

SPECIAL NEEDS NETWORK AWARDED \$11 MILLION TO EXPAND C.O.R.E. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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A Unique Initiative with Top Experts to Drive Equity in Developmental Services

Los Angeles, CA – Special Needs Network (SNN) has been awarded an additional \$11 million from the California Department of Developmental Disabilities (DDS) to expand its groundbreaking C.O.R.E. (Centering Opportunities, Resources, and Equity in Early Intervention) program. This funding, administered by the Lanterman Regional Center, will allow SNN to strengthen its unique workforce development initiative that trains and places BIPOC clinicians in behavioral and allied health roles, addressing systemic inequities in California's healthcare workforce.

SNN President, Civil Rights Attorney, and Project Principal Areva Martin, Esq., together with SNN Advisory Board Member Dr. Arysha Vahabzadeh, M.D. (Psychiatrist and Autism Expert) and SNN Board Member Dr. Anshu Batra (Developmental Pediatrician), have developed a proprietary, multidisciplinary 100-hour training program. This rigorous program includes anti-bias and anti-racism training and is designed for individuals pursuing careers in early intervention and behavioral health. The program aims to build a more diverse, culturally competent workforce capable of providing sensitive early intervention therapy to children ages 0-5 and nonverbal adolescents.

“Special Needs Network has shown remarkable leadership and accountability in meeting the needs of California’s diverse communities,” said Melinda Sullivan, Executive Director of the Lanterman Regional Center. “With this additional funding, we’re taking meaningful steps to bridge the gaps in access to care by empowering practitioners who are not only trained but also deeply understand the cultural sensitivities of the communities they serve.”

C.O.R.E.: A Program Powered by Expertise and Purpose

The C.O.R.E. program brings together a distinguished team of experts to provide cutting-edge training in areas critical to early intervention and culturally competent care. The program's advisors and trainers include leading professionals in DEI, applied behavior analysis, occupational therapy, and developmental science, all committed to addressing disparities in service delivery for underserved communities.

The training is implemented by SNN staff and regional and national subject matter experts including:

- Dr. Shaun Harper – University Professor, Clifford and Betty Allen Chair in Urban Leadership, and Founder of the USC Race and Equity Center.
- Dr. Jonathan Tarbox, PhD, BCBA-D – Program Director for the Master of Science in Applied Behavior Analysis at USC, Director of Research at FirstSteps for Kids, and member of the ABA Taskforce to Eradicate Social Injustice.
- Dr. Omékongo Dibinga, CSP – Director of UPstander International, specializing in anti-racism and cultural competency.
- Dr. Michael D. Hannon and Dr. LaChan V. Hannon – Founders of the Greater Expectations Teaching and Advocacy Center, experts in mental health and DEI.
- Jenna Kobara, OTD, OTR/L, SWC – Assistant Professor at USC’s Chan Division of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, Community Behavioral Health Program at Children's Hospital Los Angeles.

Tuesday
November 5, 2024

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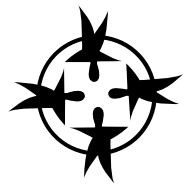
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- Dr. Natalie Niles, PT, DPT, PCS – Expert in pediatric physical therapy.
- Christine Turnbull, OTD, OTR/L, BCP – Assistant Professor at USC and specialist in motor and cognitive development at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles.

This team has developed a rigorous 100-hour training program, which includes DEI certification, professional coaching, and virtual and in-person learning modules, making C.O.R.E. a premier training initiative in the field.

Program Components and Expansion Goals

Key Components:

- **Specialized Curriculum on Bias and Anti-Blackness:** Developed with Dr. Harper, the curriculum addresses implicit bias and structural racism, equipping fellows to bring DEI practices into developmental services.
- **Increase Awareness:** Raise awareness in BIPOC communities of career opportunities in behavioral health, speech and language therapy, assistive technology, early intervention therapeutics, and related fields. Emphasize pathways for professional growth and support through certifications, job placement assistance, and mentorship programs, aiming to diversify and strengthen the workforce in these critical areas.
- **DEI Certification and Specialized Training:** Provided through the USC Race and Equity Center, the DEI certification deepens fellows’ understanding of cultural competency and equity. The training also includes DEI training and university-based certification, early intervention therapeutics, speech and language therapy with a focus on assistive technology, professional coaching, job placement assistance, and both virtual and in-person learning modules.
- **Job Placement and Mentorship:** Fellows complete a year of employment with partner agencies in roles such as early intervention specialists, speech-language pathologists, and occupational therapists, supported by ongoing career mentorship.

Expansion to New Regions: The program will extend into Orange County, Riverside, and underserved areas like Bakersfield, establishing C.O.R.E. as a critical resource across California for culturally sensitive therapeutic services.

Impact and Future Vision

SNN’s initial \$7 million investment has already led to significant outcomes, including the training of over 300 fellows and placement of 200+ graduates in meaningful healthcare roles. With this new funding, C.O.R.E. will continue to grow, positioning SNN as a trusted leader capable of managing large-scale, high-impact programs with measurable results.

"Our successful track record with the C.O.R.E. program demonstrates that Special Needs Network is capable of administering large-scale, state-funded initiatives that deliver real, measurable outcomes," said Areva Martin, Founder and President of Special Needs Network. "This new investment allows us to build on our achievements, empowering even more professionals to serve their communities while reducing the financial burden of education."

The C.O.R.E. program exemplifies SNN’s commitment to addressing healthcare inequities by fostering a diverse workforce that reflects California’s communities. This funding from DDS ensures that the program will continue to address urgent needs in healthcare while setting a high standard for cultural competency and equitable care.

Special Needs Network, Inc. (SNN) is a nonprofit grassroots organization responding to the crisis of autism and other developmental disabilities in underserved communities. We recognize the intersectionality of individuals with disabilities and that their fight for disability rights is inextricably tied to the fight for racial justice and the civil rights of all people.