You might also find it helpful to keep in the crate any school district forms which may be needed during the course of the school year (bus forms, release of information, etc.). By having information and materials available, the participating staff will have a sense of investment in the child's program and progress. Keeping the participating staff informed and involved will help to ensure that the inclusive setting is effective.

### STUDENT NOTEBOOK

Front cover information includes:

- student's name
- address
- home phone
- parents/emergency contacts
- date of birth
- Related services phone numbers
- transportation: bus numbers
- arrival time
- departure time
- transportation

Schedule:

- summary of daily schedule and information on how to work with the student including special procedures, positioning instructions, feeding techniques, communication needs, etc.

Attendance record

Health check

Medication chart/health information

Current IEP

Anecdotal records:

- include any special or new skills observed as well as general events of that day.

Parent contacts

Related staff services:

- sign in and summary sheet
- other information such as PT-ROM instructions or ST-computer

directions

Team meeting reports

Data/graphs

**IDEAS FOR INFORMATION AND FORMS  
TO BE KEPT AT COMMUNITY SITES**

**FORMS:**

- |                               |                                |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| *permission to evaluate       | *release of information        |
| *educational program change   | *district referral forms       |
| *notice of parental rights    | *bus/transportation forms      |
| *IEP notification form letter | *district stationery/envelopes |
| *blank IEP signature page     | *observation forms/logs        |
| *carbonless (NCR) paper       | *blank team minute agendas     |

**INDIVIDUAL CHILD NOTEBOOK:**

- \*list of those authorized to use the notebook
- \*classroom schedule and paraprofessional responsibilities
- \*service provider schedules
- \*equipment checked out by center (form)
- \*child's IEP
- \*specific child programs and data collection forms
- \*copies of completed team minutes/agendas

### **Resources and References**

Bailey, D. B., & Wolery, M. (1992). Teaching infants and preschoolers with disabilities. New York: Macmillan.

Collaborative teaming for inclusion-oriented schools: A resource manual. (1992). Kansas State Board of Education.

Peck, C. A., Odom, S. L., & Bricker, D. D. (1993). Integrating young children with disabilities into community programs: Ecological perspectives on research and implementation. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

Peterson, N. L. (1987). Early intervention for handicapped and at-risk children. Denver: Love Publishing.

Safford, P. L. (1989). Integrated teaching in early childhood: Starting in the mainstream. White Plains, NY: Longman.

TEEM: A manual to support the transition of young children with special needs and their families from preschool into kindergarten and other regular education environments. (1991). Center for Developmental Disabilities, UAP, University of Vermont.

Thompson, B., Wickham, D., Wegner, J., Mulligan Ault, M., Shanks, P., & Reinertson, B. (1993). Handbook for the inclusion of young children with severe disabilities. Lawrence, KS: Learner Managed Designs.

# TEAM MINUTES

Classroom/Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Persons Present

Absentees

Others who need to know

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Agenda Items

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

## Minutes/Notes

Action Items

Person Responsible

By When

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

## Agenda for Next Meeting

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

1.

2.

3.

4.

# TEAM MEETING REVIEW SHEET

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Case Manager: \_\_\_\_\_

I. Motor (Gross & Fine)	II. Communication
III. Cognition	IV. Socialization/Behavioral
V. Self-Help	VI. Family Needs/Concerns Child Needs/Concerns
VII. Related Services	VIII. Other

Follow-up Needed

By Whom

By When

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

WIN Grant

# CHILD NOTEBOOK

## Front cover information includes:

- child's name
- address
- home phone
- parents/emergency contact numbers
- date of birth
- ECSE teacher's office number
- transportation: bus numbers
- arrival time
- departure time
- transportation

## Schedule:

summary of daily schedule and information on how to work with the student including special procedures, positioning instructions, feeding techniques, communication needs, etc.

Attendance record

Health check

Medication chart/health information

Current IEP

## Anecdotal records:

include any special or new skills observed as well as general events of that day.

Parent contacts

## Related staff services:

- sign in and summary sheet
- other information such as PT-ROM instructions or ST-computer directions

Team meeting reports

Data/graphs

WIN Grant

**CLASSROOM SCHEDULE**  
**FORM TO LIST COMMUNITY CLASSROOM SCHEDULE**

Name of Preschool: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Preschool Staff Names and Titles:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Time:

Activity:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

LIM Grant

# TEACHER/PARAPROFESSIONAL DAILY SCHEDULE AND CLASSROOM RESPONSIBILITY

Teacher Responsibility

Paraprofessional Responsibility

Develop a classroom schedule for a typical day and determine who will be responsible for portions of the schedule.

Time Block

Teacher Responsibility

Para Responsibility

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

Paraprofessional \_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

LIM Grant

**USD#**  
**EQUIPMENT & MATERIALS LIST**  
**USED IN THE COMMUNITY**

(For: Fall, Spring, Summer)

NAME OF SCHOOL: \_\_\_\_\_

MATERIALS/EQUIPMENT SIGNED OUT:

MATERIALS/EQUIPMENT RETURNED:

Person returning equipment \_\_\_\_\_

Date equipment returned \_\_\_\_\_

Location of returned equipment \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Therapist/Teacher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

LIM Grant

**USD#**  
**EQUIPMENT & MATERIALS LIST**  
**USED IN THE COMMUNITY**

(For Fall, Spring, Summer)

NAME OF SCHOOL:

MATERIALS/EQUIPMENT SIGNED OUT:

I understand that the above list of items will be in use at \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ and I assume full responsibility if any of the items are missing or damaged. In the case that any of the above listed items are missing or damaged, a means of fixing and/or replacing the items will be determined that will be mutually satisfactory to both the community preschool & USD# \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Therapist/Teacher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

LIM Grant

# FOLLOW-UP/DOCUMENTATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

**Activity:**

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Letter \_\_\_\_\_ Home Visit \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Made With:**

Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Father \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

SUMMARY

Staff Member:

**Activity:**

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Letter \_\_\_\_\_ Home Visit \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Made With:**

Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Father \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

SUMMARY

Staff Member:

**Activity:**

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Letter \_\_\_\_\_ Home Visit \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Made With:**

Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Father \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

SUMMARY

Staff Member:

**Activity:**

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Letter \_\_\_\_\_ Home Visit \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Made With:**

Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Father \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

SUMMARY

Staff Member:

WIN Grant USD 500



