

**About OCS.** For over 100 years, the Olmsted Center for Sight (OCS) has been helping blind and visually impaired individuals achieve their highest level of independence. Through its multitude of programs, OCS is dedicated to helping sight-impaired individuals living in Western New York lead fulfilling, prosperous lives despite their vision loss.

OCS offers essential programs and services for individuals who are blind and visually impaired from infants to senior citizens, each with the mission of helping the visually-impaired live fully in a sighted world. OCS' Early Education Program (EEP) provides pre-school services that give children and their parents the confidence and skills necessary to be academically and socially successful in mainstreamed 1st grade. EEP also acts as a support system for parents with sight-impaired children, providing them with a network of families all sharing the experience of raising a disabled child.

OCS provides adolescents the opportunity to learn the life and social skills required to live independently by participating in a 6 week overnight program in a college dormitory. Through this program, young adults explore career options via work-experience internships, learn to safely navigate public transportation, and gain confidence in their independent living skills. For many this is the first time away from home, and the first time interacting with other adolescents who are blind.

Through the National Statler Center, OCS' career training program for individuals that are blind, visually impaired, or physically disabled, OCS helps disabled individuals--both locally and from across the country-- become financially self-reliant by offering comprehensive job training in telecommunications, hospitality, and general business fundamentals. Through this training, these individuals are able to find long-lasting, rewarding careers that empower them to live autonomously and experience meaningful career success.

OCS takes great pride as an employer of 41 individuals that are blind or visually impaired. Through the Olmsted Contact Center (a state-of-the-art telecommunications center providing customer service to inbound callers) and the agency's manufacturing division, OCS helps sight-impaired individuals overcome one of the most paramount barriers to independence: the inability to find a job due to the complications associated with their disability. Through employment, these individuals are able to provide for themselves and their families, and ultimately lead more fulfilling lives.

In addition to the programs mentioned above, OCS is the provider of the 211WNY Health & Human Services Helpline for the eight counties of western New York, operates the switchboard services for the Veterans Hospitals in Buffalo, New York and Erie, Pennsylvania, and offers Orientation & Mobility training and other blind rehabilitation services. Through its many programs and services, as well as the tireless work of committed staff members, OCS demonstrates to clients that--despite their vision loss--there is nothing they can't do.

***Project Description.*** "Provisions for Blind and Visually Impaired Children" is a project designed to provide much-needed educational materials, classroom furniture, and other essential childcare provisions to Olmsted Center for Sight's (OCS) Early Education Program (EEP). These items are necessary for the day-to-day functioning and operation of the EEP. Items listed on the attached budget allow the program to provide a safe and comfortable environment for children who are blind, visually impaired,

and physically disabled, and are needed in order for the EEP to adhere to guidelines and safety regulations put in place by the New York State Departments of Education and Health. Without access to these materials, EEP will no longer be able to effectively accommodate the children that attend the program (both impaired and unimpaired), compelling EEP to cease providing childcare and early education services to families of Buffalo and the surrounding area.

A central benefit of the EEP is its status as an *inclusion program*, or a program having the ability to accommodate both impaired and unimpaired children within the same facility. The facility is equipped to cater to the needs of the children that are blind, visually impaired, and physically disabled by providing adapted rooms for physical therapy and motor skill development. EEP also offers traditional classrooms and infant care areas for the learning and supervision of unimpaired children. The ability to cater to the needs of both impaired and unimpaired children is unique to the EEP and allows siblings with different care and observational needs to attend the same program, a tremendous benefit to both siblings and parents. Without this program in the Buffalo community, siblings will be forced to attend different daycares and preschool programs, placing extreme financial and emotional strain on the families served by the agency.

The need for “Cribs and Provisions for Blind and Visually Impaired Children” arose from an immediate and unforeseen separation with a long-time childcare service partner, who operated the traditional childcare program and provided the bulk of child and infant care provisions (cribs, bassinets, changing stations, etc.) as part of their service agreement. As this major organizational change wasn’t anticipated, OCS currently has no resources available to allocate for the purchase of these necessary items, which are required for the program’s safe and legal operation. Funds generously granted by The Children’s Guild Foundation will prevent the displacement of the existing children and allow for the continued success of the EEP.

The EEP is aligned with the Children’s Guild Foundation’s stated mission of being “a catalyst of demonstrable change for children with special needs and their families by funding opportunities that will allow them to achieve their highest potential.” In order for a disabled child to reach their full potential, they must receive a level of care that is commensurate with their special needs, physical limitations, and particular level of cognitive and emotional development. Staff of the EEP are able to offer this level of attention through their experience teaching and care for children with impairments. The EEP facility is also equipped to cater to infants and toddlers with heightened needs, helping them develop in an environment that is comfortable and unobtrusive to their growth. By providing an atmosphere tailored to the needs of both impaired and unimpaired children, the EEP program helps them achieve their highest potential.

The target population for this program is families within the Buffalo area that rely on an affordable childcare and preschool that can provide services to children with a broad range of supervision, education, and adaptive care needs. Students most affected by the program’s material needs are those from birth to three years of age. Upon receipt of funds from the Children’s Guild Foundation, OCS will immediately purchase the necessary equipment needed to continue offering services to children

attending the EEP program. Equipment to be purchased with funds from the Children's Guild Foundation is non-adaptive, consumer-grade, can be purchased at any major retailer and can be used by any child of the EEP.

**Your history, mission and geographic focus\***

Founded in 1907, the Olmsted Center for Sight's (OCS) is a 501(c) (3) community-based organization that provides traditional blind rehabilitation and ancillary vision-related services to sight-impaired individuals of all ages who reside within the eight-county region of Western New York. OCS' mission is to help individuals who are blind and visually impaired reach their highest levels of independence. Services also include an inclusionary early childhood education program; summer youth employment and youth development programs; low vision and senior vision services; independent housing; community education, screening and service events; operation of the region's only comprehensive 2-1-1 Health and Human Services Information and Referral Helpline; and permanent full and part-time employment in OCS' Manufacturing Division and fully operational Contact Center.

OCS addresses the vision-related and ancillary health and human service needs of blind and visually-impaired individuals of all ages who reside in Orleans, Niagara, Erie, Allegany, Genesee, Wyoming, Cattaraugus and Chautauqua counties. Through its National Statler Center for Careers in Hospitality Service, the agency also serves blind and/or otherwise disabled working-age adults both nationally and internationally. Most individuals served are unemployed, live at or near the poverty level, receive supplemental social security or disability benefits, and/or are elderly individuals whose incomes are fixed. All persons in need of vision rehabilitation and/or specialized vision-related services receive them regardless of age, race, gender, socioeconomic status, religious preference or sexual orientation.

The Early Education Program (EEP) located in Amherst, NY, a program of OCS and a school that operates under the requirements of the NYS Department of Education, serves approximately 40 children each year who have visual impairments and/or other physical disabilities and their families by providing a wide range of orientation and mobility training, occupational and physical therapy services, and speech and language therapy, both on-site and in the community, to children age birth through five years. Children come to the EEP from all over the Buffalo area, including Amherst, Orchard Park, Tonawanda, Williamsville, East Aurora, and Lockport, among others.

**Goals of the proposed work\* Immediate and long term (2,500 character limit)**

The most urgent goal of the program is to maintain the EEP's capacity to serve its current population by purchasing the necessary equipment for the safe and comfortable care of children in the program. If funds are granted by the Children's Guild Foundation, this will be fulfilled immediately. Vendors for material acquisition have already been identified by program staff.

"Cribs and Provisions for Blind and Visually Impaired Children" also has an immediate goal of adhering to code and safety regulations for daycare, infant care, and preschool programs put in place by the New York State departments of Education and Health. State regulatory bodies mandate that infants and children attending childcare facilities are equipped with a sufficient number of cribs, basinets, mattresses, and diaper changing stations. In addition, if the facility also serves as an early education

center, the NYS Department of Education has strict guidelines on what materials need to be on hand, and how many. Objects such as blocks, Fisher Price and Little Einstein educational toys, and materials to aid in educational development must be readily accessible for use by children and implemented into daily lesson plans. These regulatory measures are more strenuous when the program also caters to blind, visually impaired, and physically disabled children; in addition to the aforementioned materials for childcare and education, premises must be equipped to aid in the physical, cognitive, tactile, and sensory development of infants-3<sup>rd</sup> grade children.

The primary long-term goal of the program is to continue offering services to Buffalo-area families that cater to the needs of both impaired and unimpaired children within the same facility. The EEP's status as an inclusion program is of paramount significance to the mission of the program, as well as to the mission of the OCS. The EEP allows impaired children to develop, learn, and grow alongside unimpaired children, so that children with visual or physical disabilities receive quality care and an equal level of education to that of their non-disabled peers. Although, not exclusively a program for children with visual impairment, the EEP staff have a differentiated level of skill and expertise in serving this specialty population, providing families in the region with this valuable alternative. Additionally, the program eases the financial burden for families with both impaired and unimpaired children, allowing both to be cared at the same site.

**Implementation plan to achieve the goals\* (1,500 character limit)**

Most of the preliminary work for successful program implementation has already been fulfilled by staff of the EEP. Staff members have done an exhaustive inventory of all necessary items needed to be purchased in order to maintain the program's adherence to NYS Health and Educational regulations, as well as an inventory of what is needed in order to maintain the facility's capacity to accommodate the rostered number of program attendees. A full account of these items, along with their respective costs, can be found on the attached Program Budget spreadsheet. Upon receipt of funds generously granted by the Children's Guild Foundation, EEP staff will purchase all needed materials, which will be immediately added to the facility and introduced into daily classroom instruction.

The addition of these materials and subsequent adherence to regulatory requirements and capacity needs will be communicated to NYS departments of Education and Health, in an effort to ensure that the EEP will continue successful operation, thus satisfying the program's long-term goal of offering a program for Buffalo-area families that caters to the needs of both impaired and unimpaired children within the same facility.

**Impact on the population involved\* (2,500 character limit)**

The successful implementation of "Cribs and Provisions for Blind and Visually Impaired Children" will result in the necessary capacity expansion needed to accommodate the current roster of EEP attendants slotted to begin in September of 2016. Additionally, the acquisition of cribs and provisions will ensure that EEP maintains its adherence to safety code regulations put in place by the New York State Department of Health and Safety. Capacity expansion and adherence to safety regulation will allow for the continued operation and success of the EEP.

These necessary material additions will be particularly impactful for children attending the EEP. In order for the program to function properly as an institution of childcare and early learning, children must feel comfortable and safe in their daily environment, and program staff must feel confident in their ability to educate, care for, and attend to children and students in a manner that ensures that level of comfort and safety. When necessary provisions are limited and in short supply, program staff feel the strain of guaranteeing adequate care and attention without the necessary tools to do so. Cribs, bassinets, and materials for physical and cognitive development are all critical components aiding in the safe and comfortable environment of EEP.

The ability of EEP to acquire necessary provisions and materials to maintain capacity and adhere to regulatory codes is also impactful to program attendees by maintaining EEP's status as an inclusion program, or a program that accommodates impaired and unimpaired children together. As the EEP is one of the only programs in the Buffalo area that maintains this status, many families containing both disabled and high-functioning children rely on the agency to provide all of their child care needs, eliminating the obligation of parents and caretakers to enroll children in multiple programs. This eases the financial burden of childcare for parents and guardians, and allows children to attend daycare and pre-k with other members of their family.

**Partners in the community \* List partners in the community that are also working on the same issues, and how you are coordinating your efforts with them**

The EEP is only one of a few childcare and early education programs in the Buffalo area with an inclusionary status, and of those programs the EEP is the only one with a specialization and differentiated level of skill in caring for children who are blind or visually impaired.. As such, the efforts of the EEP aren't being duplicated by any other childcare provider in the community.

The EEP receives program funding from the Children's Foundation of Erie County, the James H. Cummings Foundation, and the Kelly for Kids Foundation. All these organizations share EEP's mission of providing opportunity, rehabilitation, education, and/or therapeutic healthcare for children; specifically, children with special needs and visual impairment.

**Describe your plans for sustaining the program after the grant funds are depleted. \* (10,000 character limit)**

The materials and provisions to be purchased with funds provided by The Children's Guild Foundation are one-time purchases, are exceptionally durable, and will be used for the duration of their life. In anticipation of eventual damage, wear-and-tear, or operational cessation, OCS will allocate funds in the EEP budget to address unanticipated material replacement, upgrade, and upkeep.

OCS regularly researches potential funding sources and new areas of operational support for the EEP, in an effort to guarantee the program's future health and operational capacity. During the year to date, OCS has successfully received over \$10,000 of foundation support, with an additional \$11,000 of grant support still under review. OCS intends to continue this practice for the life of the program, to ensure that all program costs and material needs are addressed.

**Funding sources and amounts applied for, received or committed\***

**Criteria and procedures\*Criteria and procedures that will be used to evaluate the proposed work; how will you know this project succeeded at the end of this grant? List at least three goals [measurable if applicable] for the project (1,200 characters)**

Goal#1: Maintain the EEP's capacity to serve its current specialty population. Success of this goal will be measured by enrollment and whether all children currently enrolled in EEP beginning in September of 2016 are still accommodated. EEP staff will compare enrollment before-and-after the implementation of provisions to verify that all original enrollees have been accommodated.

Goal #2: Adhere to code and safety regulations for childcare, infant care, and preschool programs put in place by the New York State Departments of Education and Health. The EEP facility is regularly inspected by NYS officials, to ensure that all regulatory measures are being adhered to. The implementation of provisions and materials will ensure that no codes are violated and that EEP successfully passes all relevant inspections, indicating that the project was successful.

Goal #3: Continue offering a program for Buffalo-area families that caters to the needs of both impaired and unimpaired children within the same facility. If the EEP successfully implements new materials and needed provisions, the EEP will continue to offer inclusionary childcare and early education services to Buffalo-area families.

**Recognition/publicity/naming opportunities that will be given to the Foundation\***

If OCS is chosen to receive dollars from The Children's Guild Foundation, the Foundation will be recognized in all agency publications and materials where foundation support is regularly listed. These include the OCS newsletter (both internal and external), the OCS website, agency communications to foundations and state/local government entities, and regular communications between the EEP and parents/guardians of program attendees.

**Funding from other funders:\***

No other foundations or funders have been approached for dollars in support of this project.