

BREAKING GROUND

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Best Buddies Tennessee



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CORRECTION TO PREVIOUS ISSUE

In *Breaking Ground* Issue #65, the article "Preparing Next Step Students for Employment" listed Next Steps participant Sean Faulkner as working for The Arc Davidson County. In reality, Mr. Faulkner works at The Arc Tennessee for the agency's CHOICES program. The editors apologize for the error.

Cover: Christy Martin and Jessi Solomon
Photos courtesy of Best Buddies Tennessee

CONTACT INFORMATION



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Best Buddies Tennessee

Begins Citizens Program

BY ASHLEY WEBB

L OYAL. FUN. REAL. Three words that came to mind when Best Buddies veteran volunteer Jessi Solomon described her long-time Buddy, Christy Martin. Since their initial meeting over six years ago, the friendship between the two "buddies" has grown exponentially into the rooted companionship they share today.

"Our relationship has evolved so much in the time that we've known each other," commented Ms. Solomon. "In the beginning, Christy was really shy and it took us a long time to become as comfortable with each other as we are now. It's just like any friendship; it takes time and devotion to really make it grow into what will be a lasting relationship."

Jessi and Christy are just one of the many success stories to result from the efforts of Best Buddies Tennessee. For the past two years, the organization has matched students with developmental and intellectual disabilities in one-to-one friendships with volunteers in high school and college. Now, building off the success generated from the school programs, Best Buddies Tennessee is pleased to announce the addition of the Citizens program.

Best Buddies Citizens—also known as the Adult Friendships program—further extends the creation of one-to-one friendships to adults 18 and older who are not involved with one of the high school or college programs. The introduction of Adult Friendships allows more citizens

throughout Davidson and Williamson Counties to get involved with Best Buddies Tennessee and experience the benefits and relationships that result from the program.

Best Buddies Citizens launched early this year and already six Buddy pairs have been matched, with several more waiting to be paired with the right person. The new program manager for Adult Friendships, Margaret Marchetti, acts as a "Buddy Matchmaker", gathering information from both the Buddy and the volunteer to increase the possibility of a mutually beneficial friendship.

"It's so exciting and fun for me to be able to learn more about the Buddies and volunteers so I can make the perfect match," said Ms. Marchetti. "This is a very special process which I hope will help build a foundation for an equally enriching friendship. It is our hope that the new Adult Friendships program will breed strong, genuine friendships, similar to the one Jessi and Christy have developed."

A current student at Vanderbilt Medical School, Ms. Solomon has always had a passion for helping people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. As a high school student in Cleveland, Ohio, she started a group similar to Best Buddies called Project Support.

"I was really disappointed that the



Photos courtesy of Best Buddies Tennessee

students with disabilities were kept so separate, and that's why I started Project Support," Ms. Solomon said. "It was just an inclusive group that would go to football games and do other things together outside of school."

Ms. Solomon jumped right into Best Buddies upon her arrival in Nashville, becoming president of the Vanderbilt chapter as a freshman. She met Christy Martin at the beginning of her first year as a college student. Looking back, Ms. Solomon explained how Ms. Martin has grown since their original introduction.

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“She was my first close friend when I moved to Nashville. We would go bowling and go to Vanderbilt football and basketball games. Back then, Christy was not as talkative and was somewhat uncomfortable in social situations. Now, after spending so much time together, Christy is more at ease and fits in anywhere.”

During the course of their friendship, Ms. Martin secured a job at Publix and has been working at the popular supermarket for the past three years. “I used to be shy but now I feel more comfortable with big groups of people in lots of different situations,” said Ms. Martin. “I was even able to get a job at Publix because of Best Buddies.”

When she’s not busy at Publix and Ms. Solomon gets some time away from

medical school, you can find the two pedaling away on their tandem bicycle. Ms. Martin’s first time ever on a bike was in June of last year as she and Ms. Solomon began preparation for the Best Buddies Challenge in Washington, D.C. The bike race occurred in October, which gave the team less than five months to get ready.

“We practiced a lot on our own to get the hang of riding it,” said Ms. Solomon. “It takes a lot of teamwork to be on a tandem bike. You have to talk to each other the whole time or else you’ll fall over. If there’s ever a moment without communication, you’re on the ground.”

Thankfully, the pair got enough training time in to ride 62 miles together at the Best Buddies Challenge. Their next goal is to reach 100 miles.

With six years of friendship already on the books, Ms. Martin and Ms. Solomon serve as a prime example of the impact Best Buddies can have on the lives of people both with and without disabilities. As Best Buddies Tennessee adds the Citizens Program, we look forward to the creation of even more wonderful connections.

To learn more about Best Buddies Citizens and how to be placed in a friendship, contact Margaret Marchetti at margaretmarchetti@bestbuddies.org or 615-891-2046.

Ashley Webb is development coordinator for Best Buddies Tennessee. Hailing from the suburbs of Atlanta, she has a passion for writing as well as making a difference in the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

TENNESSEE’S NEW FIVE YEAR STATE PLAN

BY ALICIA CONE, PhD

In August, 2011, the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities submitted a new five-year State Plan to the Administration on Developmental Disabilities. The submission of the plan was the culmination of roughly 18 months of activities designed to gain input from the public and to review the service system available to people with developmental disabilities in Tennessee.

After posting the proposed goals and objectives that constitute the State Plan for 45 days of public review and comment, the Council received a number of comments. A brief summary follows.

TYPE OF COMMENT

Requests for more information about those we would be partnering with to accomplish objectives and activities.

RESPONSE

Under each activity, there is a requirement to list our confirmed and even potential “Collaborators”. Activities are the grants or staff activities that will be undertaken to accomplish a specific objective.

TYPE OF COMMENT

Inquiries about Needs Assessment data.

RESPONSE

We explained that we get needs assessment data from a variety of sources. We were very thankful to be able to obtain data from 15 different sources using the following activities: needs assessment surveys (mailed and on-line), project summary reports, research results, program evaluations, a series of person-centered planning tools, review of DD (Developmental Disabilities) Network agency State plans, customer satisfaction surveys and stakeholder forums.

Additionally, information was gathered from the federally assisted State programs through reviewing the following documents: agency State plans, agency policies and procedures, data management reports, and program satisfaction and surveys. Then a comprehensive State and agency questionnaire was developed and sent to 12 departments and 24 programs of State government. The surveys asked for program, outcome and resource allocation information.

TYPE OF COMMENT

Remarks seeking clarification.

RESPONSE

We clarified that:

1. The Council does not provide direct services and cannot replace Waiver-funded services that are reduced due to budget cuts.
2. Council goal areas are Leadership Development, Service System Improvement, and Information and Outreach.
3. The Council works with a finite amount of resources, therefore, we must and do set priorities based on where work is needed and where we can do the most good with the tools we are able to use.
4. Postsecondary and transition activities are contained under Goal 2, Objectives 2.1 and 2.5.

5. The Youth Leadership Forum and the Postsecondary Education programs target different ages and purposes.
6. The Next Steps at Vanderbilt postsecondary education program has built self-advocacy and leadership into all aspects of the program.
7. Policy research falls under Goal 2, Objective 2.4.

TYPE OF COMMENT

Several reviewers simply shared their opinions or views on the service system.

RESPONSE

No action was needed on comments that simply stated the reviewer's perspective or opinion. The comments are kept and are part of our continual effort to collect input from the public. For example, one reviewer shared her perspective that the "whole medical model needs to be discarded" for providing services to people with developmental disabilities.

In the final analysis, no changes to the goals and objectives of the State Plan were required after reviewing the public comments. Therefore, it is with great pleasure that we share the final goals and objectives for our new State Plan.

Goal 1: Leadership Development

Annually, in partnership with Tennesseans with disabilities, families and others, provide training, education and informational opportunities that result in people who are better able to access services, serve on cross-disability and culturally diverse leadership coalitions, influence policy, communicate needs and build relationships in their communities.

OBJECTIVES

- 1.1 Yearly, provide seven weekend sessions of Partners in Policymaking to train 10 self-advocates and 15 family members on disability policy and practice in Tennessee and nationally.
- 1.2 Yearly, provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities and family members to develop their knowledge and leadership skills via five activities: supporting a statewide self-advocacy organization; strengthening statewide self-advocacy initiatives; funding and operating the Consumer Education Stipends so 150 people are assisted; partnering with advocates to reach underserved families from diverse cultures with minority leadership training; and, in partnership with other advocacy groups, funding and co-sponsoring the annual Tennessee Disability MegaConference.
- 1.3 Each year of the plan, provide the Tennessee Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) to support 15 youth in high school with disabilities to develop and serve as leaders and mentors to their peers.
- 1.4 For a minimum of FY 2012 and 2013, expand the number of members in Next Chapter Book Clubs from 50 to 75.

Goal 2: Service System Improvement

Annually, in collaboration with individuals with disabilities, families, professionals and policy makers, fund and replicate demonstrations of best practice, design and support public policy development, and coordinate coalitions so that the Tennessee

developmental disability service system is person- and family-centered and supports individuals with developmental disabilities to be independent, productive and included in community life.

OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 For FY 2012 through 2014, facilitate replication of Project Opportunity to two additional sites in Tennessee.
- 2.2 Research demand-side employment demonstration projects.
- 2.3 Annually, work with the Tennessee Employment Consortium (TEC) and the Tennessee Alliance for Full Participation (AFP) to fully develop and implement the Tennessee AFP plan to double the number of individuals with I/DD working in competitive employment.
- 2.4 Yearly, form, support and/or serve on public policy coalitions in order to advocate for and educate policymakers on best policies and practices in services to people with DD. Note—the focus of the coalition can be employment, housing or any other topic relevant to the DD Act.
- 2.5 Annually, fund a minimum of four demonstration projects in order to highlight models such as self-directed services, person-centered thinking organizations, or other community-based best practice models. Note—this can be accomplished through either the Call for Application or Continuation Proposal processes.

Goal 3: Information and Outreach

Annually, provide Tennesseans with disabilities, family members, professionals, organizations, policymakers and the public with reliable sources of information about disability issues, services and supports which can be used to increase access to services and drive systems change.

OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 Yearly, provide information on disability issues and topics through a magazine format.
- 3.2 Yearly, provide educational information on policy and legislation at the state and federal level through a newsletter format distributed via mail, e-mail, conference calls and the Internet.
- 3.3 Yearly, provide information, referral and support to people with disabilities and families seeking to access and use services.

In December, 2011, the Council undertook an informal survey of our Governor-appointed Council members. When asked what their strongest areas of interest in the disability field were, policy and legislative issues, employment, transition and housing issues were the top four, with transition and housing tying for third highest in the rankings. When asked to identify their top priority disability issues, employment, policy and legislative issues, and transition were the top three. While this was an informal survey, and not designed as a vigorous research project, the Council was heartened that these findings support the areas identified in the State Plan development process as needing the Council's focus and resources.

Alicia Cone, PhD, is grant project director for the Council on Developmental Disabilities.

wcsLink:

Connecting Special Education Families, Educators and the Community in Williamson County

BY JENNY A. VOGUS

In 2008, a small group of parents and leaders of Williamson County Schools' (WCS) Student Support Services (SSS) partnered to establish wcsLink, a collaboration between parents and schools designed to provide resources, support and education to families of students in special education. Our name, wcsLink, reflects our intent to bridge divides and better "link" parents and schools. The wcsLink Parent Advisory Committee consists of eight parents (all of whom have students in special education), each representing a different section of the county, and meets with the SSS director and coordinators regularly throughout the year.

In the past three years, wcsLink has accomplished a considerable amount as a group. Our organization has been guided by the results of two parent surveys that identified the needs and interests of parents with children in special education. We currently average 3-4 wcsLink events per month. When planning our earliest events, we wanted to provide parents access to WCS administration. To this end, we offered "Coffee with Carol" in the Fall of 2009 and now host four coffees each year. This forum provides an opportunity for families of students in special education to meet face-to-face with the WCS SSS Director, Carol Hendlmyer, to discuss their concerns and offer suggestions regarding special education. Twice a year, we also host a Q&A session with the WCS Superintendent.

Starting in 2010, we also have held an annual "Parent Expo". This event represents the truly collaborative nature of wcsLink as it provides parent and school perspectives on several topics, including eligibility, preschool, transitions, conservatorship, related services and giftedness (gifted students also have IEPs [Individualized Education Plans]). We also have connected parents to each other through parent support groups that began in Fall 2011. In addition, we've hosted several parent trainings, including eligibility, transition into school-age services, IEPs and literacy. These sessions often are conducted jointly by parents and SSS.

Communicating with families of the 5,000 students with IEPs in WCS has been challenging and has evolved over time. We initially began the process through a quarterly newsletter e-mailed to special education teachers, who, in turn, printed and distributed it to the families on their caseload. Unfortunately, this proved unreliable for reaching all families. Realizing we needed a more direct means of distributing our newsletter and otherwise communicating, we began building an e-mail distribution list by collecting names and addresses at our events.



Pictured from left to right: WCS SSS director Carol Hendlmyer, wcsLink Parent Advisory Committee members Allison Moore and Jen Vogus and WCS SSS coordinator Janie Thompson. Photo by Angel Gaither.

To gain visibility and connection to each of the schools, we created an informational brochure and distributed it to each school in the county to be displayed in the front office or foyer. At the same time, we actively recruited wcsLink Parent Representatives for each school to help make sure that our announcements reliably reached all families at their school and to act as a contact for other parents. By our first wcsLink Parent Rep meeting in the Spring of 2010, about half the schools were represented. Today we have representatives for 35 of 42 schools. SSS also submits our announcements to *In Focus*, WCS's bimonthly e-mail newsletter.

To date, our biggest communication success has been the creation of our Web site. As we lacked the skills to develop a Web site ourselves, we looked to my brother, a graphic designer, for some pro-"bro"no assistance. www.wcslink.org went "live" in November 2011. It provides a comprehensive look at who we are and what we do.

Our event calendar is an inclusive listing of not only wcsLink events, but a variety of related community events across greater Nashville. WCS parents contributed recommended books, Web sites, movies, apps and articles to our resource pages. SSS and community advocates contributed FAQs [Frequently Asked Questions] for an array of topics of interest to parents regarding special education. We also celebrate a student and staff person quarterly in our spotlight feature and post pictures of our events in the photo gallery. To further alleviate our communication challenges, parents can enroll in our group and be added to

our e-mail distribution list with the click of a button! Our goal is to make the wcsLink Web site a “go to” place for families of children in WCS special education for resources, events and current information.

We hope this brief description of what we’ve done and will continue doing to link parents and schools will serve as an inspiration and call to action. It’s easy for the parents of children in special education to be overwhelmed and to view the school district as unapproachable and unchangeable. What wcsLink

has shown is that such partnerships are possible and opening the channels of communication can be a starting point for change. But it requires persistence (there have been attempts by SSS to create something like wcsLink since 2005) patience and creating “small wins”.

Jenny A. Vogus is on the wcsLink Parent Advisory Committee and is a 2007 graduate of the Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute. She has a nine-year-old son who has multiple disabilities and infinite ways of making her smile.



Tenth Annual Tennessee Disability MegaConference

will take place **May 31st** and **June 1st**
at the Nashville Airport Marriott

The 2012 conference has an overarching theme of “Sharing Our Strengths: Tools for Empowerment and Change” which is organized into five tracks.

- A. Tools for Economic Well Being
- B. Tools for Personal Fulfillment and Quality of Life
- C. Tools for Professional Development
- D. Tooling Up to Advocate
- E. Tools for Community Engagement

There also will be a MegaMarketplace, a free event where self-advocate entrepreneurs exhibit for free to sell their wares and advertise their services, and The Arc Awards Banquet & Dance on Friday evening.

Keynote presenters this year are:

ALEX PLANK is the 25-year-old guy behind WrongPlanet.net, the incredibly popular site for individuals with Asperger's Syndrome, autism and other neurological differences (and parents/professionals).

ARI NE'EMAN is the President of Autism Self Advocacy Network. The first person with autism to be appointed to the National Council on Disability; Interagency

Autism Coordinating Committee; he also has received the Advocates in Disability Award from HSC Foundation, Expanding Horizons Award from United Cerebral Palsy, and is a TASH board member.

JOHN MCKNIGHT is a community organizer, an academic and a brilliant story-teller. He is deeply committed to promoting the ability and capacity of people, their neighbors and their associations. Anyone interested in successfully including people on the margins into neighborhood and community life needs to listen to John McKnight and study asset based community development.

BRETT LEAKE is a comedian, uses a wheelchair and has muscular dystrophy. He is very funny and delivers a positive message.

ERIK CARTER is an associate professor of Special Education at Vanderbilt University. His research goal is to identify those skills, supports and experiences that enable young people with significant disabilities (intellectual disabilities, autism and multiple disabilities) to live rich and personally satisfying lives during and after high school. His work strives to increase the capacity and commitment of communities to meaningfully include children and adults with significant disabilities, as well as engaging new partners in these efforts.

For all MegaConference information, visit: www.tndisabilitymegaconference.org

Inequality *in* EDUCATION *and* BEYOND

BY MATT CRAFT



My name is Matt Craft, and I am a fourth-year student at Belmont University majoring in history and minoring in creative writing. I came to Belmont because it felt homey; I have been living in the Nashville area all my life. I've been writing fiction for over a decade. I enjoy science fiction, fantasy, action adventure and crime works. I also have a love for music, poetry and for God. I'm fascinated by the past and like to imagine what would

have happened if something did or did not happen. My choice of major and minor stemmed from that fascination and my passion for the indefinite possibilities of the past and the future.

I have a host of physical disabilities that affect my speech, visual perception, physical orientation and muscular functions. Nevertheless, my disabilities do not hinder my intellectual and psychological capabilities and I have a certain direct, straight-to-the-point and critical personality. My skills and talents, despite my disabilities, enable me to voice my own opinions and to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Although there has been progress made, I argue that there is still inequality in the various educational systems toward students with disabilities.

Inequality is a slippery term with numerous definitions and variations. To me, inequality means that one individual or group of individuals possess greater privileges and advantages than another individual or group. It also encompasses preference and favoritism. We all are guilty of these two behaviors as part of human nature. The spectrum of inequality is broad. For instance, slavery and racism are obvious forms of inequality. But the treatment and quality of education for certain individuals, such as me, also entails inequality.

Consider my history. In first grade, I was a shy, quiet kid. I had just transferred to a traditional elementary school from a special needs school. I used variations of sign language and a bulky laptop setup

to communicate. I felt awkward and displaced as I was an outsider. But since my first Lightwriter assistive communication device in the Spring of 2001, my fifth grade year, I became more active, more talkative. The Lightwriter gave me a "voice".

I grew accustomed to an integrated environment with peers who did not have disabilities, and that environment became my preference. I was lucky to have teachers who went the extra mile, and I benefited from all their hard work and fair judgment. In hindsight, however, I resent having had no choice in decisions concerning my education.

In seventh grade, I did not get to choose between regular and special education math. My teachers placed me in regular math. I didn't have a voice or presence in my IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meetings until high school. I didn't have the choice of how I would be educated. I also couldn't choose who my assistants would be. In effect, I couldn't decide who would help me. My assistants, though great people, were previously determined and assigned according to schedules. I think I should have had more say in the matter.

What I have experienced over the years has definitely had an impact on me. There's little practical specialized training given to general education teachers in order to help them more effectively teach students with disabilities; such training is still given only to special education teachers. Secondly, although it varies from state to state and district to district, the policies and guidelines regulating the use of assistive technology are not uniform and place unnecessary restrictions on the students with disabilities. I literally could not walk up on the stage and receive my high school diploma until I had turned in all the assistive technology that the district had provided to me.

How will inequality affect me in the future? Inequality will inevitably affect my job and income security. I might not obtain a job as easily as my peers without disabilities; although in today's economy, even individuals who do not have a disability are experiencing difficulty finding jobs. I feel inequality will affect where and how I will live because some homes are not exactly disability-friendly or cost-effective due to my budget constraints. My means of transportation will be limited due to my lack of a

driver's license and my directional orientation issues. Therefore, I will have to depend on someone else to get me to and from work and to run the simplest of errands.

Throughout my education, I have noticed improvement, but there is still work to be done. I can inform and educate others on the matter. I could give seminars and speeches to audiences. I also could guest lecture in classes where disabilities are relevant. I can use my voice. I can write articles, books, plays and films on the matter, like I am right now. You can join me in educating others. Finally, you can act! You can include people with disabilities

in your work and personal lives. You can communicate with lawmakers or school officials.

Inequality is broad and diverse. I have experienced and overcome inequality, but perhaps the inequality I have faced is more noticeable than others. So far, it has been encased in the realm of education; nevertheless, in the future it will enter the realms of life, work and home. I am certain that it will not stop me, and it should not stop you. We have made some progress, but we have a long way to go.

Overview of New Office of Policy and Innovation, DIDD

BY DR. SCOTT MODELL, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER OF POLICY AND INNOVATION



Photo by Sam Parsons

On August 29, 2012, I started my first day at the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD). I had just moved from California after being a professor for the past 14 years and director of our Autism Center for Excellence since it began in 2006. Leaving academia and entering the world of state service delivery has been an exciting change. Over the past five months it

has become increasingly clear that there are many people in our Department who are truly dedicated to improving the quality of life of Tennesseans with disabilities. I am honored to be working with our Commissioner and all of our incredible DIDD staff to make our Department the best in the nation.

OVERVIEW

There are three Divisions within the Office of Policy and Innovation within the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. These include **Information Systems**, **Protection from Harm**, and **Policy**. The goal of the Information Systems Division is to identify and implement technological solutions that support our DIDD's goals of maximizing operational efficiency and providing individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities with an opportunity to lead healthy, secure and meaningful lives.

The goal of the Protection from Harm Division is to significantly reduce the risk of abuse, neglect, exploitation and other incidents

of harm to Tennesseans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The goal of the Policy Division is to develop policies, procedures and other guiding documents necessary for the day-to-day operations of DIDD and contracted providers that are person-centered and focus on improving the quality of life for all Tennesseans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

MAJOR INITIATIVES

Accreditation: DIDD intends to externally examine its operations as a means to validate the results of past efforts, and to focus and enhance continued initiatives to put people receiving services at the center of planning, policy, program and practice at the local, regional and State levels. As such, it is the intent of DIDD to seek accreditation to: increase person-centeredness throughout the system; increase consistency between and among regions in culture and service implementation; use better measurement and assessment methodologies; and identify needs and priorities for future improvement efforts.

Project Titan: DIDD currently needs to upgrade its existing computer information systems that are used to track recipient demographic data, service authorization and billing information, case management and incident investigation data. Many of these systems were developed on an older software platform, known as FoxPro. While these systems continue to be effective in serving their original purposes, the need for an integrated technology platform to increase the functionality of the Department's IT (Information Technology) systems is necessary. Project Titan will serve as the Department's single integrated database solution and will utilize the newest technology to provide the best and most efficient business solutions for all of DIDD needs.

Self Determination Waiver: DIDD will soon be in the planning stages of developing a Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver for persons with developmental disabilities. We will be working closely with TennCare, providers and other interested parties. This is a lengthy process subject to State appropriations and pending approval and funding from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS). Consistent with the revisions to the Self-Determination Waiver, Commissioner Jim Henry intends to overhaul all the waivers with an emphasis on serving more people on the waiting list. Certainly, DIDD will continue to keep everyone informed of developments as they occur.

ALLIANCE *for* FULL PARTICIPATION

BY EMMA SHOUSE

The Alliance for Full Participation (AFP) is a national organization dedicated to increasing the integration, productivity, independence and quality of life of people with developmental disabilities. It is a partnership of leading developmental disability organizations, including the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, The Arc United States, Autism Society of America, United Cerebral Palsy, the Association of University Centers on Disability and the National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities, as well as many others. The Alliance's current major goal is to double the employment rate for people with developmental disabilities by 2015. For the Alliance for Full Participation and its member organizations, "employment" refers to integrated and competitive job opportunities.

STATE TEAM AND TENNESSEE'S SCORECARD

After the last national summit for AFP in 2005, a state planning team was formed in Tennessee to guide the efforts of doubling employment rates for Tennesseans with developmental disabilities. This state team involved members from the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, the Disability Law & Advocacy Center of Tennessee, The Arc Tennessee, the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and the Center for Literacy Studies at the University of Tennessee. The state team utilized a tool provided by AFP called a state scorecard to review policies and practices that affected opportunities for competitive and integrated employment for people with disabilities.

The scorecard asked questions about whether Tennessee has:

1. Measurable annual performance goals related to competitive integrated employment;
2. A strong Employment First policy;
3. A system to collect and share data on employment outcomes to inform policy decisions;
4. Strategies for achieving better employment outcomes that are managed at multiple levels (state/county/local) with all stakeholders;
5. Formal and informal relationships or collaborations to support integrated employment;
6. A system for supporting and encouraging innovation in employment services;

7. Resources for transition-age students and those waiting for services to encourage them to choose employment over other service options; and
8. Strategies for advancing economic self-sufficiency of people with disabilities.

An on-line survey was posted and received about 90 respondents; these results were then used to develop strategies for doubling the rate of employment among Tennesseans with disabilities.

SURVEY RESULTS

There were several interesting findings from this survey. One major issue that was apparent from multiple answers—especially from individuals with disabilities and family members—is that State departments, advocacy organizations, provider agencies and other entities serving those with disabilities need to improve communication with the public about the various initiatives related to employment. Individuals with disabilities and family members frequently responded that they had no idea if particular goals, policies, agreements, data or collaborations existed among various stakeholders or not.

Clearly, where these types of goals, policies and initiatives already exist, agencies need to improve transparency and meaningful communication with the public. There was also a common theme among many respondents that stakeholders tend to talk quite a bit about changing the state of employment among people with disabilities in Tennessee, but that there is rarely any meaningful action taken after these discussions about potential improvements and changes.

There also seemed to be dissatisfaction among respondents about how many decisions are made at the State level or by high-ranking officials without involving consumers, direct service providers and other stakeholders at the local level. Another evident concern is the urgent need for better employment services and resources for students with disabilities transitioning from high school and those on waiting lists. There was agreement among several respondents that caseloads for handling transition-age students are typically too high and that there is a lack of coordinated action between school systems and Vocational Rehabilitation to

improve employment outcomes among young jobseekers with disabilities. Overall, this survey allowed respondents to raise concerns about a number of issues related to the employment of Tennesseans with disabilities and suggest how Tennessee could change its approach to improving employment rates.

EMPLOYMENT GOALS FOR TENNESSEE

Given the survey findings, the State team developed the following goals to direct the efforts to accomplish long-lasting change in the area of employment of people with developmental disabilities in Tennessee.

GOAL 1: Tennessee will adopt and implement an Employment First Policy.

Possible objectives/strategies.

- Create financial incentives to achieve employment outcomes.
- Develop HCBS (Home and Community Based Services) Waivers that include follow-along as a service.
- Develop natural and funded employment supports to individuals on waiting lists.
- Increase professionalism among and access to training for Job Developers or Employment Specialists.
- Remove systemic barriers to competitive employment, such as having all Tennessee employers provide reasonable accommodations, when requested, for employees with developmental disabilities.
- Enhance statewide collaborations.

GOAL 2: Tennessee will double the number of individuals with developmental disabilities with employment by 2015.

Possible objectives/strategies.

- Increase the number of individuals in DIDD services and on the DIDD waiting list, including individuals on the autism spectrum, that are employed.
- Increase the number of students with developmental disabilities exiting school with paid employment.
- Increase models of Project Opportunity/Project SEARCH across the State and in a variety of businesses.
- Increase the number of technology centers and college-based programs

for students with developmental disabilities.

- Increase the capacity of the Ticket to Work program by increasing the number of Employment Networks (ENs) and people who use them.

GOAL 3: The Tennessee employment partners will disseminate information about the benefits of employment related services and supports to individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

Possible objective/strategy.

- Produce written, electronic and media information for students and families about employment options, services and supports.
- Publish effectiveness of Employment Networks and provider agencies.
- Implement research-based strategies that lead to improved employment outcomes for young people.

NATIONAL AFP SUMMIT: “REAL JOBS - IT’S EVERYONE’S BUSINESS”

In November, 2011, the second national Alliance for Full Participation summit was held in Washington, D.C. Over 1250 individuals attended the conference from all over the country and from a variety of organizations, including a large number of self-advocates. The conference included sessions on a variety of topics related to employment, such as asset development, transportation challenges, self-employment and microenterprises, assistive technology in the workplace, transitioning from school to employment, virtual jobs and the fiscal impact of integrated employment. If you visit www.allianceforfullparticipation.org, you can view and download many of the information sheets and presentations from various sessions at the conference for free.

To view all of the survey results for Tennessee, visit kc.vanderbilt.edu/site/services/disabilityservices, click on the link “Employment of Persons with Disabilities” and then select the link “Tennessee State Team for National Alliance for Full Participation”. You can also e-mail emma.shouse@tn.gov or call Emma Shouse at 615-253-5368 for a copy of the results.

Emma Shouse is director of public information for the Council on Developmental Disabilities.

A Center for Independent Living Serving Northeast Tennessee: A PARTNER'S PASSION

BY BRYAN J. HILBERT



Photo by Bryan J. Hilbert

When you think about Northeast Tennessee with its majestic mountains, and countless streams and rivers, one can often overlook the most important feature of this area: the people. The nine counties of Northeast Tennessee include Carter, Claiborne, Greene, Hancock, Hawkins, Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi and Washington.

A land once traveled by Daniel Boone has a population of over 363,402 and over 125,000 are people with disabilities. The fundamental principle of independent living is that people with disabilities can have a job, a house or an apartment, and make their own decisions about life. Unfortunately, many people are never able to live a life of their choosing simply because there is no one to help them advocate for, find and coordinate the programs and services they need.

UNPREPARED

When people look at me today, they see a successful and well educated man, but before I became those things I was a high school senior unprepared to step out into the wider world. Thankfully, a teacher encouraged me to apply for the Tennessee Youth Leadership Forum (YLF), a program of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. This four-day training

program literally changed my life. I learned self-advocacy skills, life-planning skills and had my first introduction to adults with disabilities who were living independently. My experience with YLF helped me chart a successful course through college.

As I was preparing to enter graduate school, I began to have those same feelings of fear and apprehension as I looked at life beyond college. I knew that I was in need of help to navigate the world of work and life that was waiting for me. Luckily, I became connected with the staff of the Disability Resource Center (dRC), a Center for Independent Living (CIL) serving Knoxville and Knox County. It was through my involvement with dRC that I began to understand how to find and utilize the services and supports I would need to take my next steps in living independently. Now that I have reached my personal goals, my desire is to give others the same opportunity I had to succeed.

FILLING A NEED

For almost 20 years, different groups have endeavored to establish a permanent CIL serving Northeast Tennessee. In 2010, Judy Barrett, a longtime community activist and person with a disability, began to organize East Tennessee Citizens for Independent Living (ETNCIL). In 2011, Ms. Barrett asked me to assist her group in organizing support for and advocating for a new CIL. Because of the cross-disability focus and broad mandate, ETNCIL will be an ideal place for people with disabilities to come and seek assistance. Our new CIL could be the key in locating and coordinating services for thousands of people in Northeast Tennessee!

When a consumer contacts us, they are accessing a treasure trove of information about the supports and services available. If a person has more involved needs or requires a greater level of support, a peer mentor can help write an independent living plan that is designed to work through the challenges the individual is having with meeting his goals.

CILs are non-profit organizations that are founded and run by people with disabilities with the express purpose of helping people live independent and self-directed lives. CILs provide four core services:

1. Information and Referral,
2. Peer Counseling (Mentoring),
3. Advocacy, and

4. Independent Living Skills Training.

LEARNING TO ADVOCATE

Because of the excellent training I received in the Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute, another Council on Developmental Disabilities program, I have been able to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities on a local and state level. On the local level, I served as assistant to the City of Knoxville's Disability Services Coordinator, where I addressed citizens' concerns about accessible transit, housing, health care, employment and other issues related to equal access for people with disabilities.

My greatest achievement thus far was working as part of a multi-agency, cross-disability effort that was able to convince the then mayor of Knoxville, Bill Haslam, and the City Council to stop proposed cuts to paratransit services that would have left hundreds of senior citizens and people with disabilities virtual prisoners in their homes. Later that same year, the City Council appointed me to the Knoxville Mayor's Council on Disability Issues. On the state level, I am a two-time regional representative for East Tennessee Disability Days on the Hill, where I've met with many State legislators on issues of education and employment.

LESSONS LEARNED

Below is some wisdom I gained from my experiences with the ETNCIL project so far.

1. The challenge of organizing a group of advocates in Northeast Tennessee was finding the right people to help and support our endeavor.
2. Start with who you know. When charting a new venture, get the word out and let people know what you want to do even if the people you talk to are not a good fit for your project or, more often, are too busy. They may know someone else who can be of help.
3. Find a need to focus on. Starting out you might get overwhelmed by the variety of needs in your area, but you have to focus on what you can do, not on what you can't do.
4. Look for organizations that will share a common interest.
5. Don't get discouraged. Like most things, starting your project will take twice as long and demand more effort than you anticipated. If you work with focus over a period of time, you will overcome the challenges and have a positive impact on your community.

If you would like more information on this project or would like to be involved, please contact Bryan Hilbert at 865-335-7737 or at bhilbert1@gmail.com.

Bryan J. Hilbert graduated from William Blount High in 2002, went on to earn bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Tennessee, completed his teaching internship at a large, inner-city high school, worked in programs for at risk students and launched his career at UT Knoxville.

Nicky's Drive, On the Road Again after Visiting Nashville

BY ALICIA CONE, PhD

In January, the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities had the pleasure of a visit from Nicky Abdinor from South Africa. Born with shortened legs and without arms, Ms. Abdinor shared her story as a person with a disability living in South Africa. She also told the Council members, staff and guests about an organization she initiated called Nicky's Drive.

Nicky's Drive is a registered non-profit organization that aims to assist people with disabilities within South Africa to be mobile and independent through the funding of car adaptations. According to its promotional materials, Nicky's Drive seeks to inspire, enable and motivate. In her remarks at the Council meeting, Ms. Abdinor stressed that the ability to drive a modified vehicle not only provides the freedom that people so often take for granted, but it also enables people with disabilities to develop their self-confidence and contribute to society through their work and family life.

Based in Cape Town, South Africa, Ms. Abdinor is a clinical psychologist, lecturer and motivational speaker, and drives a



Photo by Alicia Cone

specially adapted car that was donated to her by a person in the United Kingdom. The types of modifications she required to make a car accessible to her have been done in the United Kingdom for the last 20 years. She initiated the project to help her raise the funds needed for a more suitable replacement car to keep her mobile and independent, but quickly recognized the need to extend the project for people with disabilities across South Africa. We are thankful that Tennessee, the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities were stops on Ms. Abdinor's United States public outreach and awareness tour, so we could learn about her life experiences, her goals, and glimpse a view of life and disability services in another country.

For more information about Ms. Abdinor, please visit her Web site: www.nickysdrive.com

From Developmental Center to the Community:

SUCCESS STORIES IN WEST TENNESSEE

BY NANCY MUSE

West Tennessee Family Solutions was born of the reaction of a group of parents to the planned closure of Arlington Developmental Center (ADC). When it was announced in the late 1990s that ADC residents would be moving into the community, these parents began searching for a community-based system of care that would offer their loved ones the best possible support. They researched several models of care and overwhelmingly chose the “Teaching Family Model”, an evidence-based, best-practice model utilizing a family-style environment in which a married couple lives with the individuals needing support. This arrangement seemed to offer both residents and family members the highest level of choice and decision-making and allowed families to remain involved in the care of their loved ones.

The story of how West Tennessee Family Solutions (WTFS) became a reality is the stuff of a TV miniseries, with plenty of plot twists, but the result was that the State granted these West Tennessee families permission to found WTFS in October, 2000. The first residents moved into their new home in May, 2001.

There are now 27 Teaching Family

Model supported living residential homes in Cordova, Arlington and East Memphis. WTFS supports 75 persons with intellectual disabilities, offering adult enrichment activities through the WTFS Good Life Center, behavioral therapy, nursing services and community-based day activities. Nearly 50% of the WTFS residents enjoy supported employment. The model also allows for teaching social skills in a natural environment through specific intervention strategies.

Family participation has been important to WTFS since its founding. Family members make up over 80% of the Board of Directors and participate in everything from planning sessions to cookouts and community outings. The organization’s more than 10 years of operation have seen major changes in the lives of the individuals served. There have been positive changes in health and behavioral levels. Individuals who were once considered aggressive, self-injurious or destructive are now able to enjoy outings and other group activities peacefully, and an increase in maturity levels has led to more independence. Many who could barely communicate before can now express themselves well, with the spoken

word or without, and function at a level formerly thought impossible.

As executive director of WTFS, Sharon Perry is in a good position to have witnessed major shifts. She came to Tennessee from Texas in 1996 to work as a QMRP (Qualified Mental Retardation Professional - now QDDP, or Qualified Developmental Disabilities Professional) at Arlington Developmental Center. At the time, there were still 300 people living at ADC, but changes were already underway. Behavior analysts were being brought in by court order, medications were being reduced, and they were beginning to embed Physical Nutritional Management (PNM), a method of treating multiple disabilities.

Ms. Perry said of Arlington, “Awesome people worked there!” Many staff transitioned to West Tennessee Family Solutions along with former residents, which meant that no history was lost. Ms. Perry said that there is no such thing as a “typical WTFS resident”. Ages 22 to 70 are represented, with widely varying levels of abilities and needs. She pointed out that most individuals had lived at ADC for a very long time.



However, Ms. Perry has seen many transformations of former ADC residents since the founding of West Tennessee Family Solutions. There are “so many success stories!” she says. One that stands out is the story of Josie (not her real name), now in her forties, who presented quite a challenge to the staff at ADC. Said Ms. Perry, “To say there were behavioral issues is an understatement!”

Josie, who is nonverbal and communicates mostly through noises and gestures, was overweight and took no care with her appearance, typically wearing plain men’s t-shirts and baggy clothes topped off by a baseball cap. There were patches on her head where she didn’t have hair. She smoked a pack of cigarettes a day and slept until Noon because no one dared to wake her up. Even experienced staff members were afraid of her. There were times when the police would bring her back to ADC because she had been threatening people with hammers or crow-bars.

When Josie moved to a West Tennessee Family Solutions community home in 2004, there was great concern that she might get into trouble. For safety reasons, she wasn’t given a roommate at first. Gradually, however, Josie began to “develop herself,” said Ms. Perry. Instead of sleeping late, she initiated a habit of waking up early to walk from 8 to 8:30 every morning. She began losing weight, all on her own, and started taking an interest in her appearance.

Josie has lived in a WTFS community home for more than seven years now.

She has lost a total of 80 pounds, has quit smoking and is clearly proud of the way she looks. She takes care of her hair—cut attractively close to the head—and has a party wig she wears to dress up in, as well as party clothes.

Josie’s transformation extends beyond the personal to contributing to the world around her. She has a part-time job cleaning offices two days a week. She can sew and makes purses and end pillows, some of which she sells. She sings in the Good Life Center Choir, which performs at assisted living facilities in the area. Josie recently had a solo, in fact. Although she doesn’t use words, she doesn’t really need them. She is able to “make a joyful noise” simply with her own unique voice.

Ms. Perry says Josie now “has a sweet way about her”. When she comes into Ms. Perry’s office, she pats her heart and points to Ms. Perry, indicating her affection for her. She no longer needs behavioral services and has become so sociable that, when there are visitors to her home, she proudly gives guided tours. This person whom others were afraid to even touch before has now come into her own and obviously loves her life.

It was the Family Teaching Model that made the difference for Josie. Or more specifically, her Family Model teacher, who loves Josie and has stuck with her through many “teachable moments”, as Ms. Perry put it. This teacher saw Josie’s potential and made a commitment to helping her. By demonstrating that someone cared for her, the teacher made

it possible for Josie to experience love for others, and lead a full and meaningful life.

Damien is another WTFS success story. He was at Arlington Developmental Center for only a short time, but while there, he witnessed some serious senior abuse and had extreme anger issues. He had spent time in a psychiatric unit at 19 after destroying the seats in his mother’s van. When time came for him to leave Arlington, it was decided that he would fare better in a community home than with his mother.

Like Josie, Damien was overweight and had severe behavior issues. A WTFS resident since 2002, Damien decided in 2008 that he wanted to lose weight. He approached it systematically and, gradually, with the help of nutritional counseling, lost 35 pounds. Having had success himself, he wanted to show other people how to do it. Damien’s video “Getting Fit with Damien”, which appears on the WTFS Web site, tracks his weight loss with pictures of Damien at various stages. He takes viewers through the grocery store—pointing out that “fresh food is good for you”—and to the gym. He concludes by saying, “I was encouraged to get fit; I want to do the same for you!”

Not surprisingly, Damien enjoys sports, especially basketball, and recently participated in a bocce tournament. He has presented at conferences and loves to teach other people how they can improve their lives. He also has developed a handout of safe places in Memphis to exercise. His active life has made his behavioral issues a distant memory. Like Josie, Damien is thriving thanks to the encouragement and support he receives as a WTFS resident.

In September, 2011, the agency celebrated 10 years of providing supported living residential homes on the Teaching Family Model.

Breaking Ground readers are invited to visit its Web site at www.wtfs.org to find out more about WTFS, the Good Life Center, the Related by Heart Program and much more.

Nancy W. Muse is information & referral services coordinator with Tennessee Disability Pathfinder.

News From Pathfinder

BY NANCY W. MUSE

Most readers of *Breaking Ground* probably already know that Tennessee Disability Pathfinder is a multilingual statewide information and referral HELpline service for individuals of all ages, disabilities and nationalities. We offer assistance over the phone in English, Spanish, Kurdish and Farsi. Furthermore, we serve as a statewide clearinghouse for information on disability services through our Web site, found at www.familypathfinder.org, which contains two searchable services databases: Pathfinder in English and Camino Seguro in Spanish. Last fiscal year, Pathfinder assisted a total of 2,246 individual consumers, family members and agencies from 89 counties in Tennessee, 27 states, and 14 other countries of origin. Nearly 300 multicultural families and individuals contacted us for disability information and community services. They came from a diverse array of countries, including Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Kurdistan, Nepal, Nigeria, Somalia and Russia.

In this edition of “News from Pathfinder”, I would like to give *Breaking Ground* readers a sense of what we really do at Pathfinder. I hope to paint a portrait of Pathfinder as a vibrant organization involved in the community that we serve.

Things are really hopping in the Pathfinder offices right now. In addition to our four Pathfinder staff members and four Multicultural Department staff members, our student workers have returned to help us with updates, research and follow-up surveys that monitor satisfaction rates among callers to the HELpline. We also are honored this Spring to have with us Humphrey Fellow Cathy Arendse from Cape Town, South Africa. Ms. Arendse is working on developing a services database modeled on Pathfinder’s for families with disabilities in South Africa.

This quarter is particularly busy for us, as we are in our annual updating season. During this time each year we systematically contact each of the approximately 2,200 agencies in our services database to be sure that the information we have is as current as possible. This process takes two to three months but is well worth the effort to know that we are providing the most accurate information possible.

How else do we keep on top of what’s happening with disability services? By getting out of the office and into the community! Pathfinder staff attended 134 community meetings last year to build relationships, share information and meet new service providers. Collaboration with other agencies is at the heart of these activities.

We serve on local and statewide advisory boards and planning committees and are involved with such organizations as the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, Tennessee Disability Coalition, The Arc Tennessee, Tennessee Technology Access Program Statewide Council and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center Community Advisory Council.

We conduct trainings that provide information and strengthen our ties to the disability community across the State. Our “Advocacy in the Community” trainings in Chattanooga, Nashville and Memphis had panelists from the Disability Law and Advocacy Center of Tennessee, Tennessee Justice Center, Tennessee Voices for Children, Memphis Center for Independent Living and The Arc Mid-South.

We present at local, statewide and national conferences on such topics as “Finding Services and Navigating Pathfinder”, “Disability Etiquette and People First Language” and “Working with Families from Different Cultures”. Our Multicultural

Conference in November, 2011, was a big success, and we are following up this event with our “Continuing the Conversation” roundtable discussions on disability and diversity to keep communication among members of this community alive.

We organize and lead or assist with parent support groups, two for Spanish-speaking families and, in collaboration with the Meharry Department of Pediatrics, one for parents from Nigeria.

We promote self-advocacy through chairing a statewide committee of self-advocates and agencies, including the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Kennedy Center University Center of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities.

Pathfinder staff are involved in the community, serving on boards, attending meetings, conducting and participating in trainings, and collaborating with other agencies, all in the interest of staying on top of developments in disability services and listening to the needs of the communities we serve. If you have not yet used our services, we invite you to explore our Web site at www.familypathfinder.org or give us a call at 1-800-640-4636.

Nancy W. Muse is information & referral services coordinator with Tennessee Disability Pathfinder.

• FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

• Tennessee Disability Pathfinder
• English & Español
• (615) 322-8529
• (800) 640-4636

• TTY/TDD users:
• please dial 711 for free relay service

• www.familypathfinder.org
• tnpathfinder@vanderbilt.edu

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder has phone, Web and print resources in English and Spanish to connect the Tennessee disability community with service providers. Referral services, free of cost, are provided to persons with disabilities, family members, service providers and advocates. Pathfinder is a joint project of the **TENNESSEE COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES** and the **VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**.

You Are Invited...

Are you the parent or caregiver of a young person with an intellectual disability or autism (between the ages of 13 and 21)?

If so, you are eligible to participate in a new Vanderbilt survey study focusing on the strengths, spirituality, and well-being of young people with disabilities in Tennessee.

Participating parents will receive a \$20 gift card for their involvement.

Based on what we learn from parents, we will create a helpful and freely available guide for families, faith communities, disability organizations, and service providers across the state.

If you are interested in learning more about this survey study—or know of other families who may be interested—contact:

Erik Carter, Ph.D.
erik.carter@vanderbilt.edu
or (615) 343-4138

Photos ©Gary Radler and ©digitalskillet, istockphoto.com. Research and graphic services supported by NICHD Grant P30 HD15052 to the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, whose mission is to facilitate discoveries and best practices that make positive differences in the lives of persons with developmental disabilities and their families. February 2012. kc.vanderbilt.edu



Help Us Learn How Young People With Disabilities Might Flourish



VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER
FOR EXCELLENCE IN DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Tennessee Spotlight



Photo by Tyler Nelson

Brittany Schleicher, *Breaking Ground's* graphic designer, won three **AAF** (American Advertising Foundation) **Addy awards** for her design work this past year with The Community Foundation of Middle Tennessee and other freelance projects. Ms. Schleicher received two gold and one silver awards at the February 25, 2012, ceremony.

Tammy Day, program director of the **Next Steps at Vanderbilt** postsecondary education program, has been invited to serve on the national advisory board for the **2012 State of the Art Conference for Post-Secondary Education and Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities**. The Conference, coordinated by the **Helen A. Kellar Institute for Human Disabilities at George Mason University**, provides an opportunity for colleges and universities, researchers, program staff, parents and self-advocates to discuss the current state of policies, research and practice in the field of postsecondary education of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Conference goals are to provide a better understanding of existing postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities and to facilitate recommendations for future research. The findings are intended to help shape federal

efforts to improve access to postsecondary education as envisioned by Congress and made law as the **Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008**.

The Autism Society of Middle Tennessee is excited to welcome **Melissa Meadows** as its new **Community Outreach Director**. Ms. Meadows is originally from Mobile, Alabama, but was raised as a Marine Corps kid stationed all over the country on military installations in North Carolina, California, Hawaii, and Tennessee. She spent 18 years in the radio broadcast industry as a promotions director and air personality in Atlanta, Georgia, and most recently here in Nashville on **WKDF**. Her 14-year-old son, Sam, has Asperger's syndrome and is a freshman at Centennial High School in Williamson County.

VSA Tennessee recently hired Partners 2009-10 graduate **Pam Weston** as a part-time assistant. Ms. Weston will be handling an animation workshop in the Spring, an exhibit/lecture/performance at **Hiawassi College**, the Costume exhibit, VSA Tennessee's participation in the **Tennessee Disability MegaConference** and a future visual art exhibit.

Over 600 people gathered at the **2011 AUCD** (Association of University Centers on Disabilities) **Conference and Awards Gala** on November 8, 2011, to honor many of the deserving network members, partner organizations and individuals who have made significant contributions to people with developmental disabilities, their families and communities.

Partners 2008-09 graduate **Meghan Burke** received the **2011 Anne Rudigier Award**, named for Anne Rudigier, a young woman who demonstrated that one individual's commitment, energy, love of life, and respect for all people can be shared and can persevere through others. Presented by the Rudigier Family to commemorate the accomplishments and commitment of their daughter, this award recognizes an outstanding AUCD trainee demonstrating a commitment to supporting people with developmental disabilities and their families.

Elisabeth May Dykens, PhD, received the **2011 Outstanding Achievement Award**, which recognizes a **UCEDD** (University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities), **LEND** (Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities), or **IDDRC** (Intellectual and Developmental Disability Research Centers) executive, faculty or staff member who has demonstrated excellence in teaching, scholarship and service to the wider community.

The 30th Annual Awards presentation of the **Mayor's Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities**, in conjunction with the **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities** were held on October 17, 2011, at the Nashville Farmers Market. Hosted by Nashville **Mayor Karl Dean**, Partners 2008-09 Graduate and **SILC** (State Independent Living Council) executive director **Mark Montgomery** and **Janet Ivey**, the awards honor persons and entities that have done an outstanding job of promoting the inclusion of persons with disabilities in their communities. The award titles and recipients are listed below.

Mack West Children's Award
Savannah Miller

Trey Pointer Young Citizen Award
HK Derryberry

Jo Andrews Award
Frank Meeuwis

Agent of Change
Norman Tenenbaum

Artist
Lake Rise Place

Athlete
David Meador

Direct Support Professional
Kim Barranco

Education
Parthenon Education Department

Employer
Social Security Administration

Family
Betsy Everett
Health Care Provider
Dr. Terry Sawyer

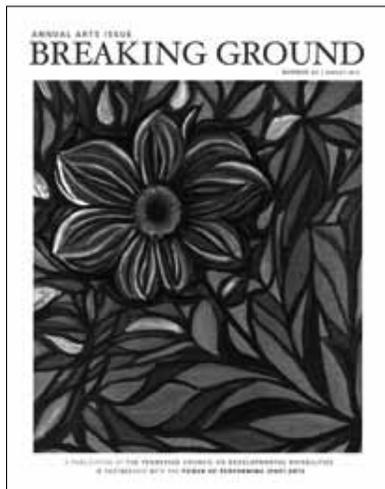
Organization
Harpeth Bike Club
Public Policy and Advocacy
Carrie Hobbs Guiden

Volunteer
Steve Christiansen

In addition, the following artists were recognized for their creative accomplishments.

Jerry Adams, Anne Ambrose, Shree L. Brown-McGruder, Jenny Cordle, Randy Dilbeck, Leslie Eleazer, Grace Goad,

Deborah Hanson, Miranda Hester, Laura Hudson, Tilmer "Tim" Kerr, Avery Laughman, J. Renee Ray, Leigh Richardson, Brandon Stoeber, Delsenia Sales, Robert Sanders, Dennis Shaw, Davina Suggs, Teresa Taylor, Kathy Tupper, Jalyn Weston, Tabitha White, Robert G. White, Connie Wyatt and Mayra Yu-Morales.



Do you write short stories or poetry?

Do you paint, draw or take pictures?

Then we'd like to see your work for possible publication!

ALL ENTRIES MUST BE SUBMITTED BY JUNE 15, 2012

Inviting you to contribute to our Special annual issue of *Breaking Ground* devoted to the arts.

THE EDITOR WILL CONSIDER:

- fiction, up to 1,000 words, and poems, whether traditional or modern.
- photos and all other forms of artwork.

Content is devoted to materials by or about persons with disabilities.

We'll give contributors a prominent by-line, a biographical note and copies of the issue.

Please include your name, complete contact information and a two- or three-sentence biography with your submission.

SEND YOUR SUBMISSIONS TO:

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Questions? call 615-532-6556

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