Karoly Mirnics in his lab, where he studies gene expression in autism, schizophrenia, and other disorders.

Neuroimmune Changes in Autism

The old debate was whether nature or nurture—genetics or environment—played the larger role in human development. Modern neuroscience has made it clear that it's genetics and environment, and that environment, especially early, even prenatal environment, regulates genes with enduring effects on an individual's brain development. Nowhere is this interplay more apparent than in the national quest to understand the causes of autism spectrum disorders as a pathway to amelioration or prevention.

Autism is one of several brain-based disorders investigated in the laboratory of Karoly Mirnics, M.D., Ph.D., James G. Blakemore Chair, professor of Psychiatry, vice chair for Basic Science Research in Psychiatry, and VKC associate director. The Mirnics lab focuses on gene expression profiles, including neuroimmune and synaptic changes, using mouse models and studying human postmortem brain tissue.

Modeling Development

All individuals are born with a genetic make-up that is susceptible to environmental insults over the course of prenatal or postnatal development. (See figure p. 2.) Environmental insults include poor nutrition, infections, and chemical exposures. Environmental insults interact with genetic susceptibility to produce impairments in gene expression. Gene expression regulates neurochemical and metabolic processes that control the connectivity among brain neurons. When neuron connectivity is atypical, information processing is impaired, which leads to alterations in behavior, cognition, and emotion.

“Genetics is not diagnosis,” Mirnics said. “Genes alone do not determine ultimate outcomes.”

Immune-Related Genes in ASD

In 2008, the Mirnics lab conducted a study in which they found a profound dysregulation of immune system genes in the post-mortem brains of individuals with autism. The research team did gene expression microarrays—looking at the whole genome—in 6 subjects with an ASD diagnosis and matched control subjects. Out of roughly 40,000 genes in the human genome, only 110 genes separated the ASD subjects from the controls, providing a clear autism “signature” in the brain. Of the 110 genes, some were under- and others over-expressed.
I’m a proponent of positive psychology, a branch of psychology that focuses on how people experience well-being. One finding is that work is important to well-being, especially when people have work that is meaningful. Another finding is that while happiness is influenced by genetics, people can learn to be happier by developing optimism, gratitude, and altruism.

I am grateful for the work that VKC researchers, clinicians, students, and staff are doing this summer. This work is purposeful and joyful. We salute that work with a photo gallery (pp. 4-5) showing joy within our service, research, and training.

SENSE Theatre is a ‘stage of hope’ for children with autism working with peer actors as a research intervention to promote communication and social skills and to reduce stress and anxiety. Data will be analyzed and published. But in the performance of Circus del Se’ (a journey of self-discovery), a teen with autism stopped mid-stage and circled a hula hoop to the round of applause. Bravery.

In June, 28 campers with Williams syndrome and other developmental disabilities from 14 states and Canada were here in Music City for a week of music enrichment, thanks to ACM Lifting Lives, the charitable arm of the Academy of Country Music. Photos show campers with generous ACM stars who made their week so memorable. Not shown are skills gained by graduate student staff or the research studies accomplished.

These are but two examples of a summer of purposeful work.

Our founding director Nicholas Hobbs was respected on many counts but especially for Project Re-ED serving children with emotional disorders. The final Re-ED principle was, “A child should know some joy in each day and look forward to some joyous event for the morrow.” We wish you moments of Summer Joy.
Grant Bolsters Autism Training for Tennessee Educators BY JENNIFER WETZEL

A grant from the Tennessee Department of Education will allow TRIAD to continue a 13-year partnership to provide autism-specific training opportunities for school personnel throughout the state.

The 3-year, $1.5 million grant marks the largest award received since 1999 when TRIAD first partnered with the Tennessee Department of Education to offer training for educators.

Last school year, TRIAD reached 1,400 school personnel in 86 of Tennessee’s 95 counties. The current grant will enable TRIAD to conduct more than 25 workshops each year.

This increase in funding correlates with the ever-growing need for autism services, says Zachary Warren, Ph.D., assistant professor of Pediatrics and Psychiatry and TRIAD director.

“Given that we are now seeing autism in over 1 percent of the population, we must increasingly develop realistic ways for meeting the intensive educational needs of students with autism,” Warren said. “Our partnership with the Tennessee Department of Education provides us the opportunity to translate cutting-edge educational science into sustainable educational practice throughout the state. This type of partnership is, in my opinion, critical to improving educational, vocational, and social outcomes for individuals with autism.”

The training opportunities are free and include individual and team-based workshops on topics ranging from communication, social skills, and behavior. Workshops are designed for specific audiences including teachers, administrators, teaching assistants, and parents.

“Everything we present is very current on what we know works for kids with autism, and we break it down in a way participants can easily understand and implement,” said Pablo Juárez, M.Ed., TRIAD educational consultant. “If the teachers can use what they learn immediately, it benefits the students more quickly, and the teachers will continue using those strategies if they see them working.”

Most of the trainings occur each academic year in each of the state’s three grand regions.

The Elementary/Middle School Teacher Training involves teams of two—a teacher and a paraeducator—who learn about ASD and integrated, evidence-based approaches within an interactive school-based workshop setting. High School Teacher Training has a similar aim and setting.

The Administrator Academy is a 2-day workshop for school and system administrators. It, too, is held in each of the state’s three grand regions.

Each of the following will occur once in each grand region of the state during the academic year: workshops for paraeducators and for parents, and workshops on discrete trial teaching, social skills, and communications.

The 2-day Summer and Winter Institutes are held in Nashville. This is a two-part, team-based workshop in which teams focus on one of their own student’s IEP, and learn integrated, evidence-based approaches to teaching students with ASD.

Dates and locations will be posted as they are confirmed. For information and registration, check periodically at http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/triad/events/.

Helping School Systems Assess Autism BY JAN ROSENERGY

With school systems serving increasing numbers of students on the autism spectrum, school psychologists are among the educational professionals seeking autism-specific training.

School psychologists help students succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. Among their many responsibilities are identifying and addressing learning and behavioral problems and evaluating eligibility for special education services, as part of a multidisciplinary team.

“Across TRIAD programs, we aim to find ways to build sustainability and capacity within school districts across the state,” said Whitney Loring, Psy.D., a clinical psychologist and assistant professor of Pediatrics at Vanderbilt. “Providing training for school psychologists so that enhanced autism-specific assessments can be done at the community level is a new training activity at TRIAD, begun last year and expanding in the coming year.”

TRIAD has provided half-day and full-day training sessions for school psychologists for individual Tennessee school districts, as well as for a South Carolina school district. Training focuses on an in-depth understanding of what autism is and how to structure high-quality autism assessments within school settings.

For school psychologists who have completed this initial level of training, TRIAD periodically offers 2-day clinical training workshops in administering the ADOS—Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule. The ADOS is the “gold standard” instrument for assessing autism spectrum disorders across age, developmental level, and language skill. The course provides detailed, initial training for professionals who plan to use the ADOS in clinical or school settings.

 Evaluations of training sessions for school psychologists have been quite positive, Loring indicated. One participant commented, “The multitude of examples was very beneficial for practical application ideas.” Another said, “I enjoyed how [the presenters] communicated the importance of getting quality answers and then provided videos of what that might look like.” Still another commented, “It was helpful to receive updated information and terminology, since it has been a while since I worked on an autism evaluation team.”

TRIAD is providing such training through a variety of mechanisms. Some training is provided through TRIAD’s collaboration with the Tennessee Department of Education to provide autism-related training to Tennessee school districts; costs are covered by Department. In other instances, school districts contact TRIAD directly to schedule and cover costs. For ADOS and other clinical training, workshop registrants pay a fee individually or through their school districts.

“By enabling school districts statewide to provide this high level of specialization in their autism assessments, families can feel confidence in their local services, thereby providing continuity of care at the community level,” Loring said.

For information, contact lori.m.ryden@vanderbilt.edu, (615) 936-0267.
"As a parent of a child with special needs, I’m always learning. Sometimes love can make us hold on too tight, help too much, and ‘protect’ our child from some of the necessary experiences that help them mature. Recently, while working behind the scenes at SENSE Theatre Camp, I was able to observe 16 kids with all different levels of autism. I was reminded how capable our kids can be when we back away and give them a little space to blossom. It was a clear sign for this mom that I’ve been blocking my daughter’s sun. It’s time to take a few more steps back, so she can grow. Although I’ve got some backtracking to do, I’m very thankful to be headed in the right direction.” ~ Tammy Vice

SENSE Theatre Camp, founded by Blythe Corbett, Ph.D. (Psychiatry), is a 2-week summer program that combines established behavioral strategies alongside theatrical techniques to target social interaction and stress responsivity in children with autism spectrum disorders.

Reading Clinic’s Amazing Race to Reading (4, 7, 12)
The VKC Reading Clinic initiated two summer programs to help struggling readers. Read Enjoy And Discover featured captivating books that told amazing journeys. This 2-week program was half-days, for students K-4th grades and 5th-8th grades who were behind in reading or had learning or intellectual/developmental disabilities.

In the Amazing Race to Reading (5 hrs/day, 5 days), students in 5th-8th grades who were behind in reading or had learning disabilities were taught both word-level and comprehension skills. For example, students read a chapter book about a “couch potato” who finds adventure visiting his uncle in Costa Rica. In addition, all children created art (to be exhibited later at the VKC), and acted out parts of the book. Day 5 was a big adventure—students visited Vanderbilt’s LifeFlight. Reading Clinic instruction is evidence-based, and led by faculty director Laurie E. Cutting, Ph.D. (Special Education).

Research Stars at Music Camp (1, 3, 8)
The 2012 ACM Lifting Lives Music Campers performed with Big & Rich at the Grand Ole Opry—to a standing ovation. ACM Lifting Lives staff, VKC Leadership Council’s Lorie Lytle, and Rondal Richardson were instrumental in planning a phenomenal week for 28 campers with Williams syndrome or other disabilities from 14 states and Canada. “Ofstage”, campers took part in research. The Williams Syndrome Research team, led by VKC director Elisabeth Dykens, Ph.D., collected data for 6 studies, including two dissertations. Brain imaging methods included MRI, DTI, and resting state scans; and ERP auditory processing. Cognitive and psychiatry evaluations were done. Projects focused on amusia and music production; teaching personal safety strategies with strangers; and biomarkers of a mindfulness-based stress reduction intervention. All this plus songwriting, jamming, and meeting the stars!

“I liked learning about mindfulness.”
 sweep, clean tables, wash the windows, and learn about food preparation.”

“M y favorite part is w orking inside the kitchen,” said Moore. “I like to wrap the cheese in aluminum foil. O ur co-w orkers are our friends and they help us out. We check in w ith them .”

“Yes,” added DePauw. “O ur co-w orkers help us and are really nice and friendly. I love w orking at the Zoo.”

Just as they are for other college students, sum m er jobs are part of preparing for future careers for these students w ith developmental disabilities.

Next Steps Summer Institute (9, 10, 11)
Next Steps at Vanderbilt Summer Institute is a college transition program for young adults with developmental disabilities up to age 24. It provides a week-long peek into what it is like to go to college. Both accepted Next Steps students and other students interested in postsecondary options stay in a dorm on campus and explore social, educational, and independent living. The week was filled with mindfulness exercises, career assessments, self-advocacy training, a session on dating, grocery shopping, art, public speaking, cookouts, and more!

Summer Jobs (13)
All Next Steps at Vanderbilt students have summer jobs. Two of those students, Matt Moore and Carrie DePauw, are proud to be seasonal employees at the Nashville Zoo at Grassmere. They split a full-time shift in the Zoofari Café.

“We help to keep the Zoo clean around the Café,” said DePauw. “Some of our tasks are to

“I was reminded how capable our kids can be when we back away and give them a little space to blossom.”
innovation has made a major impact on society.”

The award recognizes Tennesseans for their efforts to accelerate the discovery of new drugs and therapies. The Governor’s Award for Innovation Excellence was established to honor individuals who have made significant contributions to the state’s economy through innovation.

At the 2012 Commencement, 19 retiring faculty members received the title of emeritus or emerita, faculty honoring their years of service. Among them were William Bernett, M.D., professor of psychiatry, emeritus (1992-), Ford E. Ebner, Ph.D., professor of psychology (Arts & Science) and Cell & Developmental Biology, emeritus (1991-), and Robert Fox, Ph.D., professor of Psychology (Arts & Science), emeritus (1963-).

Randolph Blake, Ph.D., Centennial Professor of Psychology, was one of two Vanderbilt professors elected to the National Academy of Sciences, a prestigious group created by President Abraham Lincoln to advise the government on science and technology. Blake was among only 84 new members selected nationwide.

Meghan Burke, a doctoral student in Special Education and a VKC UCEDD trainee who graduated in May, received the Anne Rüdiger Award of the Association of University Centers in Disabilities recognizing an outstanding trainee.

Carissa Cascio, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychiatry, received the Slifka/Ritvo Innovation in Autism Research Award at the International Meeting for Autism Research. The goal of the Slifka Awards is to create opportunities for junior investigators to fund brilliant ideas that could not be funded through other means. Cascio was one of only two who received the research award.

Jeffrey Conn, Ph.D., Lee E. Limbird Professor of Pharmacology and director of the Vanderbilt Program in Drug Discovery, won the first Governor’s Award for Innovation Excellence for his efforts to accelerate the discovery of new drugs for Parkinson’s disease, schizophrenia, and other brain disorders. The award recognizes Tennesseans “whose dedication to enhancing our world through innovation has made a major impact on society.”

Continued on page 7
**Selected Publications**  


**ACCOLADES from page 6**  

**Blythe Corbett**, Ph.D., assistant professor of Psychiatry, achieved a milestone when her article “Brief Report: Theatre as Therapy for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder” was listed among the Top 20 Downloaded Articles on the website of the *Journal for Autism and Developmental Disorders*.  

**Tammy Day**, M.Ed., program director of Next Steps at Vanderbilt, was invited to serve on the National Advisory Board for the 2012 State of the Art Conference for Post-Secondary Education and Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities.  

VKC director *Elisabeth Dykens*, Ph.D., Annette Schaffer Eskind Chair and professor of Psychology, Psychiatry, and Pediatrics, received the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Award for her innovative work in focusing on genetics and specific etiologies of IDD, developing effective behavioral/mental health interventions, and introducing positive psychology to the field. In addition, she also received the Outstanding Achievement Award of the Association of University Centers on Disabilities.  

**Lynn Fuchs**, Ph.D., professor of Special Education and Nicholas Hobbs Chair in Special Education and Human Development, and **Steve Graham**, Ed.D., professor and Currey Ingram Chair in Special Education and Literacy, were among 36 scholars nationwide to be named to the 2012 class of American Educational Research Association Fellows in recognition of their exceptional scholarly contributions to education research.  

**John Gore**, Ph.D., Hertha Ramsey Cress Chair in Medicine, Chancellor’s University Professor of Radiology & Radiological Sciences and Biomedical Engineering, professor of Molecular Physiology & Biophysics and Physics, and director of the Institute of Imaging Science, has been appointed to the National Advisory Council for Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering. The Council advises the federal government on policies regarding the conduct and support of research training and other programs involving biomedical imaging, biomedical engineering, and related technologies.  

**Craig Anne Heflinger**, Ph.D., associate dean for Graduate Education, Peabody College, and professor of Human & Organizational Development, will serve on the Measurement Advisory Panel of the National Committee on Quality Assurance as part of its National Collaborative for Innovation in Quality Measurement.  

Professor of Special Education *Carolyn Hughes*, Ph.D., was recently awarded the American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities 2012 Education Award. Hughes was recognized for her commitment to improving the lives of those with significant disabilities and their families as well as her contributions to the field of special education.  

Three VKC members were recently named to new endowed chairs. **Jon Kaas**, Ph.D., professor of Psychology and Radiology & Radiological Sciences, and **Sohee Park**, Ph.D., professor of Psychology and Psychiatry, were both named Gertrude Conaway Vanderbilt Professor of Psychology. **David Piston**, Ph.D., professor of Molecular Physiology & Biophysics, Physics, Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering and director of the Biophotonics Institute, was named Louise B. McGavock Chair.  

**Beth Malow**, M.D., M.S., Barry Chair in Cognitive Childhood Development, professor of Neurology and Pediatrics, and director of the Vanderbilt Sleep Disorders Division, was awarded the 2012 Sleep Science Award of the American Academy of Neurology for her presentation “Thinking About Sleep in Autism—A Model for Treating Neurological Disease.”  

The Alexander Heard Distinguished Service Professor Award was presented to **Sohee Park**, Ph.D., Gertrude Conaway Professor of Psychology and professor of Psychology and Psychiatry. A leading researcher in the study of schizophrenia, Park was one of five professors honored at the Spring Faculty Assembly.  

**Rachel Pearson** of Nashville, a graduate of Next Steps at Vanderbilt, received the Self-Determination Award from The Arc Tennessee during the tenth annual Tennessee Disability MegaConference Awards Banquet and Dance.  

**Krystal Werfel**, a doctoral candidate in Hearing & Speech Sciences mentored by assistant professor **Melanie Schuele**, Ph.D., received the International Reading Association Jeanne S. Chall Research Fellowship Award for her dissertation “Contribution of Linguistic Knowledge to Spelling Ability in Elementary Children With and Without Language Impairment.”  

**DISCOVERY | Summer 2012**
Educating to Advocate

U CEDD faculty and staff, trainees and Community Advisory Council (CAC) members all have a responsibility to educate our communities—and most especially public policy makers. We educate to inform public policies and to shape service systems to promote independence, self-determination, productivity, integration, and inclusion of individuals with disabilities.

▶ White House Policy Briefing
VKC UCEED CAC member and president of The Arc Tennessee Board of Directors holly lu conant-rees attended the White House Policy Briefing organized by The Arc U.S. Reflections on her experience follow:

A day-long disability policy briefing at the White House! Fabulous. Representing Tennessee in a group with only 150 slots? Humbling. High level policy-makers not only speaking to us but listening to us? An awesome opportunity.

I sat in a row among self-advocates, family members, and executive directors, reminding me that while our heart is centered in families and people with intellectual/developmental disabilities, our body has many parts, and our power lies in partnership. Marvelously, all these officials spoke to the myriad ways that we are wrong-minded.

[At the conclusion] Kareem Dale, the Special Assistant on Disability Policy, returned to the podium, and said, “We thought you might like to hear from one more person.” And that person was Barack Obama. I’m guessing that it doesn’t matter what your politics are. The words “Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States” have a uniquely galvanizing effect on the human nervous system.

I realized later when I was restored to common reality that I had heard virtually nothing the man said except when he assured us that he’s got our backs. But even the most eloquently crafted sentence could not have carried more power than the simple fact of his appearance in a room with 150 leaders of The Arc nation. The President of the United States made time for us.

I challenge every one of you/us to say . . . and to back it up with action, whether it’s a phone call, a volunteer hour, a check or spreading the gospel: We’ve got your back.

▶ Down Syndrome Day on the Hill
Will McMillan and Matthew Moore are students in Next Steps at Vanderbilt: Wednesday, March 21, was Down Syndrome Day in Tennessee. We both attended and got to speak about advocating for our rights to be a part of the community. We met Miss Tennessee and Governor Haslam and the State legislators. Our speech was about being in Next Steps and what we will be doing after graduating. We also talked about being a voting Tennessean and how government could help families and their kids. We were both a little nervous before we gave the speech. And we both felt brave and confident to talk about advocating.

▶ Disability Days on the Hill
Christine Sartain and her daughter Lake met their representatives at 2012 Disability Days on the Hill.

As Lake waved and yelled goodbye, her mom replied “I’m teaching her the self-advocacy skills, but the charm is all her own!” Sartain is a VKC CAC member and was the 2011-12 LEND Family Trainee. Each spring, disability advocates meet with their representatives at the Legislature to share their personal stories and to educate on disability issues. The VKC UCEED and The Arc Tennessee distribute Family Stories, collected by VU Special Education students through family interviews. Find Family Stories at kc.vanderbilt.edu, Resources. Hold the date: January 30, 2013; see www.tndisability.org.

▶ Sharing Research Expertise
Through the years, VKC- affiliated faculty have shared their expertise with policy makers so that state and national public policy can be evidence-based. Most recently, Erik Carter (Special Education) spoke at a Council for Exceptional Children briefing on Capitol Hill in Washington. He discussed how funding for education research has improved academic, behavioral, and lifelong outcomes for children with and without disabilities.

It’s Not Too Late...End the Wait!
The Arc Tennessee is hosting informational meetings across the state for family members of an individual on the Waiting List for DIDD Services. Meetings will include the status of the Wait List, ways families can advocate, and resources. For more information, contact cguiden@theartctn.org, (800) 835-7077 x14.

Next Steps and New Beginnings

Next Steps at Vanderbilt graduated its second class of students on April 25. Steven Greiner, Michael Heroux, and Rachel Pearson completed this 2-year certificate program for students with intellectual disabilities, which aims to improve academic, social, and independent living skills and to broaden career options.

In her commencement address, Sharon Shields, Ph.D., professor of the Practice of Human & Organizational Development and Dean of Professional Education, remarked that in her 35 years at Vanderbilt, participation in the Next Steps program has been a highlight of her career.

“I have been profoundly moved by these students,” Shields said. “You enrich our classrooms because you give us new perspectives, you bring us a joy and an enthusiasm for learning, you bring ideas, and you share from personal experiences. We know you will go on to do amazing things in life, to be agents of change, and to make a difference in this world. How do we know that will happen? Because you have been amazing agents of change right here at Vanderbilt, and you have made a difference for us all. We are here today to celebrate your completion of the Next Steps Program. But we also are here to celebrate the new beginnings that await you.”

With job locating and coaching assistance from Next Steps job developer Amy Gonzales, the graduates have indeed embarked upon their new beginnings. Greiner is doing data entry for Project Support and Include with Vanderbilt associate professor of Special Education Erik Carter. Heroux has been hired at Goodwill Industries, working 20 hours/week in the retail area sorting clothing and helping with shipments. Pearson is at The Gardner School, working as a teacher assistant in a preschool classroom. She also worked as the vocal warm-up coach for SENSE Theatre campers and received a surprise invitation to join the cast.

Gonzales says that the transferable skills the graduates gained through their internships and classes have been invaluable in helping them secure meaningful employment.

First UCEDD Long-Term Trainees Graduate

“It is with great pride and sadness that we congratulate and bid farewell to UCEDD long-term trainees Dr. Megan Griffin and Dr. Meghan Burke,” said Elise McMillan, VKC UCEDD co-director. “As our UCEDD’s first long-term trainees, they have exhibited great commitment to our Center’s mission and have shared their skillful knowledge and efforts, which have enabled so many of our programs to develop and grow. We wish them well in their future endeavors and look forward to watching their careers blossom.”

Griffin will join the Special Education faculty at the University of New Mexico. Her dissertation, Participation in Transition Planning Among High School Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, concluded that attendance in transition meetings was positively related to expressive communication, and was negatively related to parent involvement at school. Participation was positively related to self-advocacy ability; however, older students were less likely to participate actively, as were African-American students. Both student attendance and participation were positively related to the percentage of time students spent in general education and the frequency of discussions they have at home about transition.

Burke will begin a postdoctoral position at the University of Illinois-Chicago. Her dissertation, Correlates of Family-School Partnerships in Special Education, focused on a national dataset of 1,004 parents of students with disabilities. Respondents completed a 163-item, web-based questionnaire. Stronger family-school partnerships related to: increased satisfaction with services, frequent parent-school communication, and parents who were more extroverted.

Both Burke and Griffin received national awards in recognition of their contributions as trainees.

SGS Director Retires

Ruth Wolery, Ph.D., has stepped down as director of the Susan Gray School for Children (SGS), a position she has held since 2001. She will remain on the Special Education faculty until May 2013. She will be on sabbatical for much of 2012-13 in Abu Dhabi, where she and husband Mark Wolery, Ph.D., professor of Special Education, will be working with the special education component in two new demonstration schools.

“I take with me a strong sense of how critical a culture of community is in all we do,” said Wolery. “Being at the School has shown me how effective and productive we can be as a community when everyone is included and involved.”

Kiersten Kinder, Ph.D., has been named SGS interim associate director and is working closely with assistant director Michelle Wyatt to cover administrative and leadership responsibilities while a national search for a new director is under way.

Building Capacity

With the goal of laying the groundwork for creating more inclusive postsecondary education (PSE) programs for individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities, the 2012 Tennessee Postsecondary Education Alliance Capacity Building Institute (CBI) was held in Knoxville, April 30. Over 75 representatives from secondary education, institutes of higher education, and disability agencies attended.

A packed agenda included a presentation on the national landscape of the postsecondary education movement by Think College coordinator Cate Weir; updates from University of Tennessee FUTURE and Next Steps at Vanderbilt students and staff; and an overview of the North Carolina Postsecondary Education Alliance by Deborah Zafer and Donna Yerby, Carolina Institute for Developmental Disabilities, UNC-Chapel Hill. The CBI was co-sponsored by Think College Consortium, the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, and the University of Tennessee.
A Commitment to Inclusive Postsecondary Education: Carol Henderson

BY COURTNEY TAYLOR

Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC) Leadership Council member Carol Henderson has been a long-term supporter of inclusive education for students with disabilities. In 1996, she and her husband endowed the Britt Henderson Training Series for Educators in memory of their son Britt. The series provides training for school teams that focuses on innovative, evidence-based practices to improve the quality of education for students with disabilities.

This year, Henderson has given a significant 4-year financial gift to the Next Steps program at Vanderbilt, a 2-year certificate program for students with intellectual and other developmental disabilities. The program aims to provide students with a traditional college experience and to improve their employment options. Henderson was drawn to the program because she believes it would have been a great fit for her son.

“I first heard about Next Steps at a Leadership Council meeting,” Henderson said. “I can remember thinking ‘Oh, I wish this had been around when Britt was alive.’ Much of my interest in the area of education, and much of my motivation for giving in this regard, is grounded in what I think would have worked for Britt. Of course, I also love Vanderbilt. I am a very proud graduate and the very thought of Britt going to Vanderbilt and taking classes and being in college—I think it’s wonderful. I get chills just thinking about it.”

Henderson was eager to meet with Next Steps students and to get a glimpse of the program. Her visit increased her enthusiasm and affirmed her belief that students with disabilities need more options as they transition from secondary education.

“Britt was such a social and curious young man,” said Henderson. “I can’t imagine a life for him with no options. You know, a lot has changed since he was alive, and yet a lot remains the same. What are our children going to do, and what are we going to do to support them in their endeavors? These are the questions that we, as parents and as a community, need to be asking ourselves. What are we doing to ensure that our children have meaning in their day-to-day living? What are we doing to help them find out who they are and what they want for themselves in order to lead a good life? The Next Steps program, to me, seems to be one more step in this puzzle.”

“We’re enormously grateful to Carol and her family for this marvelous gift,” said Elise McMillan, J.D., VKC UCEDD co-director. “Their deep commitment to inclusive education has reached hundreds of students, teachers, and families through the Britt Henderson Series for Educators. Now this new gift is a cornerstone in continuing Next Steps past its initial funding through a grant from the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and the continuing philanthropy of Leadership Council member Linda Brooks. This gift is an instance of how family members who share our vision for a fulfilling future for individuals with disabilities make a critical difference in what is possible.”

Grants Awarded

Presynaptic Regulation of C. elegans Dopamine Transporter
Randy Blakely, Ph.D.
(Pharmacology)
National Institute of Mental Health

Genetic and Developmental Analyses of Fragile X Mental Retardation Protein*
Kendal Broadie, Ph.D.
(Biological Sciences)
National Institute of Mental Health

Mechanisms of Neurotrophin Signaling Through P75 Receptor*
Bruce Carter, Ph.D.
(Biochemistry)
National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke

Spectrum Disorders
Suzanne Goldman, Ph.D.
(Nursing)
Autism Speaks Foundation

Novel Transgenic Tools for Analysis of 5HT2C Receptor Expression and Function
Ronald Emerson, Ph.D.
(Pharmacology)
National Institute of Mental Health

Regulation of Neurogenesis in TSC by mTORC1 and mTORC2
Kevin Ess, Ph.D., M.D.
(Neurology)
National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke

Iron Treatment of Sleep Disorders in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder
Beth Malow, M.D., M.S.
(Neurology)
Health Resources and Services Administration

Ascorbic Acid Function and Metabolism*
James May, M.D. (Medicine)
National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases

Adaptive Interventions for Minimally Verbal Children with ASD in the Community
Connie Kasari, Ph.D. and Ann Kaiser, Ph.D.
(Special Education)
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

A Murine Sox10 Dominant Negative COIN Allele for Functional Gene Analysis
Michelle Southard-Smith, Ph.D. (Medicine)
National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke

Classical vs. Operant Conditioning: Differences in Mechanism and Circadian Regulation
Terry Page, Ph.D.
(Biological Sciences)
National Science Foundation

Toddler Interventions for ASD: Testing Effects of Intensity Levels and Delivery Style in a Randomized, Multisite Study
(SUBTRACT UC-Davis; Sally Rogers, Ph.D.; Paul Yoder, Ph.D. (Special Education)
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

Jeffrey Schall (Psychology), Thomas Palmeri & Gordon Logan (MPI)
National Eye Institute

*Competing renewals funded
My Story of Chance  BY JESSICA YOUNG

I am a single mother of two beautiful children. Jenna is my 7-year-old typical child and Chance is my 2-year-old with ASD, or autism spectrum disorder.

Chance was delayed in a lot of things. He didn’t cry a lot. He wasn’t interested in eating and he could not tolerate being strapped in his highchair. So now we eat standing up, and I change his diapers standing up. The desire to have tummy time, roll over, or to sit up, just wasn’t there. I thought “Wow. I have a good quiet baby.”

Chance was very slow in reaching age group milestones. Everyone told me ‘Ah, boys take longer, don’t worry.’ But I did. Deep down inside somehow, I knew something was off. It didn’t add up. Chance’s primary care provider shared a lot of my concerns.

I learned about TRIAD and found out that they were doing a study for Chance’s age group. The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center has helped me with a lot of resources on autism-related information and intervention programs. Recently I signed Chance up for a Useful Speech Study. We need more funding for programs like these.

On September 22, 2011, my son Chance Patrick was diagnosed with full autism on all 3 counts. Nonverbal, antisocial, and repetitive behavior. That is a day I will never forget. Now that we had a diagnosis, it was time to find treatment.

What does the word Chance mean to you? I’ve asked myself this question randomly throughout experiences in my life. Now I have an answer. By the Grace of God, I have another Chance. So in that sentence were both of the baby names I had picked out. Chance was the name given to him way before autism attached itself to my son. He was my second Chance to be a mother, and another Chance for me to start over.

TRIAD kept in touch with us. And we found out that a new study was out. The Early Start Denver Model (ESDM). It was a 12-week intervention program. The staff was excellent. They explained everything they were doing and kept me involved. Most of the study is play-based. Chance and a therapist were in one room, while I watched through a 2-way mirror. He picked it up quickly, and we started to see results. Chance has therapy 4 days a week, twice a day. I have formed my life around his therapy schedule.

After Chance’s diagnosis, I signed him up for feeding therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and applied behavior analysis. Anything I could find out there, we went for it. We went to workshops and learned about IEPs. I got into the autism community and joined a great moms group. I educated myself on autism and came to realize that this is in my life to stay. And I learned how not to let the label of autism rule me.

Chance’s ESDM teacher asked if I was interested in participating in a Parent Training Program. This program is showing me how to implement the Denver Model into Chance’s play.

Donna Eskind, Leadership Council chair, opened the evening’s program. Shirley Speyer, Hobbs Society chair, thanked members whose gifts support Hobbs Discovery Grants. Promising findings from these innovative “seed” grants help researchers obtain federal grants for larger studies. Jeff Balser, Vanderbilt Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs and Dean of the School of Medicine, thanked Hobbs Society members for their important role in supporting scientific discoveries.

Jessica Young, whose 2-year-old son Chance has been diagnosed with autism, shared how her son has benefitted from VKC programs (see “My Story of Chance”).

VKC director Elisabeth Dykens summarized the innovative research being undertaken by the 2012 Hobbs Discovery Grant recipients, who were introduced. She thanked the many Hobbs Society members who fund ground-breaking science that over time may lead to improvements in the quality of life for children and adults with disabilities and their families.
Leadership Council of Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

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Return Service Requested

Survey
TN Autism Service Needs and System
kc.vanderbilt.edu/AutismServicesSurvey

If you are a parent or guardian of a child with autism (ASD) and would like to take part in this survey, go to the link: https://kc.vanderbilt.edu/AutismServicesSurvey. Survey takes 25-30 minutes to complete. Responses are voluntary and anonymous.

This statewide survey is a project of TN Disability Coalition, TN Autism Summit Team, and the VKC. Findings will be used to develop a state plan to improve services and service coordination for children with ASD and related disabilities.

Questions? Email AutismServicesSurvey@vanderbilt.edu or Phone (615) 322-8240, (866) 936-8852

Find Us on Facebook
Find us on Facebook for frequent updates and discussions on news, events, and research going on at the Center. tinyurl.com/vkcfacebook

Giving
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Sign Up for Research News
Subscribe to Research News @ Vanderbilt to receive weekly coverage of the latest research from across Vanderbilt University and Medical Center.
Youth with autism designed and made Superhero costumes, thanks to VSA Tennessee and MTSU Human Sciences students. On exhibit at VKC through Aug. 31.

Please keep this calendar and check the Event Calendar on the VKC website for updates. If you wish to receive event announcements by email, send your email address to kc.vanderbilt.edu.

*Event will be held in Room 241 Vanderbilt Kennedy Center/One Magnolia Circle Bldg (110 Magnolia Circle).
Disability & Cultural Diversity Conference  
November 13, 2012

**DECEMBER 13**
Lectures on Development and Developmental Disabilities
Order and Disorder in the Developing Emotional Brain: Prospects for Cultivating Healthy Minds
Richard J. Davidson, Ph.D.
Professor of Psychology & Psychiatry, University of Wisconsin
Thursday 4:10 p.m.

**ARTS AND DISABILITIES EXHIBIT**
Superheroes
Super Hero Costumes designed by youth with autism in a fashion design course in the Human Sciences Department, Middle Tennessee State University, a project with VSA Tennessee
Monday-Friday 7:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
Lobby VKC/One Magnolia Circle
Info (615) 936-8852

**THROUGH AUGUST 31**
Creative Expressions XVIII
Jointly sponsored by the VKC and the Nashville Mayor’s Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities, this annual exhibit features work by artists with a wide range of abilities/disabilities and ages.

**AUTISM TRAININGS FOR K-12 SCHOOL PERSONNEL**
With the Tennessee Department of Education, TRIAD offers free autism-specific workshops for school personnel, parents, and the community in locations across the state. Dates/locations TBA; see kc.vanderbilt.edu/TRIAD/events.

**LEARNING ASSESSMENT CLINIC**
Multidisciplinary academic assessments of students, 5-25 years, to identify learning strengths and challenges and to recommend strategies to improve academic learning. Info (615) 936-5118 or patty.abernathy@vanderbilt.edu

**NEXT STEPS AT VANDERBILT**
A 2-year certification postsecondary education program for students with intellectual disabilities providing individualized Programs of Study in education, social skills, and vocational training. Info (615) 343-0822 or NextSteps@vanderbilt.edu

**READING CLINIC**
Assessment and tutoring for students through middle school
Info (615) 936-5118 or patty.abernathy@vanderbilt.edu

**TAKE PART IN RESEARCH**
VKC Research Studies
For children and adults, with and without disabilities
Lynnette Henderson (615) 936-0448
Toll-free (1-866) 936-VUKC [8852]
• Research Family Partners
  kc.vanderbilt.edu/rfp
  Register and be notified of research studies
• StudyFinder
  kc.vanderbilt.edu/studyfinder
  View lists of studies, criteria, and contact information
• See also VUMC Clinical Trials
  www.vanderbilthealth.com/clinicaltrials

**TENNESSEE DISABILITY PATHFINDER**
MULTICULTURAL OUTREACH
Helpline, Web-Searchable Database with Calendar and Resource Library, Print Resources
www.familypathfinder.org
English (615) 322-8529
Español (615) 479-9568
Toll-free (1-800) 640-INFO [4636]
tnpathfinder@vanderbilt.edu
Project of VKC UCEDD and TN Council on Developmental Disabilities

**ASMT EVENTS**
Autism Society of Middle Tennessee
ASMT members free; nonmembers $5/family. Registration is requested for all events. Info (615) 385-2077 or www.tnautism.org

**DSAMT EVENTS**
Down Syndrome Association of Middle Tennessee
Info (615) 386-9002 or www.dsamt.org.