

breaking ground

SUMMER 2024

ISSUE 118



What's Happening in TN Inclusive Higher Education?



Council on
Developmental Disabilities

breaking ground



ON THE COVER: At the UTK FUTURE Tennessee Believes Kitchen, students learn cooking skills from a professional chef to aid independent living and future career options. The Kitchen was made possible by a Tennessee Belives grant from the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. See page 8 for more on how Tennessee Believes is growing inclusive higher education options for students with intellectual disabilities across the state.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

TN's Center for Decision-Making Support: Help for the Process of Making Life Decisions	2-4
Creating Accessibility and Inclusion For Children With Disabilities in Child Care Settings	5-6
Five Accessible Housing Resources to Know About	7
Tennessee Believes: Growing Inclusive Higher Education for Students with Disabilities	8-11
"What Happens After I Apply?" — TN-START	12-14
Enhancing Health Care for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities	15
"What Happens After I Apply?" Ravi Lipman: A Vocational Rehabilitation Story	16
Introducing Our New Council Communications Coordinator	17

Learn more about the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. 615.532.6615 | www.tn.gov/cdd | www.facebook.com/TNCouncilonDD | Tnddc@tn.gov
Subscriptions to Breaking Ground are free and available through the Council website. Visit tn.gov/cdd to subscribe or contact us by phone or email with subscription updates or requests, and please include name and mailing or email address.

This project was supported in part by grant number 2101TNSCDD, from the U.S. Administration for Community Living, Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. 20201. Grantees undertaking projects with government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Points of view or opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official ACL policy.

Dear Readers,

As we talk to Tennesseans every day (to many of you!), we often conclude: this story needs to be told.

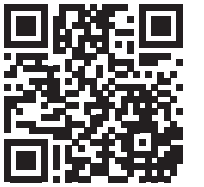
The articles you're about to read started that way. "What happens after I apply?" became such a consistent theme across our conversations with you that we have developed a story series on that topic.

Similarly, we created a Center for Decision Making Support (CDMS) because, across everything we heard for years, choice was the root of so many issues. In this edition of *Breaking Ground*, you'll read about the stories that continue today — now with support from CDMS.

I hope you can see how directly you impact our work. Your stories and questions are our constant guide. Visit our Engage with Us page on the website to learn more.

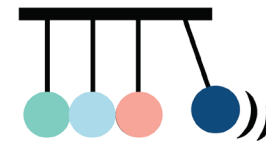
And speaking of engaging with us, we have big news to share: we hired a new communications coordinator, Dirk Strider. Dirk's professional experience is in communications, specializing in accessibility and plain language. His personal passion is autistic self-advocacy and how disability identity intersects with other marginalized communities. Combine that with his self-proclaimed special interest in bureaucracy and state government, we are convinced that we have found the true perfect fit for this role on our team. Read more about Dirk on page 17. You will hear a lot more from Dirk in the coming months on our social media, e-news, and this magazine. Please help us give him a warm welcome!

Sincerely,
Lauren Percy



ENGAGE WITH US PAGE

Healthy Behavior Check-In



Supporting Well-being for People with Disabilities

Behavior is communication. It can be hard for people with disabilities to say when their needs aren't being met. Sometimes, unmet needs show up through behavior. Sometimes, behavior is a symptom of a medical problem (like a seizure or a urinary tract infection). Supporting well-being for a person with a disability means working to understand what the person's actions and non-verbal cues are telling us they need.

Autonomy & Independence

- Does the person have as much say as possible over their own life? Are they given meaningful choice whenever possible? Are they getting support to understand and make decisions?
- Are supporters and caregivers speaking directly TO the person? Are they paying attention to the person's responses (verbal or non-verbal) and wishes?
- Does the person have space to take reasonable risks and make mistakes?
- Does the person have time to be alone/do their own thing without direct supervision (as developmentally appropriate)?

Need help in this area?
Visit the **TN Center for Decision-Making Support** for information and tools.

Mental health

- Does the person have professional support for mental health? Do other family members/supporters?
- Are there mindfulness or other mental wellness tools that could be helpful?
 - Are there signs that a more complete mental health evaluation is needed?

Physical health

- Is it possible the person is not feeling well?
- Are they experiencing pain they can't explain (for example, a urinary tract infection or dental pain)?
- Are they getting recommended preventive, medical, and dental care?

Medication

- Is medication being taken as prescribed?
- Have medication dosages been checked recently?
- Has a doctor checked for possible interactions between different medications the person is taking?
- Do any of the person's medications have possible negative side effects? Are there other alternatives to try?

Finding the root cause for behavior can sometimes take some real detective work. Learn about a new tool to help people with intellectual/developmental disabilities and their supporters think about the needs behind behavior.

AVISO: Subtítulos disponibles en inglés y español.



SCAN TO VIEW VIDEO



TN's Center for Decision-Making Support: Help for the Process of Making Life Decisions

by Penny Johnson, The Arc Tennessee Program Coordinator, Center for Decision-Making Support

Photo caption: The Cobb family shares their story of how they learned about decision-making support options to choose the best support for Alex. This is one of the latest videos available on the Center website.

Editor's Note: For years, our Council staff heard stories about the need for people with developmental disabilities to have more choices and control over their own lives. Families had no easy way to find tools, resources, and legal advice to help them support decision-making for a loved one with a developmental disability. Out of these needs, we partnered in 2019 with The Arc Tennessee and Disability Rights Tennessee to establish the TN Center for Decision-Making Support. We're proud of how the Center's work has grown and benefited so many lives since it was founded.

Making life decisions is part of everyday life. Most of us make countless decisions each day with little effort. However, for some people with disabilities, decision-making is not so easy. People with intellectual or developmental disabilities, with mental illness, or age-related disabilities like dementia may need support from family members, professionals, or other trusted advisors to help them make life decisions.

There are many ways to support someone with decision-making. Some ways are **informal**, like helping someone understand the benefits or risks related to a specific decision or going to a doctor's visit with someone to take notes to help them understand their medical condition or treatment. Some supports are **formal**, like legal documents or processes such as a durable power of attorney, conservatorship, representative payee, special needs trust, wills, supported decision-making, and more. We all need support with decisions at one time or another.

For situations when someone needs legal documents, it can be overwhelming to try to figure out which documents are appropriate or how to go about getting them. In Tennessee, we have the TN Center for Decision-Making Support to help people understand these legal documents and processes. People from all walks of life call the center for help regarding all kinds of situations related to decision-making documents and supported decision-making practices.



Penny poses with a group at a recent conference where she shared Center information with families.

The Center in action: one family's story

Recently, the Center received a call from the parents of a young adult with a disability. Mom and dad were told by a case worker that because their daughter has an intellectual disability and is over eighteen years old, the parents needed to get a conservatorship for her. The case worker said this was in order to protect her from being taken advantage of and so the parents could be involved in decisions for her.

Neither mom nor dad knew what conservatorship was or the process to obtain one. Their daughter had recently graduated from high school and was working part-time at a local business. She was in a program to help her increase independent living and job skills. Up to this point, mom and dad had just talked with their daughter to help her make decisions and plan her future. However, when they were told they needed a conservatorship to protect her, they became concerned that they needed more protection.

The family scheduled a consultation to meet with a Center staff member to discuss their situation and the various decision-making support documents. They learned about:

- conservatorships,
- durable powers of attorney,
- special needs trusts,
- ABLE savings accounts,
- and healthcare directives.

After learning what these legal documents are, how they work, and processes to obtain them, the parents realized they did not need a conservatorship for their daughter. They realized a durable power of attorney for medical and financial decisions would give their daughter the support and help she needed without removing her legal decision-making rights. They were able to choose the best support options based on their daughter's individual decision-making abilities. During this consultation, they also learned of various support services that could help their daughter to achieve greater independence.



Lesley and Angel share Angel's story about how he uses Supported Decision-Making. They are featured in one of the latest videos for the TN Center for Decision-Making Support website.

A growing resource for Tennessee

Since its launch in May of 2021, the TN Center for Decision-Making Support has become an invaluable resource for Tennesseans. Staff have conducted hundreds of one-on-one consultations, provided hundreds of trainings, attended scores of transition fairs, and reached thousands of families through outreach and website resources.

The need for decision-making resources and information continues to grow. Currently, the Center is making more updates to the website and adding new content, including:

- more videos of Tennesseans sharing their stories,
- webinars,
- and decision-making tools.



Angel's story of using Supported Decision-Making is featured on the TN Center for Decision-Making Support website.

Information, Tools, and Resources About Decision-Making Options for People with Disabilities

A collaborative effort by the The Arc Tennessee, Tennessee's Council on Developmental Disabilities, and Disability Rights Tennessee

TNDecisionMaking.org

Our biggest website change will be a new legal database that will enable families to search for attorneys in their area that specialize in various aspects of disability law. Recently, the Center was awarded a grant in the Governor's budget to continue and increase the work of the Center. With this additional funding, the Center will be able to serve more families with this information. Watch for the new legal database, videos and resources coming to the website in 2024!

To learn more about the TN Center for Decision-Making Support, you can visit our website at tndecisionmaking.org, contact our office at (615) 248-5878, ext. 322, or email at ds@theartcn.org.

Penny Johnson is the Program Coordinator for the Tennessee Center for Decision-Making Support with The Arc Tennessee. Penny joined The Arc Tennessee in July of 2020 to oversee the project from the website and program development to the ongoing management of the day-to-day activities and services.

Prior to joining The Arc Tennessee, Penny worked as a Pre-Employment Services Coordinator for youth with disabilities. She has over eighteen years of social services experience ranging from eligibility worker to program manager. Throughout her career, Penny has been dedicated to supporting and advocating for vulnerable populations,

including individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Penny is passionate about helping individuals with disabilities achieve their greatest potential and success in life.



CDMS coordinator Penny Johnson poses with The Arc Tennessee staff member Breanna Atwell at a recent event.

Creating Accessibility and Inclusion For Children With Disabilities in Child Care Settings

by Karen Wright, Deputy Director of Inclusion, Early Language and Literacy, TN Child Care Resource and Referral Network

Editor's Note: The Child Care Resource and Referral Network helps childcare providers meet the needs of young children with disabilities. The network was first established in 1995 by a collaboration between our Council, the Department of Human Resources and the Department of Health, before moving to its current funding home.

The TN Child Care Resource and Referral Network (TN CCR&R) provides free training and onsite coaching to Department of Human Services-licensed child care educators on many topics, such as:

- child development,
- behavior and guidance,
- health and safety,
- and the inclusion of children with disabilities.

TN CCR&R is funded through a grant between the Tennessee Department of Human Services (DHS) and Signal Centers, Inc.

TN CCR&R believes that all children deserve to have access to:

- high-quality early childhood environments,
- participation and engagement in all aspects of the childcare experience,
- and the support and resources to fully participate in childcare activities and routines.

Hands-on Support through Inclusion Coaches

While helping children thrive in childcare is important to families, teachers, and childcare center directors, knowing how to help them thrive can be difficult. Thus, a team of well-qualified Inclusion Coaches was created in 2022. These coaches provide specialized coaching and training services to help childcare educators and directors offer accessibility, support, and participation for children with disabilities in a meaningful way.

One of the most important things the CCR&R Inclusion Coaches do is to help directors and educators feel confident in providing care for children with disabilities.



Child care centers often use visual schedules to help children know what to expect during their day.

Photo Credit: Baylan Meganck, CCR&R Inclusion Coach

They do this through training and individualized, onsite modeling and coaching. This coaching relationship provides early childhood professionals with the knowledge and skills they need to successfully include all children in their classroom activities and routines. This can happen through working with the classroom professionals on proven activities, materials, and strategies that all children can enjoy and learn from.

Strategies for Inclusive Environments

A popular strategy that early childhood educators use in their classroom is the visual schedule. The schedule provides pictures and written text about how the classroom routines and activities will unfold throughout the day. This directly supports children by providing the sense of predictability and security that young children need to thrive.

Visual schedules benefit toddlers, preschoolers, and school age children, and can be particularly helpful when working with children diagnosed with developmental delays, autism, and sensory processing disorders. CCR&R Inclusion Coaches help educators create and understand how to use visual schedules with young children and have found that teachers report fewer behavior challenges during transitions when the visual schedule has been implemented.

Another strategy that early childhood educators use is the calming area. Children who have sensory processing disorders can feel overstimulated by the busy and noisy nature of the early childhood classroom. The calming area provides children with a relaxing place to go when they feel overwhelmed by their environment. Often found in a quiet part of the classroom, the calming area can include comfortable seating, neutral colors, and soft music to help the child calm down and self-regulate. CCR&R Inclusion Coaches help educators to create calming spaces and coach them on how to use the area as a tool to help children self-regulate so they can fully take part in play and learning throughout the day.

Inclusion Coaches also aid educators in supporting and providing access to materials and equipment, first through the observation of the classroom activities and routines, and then by offering strategies and ideas on how to make it more accessible for all children in the setting.

For example, tables and shelves may be re-arranged to create a wheelchair accessible route through the classroom. Materials like knobbed puzzles, chunky paint brushes, or modifications to activity storage containers can be provided so that children with fine motor disabilities can participate along with their peers.

Support and accessibility are vital components in a high-quality childcare setting. High-quality childcare



Calming areas give children a place to relax when the environment feels overwhelming.

Photo Credit: Baylan Meganck, CCR&R Inclusion Coach

should be an option for all children and their families. Inclusion Coaches can help educators use various strategies in the classroom to improve accessibility, support, and participation for children with disabilities in a meaningful way.

For more information, visit tncrr.org.



Five Accessible Housing Resources to Know About

by Rebecca Anderson, Director of Communications, TN Housing Development Agency

Every Tennessean needs safe, decent housing. However, many individuals, especially those who are aging or disabled, face challenges related to housing. To assist with some of these challenges, Tennessee Housing Development Agency offers the following programs to support people across the state.

Finding Rental Housing: Looking for a rental home can be challenging for individuals with disabilities. TNHousingSearch.org is a resource for finding rental housing that can meet your needs. Unlike typical rental housing websites, searches on TNHousingSearch.org can be based on various accessibility features, ranging from wheelchair-accessible doorways to showers with grab bars. Learn more by visiting TNHousingSearch.org.

Emergency Home Repair (ERP): If an aging or disabled homeowner's residence has an emergency repair need, such as a leaky roof, major plumbing issue, or broken heater, THDA's Emergency Repair Program (ERP) may be able to assist. This program helps homeowners correct, repair, or replace essential systems or critical structural problems in their homes, making the homes more livable. Visit thda.org to find the local ERP administering agency in your area.

Home Modifications and Ramps Program: Making homes more accessible for people who are disabled or aging can be costly. THDA's Home Modifications and Ramps program helps make homes wheelchair-friendly by installing ramps, widening doorways, and installing grab bars in bathrooms. These small changes make homes safer and easier to navigate.

Applications for this program are accepted through United Cerebral Palsy of Middle Tennessee. More information can be found thda.org.

Saving Money on Energy Bills: THDA also helps people save money on their electricity bills through the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP). This program helps low-income families – especially those with young children, aging adults, or people with disabilities who pay a high proportion of household income on home energy – by meeting their immediate energy needs. Common weatherization measures include air and duct sealing and adding insulation to attics, walls, and floors. This ensures a home stays cool in the summer and warm in the winter without wasting energy. Contact THDA for more information.

THDA's Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is another program that offers financial help to low-income families, including those with disabilities. LIHEAP provides a one-time payment to help you pay off your heating or cooling bill. This program is especially helpful to those with disabilities where staying at a comfortable temperature may be crucial for their health and well-being. Contact THDA for more information.



DeCarlos and Deontae are thrilled with their new home in Williamson County.

THDA programs do not just fix houses, they improve lives. By working with local organizations in your community, THDA is working to make sure all Tennesseans have a safe, comfortable, and affordable place to call home. Visit THDA.org for additional information and resources on all these programs.

Upcoming Training Register for a CPR Training today!



Resources Regions About Careers Login Search Find training

Training and resources for families and child care professionals

This project is funded through a grant with the TN Department of Human Services and Signal Centers, Inc.

Find training Explore resources





Inclusive higher ed students learn plant care in a greenhouse environment.

Tennessee Believes: Growing Inclusive Higher Education for Students with Disabilities

by Angella Broussard, Innovation Project Manager, Division of Program Innovation/East Tennessee Regional Office, TN Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Tennessee Believes is a grant program awarded by the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD). Its goal is to increase the number of inclusive higher education programs (IHE) in Tennessee. These programs serve and empower students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in classrooms, campus life, and in their communities.

In 2022, four schools were awarded grants. Thanks to the continued support of Governor Bill Lee, DIDD was able to award an additional five grants in 2023. These grants went to two- or four-year colleges and universities across the state committed to launching new programs or enhancing existing programs.

Inclusive higher education programs foster an environment that goes beyond mere representation of students with IDD on college and university campuses. These programs help to remove barriers and provide students with IDD an opportunity to achieve their desired outcomes in a manner similar to students without disabilities. IHE programs strive to provide

equitable access, support, and prepare students to thrive in their communities.

There are thousands of young students with IDD in Tennessee who have dreams for their future. These students deserve the opportunity to expand their education, develop employable skills, increase their independence, and become integral members of their communities. Thanks to the TN Believes grant, students in IHE programs receive:

- comprehensive educational instruction,
- vocational and employment preparation,
- community integration,
- peer support,
- access to extracurricular activities,
- and the opportunity to audit courses or earn college credits.

Currently, more than 100 students have benefited from TN Believes-supported programs. More than 21 of these students will graduate from their respective programs this year.

DIDD has awarded grants to the following IHE programs:

- Chattanooga State Community College
- Dyersburg State Community College
- East Tennessee State University
- Lipscomb University
- Tennessee State University
- Union University
- University of Memphis
- University of Tennessee Knoxville
- Vanderbilt University

To learn more about college options for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, please visit: tnihealliance.org

A full range of learning opportunities

TN Believes funded programs help students with IDD gain a wide variety of educational experiences.

- During the spring semester at East Tennessee State University, students completed inclusive classes from disciplines such as Appalachian Studies, Biology, Communications, Theatre, Sports & Leisure Management, and Storytelling.

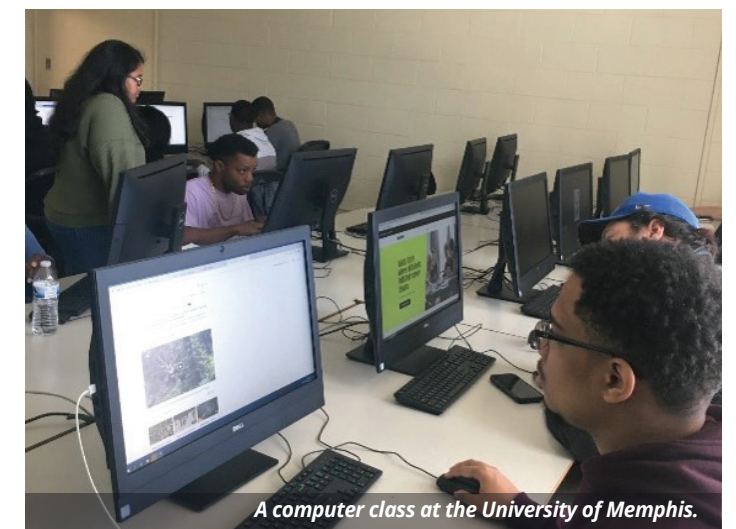
- At Dyersburg State Community College, students learned horticulture skills by providing plant care through the full plant cycle with support from Biology faculty.
- The University of Memphis is planning to offer certificate programs in Digital Badging (computer data) Entry with Team Logic IT and Animal Caretaking/Stable Hand with Southern Reins Center for Equine Therapy which will become U.S. Department of Labor approved certifications.

The educational opportunities do not stop there. TN Believes-funded programs have been able to offer opportunities for:

- mentorship,
- internships,
- independent living skills development,
- leadership development,
- sewing classes,
- art appreciation,
- cooking labs,
- computer skills development,
- and so much more!



Luka receives a certificate of achievement from his American Government class at Chattanooga State Community College.



A computer class at the University of Memphis.



University of Memphis students learn horse grooming as part of a Southern Reigns internship.



UTK FUTURE students learn cooking skills from a professional chef in the TN Believes Kitchen.



Direct from students and program leaders

Vanderbilt University

"SAIL is a[bout] leadership. You must be a leader and stand up for others. I like SAIL a lot because its lots of fun. I love the class! I went to Disability Day on the Hill and get SAIL hours and go to lots of events and I get a credential at the end. In SAIL, we support our friends, families, and community."

— Courtnie Taylor, Self-Advocacy in Leadership (SAIL) scholar, Class of 2025

University of Tennessee Knoxville

"I love the first class, the first time we turn on the burners. There is always a few 'whoas' and 'wows.' Many of the students [have not used] fire and knives in their regular day-to-day lives. I get to be a spark to them, to push them to do things they haven't been able to do before. It's hard not to share their excitement."

— Robert Allen, Executive Chef, UTK FUTURE Tennessee Believes Kitchen

Chattanooga State Community College

"Another student secured a spot in the Think College Public Speaking Skills Class during the summer. He also received an achievement award in his American Government class. His professor, Jonathan Gladden, stated 'Luka was a joy to have in class. His enthusiasm was contagious. Even more impressive, he completed quizzes and assignments that the rest of the class had to do, and he excelled at them, even getting a 100 on one of the quizzes. His semester project was amazing. If this course had been taken for credit, Luka would have earned a high C or low B based on his work and effort.'"

— Tina Gower, Program Coordinator

Union University

"In our students' first year, they have an internship on campus. In their second year, they find a job in the community. Our students take two EDGE classes and audit two classes with their traditional undergraduate classmates. The EDGE program is almost fully residential, so the majority of our students live on campus with other college students."

— Jonathan Lafferty, Assistant Director, EDGE Program



Chef Robert Allen teaches expert techniques to UTK FUTURE students in the TN Believes Kitchen.



“What Happens After I Apply?” – TN START

You've learned about a disability service program that could help you or a loved one. You're considering or have already applied. But...what next?

People with disabilities and their families tell us this can be a confusing time. They ask questions like:

- *What is the enrollment process?*
- *What will I need to do next?*
- *How will services really work?*
- *How will this program help me?*

We're setting out to answer some of those questions. This article continues our story series about real people who have applied for different disability service programs in Tennessee. We want to illustrate what the process was like, lessons they learned, and how services are working for them.

Have you recently applied for a disability program? We'd love to hear about your experience! Email us at TNDDC@tn.gov.

Cristina and David: A TN START Story

TN START is a crisis prevention, intervention, and response program. "START" stands for:

- Systematic
- Therapeutic
- Assessment
- Resources &
- Treatment

START is a program for people with disabilities who also have mental health concerns. It helps people who are in crisis situations, dealing with dangerous behavior, have been in psychiatric hospitals, and/or have complex mental health needs. It is a national model created in the '90s that operates in several states, including Tennessee, since 2021. The Council helped fund a START pilot many years ago. We also funded a training in 2020 that helped create this new START program in the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities services (soon to be TN's new Department of Disability and Aging).

Thank you to Cristina for talking to us about her brother David's experiences with the TN START program. Thank you to David for giving us permission to share this story. They asked that we only use their first names. (The photos with this story are representative and do not show the individuals in this story.)

David is a man in his 30s with intellectual disability and paranoid schizophrenia. Until May, he had been living in East TN with Cristina and their aging parents, who have health concerns of their own. They were worried about their ability to be David's caregivers. David recently got support to move out to his own apartment in a new city, where he gets support from a provider agency under the Employment and Community First (ECF) CHOICES program as well as the START program. We have summarized and paraphrased our conversation with Cristina here.



ECF CHOICES

Breaking Ground: How did you and David learn about the TN START program?

Cristina: Claire, David's support coordinator with the ECF CHOICES program, told us about TN START. We said we were interested. Then we got a call one day from TN START saying that Claire had made a referral, and they wanted to know if we wanted their crisis intervention services. We said, "Sure, why not? Let's try it."

David was having a lot of problems, emotional outbursts and feeling suicidal a lot of the time. He was having delusions and sometimes hallucinations – hearing voices and seeing things that weren't there. He was struggling with some extreme and risky behaviors. He would run away from home a lot. Sometimes, he would threaten to harm himself or run out to the median of the highway. If he was feeling like he needed attention, he would call emergency services. So, Claire thought some extra professional intervention might help us help David stay safe.



He still has some of those behaviors, but now he has more professionals to help him deal with them. He still sometimes has the delusions that people want to harm him, but they are working on it. He recently moved out from our family home and is getting community living services. Claire is going to be able to still oversee David's case. She's been with us for at least 2 years.

I have other siblings, but as far as taking care of David, it's just me and my parents. My mom is going to be 70 soon and my dad is in his late 60s. Their health issues are preventing them from taking care of David on a daily basis, and I need to care for them. Our mom had a stroke last year, so I've been taking care of mom. With David's behaviors, him being at home with her just wasn't a good situation any more.

BG: Tell us about what came next after applying to START.

Cristina: We did a video chat with the START team. At the time, David was not in a very good mood, so he answered a few of the questions, and then said

he didn't want to answer any more. Claire, the ECF support coordinator, stepped in and helped us. She answered a lot of the questions that the START team had as they developed the crisis plan for David, since she had already interviewed him, met him in person, knew him well. So, we only did that video chat once with him for the initial meeting and then the START team began to learn more about him through monthly visits.

BG: How has the TN START program helped you and your brother?

Cristina: Before TN START, David would use mobile crisis services. If he had a crisis, he would ask to call them and he would talk to them over the phone. They would speak to him by phone, and if he ended up at the hospital, they would do a psych evaluation in person sometimes but wouldn't come out to our house.

That was very different from TN START. The TN START people will always say, "If you want us to come over, we will be right there as fast as possible." That has been very helpful.

Melissa was our START assessment and stabilization facilitator. She was supposed to come to our house and speak with David once a month, but sometimes we said it would be better if she used her monthly visit to support him at his psychiatric appointments. Sometimes he would have difficult behaviors there during those appointments. But Melissa was very calm and knew how to engage in conversation with him. I would take him to those appointments, and sometimes he decided he didn't want me to go in to see the doctors with him. So, Melissa would go with him, and support him while also being MY advocate, and represent me as his family caregiver. This was so helpful because she could give the doctor my feedback. It was extra help in a way that I really needed and didn't expect.

START shows up if David needs someone to talk to, any time. They also just get to know him and suggest programs that might be helpful for him, like different therapies. They are really good at deescalating conflicts. David can have some manipulative behaviors and they are good at not getting pulled into that. I think [his new living arrangement] is the best thing for him right now.

My advice for other families thinking about applying to TN START: Be open, be honest, ask questions. They are very helpful.

Our experience with TN-START has been 100 percent positive. I would tell other families that START can connect you to resources you may not know about, suggest treatment plans that can help, evaluate medications, see if they need to be changed. I feel like they are a very helpful resource for people with disabilities.

BG: What's next for David?

Cristina: He's in community living services in an apartment with 24/7 support staff. They give him his meds and help him with food and chores. He's getting a roommate soon. We are hoping

that is going to go ok. I think he has a good support team. I have spoken with some of them over the phone and met some of them in person, and they are very helpful and knowledgeable.

He loves to listen to music. His passion is collecting and using walkie talkies. He says he can keep up with the police and firefighters and the weather through his walkie talkies. He says he feels like he is in touch with the world through his walkie talkies. I think he would do best if we can find him some kind of work that he enjoys doing. Once they get him into extra curricular activities, then it's easier to introduce it as work later on and say, "Hey you could do this and get paid!"

Since he moved to the new city, he has a new START facilitator, Trent. David told me he liked talking to Trent, so I think it will be a good change. He sounded very positive about the conversation, so I am feeling hopeful.

Having him be on his own, learning to be more independent, learning to take care of himself is what we want him to end up doing – something that makes him feel accomplished in some way. I think that would be helpful.



Enhancing Health Care for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

New Toolkit for Primary Care Providers

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center has launched an updated version of the IDD toolkit. This website provides information for providers of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). It offers best-practice tools and information regarding specific medical and behavioral concerns of adults with IDD, including resources for patients and families. One aspect of the revisions is a greater focus on the role of the self-advocate in their own health care. Watch this brief video highlighting updates.

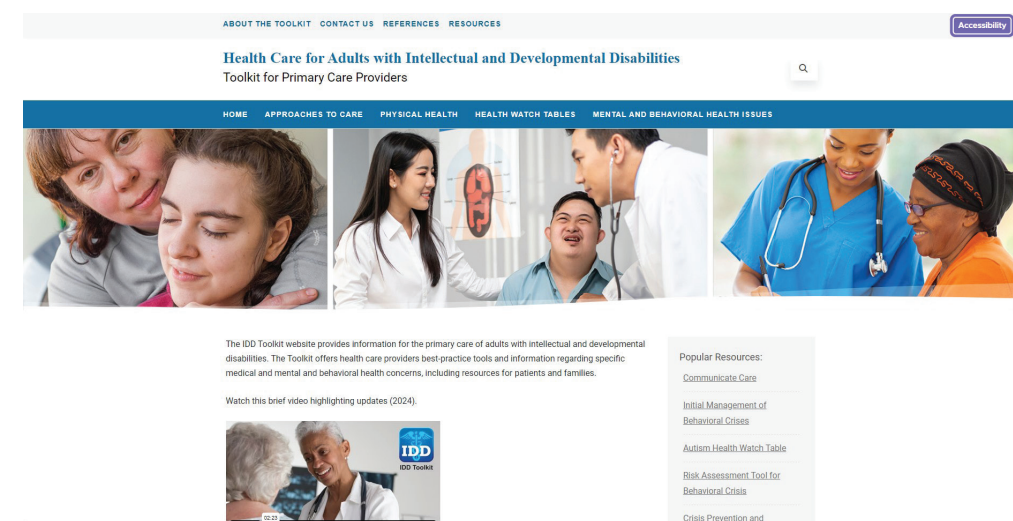
The IDD Toolkit update is a project of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, done with the extensive cooperation of Surrey Place of Toronto, Ontario, and funded by

the WITH Foundation. The toolkit is an adaption for U.S. use of tools developed by the Canadian team, Tools for the Primary Care of Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (2023) with Surrey Place. These tools support primary care clinicians implementing the Canadian consensus guidelines on the primary care of adults with IDD.

An advisory committee of health care clinicians, researchers, faculty, family members, self-advocates, and a Surrey Place representative provided review and recommendations on the toolkit for use in our U.S. health care system.



IDD toolkit



Video highlighting updates

Directory of Services, Community Events Calendar, and Trainings for the Disability Community



TNPathfinder.org

“What Happens After I Apply?”

Ravi Lipman: A Vocational Rehabilitation Story

Editor’s Note: Ravi responded in written narrative form to the same questions we asked Cristina about the TN START program. (See page 12 for that article.) Enjoy his VR story!

I did not know much about the vocational rehabilitation program before I applied to it. I did know that the program could help me with school costs and finding gainful employment. I knew that I would be assigned to a support coordinator that would oversee my case and we would come up with an individualized plan for me to reach my employment goals. I applied for the program when I was in high school. My mother was the person who helped me apply. We learned of vocational rehabilitation from other disabled people that we knew, who used the program in Tennessee and similar programs in other states.

When applying and in the intake process, we needed to have paperwork documenting my disability. That included medical forms and educational records like my Individualized Education Program (IEP) from school. The best strategy for gathering the required documentation is to keep detailed records of your disability in a secure and reliable place. Any time we receive any official documentation from doctors’ offices and from testing services and school, we gather them into a file so that they are easily accessible at a later date.

I wish I had known of all the services that vocational rehabilitation offers, so that I could have fully utilized the program. I especially wish I knew about the independent living services. I still live with my parents, which I do not mind. But I wish I had taken the opportunity to use the independent living services to learn the skills necessary to be able to live more independently. My biggest advice to other families who are considering applying is to use all the services. Stay informed by asking your care coordinator what else Vocational Rehab can assist you or your loved one who has a disability with.

After I was approved to enroll in the Vocational Rehabilitation program, I worked with my support coordinator at the time to form an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) to help me reach my job goals.



My plan included services to help me through high school, college, and now law school. The biggest source of assistance I received was that vocational rehab helped me pay some tuition and covered the cost of textbooks throughout my schooling.

Throughout my time enrolled in vocational rehab, I have had a few different support coordinators that each had their own unique style of helping coordinate services. I have had a few that were more helpful and better at communicating than others. We mostly correspond by email. If I need additional services to assist me to obtain my career goals, I let my coordinator know and we work together to modify my IPE.

For me, what has made the service most worthwhile is that through vocational rehab, last year I was able to get a modified wheelchair van with accommodations that enable me to drive. I had never been able to drive before then. It is mainly due to vocational rehab that I was able to realize this dream that I did not think was possible. This van has opened up so much more independence for me because one of the biggest hurdles I have had to employment is reliable transportation. Before I was able to drive on my own, I was dependent on other people to drive me or public transportation. Now that I have a van, reliable transportation is no longer an issue for me.

I am now about to graduate from law school, which was made possible partly from the assistance that I received from vocational rehabilitation. I hope to also gain employment soon as a lawyer, which vocational rehab can assist me to do, as well. I would recommend this service to all disabled people who would like to better themselves and to live a life full of purpose, meaning, and dignity by obtaining employment in whatever capacity they are able.

Introducing Our New Council Communications Coordinator

We are delighted to announce that **Dirk Strider** has joined the Council staff. Dirk began his role as Communications Coordinator on June 3.

In his role, Dirk is bringing the dedicated, day-to-day communications support we’ve been missing since some organizational changes last fall. Dirk will also provide support to targeted public policy and leadership development projects. That will include supporting Director of Leadership Development Cathlyn Smith in launching a new Partners in Policymaking class this fall.

Dirk comes to the Council after several years of communications consulting, graphic design work, web development, marketing, and social media management. One thing that stood out to us immediately was his ability to bring order to complex projects and track details across multiple work areas. But rather than tell you more, I’d like you to hear directly from Dirk. I think you’ll see why we’re so pleased to have him aboard.

- Jolene Sharp, Chief Strategy Officer

Hey there! I’m Dirk Strider, and I’m excited to introduce myself as the Communications Coordinator for the Council on Developmental Disabilities staff!

As someone who is autistic and has ADHD, this position and what the Council does is very near and dear to my heart. I’ve always had a deep passion for helping others navigate the often-confusing world of bureaucracy, paperwork, and terminology surrounding resources. That’s especially true when it comes to marginalized people of all kinds, who often lack access to support and services.

What has struck me most about the Council is the genuine respect, value, and understanding they show towards individuals with developmental disabilities, including myself. During my interviews, I felt at ease not only disclosing that I had a disability, but also that I needed to keep my hands busy with a fidget toy without anyone questioning my need for them. It’s heartening to know that everyone here has a close personal connection with someone who has a developmental disability. It’s clear the Council fosters an inclusive and welcoming environment.

I’m a born-and-raised Tennessee native. Growing up, I moved all over Middle Tennessee. When I’m not immersed in work, you can catch me exploring Middle Tennessee and the neighboring areas, particularly when it comes to local musical acts. The End in Nashville is hands down one of my favorite spots to discover new



and up-and-coming artists. Even though my sensory issues can sometimes make it tough to stay for the whole show, I feel so grateful to have had the chance to see and meet so many talented musicians over the years.

As an autistic person, my “special interest” lies in resources for marginalized people, health insurance, paperwork, and navigating bureaucratic cogs. While some might find these topics a bit dry, I can easily lose myself for hours in a document, captivated by every intricate detail.

(Even if my friends and family don’t quite grasp why I find paragraph A, subsection 3 on page 64 of a quarterly report to be so funny...)

I look forward to working with the Council and Council staff – including making my contributions here in *Breaking Ground!*

Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities

Davy Crockett Tower, 1st Floor
500 James Robertson Parkway
Nashville, TN 37243
Return service requested

PRSR STD
US POSTAGE
PAID
NASHVILLE, TN
PERMIT NO. 983

MEMBERSHIP AND STAFF

COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON

Ryan Durham, Vice Chair
Brent Wiles, Vice Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Shontie Brown, Memphis
Kimberly Boyd, Martin
Kezia Cox, Knoxville
Sarah Cripps, Smithville
Will Edwards, Knoxville
Diamond Grigsby, Murfreesboro
Alicia Hall, Cordova
Chrissy Hood, Pulaski
Clancey Hopper, Lebanon
Sara Miller, Jackson
Edward Mitchell, Jackson
Brigham Scallion, Bells
Bliss Welch, Harrison
Brent Wiles, Nashville
Martez Williams, Nashville

STATE AGENCY REPRESENTATIVES

Commissioner Brad Turner,
Department of Disability and Aging
Commissioner Lizzette Gonzalez
Reynolds,
Department of Education
Commissioner Clarence Carter,
Department of Human Services
Commissioner Marie Williams,
Department of Mental Health and
Substance Abuse Services
Commissioner Ralph Alvarado, MD, FACP,
Department of Health
Katie Evans,
Division of TennCare
Chief of Long-Term Services and Supports
Executive Director Richard Kennedy,
Commission on Children and Youth
Executive Director Ralph Perrey,
Tennessee Housing Development Agency
Executive Director James Dunn,
Tennessee
Commission on Aging and Disability

UNIVERSITY CENTERS FOR EXCELLENCE REPRESENTATIVES

A. Pablo Juárez, M.Ed., BCBA, LBA,
Co-Director,
Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence
in Developmental Disabilities

Bruce L. Keisling, Ph.D., Executive Director,
UT Health Science Center for Developmental
Disabilities

PROTECTION & ADVOCACY

Lisa Primm, Executive Director,
Disability Rights Tennessee

COMMUNITY NONPROFIT

Allie Haynes, Membership Manager,
Rural Health Association of TN

COUNCIL STAFF

Lauren Pearcy, Executive Director
Lynette Porter, Deputy Director
Ashley Edwards,
Assistant to the Executive Director
JoEllen Fowler, Office Resources Manager
Mildred Sparkman, Administrative Secretary
Alicia Cone, Director of Program Operations
Emma Garton,
Director of Public Policy
Jolene Sharp, Chief Strategy Officer
Cathlyn Smith,
Director of Leadership Development
Dirk Strider, Communications Coordinator



Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, Authorization No. 344067, September, 2023
21,600 copies. This public document was promulgated at a cost of \$.74 per copy.



Council on
Developmental Disabilities