

Project SHIELD: Supporting Healthy Infant Early Learning and Development: Kent State University’s School of Information (KSU iSchool) and KSU’s College of Nursing are applying for a 1-year NLG Community Catalysts Planning Grant of \$98,808 to take place from 8/2021 to 7/2022. The purpose is to conduct a pilot study to explore how public library practitioners can partner with community health practitioners (CHP)¹ to support families of children, 0-2 years, in early brain development, learning, and health.

Statement of Need: Early learning opportunities for young children have been widely acknowledged as crucial for academic success and lifelong learning¹, but while many early learning efforts focus on the preschool years, brain research has demonstrated that the first three years are the period with the greatest brain development² and are a critical time for building nurturing parent-child relationships and supporting healthy brain development.³ Due to the lack of widespread systems that address early childhood learning and health, knowledge and health inequalities for young children have become persistent in underserved communities.⁴ In addition, given that in the U.S. 23% of children under three live in poverty, 45% live with low-income families, and almost 50% of the low-income families and 60% of families in poverty are led by parents/caregivers with only a high school degree or less⁵; it is likely that these gaps will continue to persist. To address these disparities in early learning, development, and health; scholars in early learning and health stress the importance of increasing the capacity of parents/caregivers in underserved communities to support early brain development, learning and health for their young children from day one.⁶ Given that libraries are well-equipped to support early learning and family engagement, they could play a role in addressing these disparities in early learning, development, and health in a more systematic way by partnering with CHPs across the nation to reach and support families in underserved communities. However, before exploring a replicable model, effective practices, and recommendations for a large-scale implementation of these partnerships, more information is needed about 1) how libraries are currently partnering with CHPs to support families with young children; 2) what these families feel they need in terms of support; and 3) how libraries and CHPs feel they can effectively collaborate to help meet these needs.

Project: To provide this information, the project consists of two phases in which the following overarching research question and sub-questions will be addressed: *‘How can library practitioners partner with CHPs to support families with children, ages 0-2 yrs, in underserved communities with early brain development, learning, and health?’* **RQ1:** How are libraries currently supporting families of children, 0-2 yrs, with early brain development, learning, and health? How, if at all, do CHPs fit into these efforts? **RQ2:** What barriers and challenges do families in underserved communities face in being able to support early brain development, learning, and health during the first two years of their child’s lives? **RQ3:** How, if at all, can library/CHP collaborations be designed to overcome these barriers and support these families?

Phase	Activity	Participants	Purpose	Dates
1	Surveys, interviews, & focus groups	*Library practitioners and CHPs nationwide that work with children, 0-2 years, and their families. *Families with children, 0-2 years, from underserved groups in Ohio.	To provide a comprehensive understanding of 1) how library practitioners are working with CHPs to support families with children ages 0-2 yrs in underserved communities and 2) these families’ needs	August 2021 – March 2022

In Phase 1, online surveys will be administered through national listservs to library practitioners and CHPs nationwide who are working with families with children, 0-2 yrs, to provide a broad understanding of how they are supporting families’ needs around early brain development, learning, and health during the first two years of their children’s lives. Following the surveys, the research team will conduct virtual interviews with library practitioners and CHPs nationwide to gain a deeper understanding of the data that emerges in the survey around how they are reaching and serving these families and their perceptions of the barriers and challenges these

¹ For this proposal, we use ‘community health practitioner’ to refer to healthcare professionals who work closely with different groups in their community, including nurses and community health workers.

families face. To understand the needs of the families and the barriers and challenges that they face, we will also conduct several focus groups with families of young children, 0-2 yrs, from underserved communities that represent both racial and socioeconomic diversity. Participants for these focus groups will be recruited through community organizations where these families already spend time, such as [Birthing Beautiful Communities](#), [Centering Prenatal and Postpartum Education Program](#), [Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority](#), and more. To encourage participation, incentives will be provided for the interview and focus group participants.

Phase	Activity	Participants	Purpose	Dates
2	2 Participatory design workshops	40 Ohio-based library practitioners and CHPs that are working with children, 0-2 yrs, and their families.	To bring together library practitioners and CHPs to design ways that they can work together to support families with children, 0-2 yrs, in underserved communities.	April – May 2022

Phase 2 consists of two half-day participatory design workshops for 40 Ohio-based library practitioners and CHPs (20 in each workshop) to allow them to brainstorm and design ways to partner effectively to support families of young children in underserved communities with early brain development, learning, and health. We will recruit library practitioners and CHPs from the Phase 1 participants, along with contacting others identified as engaged in innovative efforts in this area. We will be intentional about recruiting a diverse mixture of participants, including those from diverse backgrounds; from urban, suburban, and rural areas; and who work with underserved populations. Incentives and travel will be provided to encourage participation.

Project Outcomes: This planning grant will lead to a plan for a larger grant focused on establishing a replicable model, effective practices, and recommendations for library/CHP partnerships that support families with children, ages 0-2 yrs, in underserved communities. However, this project will also provide insight into 1) how libraries currently support families with children 0-2 yrs and how CHPs fit in, and 2) the barriers, challenges, and needs families in underserved groups experience with early brain development, learning, and health.

Impact: Our project will cement the role that libraries can play with early learning from day one, especially when brain development is most active. This project will also provide insight into how public libraries can continue to grow as catalysts in their community by expanding their community partnerships to include CHPs to reach and serve families with children, 0-2 yrs, in underserved communities.

Relevance to community catalysts: By exploring how library/CHP partnerships can support early brain development, learning, and health for families with children, 0-2 yrs, in underserved communities, this project will *enhance methods for collaboration between libraries and stakeholders to address community needs* and allow library practitioners and CHPs to work together to *develop and implement programs, services, and partnership models focused on enhancing opportunities and well-being in communities*, ultimately revealing *how libraries can create, develop, implement, and sustain collective impact approaches in communities*.

Plan for diversity: We are committed to recruiting library staff, CHPs, and families from a variety of underserved communities to participate in this initial research and help ensure that a plan for a future grant uses an authentic, strengths-based approach to provide support for families from underserved communities and their young children that is meaningful and relevant for their needs, experiences, and daily lives.

Personnel: **Dr. Kathleen Campana**, *PI*, Assistant Professor, KSU’s iSchool; **Elaine Thomas**, *Co-PI*, MSN, RN, CNE, Senior Lecturer, KSU’s College of Nursing; and **Michelle Baldini**, *Co-PI*, MLS, Director, Reinberger Children’s Library Center, KSU’s iSchool. An **advisory board** will also offer guidance.

Budget: Total costs \$98,808; Direct costs \$72,401; Indirect costs \$26,407; Salaries & Benefits \$35,557; Student Tuition \$12,119; Participant Costs (Meals & Travel) \$9,500; Research Team Travel \$3,500; Services \$3,225; Subject Payments \$7,500; Supplies \$1,000. Indirect Cost rate of 52% is calculated on Base of \$50,782 with Participant Costs and Student Tuition excluded.

References: <https://bit.ly/2H7kE0B>