

## **Community Partner Nomination**

### **1. Best Buddies Kentucky (BBKY) and University of Louisville Partnership**

BBKY is dedicated to providing social inclusion opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) like autism or Down syndrome. Through a partnership with Uof L since 2009, BBKY matches college students in one-to-one friendships with adults with IDD. During the 2010-11 school year, the Uof L Best Buddies Chapter had 29 matched friendships and 75 program participants. Although the one-to-one aspect of the program is key, all the “buddies” get together as a chapter for group activities such as bowling, dances, and Uof L sport outings. As well, students have the opportunity to get involved in advocacy campaigns such as “Spread the Word to End the “R” Word” (i.e. campaign designed to promote ending the use of the word retarded). Students open their eyes to the life of a diverse individual and gain an understanding of disabilities issues. Because students’ buddies become dependent on the students for support and friendship, the students must be reliable and trustworthy. Furthermore, the students matched with a buddy feel a sense of moral responsibility and take on the life of a role model in the community. Students also benefit from the leadership training provided by Best Buddies. The BBKY chapter President attended an intense 3-day Leadership Conference at Indiana University last summer, and the chapter operates with its own student-led leadership team and committee structure. Overall, the BBKY/U of L partnership allows students to gain experience in civic engagement through direct service, and students are making a huge difference in the lives of adults with IDD.

### **2. Service Start Date**

Best Buddies Kentucky and the University of Louisville’s partnership started in the summer of 2009. This is an on-going project.

### **3. Impact**

The impact of the Best Buddies chapter at U of L reaches far beyond the 75 student participants. The college buddies not only touch the lives of the adult individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), they make a tremendous impact on the lives of the family members and friends. Furthermore, through the advocacy campaigns and acts of friendship towards persons with IDD, students are subliminally educating other students that people with IDD are should not be secluded, but included. Studies have shown that Best Buddies program increases the self-esteem, motivation and confidence –not to mention the betterment of social skills – of people with IDD. People with IDD often gain employment after being involved with Best Buddies. The vast majority of college buddies become agents of social change in the communities in which they live and work.

4. **Describe the benefit to Uof L providing examples of enhanced student learning, faculty teaching and research**

Best Buddies provides U of L students an opportunity to engage in active citizenship by directly helping others and spending quality time with people with IDD. The program has allowed several student athletes a positive experience as they fulfill community service requirements. Best Buddies strengthens collaborative partnerships throughout the community, nationally, and internationally. Members of the leadership team collaborate with more than 1,300 student leaders from around the world.

Best Buddies Kentucky offers University of Louisville students the opportunity to serve in our community. More than 40 University of Louisville students from multiple units now volunteer throughout the community and continue to form many partnerships with various community agencies. Best Buddies Kentucky joins the University of Louisville in efforts to promote inquiry, advocacy, and service.

5. **Describe the unique/exemplary attributes of the project**

We are the only organization in the state that is built upon the notion of integrated friendships for isolated adults with IDD. Creative implementation is part of the original vision of Anthony K. Shriver, who founded Best Buddies 22 years ago. Best Buddies was formed as the crisis of isolation and segregation needed a creative answer and this was the simple, yet innovative idea of friendship. It was exemplary and unique in that it had not been thought of before—structured one-to-one friendships between people with and without IDD. For our college students, it provides an opportunity to experience the world at a slower pace and creates lifelong learning on patience and understanding diversity that at times are missing from the daily race of a college student. These life lessons cannot be learned from textbooks; they can only be learned by experiencing and being a part of someone's life. We have also watched as our buddies solve problems, answer questions and interact with their college buddies. The University of Louisville college buddies have stepped up to the plate to insure their buddies are safe and having fun. Generally college students join Best Buddies with very little experience in interacting with individuals with disabilities. That changes as they begin to better understand things they have in common. In this unique program, both people with and without disabilities benefit immensely. Loneliness is dispelled in people with IDD and those without IDD better understand how volunteerism can change lives.

6. **How has partner been able to leverage additional resources?**

Best Buddies Kentucky and the students involved in the Uof L Best Buddies chapter do not work in a bubble. The chapter has been partnering with Down Syndrome of Louisville, Jefferson County Public Schools, The Council on Developmental Disabilities, Families for Effective Autism Treatment (FEAT), and Seven Counties to recruit adults with IDD for the program. As well, the student leadership has worked with the Uof L athletics staff to arrange their group activities and have had "Best Buddies Days" at men's baseball, football and women's basketball games. The chapter also works with the Student Government Association and abides by their guidelines and guidance. Most importantly, Best Buddies students have enhanced their learning through the support of their Faculty Advisor, Nina Beck in the College of Education and Human Development, and the guidance and support of Dean W. Blake Haselton.

