

BREAKING GROUND



TURNING PAGES TOGETHER

supporting literacy and social engagement



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Cover Photo by Bonny Matheny

Left to Right, A.J. Hoss, Vicki Slump, Sheila Leinbach, Andrea McCloud-Hoss, Linda Pierce, Blanch McClain

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TURNING PAGES TOGETHER

supporting literacy and social engagement

BY CYNTHIA CHAMBERS

The Next Chapter Book Club model, which originated at the Ohio State University Nisonger Center, provides opportunities for adolescents and adults with disabilities to engage in literacy-based social activities in community settings. East Tennessee State University (ETSU) is one of four grantees to receive funding from the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities to support Next Chapter Book Clubs across Tennessee.

Next Chapter Book Clubs at ETSU are coined Turning Pages Together, a name determined by an existing inclusive book club of individuals with and without intellectual disabilities. ETSU aims to lead six book clubs in the Tricities area in 2010-2011. To kick-off the project, Dr. Tom Fish from the Nisonger Center came to East Tennessee in early September to train book club facilitators and to demonstrate the Next Chapter Book Club model. Representatives from five cities in the East Tennessee area participated in the training. Since that event, four book clubs are up and running in Bristol and Johnson City. Other book clubs are being developed in Kingsport, Greeneville and Jonesborough.

One book club currently meets at Barnes & Noble in Johnson City. It is made up of five individuals with intellectual disabilities and an average of four individuals without disabilities. So far this group has read *Because of Winn Dixie*, *Shiloh*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*, and *Twilight*.

Andrea McCloud-Hoss has been facilitating the Johnson City book club for two years, and currently co-facilitates with her husband, A. J. "I began my involvement with Turning Pages Together anticipating that I would be positively contributing to the lives of individuals with disabilities, providing them with an opportunity to enrich their lives through literature and socialization," said Ms. McCloud-Hoss. "I feel I have done exactly that, but the unanticipated rewards of them exhibiting progress in their individual abilities and confidence has been even more encouraging to me. Their appreciation, dedication to the club and the friendships we have all gained is what motivates me to continue our meetings where we grow, learn and laugh together."

The impact of Turning Pages Together has been remarkable to watch over the past few years. As a university faculty member, I wanted to develop this program in East Tennessee to provide my pre-service teachers with hands-on opportunities to support individuals with disabilities. I also saw the need for adults with disabilities to have inclusive leisure activities in community-based settings. My university students and the book club members with disabilities have become a social network for each other. All participants, those with and without disabilities, have stepped up and assumed meaningful roles in the book club. No matter what the perceived ability level, all book club members provide support to each other through their help with reading, laughter, friendship or sense of caring.



Andrea McCloud-Hoss and Vicki Slump

Photo by Cynthia Chambers

Melissa Reed, a book club participant from ETSU, said, "Participating in Turning Pages Together has taught me that life is not about abilities or disabilities, but it is what we do with our abilities that counts."

Book club members with disabilities have communicated perspectives similar to those of members without disabilities. One member said, "I love to read [but] it doesn't matter if we stick to a book or not. For me it is about friendship and growing together." Two other book club members shared, "I enjoy reading the books and being with everyone," and "Book club gives me a good opportunity to get together with all my friends. I like being with everyone." Turning Pages Together has created a venue for access to social inclusion, membership in the community and active participation in meaningful leisure activities.

The Turning Pages Together project staff at ETSU are excited about the possibilities for reaching out to cities across the Tricities area with the new Next Chapter Book Club initiative. From our experiences so far, every book club establishes its own unique identity. Book clubs evolve to meet the needs of the participants and to create amazing relationships and support networks. For more information on Turning Pages Together, contact tptbookclub@etsu.edu or visit www.turningpagestogether.org.

Cynthia Chambers, PhD, is Turning Pages Together Director and assistant professor in the Department of Human Development and Learning at East Tennessee State University, and a member of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Other sites for Next Chapter Book Clubs are
Memphis Center for Independent Living

Pamela Momon, (901) 726-6404, pamela@mcil.org

The Arc of Williamson County

Sharon Botorff, (615) 790-5815, sbbarc@bellsouth.net

East Tennessee Technology Access Center

Marsha Willoughby, (865) 219-0130, willoughby.marsha@gmail.com

NASHVILLE AREA HABITAT FOR HUMANITY PROVIDES HOME PURCHASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

BY LUCILE HOUSEWORTH

Thanks to Federal Home Loan Bank's Affordable Housing

Program, Nashville Area Habitat for Humanity has an immediate opportunity to help ten families with a family member with a disability purchase homes as early as Spring 2011. Beginning in February, these homes will be built in the Park Preserve Community off Ewing Drive in north Nashville near Brick Church Pike.

BACKGROUND ON NASHVILLE AREA HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

Nashville Area Habitat for Humanity is an ecumenical Christian ministry that provides people with the life-changing opportunity to purchase and own quality, affordable homes. One of 1,600 Habitat affiliates around the world, Nashville Area Habitat was organized in 1985 and serves Davidson and Dickson Counties. Corporations, churches, organizations and volunteers contribute by funding and helping build the homes alongside the families who are selected to partner with Habitat and purchase their homes.

Affordable housing continues to be an unmet need in our community. Nashville Area Habitat for Humanity plays an active role in the development and construction of affordable single-family homes, collaborating with other housing providers and community-based agencies. However, its core programs are distinct from those of many other agencies.

To become a Habitat homeowner, an applicant must satisfy three basic criteria: 1) have a housing need; 2) demonstrate an ability to pay the mortgage by having a steady income and a reasonable credit history; and 3) show a willingness to partner with Habitat by attending classes to prepare for homeownership, helping to build their own house and doing other volunteer work and assignments. Habitat partner families buy their homes, paying a mortgage at 0% interest, with payments of approximately \$450-\$550 per month, including taxes and insurance.

Identifying qualified applicants is only part of the equation; funding the construction of the homes is another key component of the process. Funding comes from many sources. The Federal Home Loan Banks (FHLBanks), created by Congress, have been the largest source of funding for community lending in the U.S. for eight decades.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAM

One major program sponsored by FHLBanks is the Affordable Housing Program (AHP), which provides subsidy funding for the cost of

building homes for families with the greatest need, including those with developmental disabilities or other special needs. Nashville Area Habitat for Humanity is fortunate to be partnering with FHLBank of Cincinnati and its member bank, Pinnacle Financial Partners, in obtaining and deploying AHP funds to help cover construction costs for homes for these families.

STORIES OF FAMILIES WHO HAVE BENEFITED FROM THIS PROGRAM



Vanessa Drake purchased a quality, affordable Nashville Area Habitat home in 2009 for herself and her son, Vaden, who is four years old. Vaden has Down syndrome and congenital heart issues.

Ms. Drake is a single mother who has worked full-time at CVS as a customer care representative since October 2007. At the time she purchased her home, she was a full-time student at National College of Business and Technology, where she earned an associate's degree in business and management in August 2009. Currently, Ms. Drake is back in school at Nashville State studying to be an occupational therapy assistant.

Prior to buying her Habitat home, Ms. Drake and her son lived with Vaden's great-grandmother and great-grandfather in an overcrowded apartment. Ms. Drake looked for places to rent but had a difficult time finding one because of past credit issues.

Ms. Drake decided that moving in with family would allow her the chance to focus on repairing her credit. She worked hard to pay off bad debt and improve her credit so she could buy a home

that would provide her family with both safety and room to grow. Ms. Drake's income level made her ineligible for a traditional home loan, but she was determined to find another way to achieve her dream of homeownership. She came to Nashville Area Habitat at the recommendation of friends who were already successful Habitat homeowners.



Photo by Nicola Johnson

Left to right, Alani, Nicola and Aleigha Johnson

Nicola Johnson purchased a home in the Fall of 2010 for herself and her two daughters, Alani and Aleigha. Alani (age 9) has cerebral palsy and Aleigha is almost one year old. Ms. Johnson has worked for HCA

since 2001 and she plans to go back to school to pursue a degree in nursing.

In November, 2009, Ms. Johnson moved into an apartment that was not at all affordable but offered the accessibility necessary for Alani, who uses a wheelchair. The Johnson's previous duplex apartment had stairs leading up to the door and inside the home, and Ms. Johnson could not carry Alani. Ms. Johnson's mother suggested that she apply to purchase a Habitat home. Ms. Johnson said, "My mother is my biggest inspiration and the greatest person ever...she has supported me all my life and has not judged me when she could have."

For Ms. Johnson, homeownership means "Stability for me and my girls." Habitat modified its standard house plans to accommodate Ms. Johnson's family and to make caring for Alani easier.

To sponsor a Habitat home in Davidson or Dickson Counties, to volunteer or to refer a family for consideration for homeownership, please contact Nashville Area Habitat for Humanity at 615-254-4663. For more information, visit www.habitatnashville.org. For Habitat opportunities outside of Davidson and Dickson Counties, log on to www.habitat.org.

Lucile Houseworth is chief administrative officer for the Nashville Area Habitat for Humanity.

Division of Intellectual Disabilities Services to become the Department of Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities

BY MISSY MARSHALL

The beginning of 2011 brings some instrumental changes to the Division of Intellectual Disabilities Services (DIDS). Effective January 15, 2011, DIDS will transition to become the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD), pursuant to Public Chapter No. 1100 Public Acts, 2010 section 147.

A requirement of the legislation is a transition team comprised of DIDS employees and community members in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities. Members of the transition team were appointed by the DIDS Deputy Commissioner and met for the first time on July 27, 2010, and continue to meet on a monthly basis.

Deputy Commissioner Jim Finch also formed 12 sub-groups with Chairs appointed from the community and from within the Division. The sub-groups' tasks include: making recommendations for licensure

functions, health planning, procedures for investigating abuse and neglect, establishing services for individuals with developmental disabilities, implementing new rule requirements, as well as reviewing legal and fiscal matters for the new Department.

The transition team is responsible for reviewing the public act to facilitate transition and make recommendations for amendments to the act in furtherance of establishing the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, prior to the legislative bill filing cutoff dates established for the first session of the 107th General Assembly.

Former State House Minority Leader Jim Henry has been named to be the first Commissioner of the new Department.

Missy Marshall is director of Public Affairs/Legislative Liaison with the Division of Intellectual Disabilities Services.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO TENNESSEE'S STATE PARKS

BY MICHAEL FLOYD

Until fairly recently, our nation's state parks were not very accessible to people with disabilities. Aside from an accessible "Visitor's Center", park features rarely included activities that could be enjoyed by all. Fortunately, things began to change around 1990, when the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law by President George H.W. Bush. At that time, state parks across the country began creating a much more accessible park experience.

The State of Tennessee park system consists of 54 parks. According to the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation Web site, more than 25 million people visit these parks annually, placing Tennessee behind only Florida for park attendance in the Southeast. Nearly every one of these state parks has some degree of accessibility. Some have a few accessible buildings, whereas others are very comprehensive, having accessible nature trails, campsites and fishing piers. This emphasis on ADA-compliant facilities was one of the reasons the Tennessee park system earned the Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management in 2007. This award, presented every two years, is the most prestigious honor a state park can receive.

Beyond this national recognition, efforts to improve existing facilities and make them more accessible are ongoing. The driving force behind all of the improvements in accessibility is Isaac Okoreeh-Baah, ADA coordinator for Tennessee's state parks. We recently had the pleasure of speaking with Mr. Okoreeh-Baah, and when asked what the biggest challenge was to making parks more accessible, he replied, unequivocally, funding. His goal in 1996, when he accepted the job of ADA coordinator, was to accomplish as much as possible with the park system's limited budget. In retrospect, Mr. Okoreeh-Baah believes that the park system has achieved an incredible amount of success, as evidenced by the positive feedback regularly received from people with disabilities. In 2004, Mr. Okoreeh-Baah was honored with the "Independent Living Award" from the Jackson Center for Independent Living for all his work in making parks more accessible.

One of the biggest accomplishments during Mr. Okoreeh-Baah's tenure was the opening of the very first "Boundless Playground" at a state park. In 2007, "Darrell's Dream Boundless Playground" opened to the public at Warriors' Path State Park in Kingsport, providing a variety of outdoor recreation experiences for children of all abilities. Two years later, "The Lions Narnia Braille Trail" opened at the park. This quarter-mile trail is wheelchair accessible and includes eight sensory stations that tell visitors the story of Aslan, the lion in C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia fantasy. Each of the eight stations has a display, alternative Braille signs and an automated speaker that plays an "audio



Photo by Isaac Okoreeh-Baah

theatrical recording". This child-oriented project is just one of the many improvements and new programs that are being implemented for park visitors, including those with disabilities, to enjoy.

Park accessibility, however, does not stop at park facilities. There are also many events at parks across the State that are completely accessible for people with disabilities. Two recent events included *The Coming of the Civil War* at Bicentennial Mall in Nashville and *Crockett Christmas* at Davy Crockett State Park in Lawrenceburg. The *Crockett Christmas* event, held in early December, demonstrated how Christmas on the frontier was celebrated. Storytelling and traditional music accompanied hot wassail and pioneer food. This year, Davy Crockett State Park built a ramp that provides an entrance to the previously inaccessible playground area. This recent construction made all areas of that park accessible, with the exception of a couple of challenging hiking trails, according to Dawn Coleman, a park ranger.

Although there are still many modifications that need to be made to our state park facilities, Tennessee state parks are heading in the right direction. With all of the ongoing improvements to existing facilities, new ADA compliant amenities and efforts to create park events that can be enjoyed by everyone, it is evident that the needs of people with disabilities are finally being recognized. For more information about accessibility at Tennessee State Parks, visit their "Access Guide" at <http://www.tn.gov/environment/parks/accessguide.shtml> or call the Tennessee State Parks' ADA Coordinator, Isaac Okoreeh-Baah, at 615-532-0059.

Michael Floyd is a freshman at Vanderbilt University from Charlotte, North Carolina. He plans to major in Economics with minors in Corporate Strategy and Spanish.

VOLUNTEERS REMODEL BATHROOM FOR TEEN WITH DISABILITY

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BY KRISTI L. NELSON

By this morning, Demario Cornelius will have enjoyed his first real shower in two years.

A 2008 shooting left Cornelius, 19, paralyzed and in a wheelchair - which has always been too big to fit through the door frame of the single bathroom in the house

Cornelius shares with his mother, grandmother and four siblings.

And even if he could have gotten into the bathroom, it was outfitted with a bathtub he certainly couldn't have used.

So Cornelius has been limited to sponge baths and often was forced to eliminate in his bedroom, which is next to the bathroom. Many times, he relied on his grandmother, Jennie, and mother, Mary, for assistance.

That changed early this week, when a group of volunteers finished renovating the family's bathroom, putting in a door he can get through in his chair and installing a shower he can roll into.

"That shower's going to feel so good," Cornelius said as Keith Reardon of the DisAbility Resource Center showed him how to use a wheelchair designed to go in the shower.

Had Cornelius been 21 already, Reardon could have helped him get a bathroom remodel through the state's Home and Community-Based Services Waiver, designed to help people stay in their homes rather than going into nursing facilities.

Although 19 is the most common age to be involved in a paralyzing accident, Reardon said, teens who have already left the school system but aren't yet 21 can "fall through the cracks."

"He has two more years before he's eligible for Medicaid," Reardon said.

DRC learned about Cornelius' plight through a Knox County Schools counselor, who helped make sure he earned his diploma after the accident. They called on F.E. Trainer Construction Inc., which was looking to take on a volunteer project, owner Fred Trainer said.

Trainer and employee John Harper put together a team of local carpenters, plumbers, drywallers, flooring experts and painters to rip out the bathroom completely - replacing some rotten framework in the process - and install new flooring and fixtures, much of it donated.

They began the job Friday and finished Monday night. Commercial and Investment Properties provided two rooms at the downtown Holiday Inn where the Cornelius family stayed.

All the workers volunteered their time and materials, Harper said. "We do quite a bit of work in this area, and we've kept a lot of people busy over the last decade, so they were happy to help," Harper said, laughing. "But for this type of project, I think everybody would have helped regardless."

Upon seeing the new bathroom Tuesday- which includes a wide-frame pocket door between it and Cornelius' bedroom - his mother wept, Cornelius said. But the only emotion he felt was pure joy.

On Wednesday, before eating a sandwich, Cornelius rolled up to the bathroom sink.

"I said, 'Well, I can go in there now and wash my hands before I eat!'" he said. Being able to utilize the bathroom unassisted "made me feel better about myself."

Trainer wants to inspire other companies to take on similar volunteer projects, Harper said.

"Our skill set is what a lot of these charitable organizations are missing," he said.

As for Cornelius, the shooting, which happened when he was 17, inspired a lifestyle change. He was shot in the neck during a fight at the Max Lounge on Harrison Street, which authorities raided and closed just last week, calling it a "haven for criminal activity."

Cornelius, the oldest of five children, said he's careful now about the people with whom he associates and the places he goes. His mother said she makes a point now of knowing exactly where her children are. "It's not always who you're with or what you do, it's where you're at," Mary Cornelius said. "Bullets have no eyes, no eyes at all."

Since the accident, Cornelius has regained use of his hands and partial feeling in one foot. He stays active, playing basketball from the chair, and hopes to one day walk again. He'd like a career building or fixing things and may start speaking to younger children about "making good choices." He said he wants to be a good example for his younger siblings and his daughter, Kiemari, 2.

"I'm hoping (the bathroom remodel) makes him a little more independent and his life a little easier," Harper said.

Kristi L. Nelson may be reached at 865-342-6434.

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BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION OF TENNESSEE'S CAREGIVER SUPPORT NETWORK

BY PAM BRYAN

Brain injury is unpredictable in its consequences. A brain injury affects who we are, the way we think, act and feel. It can change everything about us in a matter of seconds. In Tennessee alone, approximately 8,000 people each year are admitted to the hospital with traumatic brain injuries. The task of caring for individuals with a brain injury largely falls on families, who struggle with these new and unanticipated responsibilities. Recovery from brain injury is measured in weeks, months and years; however the effects can be life-long.

Traumatic brain injury, also known as TBI, is defined as an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force. Due to advances in medical technology, many more people now survive these injuries. These individuals have to struggle to overcome, and in some cases live with, physical, cognitive or emotional challenges, many of which will significantly alter their lives and the lives of their families. Each brain injury is unique and the manifestation of deficits depends on the age of the survivor, the severity of the injury and the availability of medical services.

The mission of the Brain Injury Association of Tennessee (BIAT) is to ensure hope and support by providing brain injury prevention, awareness, education and advocacy to survivors and their families. BIAT, with a grant from the Tennessee Disability Coalition, developed the curriculum for the Caregiver Support Network program. This program addresses caregiver needs through information and education regarding various aspects of caregiving. In addition, numerous opportunities are provided for caregivers to share their personal stories and experiences. These vital sharing opportunities allow caregivers to gain and give much needed support.

As part of the education piece of this program, Caregiver Support Workshops are being offered across the State. The curriculum for the workshops is based on *Caring for You, Caring for Me: Education and Support for Family & Professional Caregivers*, Second Edition, developed by the Rosalyn Carter Institute for Caregiving. It has been modified to address the specific concerns and challenges of brain injury survivors and their caregivers/ family members. These workshops are also for professionals and service providers who work with individuals with brain injuries. The workshops consist of four modules.

1. What it means to be a caregiver (telling your story);
2. Taking care of yourself (managing caregiver stress);
3. Preventing and solving problems (hope and healing); and
4. Advocating (resources and services).

Two groups are targeted.

Group 1: Family members whose loved one is still in a rehabilitation facility.

Group 2: Family members who are caring for their loved one with a brain injury in the home.

The Caregiver Support Workshops for families and professionals are now being offered the first Tuesday of every month at the Stallworth Rehabilitation Hospital in Nashville. Workshops will take place in Memphis and Chattanooga after the first of the year. Subsequent workshops will be scheduled across Tennessee in 2011, including the Knoxville, Jackson and Cookeville areas. In addition, Fort Campbell has contacted BIAT to offer the workshops and Caregiver Support Network program as part of a family support program that is being developed there. Many military family members are suddenly finding themselves as caregivers for wounded warriors with brain injuries who are not able to return to service.

As a caregiver myself for 15 years, I know personally the need and importance of this program. As funding allows, the Caregiver Support Network program also will offer caregiver respite fun outings once a month, support groups and educational resource fairs.

Caregivers care for others best when they themselves are nurtured, when they find a community of others who know, who understand and who care about each other.

Please contact Pam Bryan if you are interested in these program/ workshops or know of families/caregivers of brain injury survivors who could benefit from this program.
615-248-2541 or Director@BrainInjuryTN.org.

Pam Bryan, CBIS, is executive director of the Brain Injury Association of Tennessee a Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute graduate (2004-05).

DISABILITIES, RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

A Growing Conversation in Tennessee

BY COURTNEY TAYLOR

The spiritual lives of individuals with disabilities and their families

is becoming a popular topic of conversation across Tennessee. The discussions are taking place at events for self-advocates and congregations, in research projects or even in the search for new university faculty recruits.

CONGREGATION INCLUSION CONFERENCE

"It is one thing to include individuals with disabilities and their families in communities of faith and it is quite another to be sure they are engaged," said Becca Hornstein, executive director of the Council For Jews With Special Needs. "Getting through the door is a first step, but once that person can come through the door, we need to assess whether he or she is being welcomed, in the true sense of the word."

Ms. Hornstein was addressing a group of religious leaders and educators, disability service providers and self-advocates at the First Annual Congregation Inclusion Conference held on October 5, 2010. During the day-long conference, Ms. Hornstein asked attendees to compile a list of what the welcoming of individuals with disabilities in congregations looks like, practically speaking. The list included engagement, acceptance, ownership, home, consistency, active participation, friendship, education and spiritual support.

The remainder of the day was spent sharing and gathering practical tools that would support and enable that sense of welcome in communities of faith. "The Conference was valuable as a consciousness raising exercise, as well as a place to get concrete information and strategies," said an attendee. "I really feel that inclusion benefits everyone, not just people with disabilities, but everyone in a community. I appreciated the attention to that in the program."

The Conference was co-sponsored by the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and Faith for ALL.

FAITH, DOUBT AND DISABILITIES: A SHARING OF STORIES

Stories are powerful tools. They can be used to educate, to communicate or to heal. They can be an imaginative way to learn about another person or another culture. Stories can connect us and transform how we see ourselves and how we see the world around us.

It is with this vision of the power of the story that Libby Austin, a Vanderbilt Divinity School student and intern at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, is coordinating a project that will collect stories from individuals with disabilities and their families about how disability informs their faith and their doubt. The collected and anonymous stories will be compiled into book and stage play formats to be used as educational tools to emphasize the need for attention to the spiritual lives of individuals with disabilities and their families.

In addition to the stories, the project has two research components. The first will focus on the storyteller. Basic demographic information will be collected, as well as information on their spiritual lives. They also will be asked about how the act of sharing their stories affected them. Data will be collected from the interviewee, post-interview, to determine how the listening and the receiving of the story transformed how they viewed themselves or their understanding of the lives of people with disabilities and their families.

The project will be coordinated over two years. Recruitment began in November and interviews are set to begin in January of 2011.

JEWISH FAMILY SERVICES PANEL

A panel discussion was held on inclusion in faith communities at the Gordon Jewish Community Center in September. The panel occurred in conjunction with the book and photography exhibit, *From Heartache to Hope: Middle Tennessee families living with autism*. Sponsored by Jewish Family Services, panelists included disability service agency representatives, family members and religious educators. The panelists outlined common barriers that prevent full inclusion and shared stories that illustrated successes in overcoming those barriers.

ERIK CARTER RELOCATES TO TENNESSEE

Erik Carter, PhD, author of *Including People With Disabilities in Faith Communities*, will join the faculty of Peabody College of Education and Human Development at Vanderbilt University in January as an associate professor of Special Education. In addition to an interest in disabilities, religion and spirituality, Dr. Carter focuses his research and writing on issues of transition and peer supports.

For information on any of the items included in this article, please contact courtney.taylor@vanderbilt.edu.

Courtney Taylor is associate director of Communications and Dissemination at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center.

Photos by Nicole Craig



Melissa Wartwick



Virgil Seay



Zeev Zilat

LEARNING TO BE INDEPENDENT AT WORKABILITY ACADEMY IN KNOXVILLE

BY NICOLE CRAIG

One cannot consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar...

Helen Keller

...and soaring to independence is what we are doing at the WorkABILITY Academy! The first week of October, an after-school program began providing opportunities for students aged 14 to 22 with differing abilities to explore subject areas such as peer counseling, self-awareness, soft-skill development, team-building exercises, advocacy, internships, career skills and career options.

The disABILITY Resource Center (DRC), a federally mandated Center for Independent Living, is offering this sought after program to target youth with a diversity of disabilities. Beginning at 3:00 pm and ending at 6:00 pm Monday through Thursday, students are engaged in fun and interactive activities in which the emphasis is placed on learning, not on passing or failing. The vision is to provide students with the necessary tools to become active members in their community and to lead independent lives.

The program runs throughout the school year and was created to help smooth the rough transition from youth to adulthood. "It is never too early to assist people in learning to live their lives independently," said Lillian Burch, the executive director for the DRC.

There has been an overwhelming response to this program, with parents calling from as far as 60 miles away to inquire about eligibility.

The DRC is filling in that gap where students age out of the school system and enter the real world. The skills being taught through the program are critical in the preparation for independent living. Already, several students have developed skills through their participation in the Summer WorkABILITY Academy.

Kendra Robinson is one such student. Through an internship, Ms. Robinson learned about making money, saving it, and opening her own bank account. She was inspired by bank representatives who taught the students the concepts of budgeting and saving. Ms. Robinson also learned about employment options and hopes to be a cosmetologist one day.

Another current student, Diane Godfrey, also had the opportunity to participate in the Summer WorkABILITY Academy. She learned not only about her own disabilities, but also about the disabilities of others. Her eyes were opened when she was exposed to the group project for community awareness called "X-Treme Heat Challenge", which involved an interactive obstacle course held at Knoxville's first all-inclusive playground. Each student in the Summer WorkABILITY Academy was assigned an activity that he or she would lead, such as Pluck A Duck, where community members used "reachers" to pluck plastic ducks out of a kid's pool; Simon Signs, where community members played Simon Says using sign language; Beeper Baseball, where community members played baseball blindfolded while listening for a beeping ball and then hitting it; and the wheelchair obstacle course. Ms. Godfrey led the wheelchair obstacle course and was sobered by her experience, trying to navigate the world utilizing



Ryan Schmid



Kendra Robinson, student and Virgil Seay, facilitator



Diane Godfrey

different equipment. "It helped me to appreciate the differences we have, and how each of us may use a different approach to accomplish the same things," Ms. Godfrey said.

Ryan Schmid, a first-time student at the WorkABILITY Academy, informed us that if he were not at the Academy, he would be home playing video games. Instead, Mr. Schmid is engaged with other students and is a role model to the younger ones. He exercises, reads books and takes turns listening and offering insights to other students. He is beginning to understand the connection between his interests and employment options through career interest inventories and computer research.

Mr. Schmid is excited about an upcoming group project through which the students will learn the basics of accessibility surveys. After the training is completed, the students will visit a local shopping center to conduct an accessibility survey. They will determine whether the businesses are compliant with ADA regulations and whether people with different abilities are able to access all parts of the businesses.

One parent, Karen Weber-Gilat, is so happy with the program that she travels from a neighboring county 45 minutes away. "When I came here, you opened your arms up to me which was refreshing," Ms. Weber-Gilat said.

She is so pleased for her son and recognizes it as a place where Zeev can feel comfortable and develop a network of friends. Engaging the parents as well as the students strengthens the foundation that the WorkABILITY Academy seeks to build.

So, there is a group of students, parents and staff in Knoxville, all refusing to creep when they can soar. The WorkABILITY Academy is just one way we engage people with different abilities early in life so that they can develop skills necessary for success and a sense of support



along the way. The implications for the program are great and, with the preparation of today's youth for independence, we are preparing for a bright future where we all can soar.

For more information on the WorkABILITY Academy and other DRC programs, contact Nicole Craig at the **disABILITY Resource Center**

900 East Hill Ave, Suite 120
Knoxville, TN 37915

Voice: 865-637-3666

TTY: 865-637-6796

Fax: 865-637-5616

E-mail: drc@drctn.org

Web site: www.drctn.org

Nicole Craig is the program director at the disABILITY Resource Center. She lives in Knoxville with her husband Tim, son Nicholas, daughter Laurel, a cat named Furrigus and a dog named Chula.

TENNESSEE JUSTICE CENTER EFFORTS HELP PARTNERS GRADUATE STAY IN HOME

BY SUSANNE BENNETT

Erin Brady Worsham lives in Nashville with her husband, Curry, and their 15-year-old son, Daniel. Ms. Worsham was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), better known as Lou Gehrig's Disease, in 1994. Over the years, the disease has paralyzed her body, except for a few facial muscles. Still, her mind is fully present and she communicates through words and art by painstakingly moving a cursor on her forehead connected to a computer.

Since developing ALS, Ms. Worsham has struggled to obtain home health care and keep her TennCare coverage, and the Tennessee Justice Center (TJC) has been with her at every turn. When Ms. Worsham's HMO denied necessary home health care and ignored her appeal, the Tennessee Justice Center contacted the State's lawyers and Ms. Worsham was able to get the care she needed to stay at home and not move to a nursing home. When the State tried to take home health away entirely, Ms. Worsham fought openly and stopped the new policy from taking effect.

Ms. Worsham's HMO has tried to reduce the number of home health hours she receives, which TJC has been able to fight also. Sometimes, the nursing agency fails to provide staff, leaving Mr. Worsham to sacrifice sleep to provide care. TJC has been able to fix this problem too. For her courage in standing up and speaking out, not only on her own behalf, but for all people with disabilities, Ms. Worsham was awarded TJC's Mother of the Year award. With her unstoppable voice, her husband's unflappable dedication, and TJC's legal expertise and commitment, Ms. Worsham has been able to keep her care and live her life to the fullest.

Ms. Worsham came to TJC for help when her child was two. Through TJC's intervention and the Worsham's dedication to each other, State policies were improved and, more importantly, Ms. Worsham was able to be a mother to Daniel. In turn, Ms. Worsham has done the same for other families by being part of the community, writing in various publications, including the *Tennessean* and *Quest*, a publication of the Muscular Dystrophy Association, and testifying in court to make sure that other parents with disabilities are able to stay at home to watch their children grow up. Ms. Worsham has changed policies on a broader level, but she also has served her community on a grassroots level by inspiring children and adults with disabilities to know that with perseverance much can be accomplished. Ms. Worsham's life of action reminds us all that keeping people with disabilities in the community is in everyone's interest.

Ms. Worsham's courage and Mr. Worsham's devotion are also a daily inspiration for TJC staff members. Several pieces of her beautiful



Photo by TJC Staff

artwork hang on the walls of TJC's downtown Nashville office. Mr. Worsham said, "The Tennessee Justice Center has been like a rock for us, always supporting us whenever any need arises."

Do you know someone who is on TennCare but is still not getting the services they need? Was that care ordered by a doctor, but is still not being provided? If you know families who lack access to appropriate health care, contact the Tennessee Justice Center. The TJC helps families like Ms. Worsham's every day and our services are free. We have helped get dental, physical and mental health care services that were denied by TennCare. We also help families get care when there is no doctor or specialist in the area. Please help us continue to locate and assist families in need!

The Tennessee Justice Center is located at 301 Charlotte Avenue, Nashville, TN, 37201. You can call our office at 615-255-0331 or toll-free at 877-602-1009. You can also find us on the Web at www.tnjustice.org, visit our Facebook page for the latest updates, and read client stories on our Blog (<http://tennesseejustice.blogspot.com/>).

Susanne Bennett is client advocate/educator with the Tennessee Justice Center.



Photos by Lynette Porter



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Ned Andrew Solomon

615.532.6556

ned.solomon@tn.gov

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JUSTICE FOR ALL

A REVIEW AND UPDATE ON LANE V. TENNESSEE

BY BETH HOPKINS

According to the tenets of the Pledge of Allegiance, the American flag stands for a nation that is meant to thrive, to remain united and to offer "liberty and justice for all". Throughout our history, people with disabilities and their advocates have fought to realize equality in their communities.

One such struggle began in 1998, when six Tennesseans with disabilities teamed up with a group of attorneys to bring a lawsuit against the State and against 25 of its counties. The case became known as *Lane v. Tennessee*, and its outcomes represent landmark steps on the path to more complete civil rights for people with disabilities.

The plaintiffs, all of whom had mobility disabilities, were unable to access State court programs. This failure of the Tennessee government to provide program access was a violation of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in the provision of services, programs and activities by federal, state and local governments.

Martha L. Lafferty, managing attorney at the Disability Law and Advocacy Center (DLAC, formerly Tennessee Protection and Advocacy), was one of several attorneys who worked on the *Lane v. Tennessee* case. Ms. Lafferty explained that, "For the plaintiffs, the central issue was always that people with disabilities should be able to access Tennessee's court program. That was the key issue in the federal district court part of the case. That is the issue that resulted in settlement agreements with all defendants."

Ms. Lafferty and DLAC began work on the case in 2003, joining attorney William Brown. By that time, the case had reached the Supreme Court and DLAC provided input and feedback into briefs filed with the Court. They continued working as a team with Mr. Brown on negotiations until settlements were reached in 2005, contributing substantial time and resources.

As part of the settlements of *Lane v. Tennessee*, each of the 25 counties agreed to make its court programs accessible to persons with mobility disabilities, a majority of them agreeing to make physical modifications to improve access.

Though these settlements represent significant developments for individuals with disabilities, there is still progress to be made. Nineteen of the 25 counties have complied with all terms set in the settlements, with the remaining six still working to do so. DLAC continues to monitor the compliance of all the counties involved in the case and any issues that arise regarding access to court programs in those counties.

According to Ms. Lafferty, one of the most significant hurdles for individuals with disabilities still remaining in county court systems is the provision of accommodations for people with hearing disabilities. She said, "The ADA and Tennessee's Judicial Branch ADA Policy both apply to other types of accessibility, including effective communication for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. DLAC continues to receive complaints from people with hearing disabilities who are having difficulty getting a Tennessee court to provide and pay for a sign language interpreter."

With a goal of full compliance for the six remaining counties by 2011, awareness is rising. At this stage, proper training and a spirit of collaboration between agencies are necessary. "As far as the State of Tennessee's implementation of its Judicial Branch ADA Policy goes, implementation is generally very good," said Ms. Lafferty. "However, more training is needed for local ADA Coordinators for the Courts and other local court personnel.... Although the State ADA Coordinator for the Courts has been very helpful in getting those problems resolved, we are hopeful that additional training will prevent them from continuing to occur."

DLAC is working diligently toward the compliance of all the county courts involved with the *Lane v. Tennessee* case. Working alongside them are the State ADA Coordinator for the Courts, the Disability and Language Barrier Committee of the Access to Justice Commission, Bridges and others. Five years after the closing of the case, dedicated Tennesseans continue their effort to make sure that the court programs in this State are accessible for all individuals with disabilities.

An alumnus of the Master's program in Nonprofit Organizations at the University of Georgia, Beth Hopkins is member of the 2010 Partners in Policymaking class, a former intern for the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, and a Youth Leadership Forum graduate (2002).

WHO IS DLAC?

Formerly Tennessee Protection and Advocacy, the Disability Law and Advocacy Center (DLAC) is one of a group of Protection and Advocacy agencies established by Congress under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act. The original purpose of these agencies was to address issues of abuse and neglect of persons with developmental disabilities.

DLAC began its advocacy work with a focus on special education. Over the years, its work has expanded to include general advocacy services in a variety of areas pertinent to the lives of individuals with disabilities,

such as vocational rehabilitation and employment, assistive technology, housing and mental health support services.

Direct services provided by DLAC include information and referral, training and technical assistance, mediation and negotiation services, investigation of abuse and neglect, litigation and advocacy. DLAC also will address access to public and private programs and services for individuals with disabilities and discrimination against persons with disabilities.

In addition to these programs and services, DLAC monitors developments in state and federal policy, educates people on legislative issues, and collaborates with individuals and organizations for systems change.

For more information, visit DLAC online at <http://www.dlactn.org/>

UT TO OFFER POSTSECONDARY PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES OR AUTISM

BY AMY BLAKELY

College students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities or autism will soon have the chance to attend the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UT-K).

The new two-year vocational certificate program, set to begin in Fall 2011, is being funded by a \$321,683 grant from the Transition Program for Students with Intellectual Disabilities, part of the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. UT-K was one of 27 entities in 23 states to share \$10.9 million in funding for these efforts. The grant is expected to be renewed for four more years, according to a press release from the U.S. Department of Education.

The UT-K program is being developed by Liz Fussell at Connections for Disability and Employment; David Cihak, associate professor of special education; and Melinda Gibbons, assistant professor of counselor education. The program will work in coordination with the Korn Learning, Assessment and Social Skills (KLASS) Center and the Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities, University Center for Excellence on Developmental Disabilities; Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities; Tennessee's Statewide Task Force for Postsecondary Education; the Division of Special Education; and the Division of Rehabilitation Services.

"I couldn't be more proud of our faculty and staff who successfully won the grant that will make this program possible," said Bob Rider, dean of the College of Education, Health and Human Sciences. "Providing post-secondary educational opportunities to students with intellectual disabilities helps to fulfill the mission of our college and the land grant mission of the University of Tennessee. There is no more important work to be done than helping students with special needs improve their life and job opportunities, and this will happen as a result of this program."

Dr. Cihak said UT-K plans to enroll eight students the first year with plans to increase the class size by four each year, with the goal of serving 80 students during the five years funded by the grant.

Students will take a mixture of non-graded, traditional college courses and independent study courses focusing on career development, independent living, self-advocacy, problem-solving, communication, and interpersonal social skills, as well as participating in a competitive work-based internship.

Students will be encouraged to participate in campus activities. Although they'll commute initially, in time students may be able to live on campus.

The goals are to help the students develop a social network, learn to live independently and become gainfully employed.

"Historically, these opportunities have never been available for these students," Dr. Cihak said. "We're trying to replicate what the university is already doing—but for a population that never had an opportunity to participate in college life before."

The program also will provide both outreach and research opportunities for UT-K.

Students with intellectual disabilities or autism are able to attend public school through the end of the school year in which they turn 22 years old. However, under the New Tennessee High School Diploma Project, enacted in 2009, these students will not receive a regular high school diploma unless they earn 22 credits and pass end-of-course exams. Without the required academic credits, students may earn a transition certificate or an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) certificate (formerly the Special Education Diploma).

Some go on to a State-run adult rehabilitation services program, although these programs often have waiting lists and are required to serve those with the most significant disabilities first, Dr. Cihak said. Consequently, many students are unable to find work and simply continue to live at home, dependent upon aging parents.

Nationwide, there are about 200 programs like the one UT-K is launching, Dr. Cihak said. The only other program in Tennessee is Next Steps at Vanderbilt University, which began in January, 2010. [See *Breaking Ground*, Number 54, April 2010.]

The 2009 Annual Statistical Report for the number of children with disabilities receiving special educational services in Tennessee schools includes 23,260 students with intellectual disabilities and 5,754 students with autism.

Knox County Schools serve 791 students with intellectual disabilities and 604 students with autism, according to State records.

In 2009, statewide, 1,757 students with disabilities in Tennessee schools received an IEP Certificate and 191 students received certificates of attendance rather than a regular high school diploma. That same year, 100 special education diplomas and six certificates of attendance were earned by Knox County students, according to State records.

To be eligible for UT-K's program, students with intellectual disabilities or autism must be capable of participating in class, have skills to adapt to new situations, be able to attend class alone and have transportation to campus.

The classes are expected to be housed in the Claxton Education Building on the UT Knoxville campus. The program will be run by faculty, graduate assistants, doctoral students in special education and counseling, and staff members, including someone who helps cultivate potential employment for students.

Students will pay tuition, although some financial aid options may be available.

For more information, about the program, contact Dr. Cihak at dchihak@utk.edu or Ms. Fussell at lzfuss@utk.edu.

Amy Blakely is assistant director of Media Relations at the University of Tennessee.

BY ANGELA BECHTEL

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder has been providing bilingual information and referral services to individuals with disabilities, their family members, and agency staff since 1997. This last fiscal year, Pathfinder staff made close to 6000 calls and worked with individual callers from 88 counties in Tennessee and 37 states. The most requested service needs identified in 2009-2010 included financial assistance, mental health services, housing, Social Security disability and employment.

As funding for public programs continues to be cut from the State budget, it is now more important than ever that each and every citizen has opportunities to access what very limited resources are available. Many systems are inherently challenging to navigate and can be even more so to individuals of another cultural origin. With this in mind, Pathfinder has extended its Multicultural and Kurdish programs to reach both refugees and immigrants in Middle Tennessee by locating these underserved populations and providing culturally competent information and assistance. For more information, contact Alex Santana, multicultural program coordinator, at 615-875-5083.

Photos by Tracy Pendergrass



Sunday, October 3, 2010, the Parent Support Group for Spanish-speaking families organized by the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center celebrated Family Day at Dragon Park (Fannie Mae Dees Park) in Nashville. Special guest and internationally-renowned Colombian artist Maestro Jorge Yances guided the families in the creation of a collage representing the importance of the Parent Support Group to these families. It was a fun-filled event enjoyed by everyone who attended.

Speaking of support groups, Pathfinder's recently-updated statewide support group list is now available at www.familypathfinder.org.

Pathfinder's 2011 Directory is coming soon. In January, the latest version of Pathfinder's Disability Services & Supports Directory will

be available at www.familypathfinder.org for anyone to download and print. The directory will be an abbreviated version of the same information that individuals can access through Pathfinder's on-line searchable database, which includes over 1,700 agencies throughout the State. Stay tuned for the exact date the Directory will be available, as well as directions on how to download.



Pathfinder is excited to announce our new Tennessee Disability Pathfinder and Access Nashville Facebook pages. "Friend" us to receive useful, up-to-date information on Pathfinder and Access Nashville trainings, conferences, news and events.

Pathfinder's mission is to provide comprehensive bilingual disability information and referral resources and support services to and for people with disabilities and their families in Tennessee. The scope of information, resources and support services includes all types of disabilities (mental health, intellectual, developmental, physical and learning), and all ages (birth to seniors). Call our HelpLine at 1-800-640-4636 or visit www.familypathfinder.org to find a statewide, searchable database of disability services, including social service agencies, low-income medical clinics and a multitude of other valuable resources organized by both geographic location and service provided. The listings are updated daily.

Other information is available on the site, including a "Disability Resources Library", a calendar of events related to disabilities, Camino Seguro, which is Pathfinder's statewide database of disability, mental health and social service agencies with bilingual Spanish-speaking staff, and Access Nashville, a guide to "accessibility-friendly" restaurants, entertainment attractions, hotels and transportation services in the Nashville area.

Angela Bechtel, MSSW, 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.**

SPANISH SPEAKING FAMILIES FIND SUPPORT THROUGH NETWORKING AND OPEN COMMUNICATION

BY LESLIE HARTMAN & NED ANDREW SOLOMON

Imagine that you have moved your family to another country, a place where learning the language and the culture is a daily challenge. Then, shortly after moving there you discover your child has a disability, either by your own observations or because of the concerns of a doctor or educator. You find yourself with more questions than answers, and just wish you had someone to talk to about them.

That scenario has been all too real for numerous Spanish-speaking individuals and families who have settled in Tennessee. Fortunately, Tennessee Disability Pathfinder has a Spanish-speaking parent support group that meets the first Monday of each month at Southminster Presbyterian Church on Harding Place in Nashville. This tight group of parents has developed, over time, camaraderie and mutual understanding that have helped families begin to work positively to deal with these additional, unexpected life challenges. Together, they discuss their struggles and their successes.

Fabiola, Jacinta and Macarena attend the Parent Support Group. All three women have children on the autism spectrum. They say that the Support Group has helped inform them of services that are available, reinforcing for them that they are not alone. "Why me, why my child?" said Fabiola, when her child first received his diagnosis. "But coming to the meetings and learning and educating myself about what autism is all about, I feel more at peace. I now see it as a blessing to have had my son."

Jacinta appreciates the fact that she is surrounded by people facing similar issues. She has learned about valuable resources, like her son's participation in a TRIAD (The Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders) Summer camp. She is optimistic now that her child can achieve great things, like other kids.

Jacinta's daughter, Nataly, has participated in a sibling support group and has begun to understand why her brother behaves the way he does. "When he was younger, I saw some changes in him that my little cousins didn't have," said Nataly. "I just went along with it, and thought it was natural."

Macarena has learned to have more patience with her son and has tried to encourage others who could benefit from the group to attend.

All three are thankful they landed in a community, and a society, where there is more awareness and open discussion of disabilities. They report that in Mexico those with disabilities are generally not

accepted in society and that children with disabilities are most often isolated in separate schools. They said that educators and administrators have "no concept of trying to develop a child" or of creating inclusive environments where kids with and without disabilities interact.

On the other hand, Fabiola has discovered that here, from a young age in school, children are taught about respect for children with disabilities.

Beyond acquiring vital information about services and resources, the three moms have become friends. Outside of the group get-togethers, they communicate regularly and help each other. If a problem arises, they are comfortable calling one of the other moms to see how she might have dealt with that particular issue. Even when another mom in the support group has a child with a different kind of disability, they can still support each other because they believe so many of the issues and struggles are the same.

Although the awareness and open communication is better here, the three families believe that money and education are significant factors, and often the biggest obstacles, in a family's ability to get services. Through the Parent Support group, these families have been able to access the education part, by getting connected to services and resources in the community through the Pathfinder Information & Referral Office and by accessing doctors and therapists who specialize in autism and other developmental disabilities.

The families are especially thankful to Carolina Meyerson, the founder and coordinator of these support groups. Fluent in Spanish, Ms. Meyerson helps Spanish-speaking individuals and families locate disability services and information, assists with identifying bilingual contacts and interpreters, assists in expanding disability and related social service information for the Tennessee Disability Pathfinder database, coordinates community outreach activities to promote disability services available to individuals with disabilities in the Spanish-speaking community, provides case management services to clients and helps organize the annual Hispanic conference in Nashville.

To find out more about this support group, please contact Carolina Meyerson at 615-400-4422 or carolina.meyerson@vanderbilt.edu.

Leslie Hartman completed an internship with the Council on Developmental Disabilities and graduated from Lee University in May.

Ned Andrew Solomon is director of the Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute for the Council.

TENNESSEE SPOTLIGHT

Two students in the **Next Steps at Vanderbilt** postsecondary education program met philanthropists **Bill** and **Melinda Gates** when the Gates visited Nashville's **Tennessee Technology Center** (TTC) on November 4th. Joining the Gates on the visit were **Alan Golston**, the U.S. program director of the Gates Foundation, and other Foundation members.



Edward Nesbitt

In preparation for the Gates Foundation's visit, **Edward Nesbitt**, Next Steps at Vanderbilt student, was assigned as an intern at the TTC receptionist's desk. "Edward proudly and proficiently performed his duties as a greeter," said **Tammy Day**, director of the Next Steps at Vanderbilt Program.

Hallie Bearden, another Next Steps at Vanderbilt student, also was interning with a TTC staff member in another part of the

building where she, too, was able to meet the Gates. "Both students were very excited about this amazing opportunity," Ms. Day said. "For Next Steps at Vanderbilt, this was a momentous day, because it showed how much the Nashville Technology Center supports and values the vocational training of students with significant learning challenges."

The Gates toured several programs on the TTC campus with its director **Mark Lenz** and assistant director **Arrita Summers**, who have been instrumental in the collaboration between TTC and Next Steps at Vanderbilt. After the TTC tour, the Gates were joined by **John Morgan**, chancellor of the **Tennessee Board of Regents**, and **Dr. Rich Rhoda**, executive director of the **Tennessee Higher Education Commission**, to discuss Tennessee higher education systems. The TTC tour was among other visits that the Gates made of Tennessee higher education institutions.

A program of the **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities**, Next Steps at Vanderbilt is a two-year, nonresidential certificate program for students with intellectual disabilities. Students have individualized Programs of Study in the areas of education, social and independent living skills and vocational training. Employment preparation includes internships at Vanderbilt University and, for some students, course work or internships at the Nashville Tennessee Technology Center.

Next Steps at Vanderbilt is supported in part by a grant from the **Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities** and the philanthropy of **Linda Brooks** and the **LDB Foundation**.



Paula Denslow

Project BRAIN coordinator and Middle Tennessee resource specialist, **Paula Denslow**, was the recipient of the prestigious **Tennessee Emergency Medical Services for Children's Award** as Children's Advocate of the Year. Based on Ms. Denslow's tireless efforts to reach this year's milestone for Project BRAIN, partnering with Tennessee Children's hospitals to provide effective communication links for families, she was recognized for her leadership in

expanding Project BRAIN's goals and her dedication to children across the State.

Sharon Lewis, commissioner, **Administration on Developmental Disabilities** will be a guest lecturer in the **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center Lecture Series on Human Development and Developmental Disabilities**. Commissioner Lewis will deliver the **Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Lecture** on Thursday, January 20, 2011.

In celebration of the life and legacy of **Eunice Kennedy Shriver**, the **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center**, **Next Steps at Vanderbilt**, **Best Buddies of Tennessee**, the **Disability Law and Advocacy Center of Tennessee**, and the **Tennessee Disability Coalition** hosted an evening focused on the importance of voting as a right, a responsibility and an inclusive activity.

The celebration included a presentation on the contributions of Eunice Kennedy Shriver, information on voting rights and responsibilities, information on disability issues in public policy, assistance in completing voter registration forms, and practice voting on paper ballots and on actual voting machines.

Eunice Kennedy Shriver Day is an annual national celebration of her life and a global call for people to commit actions of inclusion, acceptance and unity for and with individuals with intellectual disabilities.



Jan Rosemergy

Jan Rosemergy, PhD, director of Communications and Dissemination, has been named **Deputy Director of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center**. Ms. Rosemergy has more than 25 years experience in directing the Center's disability research and outreach communication, and in organizing and implementing continuing education activities. In her new role, Ms. Rosemergy will assist in

Photo by VKC Staff Photographer



Left to right: Becca Looker, Emily Bowlan and Anna Chisum

developing and researching programmatic initiatives. Ms. Rosemergy will also continue her role as director of Communications.

Emily Bowlan, daughter of Partners 09-10 graduate **Connie Bowlan**, participated in the homecoming pep-rally in late September as **Arlington High School** hosted **Westwood High School** for the homecoming game. Ms. Bowlan has enjoyed being a contributing part of the team, wears her uniform with confidence, and displays a sense of school spirit that has proved to get the team fired up and fans on their feet. "I am a proud TIGER...I am part of the **2010-2011 Arlington High School Cheer Team**," said Ms. Bowlan. "I cheer with 25 other cheerleaders during the Arlington High School football games each Friday night. I have loved cheering for my school team and being with my friends."

The **Tennessee Healthcare Campaign** (THCC) has named **Beth Uselton**, formerly East Tennessee lead organizer and THCC lead organizer, as its new executive director.

STEP (Support & Training for Exceptional Parents) announced that its application for funding a **Parent Training and Information Center** was successful. STEP staff are looking forward to continuing to serve families across Tennessee, collaborating with other disability organizations, and increasing effective communication with school systems to enhance parental involvement activities. The agency will be incorporating new training curricula and technology that will be used to reach out to more families and promote positive outcomes for students with disabilities in Tennessee.

The U.S. Department of Education announced the award of more than \$3.5 million in grants to operate 15 special education Parent Training and Information (PTI) Centers in 11 states, as well as the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands and Guam. The Department also awarded \$1 million to provide funding for 10 **Community Parent Resource Centers**.

Rocco Landesman, Chairman of the **National Endowment for the Arts**, announced that VSA Tennessee has been approved for a grant of \$10,000 to support the **VSA Tennessee** 10-year anniversary which will take place on April 12 at the **Schermerhorn Symphony Hall**. An independent agency of the federal government, the National Endowment for the Arts advances artistic excellence, creativity, and innovation for the benefit of individuals and communities. Currently, VSA Tennessee is working to match this national grant through state and local funds, and thanks the Tennessee Arts Commission, PCG Education and Public Supermarket Charities who have already made commitments towards these efforts.

TENNESSEE SPOTLIGHT wants to hear great things about YOU!

- Have you or your family member been accepted into or successfully completed an educational program?
- Have you or your family member received a nomination or an award for your wonderful work in the community?
- Have you or your family member been hired for a new job or gotten a recent promotion?

Send your good news and pictures by e-mail to: ned.solomon@tn.gov and we'll make every attempt to get it in an upcoming issue of **Breaking Ground!**

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