



**Talia Lomax-O'dneal,
Director of Finance
Metro Nashville Government**

Request for Direct Appropriations for FY2020

Ms. Lomax-O'dneal,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you last year regarding our Safe Families for Children program. You were very welcoming and asked excellent questions. Thank you for your consideration of our new proposal to reduce poverty and homelessness in Davidson County through career planning with underemployed adults.

1. What services does your organization provide to the residents of Davidson County?

Bethany Christian Services is a 501c3 nonprofit organization that implements the nationally-recognized Safe Families for Children (SFFC) program to serve families facing short-term crisis. The SFFC program is designed to prevent child abuse and neglect by providing parents who are overwhelmed and resource-limited with a safe, temporary place for their children to stay. SFFC develops an extensive volunteer social support network that follows the Strengthening Families Approach to strengthen families, provide opportunities for optimal child development and reduce child abuse and neglect. The program is voluntary and collaborative. The SFFC program recruits, screens, trains and monitors volunteer families from within the community according to strict program requirements. Trained volunteers open their homes to children from at-risk families for an average of 45 days, and are trained to become involved with parents as they work together toward reunification. The program also provides education and assistance to parents, helping them navigate through the healing process to secure the greatest chance of success once their family is reunited through the co-parenting relationships. According to SFFC statistics, over 90% of the children and parents receiving assistance through the program reunite, often in the most stable environments they have ever known. Key components are: 1) biological parents maintain full custody of their children; 2) volunteer host families, coaches and mentors are extensively screened and supported; 3) children are monitored while in the home; 4) there are close working relationships between SFFC, local churches and referring organizations to allow for maximum collective impact.

The Need:

More than 95% of the families who seek assistance through Safe Families for Children are single parents falling well below the state and federal poverty line. In 2018, 54 Davidson County children were hosted and reunited with their biological parents. The most frequent needs that we encounter with families living in poverty is unemployment or underemployment. When a single parent is unable to generate enough income to sufficiently cover her monthly expenses, she may begin to transition from home to home with her children. This transitioning can be traumatic on the children and creates increased stress levels for the biological parent.

More than half of the students in Davidson County currently receive free or reduced lunch. In 2017, there were 32,290 or 22.5% of children in Davidson County were living in poverty. (Source: Annie Casey Foundation).

The Solution:

Through Project Discovery, Bethany can create lasting change in under-resourced families by providing career planning and testing for parents who may be lacking the capacity of resources to seek out guidance to develop a career plan. The root of multigenerational poverty can be broken when underemployed caregivers discover their natural aptitudes, develop a career plan, and pursue necessary certification and education to provide a better future for their families.

2. How many residents are you currently serving and how do they benefit?

Over the past 3 years, Bethany provided services to 276 adults living in poverty in Davidson County. Clients receive concrete assistance with monthly expenses, parent coaching, support groups, assistance with child care, and personalized counseling. Many of these adult clients are either unemployed or underemployed. They need career development services, but often face the barriers of limited time and child care needs. Metro Nashville can partner with Bethany to provide much needed professional career development services to these underserved adults to transform the future of children living in poverty.

3. How much funding are you requesting from Metro?

\$18,000

4. If funding is awarded, how many additional residents will be served and how will they benefit?

If funding is awarded in the amount requested, there will be 50 unemployed or underemployed parents who receive aptitude testing, career coaching, and employment preparation. These adults will receive objective analysis of their natural abilities, be assigned a career coach through collaboration within the community, interview and resume preparation. The aim of Project Discovery is to transform generational poverty by empowering caregivers to successfully develop and execute a career plan. There are two primary barriers to underemployed caregivers seeking out career planning services:

1. Static location
2. Child care

Career planning services that require caregivers to meet at a static location without providing transportation or flexibility to meet the caregivers in more convenient locations can be overcome with partnerships with career coaches throughout the community. The other barrier is child care. When a parent feels as if the responsibilities at home outweigh the need to pursue a better paying career, the pursuit of new career options becomes unrealistic. If that same parent knew that their child(ren) could be cared for in a Safe Families for Children home, they will be more likely to renew the pursuit of a better paying employment opportunity. Project Discovery eliminates these barriers by providing flexible meeting locations for career coaching and child care opportunities through Safe Families for Children.

5. In addition to serving more residents, are there other community benefits Metro funding would help you achieve?

There are several additional benefits to the Metro Nashville community that can be achieved through growth of the Safe Families for Children program:

1. **Building Stronger Community Partnerships:** The Safe Families for Children program relies on partnerships with other non-profit services to help placing parents achieve housing, employment, and treatment goals. In the Project Discovery proposal, new partnerships would be forged with local career coaches such as PaNASH, Crossroads Consulting, and Thrive Consulting.
2. **Transforming multigenerational poverty cycles:** Since more than 50% of students in MNPS schools are living below the federal poverty level, the way for Metro Davidson Government can help break the multigenerational cycle of poverty is to increase opportunities for the caregivers to earn better pay and develop a professional career track. Project Discovery provides such an opportunity to occur through a collaborative of public, private, and non-profit entities to serve families with fewer resources at their disposal.

3. Expand the reach of Safe Families for Children: Safe Families for Children is an innovative prevention model of care to keep families together during times of crisis. The long term economic and social toll of childhood trauma is increasing every year. Many caregivers feel a tension between caring for their children and seeking better employment opportunities. This tension often prevents the caregiver from seeking out help for employment. There is a need for innovative programs like SFFC to prevent long term separation of families and provide new opportunities for caregivers to develop stability. Through this partnership, under-resourced families will receive child care assistance while receiving career coaching, job interviewing, and testing.

6. How would you use this funding to help create a more equitable Nashville, where all residents have an opportunity to participate in the city's success?

Project Discovery is designed to provide professional career coaching and planning for 50 underemployed caregivers of children in Davidson County. The participants in this program will meet the federal poverty guidelines and ultimately receive services they could not participate in prior to Project Discovery. The program will provide flexible meeting locations, professional career coaching, and aptitude testing with certified professionals. These services often could not be afforded to the caregivers of children living poverty. One of the benefits of Project Discovery will be that the multigenerational poverty cycle will be broken through empowerment of both the caregiver and the child(ren) involved. The caregiver will be empowered to pursue career development opportunities that have fallen by the wayside while the children will receive safety and security in a family setting through Safe Families for children.

Thank you for your consideration of the career success program in conjunction with Safe Families for Children to reduce the barriers preventing underemployed caregivers from receiving career planning services.

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