

Learning Beyond the Clinic: Obtaining a Comprehensive Education on Developmental Disabilities in an Interprofessional Setting at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

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Project Overview

This educational project was undertaken as part of a developmental pediatrician's fellowship training at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center.

This project focuses on how collaboration on an initial project as part of the Special Olympics has opened other new learning opportunities that go outside of what is typically received during medical training to create a more comprehensive view of health.

Purpose

Initially, a collaboration with the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, Vanderbilt School of Public Health, and the Division of Developmental Medicine at Vanderbilt University Medical Center (VUMC) was created to provide an internship experience during a fellowship in developmental and behavioral pediatrics at VUMC.

The focus of this internship project was the Strong Minds Initiative within the Special Olympics, a pilot program aimed at promoting adaptive coping skills in athletes.

During the internship experience, this project evolved to include multiple other opportunities to learn about developmental disabilities at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center.



Structure



The Strong Minds Initiative, as part of the Tennessee Special Olympics, was started in 2018. The team consisted of various members from around the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center including psychology, law, advocacy, medicine, and social work.

The goal of this project is to create an interactive learning activity focused on promoting adaptive coping skills in athletes.

In order to achieve this goal, the project members undergo training to perform effective screenings for coping skills and mental health concerns as well as provide interventions and education per Special Olympics guidelines.

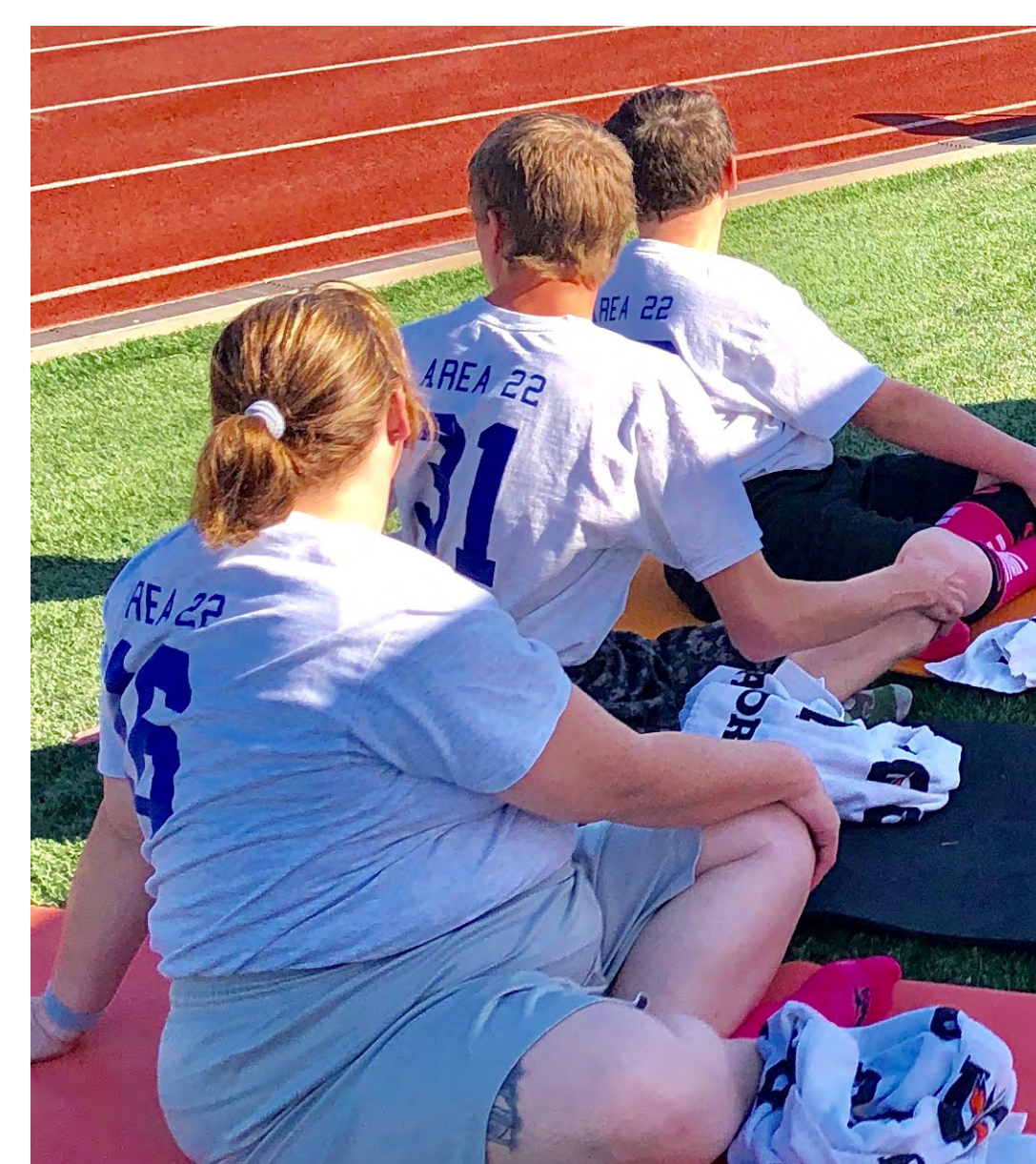
The group has also created mental health resource lists to give to athletes and caregivers with local resources in their area. [Pictured right]



Outcomes

The Strong Minds initiative is ongoing, but it was first implemented in Tennessee at the Tennessee Special Olympics Flag Football Games in October 2019.

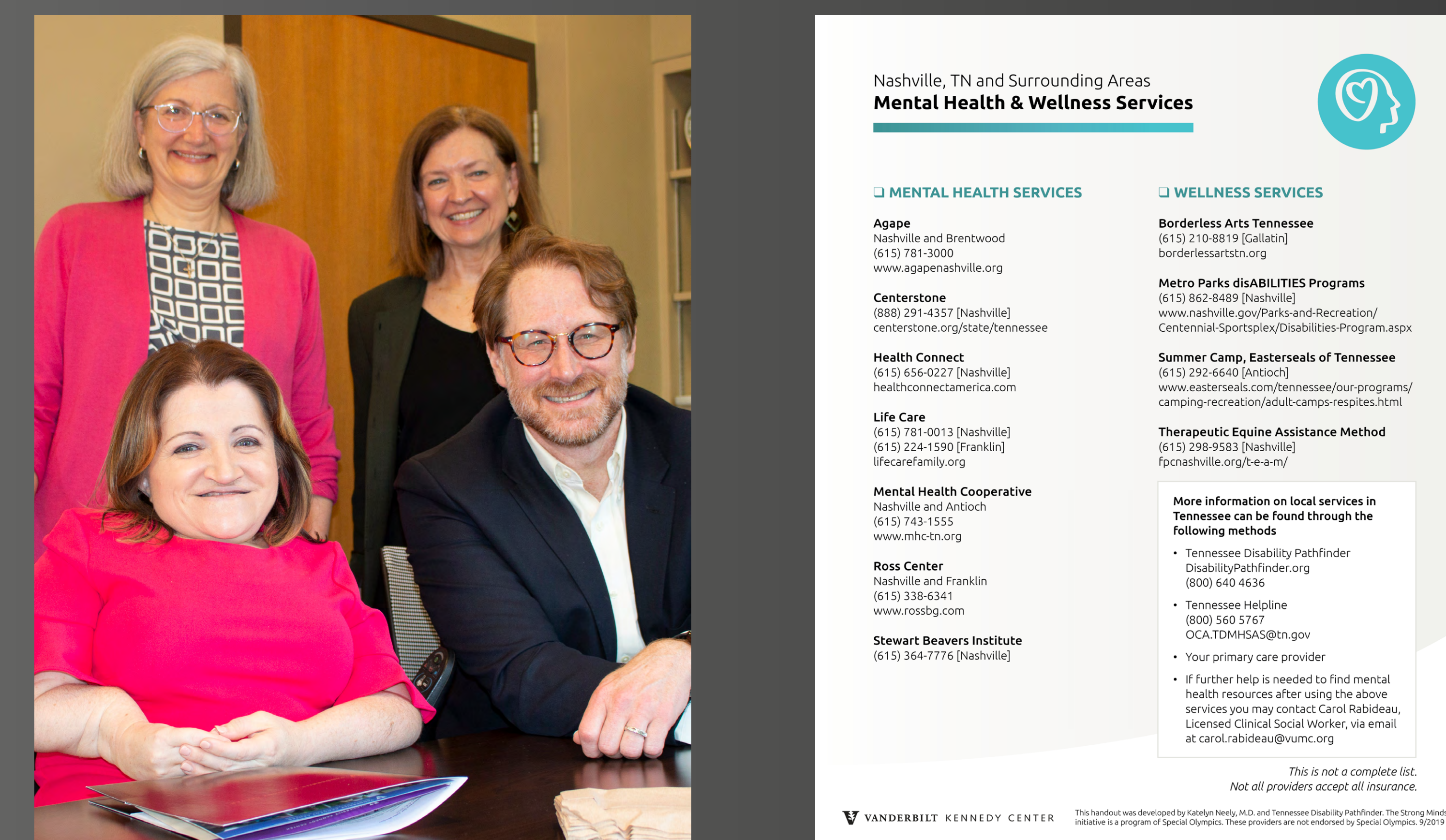
Athletes who participate in Strong Minds are able to identify areas of stress, learn adaptive techniques to help deal with this stress, and receive a copy of mental health resources close to their hometown.



This internship project has also created new relationships and strengthened prior relationships among multiple departments at Vanderbilt.

From the partnership on the Strong Minds Project, multiple other areas of collaboration were identified, including the opportunity to involve representation from developmental medicine in other projects as follows.

- Meetings with visiting federal officials from the Administration on Community Living at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center. [Pictured top right]
- Participation on an interprofessional panel discussion related to child development.
- Acting as medical counselor for the ACM Lifting Lives Music Camp, a week-long residential camp for individuals with William's Syndrome. [Pictured bottom left]



Conclusion

This project emphasizes the importance of understanding patients in the context of their environment and how that influences their access to healthcare, as well as their health outcomes.

This broader understanding of how patients function within their environment has implications for changing how developmental pediatricians see and treat their patients as it emphasizes the importance of community and family support and structure.

This project has shed light onto new career opportunities within developmental pediatrics, such as advocacy, teaching, and community involvement.