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University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDDs) are committed to a world where individuals with disabilities are a part of their communities. As a University Center for Excellence, the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center provides the expertise and leadership to help make this a reality for Tennessee and our nation.

WHO WE ARE & WHO WE SERVE

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center works with and for people with developmental disabilities and family members, service providers and advocates, researchers and policy makers.

Our aim is to ensure that individuals and family members receive the services and supports they need—and that they take part in planning those services. Services and supports help persons with disabilities be as independent as possible, make their own life decisions, have meaningful work, and take part fully in community life.

A developmental disability is a condition that:
- is significant and ongoing,
- begins before age 22, and
- substantially limits functioning in daily activities of living.

Examples include autism, intellectual disabilities (e.g., Angelman, Down, fragile X, Prader-Willi, Williams syndromes), and sensory-related disabilities.

Working Through National Networks

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence is one of 67 centers in a national network. Tennessee is one of only a few states to have two UCEDDs. This network of centers has played key roles in every major national disability change in policies and practices over the past 45 years. UCEDDs work together to provide training, develop model services, conduct research, and disseminate information.

The Vanderbilt Kennedy is among a small number of centers in the nation to be a University Center for Excellence (UCEDD), a national Eunice Kennedy Shriver Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Center (IDDRC), and a Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) training program. We address autism through the Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD). As part of a major research university and medical center, the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center is in a strong position to provide training, service, research, and information to make lives better for people with disabilities.
WHAT WE DO

Training
Faculty and staff help train university students, practicing professionals and direct care providers, individuals with disabilities and family members, disability advocates and policymakers. Training is varied. It includes classes in degree programs, supervised clinical experiences, continuing education, conferences, workshops, and technical assistance. Training is done in close collaboration with the Vanderbilt LEND training program.

Service and Technical Assistance
Faculty and staff provide cutting-edge, evidence-based services and supports to address pressing needs of persons with disabilities. We focus on serving people in Tennessee and the Mid-South while creating model programs for national use. Some Center programs provide diagnosis and intervention for children and adults. Other programs offer information and technical assistance to educators or direct service providers. Programs are done in partnership with Vanderbilt and community and State agencies.

Research
Faculty and staff conduct research that aims to improve disability services and policies, and to identify causes of disabilities and novel ways to intervene and provide support for persons with disabilities and their families. We partner with our Community Advisory Council, State and community agencies, and families to identify pressing but under-studied topics. We also use existing large databases to identify research and policy issues.

Information and Dissemination
We share what we learn through research and model programs so that others can use this information. We produce brochures, booklets, videos, and web-based materials. We provide accessible information to persons with disabilities, families, trainees, professionals, direct service providers, advocates, and policy makers.

AREAS WE EMPHASIZE

Although the UCEDD addresses many issues affecting the lives of people with disabilities across the life span, we emphasize four areas.

Education and Early Education
We have innovative programs to promote learning and development in inclusive settings. Other programs focus on supporting persons and families at transition points across the life span. Model programs include:
- Britt Henderson Training Series for Educators
- Learning Assessment Clinic
- Reading Clinic
- SENSE Theatre for children with autism
- Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders—TRIAD Professional Development and Parent Training

Employment
Individuals with disabilities have high rates of unemployment and underemployment. We collaborate with State agencies, community agencies, disability advocacy organizations, and natural partners to promote community-based meaningful employment and volunteer work for youth and adults with disabilities. Programs and activities include:
- Next Steps at Vanderbilt, a 2-year postsecondary education certificate program
- Next Steps at Vanderbilt Summer Institute
- TennesseeWorks
- Tennessee Alliance for Postsecondary Education

Health and Mental Health
Many people with developmental disabilities face physical and mental health challenges. The Center sponsors or partners with clinics and other programs to address these challenges. Model programs include:
- Autism Diagnostic and Evaluation Services through Vanderbilt Center for Child Development and TRIAD-affiliated research studies
- Down Syndrome and Fragile X Clinics with Vanderbilt Center for Child Development
- Vanderbilt Autism Treatment Network (ATN) medical specialists

Quality of Life
Persons with disabilities and families do not need to face challenges alone. We provide model services to families, including those from culturally diverse groups, and from low-income or rural areas. We provide training and share these practices by involving college students and practicing professionals. Model programs include:
- Access Nashville
- ACM Lifting Lives Music Camp, a week-long residential camp for persons with Williams syndrome
- Arts Program
- Best Buddies
- Disabilities, Religion and Spirituality
- Family Outreach Center
- Multicultural Outreach (with Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities)
- Sibling Supports—SibSaturdays and Tennessee Adult Brothers and Sisters (TABS)
- Tennessee Allies in Self-Advocacy (TASA)
- Tennessee Disability Pathfinder (with Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities)
- TRIAD Families First Workshops
- Vanderbilt Autism Resource Line
- Volunteer Advocacy Project

COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL

Our programs are strengthened by the leadership of a Community Advisory Council. It is a full partner in planning, implementing, and evaluating activities. The chair and a majority of the members are self-advocates or family members. Representatives of Tennessee disability organizations also serve on the Council. You can directly share your interests and concerns by emailing vkcac@vanderbilt.edu.

TENNESSEE DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES NETWORK

The Center for Excellence works in partnership with the University of Tennessee Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities UCEDD and LEND, the Disability Law & Advocacy Center of Tennessee, and the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. We all are funded by the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.