Supporting Aging-in-Place through Home Modifications
Amanda La Bonte, OTS
Occupational Therapy Doctorate program, Belmont University

INTRODUCTION
Aging-in-Place can be defined as the ability of any person regardless of age, income, or ability level to reside in their home and community safely, independently, and comfortably (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2009).
- 88% of adults 65 and older want to remain in their homes as they age (Keenan, 2010).
- Almost 80% of adults 65 and older own their home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).
- Nearly 70% of older adults have disabilities (Komisar, 2014).
- Many U.S. homes lack basic accessibility features (Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, 2014).

Home modifications can be described as adaptations made to an individual’s residence designed to increase safety, independence, and the usability of the home (Fagan & Sabata, 2016).
- Home modifications have been identified as one way to help older adults remain in their home for longer (Siebert, Smallfield & Stark, 2014).
- MetLife Mature Market Institute (2010) showed that the cost of home modifications can range in price from well under $1,000 for installation of grab bars and grips in bathrooms, hand rails on both sides of steps, and lever-style handles on doors and faucets to $12,000 for a stair lift.

With the number of older adults projected to almost double by the year 2050, it is essential that cost-effective methods are utilized to help seniors remain in their homes as they age (Ortman, Velkoff & Hogan, 2014).

AGENCY OVERVIEW
The Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability (TCAD) is the designated state agency on aging and is mandated to provide leadership relative to aging issues on behalf of older persons in the state. Their mission is to bring together and leverage programs, resources, and organizations to protect and ensure the quality-of-life and independence of older Tennesseans and adults with disabilities.

IDENTIFIED NEEDS OF AGENCY
• Resource guide of low-cost home modifications
• Framework for incorporating occupational therapy (OT) into TCAD structure

GOALS OF PROJECT
• Create usable and sustainable toolkit on low-cost home modifications for public distribution
• Assemble current evidence on benefits and most commonly utilized home modifications
• Create presentation materials for agency and their partners on benefits of and options for affordable home modifications
• Establish relationship with home modification specialists that agency could collaborate with in implementing their strategic plan
• Develop screening tool to identify agency clients in greatest need of OT home assessment
• Create framework for pilot project incorporating an OT into the current agency structure

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT
This project consisted of multiple tasks related to home accessibility to support older adults wishing to age in their homes including:
• Compiling evidence on commonly used and benefits of home modifications and presenting findings to agency’s overseeing Commission
• Attending court proceedings, hearings, and meetings related to supporting agency’s mission
• Participating in committee to reduce agency’s waitlist, Interagency Taskforce on Housing and Health, and HMOTA/Aim Big meetings
• Creating comprehensive affordable home accessibility toolkit
• Adding to toolkit and submitting for publishing
• Presenting overview of affordable home accessibility toolkit to agency
• Establishing relationship between agency and home modification specialists
• Providing information and resources on home modifications to be added to Tennessee Housing Development Agency website
• Creating a voice over PPT on the Benefits of Home Modifications for future Belmont students
• Assisted in grant writing
• Reviewed and added to dementia resources document for state wide distribution
• Developing screening tool for clients to prioritize greatest need for OT Home Assessment
• Creating report outlining pilot project to incorporate OT into existing agency structure

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The author would like to thank all the people who provided information and assistance throughout this experiential component project. Thank you to Debra Gibbs, EdD, MHS, OTR/L, CAPS, FAOTA, and Teresa Plummer, PhD, MSOT, OTR/L, CAPS, CEAS, ATP with Belmont University for their support and guidance throughout this project. Thank you to the staff at the Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability for providing such a beneficial and wonderful learning opportunity. Special thanks to Aging Commission Liaison, AnnaLea Cothron, for her assistance and support throughout this project.

OUTCOMES OF PROJECT
• Affordable Home Accessibility Toolkit
• PowerPoint on overview of Toolkit and submission proposal for publishing
• PowerPoint and handout on benefits of and most commonly used home modifications
• Home Modifications handout for Commission Meeting
• PowerPoint on benefits of home modifications for future Belmont students
• Report on pilot project framework to incorporate OT into current agency structure
• Screening tool to identify client’s most in need of an OT home assessment
• Feedback surveys to measure outcome of presentation and impact of toolkit

CONCLUSION
• Most older adults wish to age-in-place
• OTs can support this by advocating for and educating older adults on affordable home modification options
• This project offered many opportunities to advocate and educate including creating a toolkit on affordable home modifications, writing a report on incorporating OT into the existing agency structure, and developing a screening tool to prioritize clients with greatest need for an OT assessment
• The resources created during this project will further the agency’s mission of ensuring the quality-of-life and independence of older Tennesseans and adults with disabilities and help educate students and practitioners on affordable ways to modify a home