

Project Narrative – UT Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities UCEDD  
Partnership Planning Grants (HHS-2016-ACL-AOD-DDTI-0171)

**Abstract.** The Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities (BCDD), in *partnership* with LeMoyne-Owen College (LOC), a minority-serving institution (MSI), plans activities with the *goal* of bringing a diverse group of faculty, students, and administrators together as interdisciplinary collaborators, colleagues, and trainees to broaden career interests, knowledge base, and cultural competence within the field of developmental disabilities. The *objective* is to create a sustainable partnership between an urban University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) and a local MSI to benefit both institutions by serving as a pipeline for minority student recruitment and training in the disability field and enhancing the cultural competency of all participants. Anticipated *outcomes* include: (1) greater minority participation in UCEDD activities and a future workforce for people with disabilities that better reflects our community's African-American majority; (2) expanded interdisciplinary training, research, and service experiences offered to minority students that promote career interest and increase their cultural competence in the disability field; and (3) skill enhancement of UCEDD and MSI faculty to deliver timely and culturally competent training and services to the students they serve which benefits the disability community. The expected *products* include electronic communications and a poster presentation of the process and outcomes of this collaborative partnership across regional and national audiences.

**Problem Statement.** The University of Tennessee Health Science Center (UTHSC) and the BCDD serve a region, state, and community where children, including those with disabilities and their families, face complex and interrelated economic, social, institutional, and physical problems that create barriers for individuals seeking to live productive, independent lives in their communities. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates Tennessee has a population of 6.4 million people with 73% living in metropolitan areas and 27% in rural areas. Tennessee borders eight states, many of whose citizens seek some services in Tennessee. Some of the very poorest communities in the nation are in this region. In 2012, Tennessee ranked eleventh in the nation in terms of percent population living below the poverty level. Over 30% of Tennessee citizens live in federally designated "poverty areas" (i.e., census tracts with poverty rates of 20% or higher). Research suggests that there is a critical threshold or "tipping point" when neighborhoods reach 20 to 30 percent poverty rates: negative family and child outcomes increase dramatically, including lower quality learning experiences in the homes of young children and higher risk for health problems, behavioral difficulties, teen pregnancy, high school dropout, and substance abuse. All of these deleterious outcomes are disproportionately represented within the Memphis community.

Racial demographics in Memphis differ from those of Tennessee and the United States and are important in understanding the region's disparities and needs. **Seventy-one percent of children in Memphis are African-American** and 17% are Caucasian. In Shelby County as a whole, the trend is similar but less pronounced (58% and 29%, respectively). By contrast, both statewide and nationally, the black-white ratio is roughly the opposite. Health outcomes are worse in Tennessee and Tennessee's neighboring states than for the average state; disparities between races are particularly striking. Located 12 miles from northern Mississippi, the Boling Center is routinely faced with helping to address the significant health disparities and disability needs of this neighboring state. Mississippi childhood poverty, infant deaths, and low birth weights are routinely some of the highest in the nation. Children and their families across rural northern Mississippi seek specialized medical care in Memphis; an estimated 10% of BCDD clients reside in Mississippi. BCDD routinely has students who call Mississippi home, attend Mississippi universities and colleges, and plan to return to the state.

An important study of state-specific data compiled by the Annie E. Casey Foundation evaluating a child health index based on five child health outcomes (percent low birth weight

infants, infant mortality rate, child death rate, teen death rate, and teen birth rates) identified the “Deep South” (Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida) as a geographic region of contiguous states, characterized by their poor child health outcomes relative to other states and regions of the United States. Indeed, all other regions of the country had a child health index at or above the national average; the contiguous “Deep South” was the only region below the national average. To compound these negative findings, **Memphis (Shelby County) leads the state of Tennessee across all of these worrisome metrics.**

There is a dire need for well-qualified and *representative* behavioral health professionals in our community. Thirty-nine percent of Memphis children, nearly double the national average, live in poverty. A disproportionate number of Memphis’ youngest children, those under five years of age, live in some of the most impoverished neighborhoods in our city. These income and economic disadvantages are known to have stronger negative effects on developmental outcome in early childhood than in adolescence. Additionally, this need extends to personnel preparation in allied health services, such as social work and special education, to serve children with or at-risk for disabilities. HRSA has designated 59 urban census tracts within the metro Memphis region as Health Professional Shortage Areas, reporting a significant deficit of full-time professionals in the areas of medical care, mental health and dentistry. The surrounding BCDD service areas of rural west Tennessee, eastern Arkansas, and northern Mississippi are similarly underserved. **This personnel shortage severely limits the availability and quality of evidence-based services that can be provided to people with disabilities and their families.** Only a small percentage of poor children participate in early intervention programs of sufficient quality and intensity to overcome the developmental challenges associated with chronic economic hardship and low parental education. Established, university-based related (allied health) personnel programs in Memphis would benefit from partnership with a minority-serving institution so that a greater number of competent, diverse professionals are available to act as advocates, therapists, and interventionists for people with disabilities and their families in our communities.

**Goal and Objective.** The goal of this project is to create a partnership with LeMoyne-Owen College, a local minority-serving institution, to provide the Memphis community with well-equipped social work and special education graduates who can serve people with disabilities and their families and demonstrate: (1) a solid discipline-specific knowledge base and skill set; (2) an ability to understand the contributions and limitations of their own discipline, other disciplines, medical home providers and families, and the skill to work with them as a team; (3) skills and attitudes necessary to provide culturally competent, comprehensive, coordinated family-centered care for people from a wide variety of backgrounds and family structures; (4) an understanding of the complex interactions of biological and social determinants of health and development; and (5) a working knowledge of local, state, and national resources available to the child and family. Using the AIDD Diversity and Inclusion Toolkit as a guide, this proposal is designed to meet these interdisciplinary training needs, with the ultimate goal of improving the health and educational outcomes of people with disabilities and their families. The proposal was developed with collaborative direction from the BCDD’s statewide Community Advisory Council (CAC). Additionally, persons with disabilities and parents of individuals with disabilities are involved in the implementation and subsequent evaluation of the project.

**Proposed Intervention.** Funding for this project provides the necessary seed funding so that a collaborative partnership with faculty from LeMoyne-Owen College can be developed and sustained. The aim of this partnership is to jointly plan and co-design innovative interdisciplinary training, research, and service experiences for minority students from the academic disciplines of social work and special education. One of the BCDD’s primary missions is that of training students for their future roles as medical and related (allied health) providers and leaders in the field of disability. The core curriculum is designed to build knowledge and skills that prepare

professionals to be lifelong learners and leaders in the changing health care, early intervention, and educational systems. Since students come to the BCDD with diverse academic backgrounds, level of training, knowledge of disability, and personal experiences, so the curriculum must reflect a range of varied opportunities, venues, and methodologies. Training is delivered through didactic, research, and clinical experiences. Collaboration with MSI faculty is key in planning and designing the direction, needs, and scope of training for the students. Many of the proposed interventions are reciprocal and beneficial for both institutions. For example, BCDD faculty provides MSI faculty and staff training on best practices for working with college students in the classroom who present with a request for disability accommodations. At the same time, LeMoyne-Owen faculty provides BCDD students, faculty, and staff training on the importance of culture, custom, and tradition in reaching out to, seeking involvement and working with culturally diverse groups, notably African-American students and families. Please see the Project Work Plan for additional details.

BCDD faculty and staff have experience developing training experiences that can be modified to meet the needs of undergraduate students at LOC. For example, faculty and staff have informally partnered with another Minority-Serving Institution, the University of Memphis, to provide a two-day multidisciplinary field experience for their social work students, centered on the identification, assessment, intervention and supports for people with developmental disabilities and their families. BCDD faculty represented a wide array of disciplines at this training, including medical social work, developmental pediatrics, psychology, family, special education, speech-language pathology, and nutrition. Students were introduced to Parent-Child Interaction Therapy as one evidence-based model in behavioral health treatment. Students evaluated the experience as a highly informative and worth expanding upon with faculty and students from other academic institutions.

**Special Target Populations and Organizations.** This project partners with faculty and students across two baccalaureate degree programs at LOC in Memphis. Situated only 2.5 miles from the BCDD, LeMoyne-Owen College is a historically black, private college in South Memphis, Tennessee. Its mission is to provide a transformative experience educating students for urban-focused leadership, scholarship, service, and professional careers. As such, the college offers the Bachelor's degree in 22 different areas and has prepared generations of teachers and other leaders from the black community. Among the key majors are Business Management, Computer Science, **Education, Special Education**, Biology, Sociology, and **Social Work**. The most popular majors include: Business Administration and Management, General; **Special Education and Teaching, General; Early Childhood Education and Teaching**; Criminal Justice/Safety Studies; and Biology/Biological Sciences, General.

Not only is LeMoyne-Owen College steeped in its own history which dates back to the Civil War, its location in Memphis, which has a metropolitan population of nearly 1.4 million people, offers much in the way of cultural diversity and heritage, including Southern tradition, religiosity, and reminders of Martin Luther King's assassination and the civil rights movement. The economic realities hold little in the way of positives as there are a large number of uneducated citizens who must seek work in low paying jobs and support through government agencies. The city has numerous health related agencies such as hospitals, both inpatient and outpatient, and yet there are large numbers of those in the surrounding Shelby County area who cannot afford health insurance. **Students and minorities comprise a large percentage of this at-risk population.** Although Memphis is the largest city in the State of Tennessee, it is also one which struggles to fund education to all socioeconomic groups in an equitable manner. Recently, there has been a drop in retention in higher education, especially among minority males. Based on enrollment trends over the past five years, the typical student population at LOC includes approximately 1,078 undergraduates, with a gender distribution of 31.5% male students and 62.4% female students (6.1% not reported). Most students are younger than 25 years of age. As an HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities), 97.6% of the students

are African-American; 2% Hispanic or Latino, 5% White, and 2% non-resident alien. In general, **the economic status of the student body is low, as 96.8% of full-time undergraduates receive some kind of need-based financial aid** and the average need-based scholarship or grant award is \$7,296. Approximately 18% of the students live in college-owned, operated, or affiliated housing and 82% live off campus. As a commuter college, 80% of the students have cars on campus.

**Outcome.** This BCDD partnership with LOC results in a comprehensive plan that, when implemented, significantly increases the number of minority students who participate in UCEDD training, research, and service activities. The plan results in a sustainable partnership between an urban UCEDD and local MSI and Historically Black College and University (HBCU) that benefits both institutions, serving as a pipeline that increases minority student recruitment and training in the disability field while enhancing the cultural competency of all participants.

**Project Management.** The Project Director responsible for the leadership, day-to-day operations, progress monitoring and preparation of reports related to this grant is Bruce L. Keisling, Ph.D., the Associate Director of the Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities, including the center's UCEDD program. He carries the academic rank of Assistant Professor within the UTHSC Department of Pediatrics. Dr. Keisling is an integral part of the interdisciplinary training experiences of many students at the BCDD, providing large group didactics and individualized clinical supervision. Dr. Keisling has 20 years of experience in the field of developmental disabilities. He is a member of the Board of Directors, Executive Committee, and President-Elect (2016-2017) for the national Association of University Centers on Disability (AUCD) and serves statewide interests through his board representation on the Tennessee Disability Coalition. Michael Robinson, M.S.W., is a Professor of Social Work and Interim Division Chair of Social and Behavioral Sciences and serves as the faculty representative for our partner minority-serving institution, LeMoyne-Owen College. Please see the Budget Narrative, Project Workplan and Biosketches that accompany this application for additional information and delineation of project duties.

**Evaluation.** The Project Director meets on a monthly basis with the faculty representative from the minority-serving institution to review the project's progress toward achieving its major objectives and completion of key tasks as outlined in the Work Plan. Based on opportunities or obstacles that arise from the planning process, project efforts are adjusted to maximize outcomes. Administrator, faculty, staff and student feedback are gathered through meeting notes and attendee's satisfaction ratings of meeting structure, content, process and outcome to achieve interdisciplinary experiences for students, opportunities to deepen understand and practice of cultural competency, promote minority participation and as a means to collaborate with UCEDDs. Data are collected on faculty and staff presentations to rate skill and level of participant satisfaction with material presented. Data are collected on dissemination of BCDD products to determine level of recipient's satisfaction with material provided. All data are maintained by the Training Director who enters information into the National Information and Reporting System (NIRS). Faculty, staff, and trainees are required to report monthly activities to the Training Director on technical assistance, community outreach training, and products developed.

**Dissemination.** Products collaboratively developed by the Boling Center and LeMoyne-Owen College faculty are recorded in the National Information Reporting System (NIRS). Dissemination or circulation of these products is also recorded in NIRS. Both institutions feature the Partnership Planning Grant project goal, major objectives and key tasks on their respective websites. In addition, project staff develops electronic bulletin boards, email (listserv) networks, and other means to support program activities, increase visibility and promote participation. The Boling Center invites LOC faculty and students to two Community Advisory Council meetings over the course of the project year to share insights and progress on the partnership planning process and to solicit additional input from the Council on areas of perceived need from

community, family and disability stakeholders. Toward the end of the funding cycle, members of the partnership conduct a joint webinar to members of the AUCD network, including the recently formed *Southern Leadership Cooperative* of UCEDDs and LENDs in the Deep South, to discuss planning activities for the year and ways to approach local HBCUs or MSIs in order to replicate the project. Project leaders from the Boling Center and LeMoyne-Owen College submit an application to present a national conference for HBCUs or MSIs to highlight the outcomes that partnering with a local or regional UCEDD can have for these institutions.

**Organizational Capability.** For 46 years, the Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities (BCDD) has been an integral training site on the campus of the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, in the city's medical district and surrounded by high poverty neighborhoods. Home to two Centers of Excellence, the BCDD has functioned with autonomy and consistent support from the Chancellor, Dean and Chairman of the Department of Pediatrics. BCDD is located in a freestanding facility designed for interdisciplinary training and has been supported since the early 1970's by federal training grants from the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD) and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). The BCDD is jointly designated as a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) and a Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) program. **Given these long-standing sources of core funding and the training and service missions of the center, the BCDD will sustain all of the project activities after Federal financial assistance has ended.** Faculty and staff from 13 core and related disciplines commit significant time and effort in order to participate fully in all aspects of the programs; all faculty and staff have dedicated role(s) within our training programs. All core faculty members have extensive experience in pediatrics and in providing health and related services to individuals with disabilities and their families. Faculty members provide academic, clinical and/or community-based training in disability studies. Clinical training occurs across diverse urban and rural community settings, including Le Bonheur Children's Hospital, several suburban outpatient clinics, Ayers Children's Clinic in Jackson TN, Regional Medical Center, Baptist Hospital, Shelby County Schools, rural Fayette County and the Neighborhood Christian Centers network in predominantly African-American neighborhoods. **BCDD faculty have demonstrated previous collaborative training and research partnerships with other minority-serving institutions, including the University of Memphis and Southwest Tennessee Community College.** A family-centered approach is maintained with active participation by a full-time family faculty member; several BCDD faculty and staff members are themselves parents or siblings of persons with disabilities. Biosketches for key project personnel, including the sub-award to the LOC faculty representative, are included in this application. BCDD has 85,000 square feet used directly for interdisciplinary training. In addition, there are observation rooms with one-way mirrors and sound systems, conference rooms, examination rooms, reception and waiting areas, an exhibition area, a family library, a client records room, student carrels, a computer lab, and two 54-seat lecture rooms with internet and digital projection capabilities. The offices of faculty and students are arranged in such a manner to encourage formal and informal interactions across disciplines and enhance the interdisciplinary experience. The fourth floor contains a physical therapy suite, the occupational therapy suite, speech-language pathology offices and therapy areas, including the Scottish Rite Clinic for Childhood Language Disorders, and audiometric testing facilities. All disciplines on this floor have observation areas and offices for staff and students. Each clinical discipline has a designated area suitable for clinical work with a full range of current testing materials and essential equipment. BCDD has adequate audiovisual resources that include: telehealth; audio-, video-, and web-conferencing; computer-based projection, and other distance learning modalities.