

TENNESSEE COUNCIL ON
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

2014 ANNUAL REPORT



TENNESSEE COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Dear Reader,

2013-14 was a productive year for the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. There were opportunities to build new partnerships, develop innovative learning options for people with developmental disabilities and families, strengthen public policy advocacy efforts, and continue our commitment to ensuring Tennesseans with developmental disabilities and their family members have an active role in shaping the future of our disability service system.

Expanding employment opportunities for people with developmental disabilities continued to be a priority for Tennessee. Additionally, a new national project formed a "learning community" of six states that are looking at future approaches to supporting families not connected to disability services. Several new initiatives focused on productive postsecondary programs for students, linking them to continuing education activities that lead to career opportunities and real jobs.

A major focus throughout 2014 was determining more accurate ways to evaluate and measure the impact of Council activities. The Council worked hard to define the "vision" we want to move toward, refine our strategies to get there, make concrete predictions about what we should see if we are making progress toward our goals, and develop tools to measure whether we are hitting the mark.

2015 marks the beginning of an important time for the Council. We begin the process of developing a new federally-mandated state plan, due in August 2016. We will be seeking your input as we assess the challenges facing over 102,000 Tennesseans with developmental disabilities and their families, survey all state programs that serve people with disabilities to evaluate their impact, and formulate the Council's goals and objectives that will guide our work from 2016 into 2021. We are looking forward to renewed commitment to current projects and exploration of new and innovative initiatives that improve opportunities for Tennesseans with developmental disabilities and their families.

Don't forget to stay connected to the Council through our website, Facebook, Breaking Ground magazine and e-newsletters!



Wanda Willis

Wanda Willis
Executive Director



Stephanie B. Cook

Stephanie Cook
Council Chair

INTRODUCTION

As the state office responsible for implementing the Developmental Disabilities Act, the Council works to improve disability policies and practices in Tennessee. Tennesseans who have a developmental disability, as well as their family members, participate in the work of the Council. State agencies, service providers and universities also contribute to our efforts.

The Council provides the state with a central point of expertise on disability data in Tennessee and nationally, current service system trends, and most promising practices. An important role of the Council is facilitating public and private partnerships, working across state agencies to find ways to link programs and services that support individuals with developmental disabilities in more efficient and effective ways. Through our Communications and Public Policy offices we carry out our responsibility to provide legislators and policymakers with information about the impact of various policy decisions on citizens with developmental disabilities. The following report summarizes work of the Council in all of these areas over the past year.

The Council has accomplished groundbreaking work in Tennessee in the areas of employment, family support, housing, health, person-centered organizations/systems, leadership development, recreation and postsecondary education.

Here are five ways the Council continues to shape the future for Tennesseans with developmental disabilities:

- Creating timely demonstration projects
- Fostering public/private partnerships
- Educating leaders
- Engaging citizens in public policy advocacy
- Providing a central source of information

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- **EXPECTING EMPLOYMENT** **PAGE 1**
 - Governor’s Executive Order and Employment First Task Force
 - Project SEARCH
 - TennesseeWorks
 - Memorandum of Understanding for Transition Services
 - Employment First Leadership Academy
 - VSA Webinars

- **DEVELOPING LEADERS** **PAGE 3**
 - Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute
 - Youth Readiness Days
 - Our Community Standing Strong
 - People Planning Together

- **SUPPORTING FAMILIES** **PAGE 5**
 - Supporting Families of Individuals with Disabilities: Community of Practice
 - Tennessee Adult Brothers and Sisters of People with Disabilities

- **EXPANDING EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES** **PAGE 6**
 - IDEAL Postsecondary Education Program

- **INFORMING CITIZENS AND POLICYMAKERS** **PAGE 7**
 - Council Communications
 - Public Policy Work
 - Tennessee Disability Pathfinder
 - Breaking Ground
 - Tennessee Disability MegaConference
 - Education Travel Grant
 - Community Development Grant
 - Arts Community Conversations

- **LOOKING AHEAD** **PAGE 10**

EXPECTING EMPLOYMENT

GOVERNOR'S EXECUTIVE ORDER AND EMPLOYMENT FIRST TASK FORCE

In May 2013, the Council approached the Governor's office about designating a Tennessee Employment First Team to attend a summit convened by the National Governors Association about employment for people with disabilities. The Governor and his staff were highly supportive, so a team representing state agencies, universities and family members attended the summit in Seattle. The team brought back many ideas, including a report called "A Better Bottom Line", a handbook for increasing employment rates for individuals with disabilities.



In June 2013, Governor Haslam placed Tennessee on a short list of "Employment First" states by signing Executive Order No. 28. This groundbreaking action created the Tennessee Employment First Task Force, charged with increasing community employment for Tennesseans with disabilities. "Employment First" is a concept that emphasizes employment in the general workforce as the first and preferred option for individuals with disabilities receiving assistance from publicly funded systems.



Executive Order No. 28 acknowledges that Tennesseans with intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental health diagnoses and substance abuse diagnoses experience high rates of unemployment, underemployment and dependence on publicly-funded programs. The order directed the Task Force to address goals that would increase opportunities for people with disabilities to work in integrated community settings for competitive wages.

In September 2014, the Task Force released its report on activities accomplished over the past year. The Council funded and headed the production team for the report, Expect Employment. The full report, including a list of recommendations, can be viewed at www.tn.gov/cdd.

PROJECT SEARCH

Project SEARCH is a nationally acclaimed model for transitioning students with intellectual and developmental disabilities from high school into employment. In the summer of 2013, the Council organized a team of state agencies to develop a plan for creating Project SEARCH sites across the state. It is an important investment for Tennessee to support students with developmental disabilities as they transition into adult life. Project SEARCH is a gateway to employment, an alternative to students exiting high school with no continuing education plans, at risk for losing skills gained over their school careers.

A high percentage of Project SEARCH students are hired by the business where they complete their internship. Other students often transition to a new job utilizing the skills they learned while participating in the program. Last year, Project SEARCH sites were established in Davidson, Montgomery, Rutherford and Shelby counties with plans to expand into three new counties in 2015.

TENNESSEWORKS

The TennesseeWorks Partnership is a collaborative that connects employment efforts across the state among various state agencies, universities, service providers, community organizations, families and individuals with disabilities working to advance employment for people with disabilities. The Council convened the first meeting of this collaborative, which continues formally through the Partnerships in Employment grant awarded to the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center. The Partnership has just completed a three-year strategic plan,

EXPECTING EMPLOYMENT

a requirement of Executive Order No. 28 that established Tennessee as an “Employment First” state. Other significant activities include a series of “community conversations” held across the state about employment and building connections with families and Tennessee businesses.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING FOR TRANSITION SERVICES

The Council has convened an employment/postsecondary transition work group for several years. The work group includes the Tennessee Department of Labor, Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Department of Education, the Bureau of TennCare, Disability Rights Tennessee and Vanderbilt Kennedy Center. The group completed a “memorandum of understanding”, which is an official agreement defining roles and responsibilities of all state agencies that administer employment programs for citizens with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Currently a toolkit for local communities is being developed that will guide agencies in coordinating services for students leaving school and seeking postsecondary education opportunities. Ultimately, the goal of the memorandum of understanding and local agency toolkit is to improve the experiences of students transitioning from school to postsecondary programs and the workforce.

EMPLOYMENT FIRST LEADERSHIP ACADEMY



In 2014, the Council partnered with the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN) and the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation to sponsor the Tennessee Employment First Leadership Academy. Held in Nashville at Scarritt Bennett Conference Center, the Academy was designed to teach adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities how to advocate for more inclusive, meaningful and competitive-wage employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The training included participants from Tennessee, Kentucky and Alabama.

A second Leadership Academy is planned for October 2015. This training will focus on recent rules made by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services about the types of settings where home- and community-based services for people with disabilities can be delivered. The purpose of this training is to help adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities understand the implications of these federal changes and how they can best participate in discussions about the impact of the new rules concerning home- and community-based services in Tennessee.



VSA WEBINARS

Very Special Arts Tennessee is a statewide organization that provides people with disabilities opportunities to participate in and enjoy the arts. In 2014, the Council provided funding to VSA TN to develop a series of webinars that would provide professional development and training to artists with disabilities seeking employment in the field of the arts. Webinar topics included building careers in the arts, connecting to employment resources, and networking with other professionals in the arts community. Over 40 people participated in a pilot webinar. VSA conducted an evaluation based on feedback from participants and developed the final series of five professional development webinars for artists, now available at vsatn.org. The Council and VSA TN are continuing to track the impact of the webinars on increasing employment among artists with disabilities.

DEVELOPING LEADERS

PARTNERS IN POLICYMAKING

Partners in Policymaking is the Council's leadership program for adults with disabilities and family members of persons with disabilities. The program provides the opportunity to learn from local and national experts in the disability field. Participants spend seven weekends learning about the history of the disability experience; building inclusive classrooms, workplaces and communities; best practices in employment for people with disabilities; supported and independent living; assistive technology; and state and federal legislative processes.



The Council established the Partners in Policymaking program in Tennessee in 1993 based on the curriculum created by the Minnesota Council on Developmental Disabilities. Since that time, nearly 500 adults with disabilities and family members of people with disabilities have completed the intensive program in Tennessee. Graduates of the program have gone on to influence policy on the local, state and national level.

"The knowledge I have gained from attending Partners has helped me move from wanting to participate in the legislative process, to actively participating in it."

"The knowledge obtained through my Partners experience has been amazing. Not only is the information a blessing, but the network of individuals is worth more than anything! The network of professionals is great, and the new friendships with so many others helped me to develop a lifelong network of resources."

YOUTH READINESS DAYS

In 2012, the Council began conducting Youth Readiness Days at high schools across the state. Council staff, in partnership with the Division of Special Populations in the Tennessee Department of Education, designed an interactive training program for high school students with disabilities to help them plan for life after high school. The training includes topics around advocating for oneself and independent living, as well as an introduction to community services and resources. During 2013-2014, the Council conducted four Youth Readiness Day trainings for six high schools, which involved 75 students and 12 teachers or administrators.

"[The students were] led through a process that required self-evaluation and self-reflection. As a result, they became more confident in their ability to manage transitioning from high school to the adult world. I am certain my students benefited by being made to have positive feelings about themselves."

- Staff attendee.

OUR COMMUNITY STANDING STRONG

In 2013, the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities awarded a grant to the national group Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) to help strengthen self-advocacy organizations across the Southern region. "Self-advocacy" refers to the practice of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities speaking up for themselves, making choices about their lives, and expressing their preferences and opinions. Tennessee's statewide self-advocacy organization, People First of Tennessee, was selected as the grant recipient for Tennessee in this regional initiative, which is known as "Our Community Standing Strong".

The Council serves as an "ally" for Our Community Standing Strong in Tennessee. We have assisted with activities associated with the grant aimed at rejuvenating local grassroots self-advocacy organizations. The Council continues to explore new directions that might be of interest to Tennessee self-advocates.

PEOPLE PLANNING TOGETHER

People Planning Together has been a very successful self-advocacy initiative, launched by the Council in 2011. This initiative developed a corps of trainers, who themselves receive disability support services through a Medicaid waiver, to teach advocacy skills to other individuals who receive similar services. The training helps individuals with disabilities become more active in developing and implementing their individual service plans.



Buffalo River Services in South Central Tennessee and the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities are our partners in this initiative. Six individuals with intellectual disabilities are currently working as certified trainers and are paid to conduct sessions about self-advocacy and self-determination in service planning meetings. In 2014, 30 individuals with intellectual disabilities attended the People Planning Together training at four workshops held across the state. The Council will continue to support and expand this initiative.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

SUPPORTING FAMILIES OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES: COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

In 2013, a national grant established a “learning community” of six states to look at future approaches to supporting families who have a family member with an intellectual or developmental disability. Tennessee won a competitive bid and was named to the consortium of states that are examining the way we currently support families.

Experts estimate that on a national level only about 25% of individuals with disabilities currently receive any form of support services. Most families are providing the vast majority of care for their family members without any support from government programs. The “Supporting Families” initiative, funded by the federal Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, focuses on sharing best policies and strategies to support all families across the lifespan, and to provide flexible services that help individuals with developmental disabilities and work toward goals of independence, productivity, and participation in community life.

For the first year of this initiative, the Council focused on sharing information about the core concepts of the Supporting Families project. We created a resource folder to assist families in navigating the complexities of the service system. The folder has been widely distributed in every county of the state, thanks to assistance from the University of Tennessee Extension Office. A special issue of our Breaking Ground magazine was dedicated to sharing a wide variety of family stories, including parents with disabilities and families from multicultural backgrounds.

We made a concerted effort to connect with and learn from families and individuals with disabilities, as well as public and private agency partners. The Council began producing a monthly e-newsletter to highlight concepts of the Supporting Families initiative and update readers about grant activities in Tennessee. We hosted Lunch and Learn events for state agencies to learn about the initiative and to link with peer-to-peer support opportunities for parents, siblings and self-advocates.

In the coming year, the Council will continue work with the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center on “Tennessee Kindred Stories of Disability”, a collection of family profiles that illustrate how families who aren’t able to access formal disability services can utilize community resources and natural supports to help their family member thrive. Additionally, we will work on increasing leadership roles of public and private organizations in changing how we support Tennessee families with a member with a disability.

TENNESSEE ADULT BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The Council was a leader in developing a sibling network in Tennessee in 2008. Tennessee Adult Brothers and Sisters of people with disabilities (TABS) evolved as a statewide support and networking group for adult siblings of individuals with disabilities. Siblings often move into primary support roles for their brother or sister with a disability as their parents age. The TABS annual conference, sponsored and planned by Council and Vanderbilt Kennedy Center staff, equips adult siblings who have a brother or a sister with a disability with information and resources. TABS held its sixth annual conference in 2014. For more information about TABS, visit www.facebook.com/tabs.siblings.



“I really like hearing people’s personal stories. I like learning where other siblings are now, and how they felt when they were dealing with similar situations.”

- TABS conference attendee.

EXPANDING EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

IDEAL POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION PROGRAM

In 2013, the Council funded IDEAL (Igniting the Dream of Education and Access at Lipscomb) at Lipscomb University. This is the fourth postsecondary education program on a Tennessee college campus for students with intellectual disabilities. IDEAL is a two-year, non-degree program that teaches employment and independent living skills, allowing students to take college courses, have internships and jobs, and build relationships with their peers without disabilities. A primary goal of all postsecondary education programs is to provide career exploration through internships that help the student experience a variety of potential work environments. In many cases, students find jobs through the internships, just like their peers at the university.



"IDEAL has given our son direction, life skills, and the opportunity to learn these things in a safe, professional, and loving environment!"

- Parent of IDEAL student

"I love what this program has done to/for the Lipscomb campus."

- Lipscomb faculty member

"This program builds community and creates opportunities."

- Lipscomb staff

COUNCIL COMMUNICATIONS

In recent years, the Council established a communications office to focus full time on keeping us and our customers informed about current disability resources, issues and trends on the local, state and national levels. In 2014, the Council produced two monthly e-newsletters and began using Facebook to reach new audiences and utilize different platforms to share information about the work of the Council, as well as important updates on disability topics. We are currently working on a communications plan that will improve these efforts and define ways to measure the impact of these activities.

PUBLIC POLICY WORK



A priority for all Councils on Developmental Disabilities across the country is promoting good federal and state policy that governs programs and services for citizens with developmental disabilities. Over the past year, the Council examined policies, developed information and educational statements, and met with legislators and policymakers, as well as partners in the disability community. The goal of these activities was to improve policies and the experiences of Tennesseans based on the principles of the Developmental Disabilities Act.

Some of the Council's Public Policy work included:

- Informing and educating groups about TennCare and the Department of Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities' 2014 "concept paper" proposing administration of the state's services for Tennesseans with intellectual and developmental disabilities by managed care organizations. The Council helped to write the concept paper in accessible, understandable language, and made presentations to leaders of managed care organizations about trends and issues in services for citizens with intellectual & developmental disabilities.
- Reviewing the draft Elementary & Secondary Education Act reauthorization bill, advocating for higher national standards and for capped numbers of alternative assessments per student body;
- Addressing the waiting list for disability services by supporting the Arc TN bill for enrolling families with caregivers ages 75 or older who have a family member with disabilities at home into Medicaid waiver services;
- Supporting a Technology and Information Access Resolution to make websites and the Internet more accessible to individuals with cognitive disabilities;
- Reviewing and commenting on a voucher bill aimed at expanding educational choices for students with developmental disabilities to assure parental awareness about the impact of a voucher on the students' rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA);
- Supporting laws to limit seclusion and restraint in classrooms, and promoting safer and more acceptable alternatives to the use of prone restraint with students with disabilities.
- Supporting the development of an Occupational Diploma, a meaningful alternative to a certificate of attendance for students not on track for earning a general high school diploma. The Council was a leader in drafting the legislation for the Occupational Diploma and served on a task force to outline competencies required for the Occupational Diploma.

TENNESSEE DISABILITY PATHFINDER

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder, a statewide multilingual information and referral service for disability resources operated by Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, is one of the most important and successful projects of the Council. Responding to the most frequently cited need expressed by Tennessee citizens, this central source for disability information was created in 1997. Today the Departments of Education and Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities share in the funding of this valuable resource. Information is available via a phone helpline, as well as an online searchable database containing over 2,200 agencies.

In 2014, Pathfinder staff assisted 2,071 individuals, family members and agency staff. There were nearly 95,000 unique visitors to the Pathfinder website and almost 800 people trained on various disability topics by Pathfinder staff through its community education series.

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder's Multicultural Outreach and Camino Seguro programs are specifically equipped to help members of the multicultural, refugee and immigrant communities find needed disability services and supports. These programs also provide training to organizations serving multicultural communities on how to better address disability-related needs.

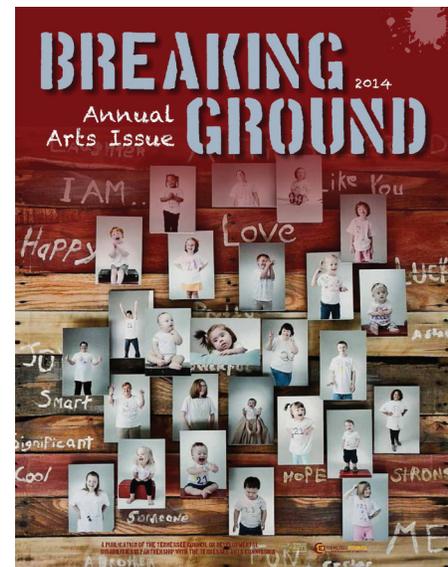
The website for Tennessee Disability Pathfinder is www.familypathfinder.org.

BREAKING GROUND

Breaking Ground is a magazine produced by the Council that informs readers of Council initiatives, innovative programs and practices, policy issues affecting people with disabilities, and stories about the lives of Tennesseans with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. Approximately 5,400 copies of each issue are distributed to individuals with disabilities, family members, state agencies, advocacy organizations, and legislators.

In fiscal year 2013-14, Council staff produced four issues of the magazine, including a special issue devoted to "Supporting Families in Tennessee". A highlight of the Breaking Ground year is the annual Arts Issue dedicated to disability and the arts. This issue has been co-sponsored in recent years by the Tennessee Arts Commission.

Issues of Breaking Ground can be found at www.tn.gov/cdd.



TENNESSEE DISABILITY MEGACONFERENCE

The Council is a primary sponsor of the annual Tennessee Disability MegaConference, which is a two-day gathering of national and local speakers, exhibitors, persons with disabilities, family members and professionals in the disability field. This conference has been held since 2003 and draws over 700 participants. The Council also provides stipends to individuals with disabilities and family members to enable them to attend.

INFORMING CITIZENS AND POLICYMAKERS

EDUCATION TRAVEL FUND

The Council makes education stipends available to Tennesseans with developmental disabilities and their family members to attend conferences and trainings about topics related to disabilities. The Education Travel Fund assisted 211 Tennesseans, all individuals with developmental disabilities or family members, to attend state and national disability conferences in 2013-2014. The Council also provided funding through this program to support seven state disability-related conferences.

"More than anything, the conference helped us feel like a part of a community."

"We have more hope than we have ever had for our daughter's transition to adulthood!"

"I now have hope that my son can be gainfully employed and have some feeling of independence."

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GRANT

In 2013, the Council launched a new fund called the "Community Development Grant" to support



Tennesseans with disabilities and their families in visiting innovative programs from other states and bringing back ideas for replicating these programs in their home communities. The fund reimburses individuals for traveling to the program being researched and provides a small amount of money to develop a Plan of Action for replicating the program back home. The goal of this grant is to help "seed" an idea and grow grassroots support in a local community under the leadership of local citizens with disabilities and their families.

ARTS COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

In 2013-2014, the Council and the Tennessee Arts Commission hosted a series of community conversations related to the arts in Nashville, Chattanooga and

Memphis. The events brought together local arts organizations, individuals with disabilities and community disability organizations to discuss making art programming more accessible and welcoming to patrons with disabilities. These highly successful conversations offered the opportunity to suggest practical solutions to arts organizations for increasing accessibility for patrons with disabilities, and to establish lasting partnerships with local members of their disability community who can be used as resources in the future.

LOOKING AHEAD

Many changes are on the horizon for the disability service system: state managed care programs to coordinate services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, new federal rules for settings of home- and community-based services provided through the Medicaid Waiver program, employment first initiatives, and a new vision for how we support families early on and throughout the life span. Please become involved in the work of the Council on these and many other issues by connecting to our website, Facebook, e-newsletters or by contacting the Council office and volunteering. Your participation is welcome and critical to our work!



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