

BREAKING

GROUND

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**IN THIS
ISSUE:**

**OF PRETZELS AND
PAINTING:
THE ENTREPRENEURIAL
CHOICE**

 **TENNESSEE COUNCIL**
on developmental disabilities

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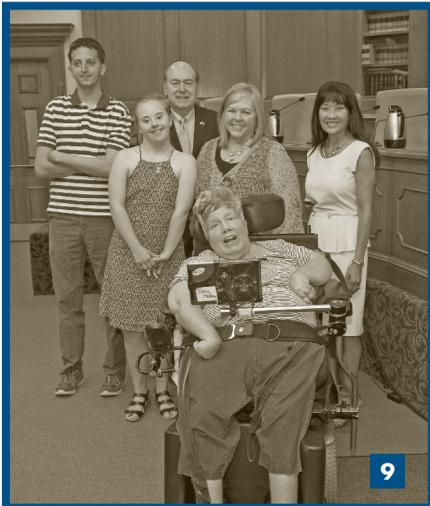
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Of Pretzels and Painting:

the entrepreneurial choice

by Ned Andrew Solomon,
Editor in Chief of *Breaking Ground*

Photography by Jerry Atnip and
Abbey G. Moore



Statistics about the employment of people with disabilities vary, but are typically not good. The number of individuals with disabilities who are gainfully employed at competitive wage jobs is low. Throw in a job of one's choosing, in an inclusive environment of employees with and without disabilities, and the number sinks even lower.

Which is why some people with disabilities have chosen to go their own way. This is the story of two young adults, Grace Goad and Theresa Daniels, on the autism spectrum. With the tireless support of their families, Grace and Theresa created entrepreneurial ventures that allow them to be their own bosses and to work in an avocation that is more "custom-fit" for their skills, talents, desires and limitations.

"Doing this is part of a whole picture of creating a meaningful life," said Leisa Hammett, Grace's mom. "What do you do that gives life meaning? For Grace it's the joy of creating art. So it stands to reason to take the products of that joy and turn it into meaningful income earning! Entrepreneurship has been on an upswing since the '90s. For individuals with autism who may lack social skills or have sensory challenges making social engagement and work place environments challenging, entrepreneurship is a win-win."

A natural

Grace began painting at age four, began exhibiting her work at age six and selling it at age eight. She launched a merchandise line at age 11 after appearing on *The View*—one of many local and national television, magazine, newspaper, book and online features about her art.

Throughout the year, Grace sells her originals, prints, notecards, and art tiles at various events and in retail locations.



Grace Goad

"It was obvious from the start, when we began working with an art therapist at age four, that Grace had keen visual art ability," said Leisa. "We engaged arts therapists to re-incorporate into her early intervention-laden life with autism the childhood joy of art making, dance and music in an adaptive - and specifically therapeutic - format. But in the process we discovered her ability, and one thing led to another."

The young artist's work has "graced" galleries since 2007. Her originals have traveled to exhibitions in Washington, DC, Massachusetts, the Carolinas, and Seattle, as well as Middle Tennessee. Two years ago, Grace began doing monthly "pop-up" markets, festivals and conferences, locally. "It's a lot of work but has been good for the business and helps make her work more accessible to those who cannot afford original, framed prints," said Leisa. "All that said, every artist, nearly, needs a 'day job' or a back-up. So, Grace is still entering the Vocational Rehabilitation process to secure other employment as well, while continuing to grow and cultivate and sell her art."

Pretzels with a purpose

Theresa Daniels didn't speak until the age of five. Today she is the spokesperson for Theresa's Twists, a pretzel-making venture, and is available for presentations.

Like many kids who struggle verbally, Theresa was taught in a self-contained classroom through second grade. By fourth grade, she was totally mainstreamed into a regular classroom for all subjects except math. At age 13, she was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome.

She has continued to excel in her scholastics. She is currently pursuing a degree in sociology and business from Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU).

"Persons like me who struggle with Asperger's have certain 'quirks'," said Theresa. "They are most obvious around social

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Painting and Pretzels ... Continued from page 3

interaction. Some employers have a difficult time handling people like that. But I have become what my parents call a hurdle jumper. I look at obstacles as stepping stones, not stumbling blocks."

Five years ago, while eating a soft pretzel, Theresa said to herself, "Theresa's Twists - Pretzels with a Purpose," and a business concept was born. The first goal is to have a food truck for selling her soft and candied pretzel products. Ultimately, she'd like to have a brick and mortar location where she can sell her products, but that's a long way down the road.

Even in its infancy, Theresa's business concept has garnered her some important recognition.

She recently won \$12,000 and a first place in the Social Enterprise Category of the Launch Tennessee University Venture Challenge. Launch Tennessee is a public-private partnership focused on supporting the development of entrepreneurship and high-growth companies in the state, funded in part by the State of Tennessee. She also won a Community Choice Award in the Jones College of Business at MTSU, and placed third overall out of over 100 applicants last year in the Jones Business College Entrepreneur Competition. She was also inducted into the National Society for Leadership and Success this past Spring.

Although the pretzel business idea was hers, Theresa's Twists is definitely a Daniels team effort. Theresa's mom, Jody, a special education teacher in Sumner County, is the vice president; Theresa's sister, Abbey Moore, an accomplished musician, is the company's social media expert; Abbey's husband Greg Moore, who works at Dell Computers, is the web designer, video producer and editor; and Theresa's brother, John, who also works at Dell, is graphic designer and media specialist. "We are blessed with a family that has been 'all hands on deck' for Theresa and her success," said Theresa's father, John.

Even though John Sr. has a degree in business, the tasks seem endless. "This has been five years in planning so far. Wow, just trying to do all the legal things to become incorporated, and the trademarks. We haven't even got to the licensing part of the food truck!"

"Every business owner asks themselves some of the same questions," Leisa said. "Do I have enough money? What happens if I fail? Will people understand the risk we're taking? There's a lot I didn't understand that goes on behind the scenes."



Theresa Daniels

And running an "art business" goes well beyond the art's creation. Grace's work has to be documented, scanned, and reproduced for prints, websites and marketing. "There's design and set up, printing, shipping, website creation, marketing," explained Leisa. "Then there's coordination and planning to participate in events, like checking out venues, transportation, packaging, hauling and storing art. There is so much that goes into a business!"

Breaking ground for others

Although solo entrepreneurs, these two individuals are not working in a vacuum. Their families realize that their enterprises can be role models for other people with disabilities, and in some cases, even open up employment opportunities for those who have struggled with traditional jobs. "I thought that owning my own business might inspire others to do the same thing," said Theresa. "Statistics quote over 90% of people on the autism spectrum are unemployed. I want to create jobs for them."

Theresa's Twists is in the process of developing collaborative relationships with educational institutions, organizations, businesses and individuals to network to develop this wonderful model to empower young adults with disabilities. The eventual dream is to have a "Life Point University" to educate, equip and empower young adults with Asperger's and other disabilities. According to the long-range plan, the "students" - with guidance and instruction from professional tutors and teachers - would receive coaching in planning, organizing and managing time, along with learning how to cook, do laundry, clean house, pay bills and balance checkbooks, and other practical daily living skills.

Leisa and Grace have been creating opportunities for other artists with disAbilities since 2000. Leisa has led several workshops and seminars, and, in collaboration with the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and Autism Society of Middle Tennessee (now Autism Tennessee), established the first "Art Through the Eyes of Autism" group exhibition. This exhibition, which led to more art projects and exhibits with VSA Tennessee and Gallery One, involved curating a collection of 55 pieces by 13 gallery-quality artists with disabilities from around the world. It now hangs in an upscale Nashville area apartment building.

According to Leisa, the pursuit of entrepreneurship opportunities is an "asset mentality vs. the tired deficit model of disAbility". What talents and strengths does the person with a disability bring to the table? How can we optimize those strengths for future career opportunities, rather than spending time focusing on what someone can't do? "Painting, tie-dying, bird house building, pottery, popcorn making, dog biscuit making, baking - fill in the blank - shows what an individual with a disAbility CAN do."

An Inspiring Visit to Orange Grove:

a Q & A with Rachel Cruickshank, Student, University of Glasgow School of Dentistry

Photo by: Dennis Wilkes



The Orange Grove Center's Dental Clinic was created with a grant from the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. It has grown, earned the respect of the community and is currently serving individuals in the office setting who had previously required going to the operating room under general anesthesia for dental work. Part of the mission of the Orange Grove Dental Clinic is to provide education and guidance about best practices in treating individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to current and future dental professionals including dentists, dental assistants and dental hygienists and students from those three disciplines.

A novel program is the Total Immersion Clerkship where students and clinicians can come to Orange Grove and see firsthand not only how dental care is provided but how true collaborative care is provided. They learn about employment, residential life, physical therapy, art, music, transportation, counseling, recreation, staff stressors and person-centered planning, and meet parents, staff and administrators. It provides the "big picture" of how a community supports individuals with intellectual disabilities. The mentoring of dental professionals is provided by the Orange Grove Dental Clinic staff, Dr. Misha Garey, Nadia Marandi, RDH and Daffney Watkins, FDA. All three are not only dedicated to providing the highest level of oral healthcare but sharing the skills necessary to succeed in "special needs dentistry".

It was a pleasure to host Rachel at Orange Grove and we are confident she will be dedicated to treating individuals with intellectual disabilities. – Rick Rader, MD

Breaking Ground: How long were you at Orange Grove, and in what capacity?

Rachel Cruickshank: Five days - enough time to get to know a great bunch of people. I am a dental student in Glasgow, Scotland, and before we enter our 5th and final year, we are allowed to undertake an "elective project". Basically, we can arrange to observe any type of dentistry we want, at home or abroad, and as I know this is my last opportunity to travel before I start working as a dentist, Scotland wasn't going to

cut it as an elective destination. For instance, I have friends in my year who are in Australia observing vet dentistry, friends observing pediatric dentistry in Chile, and there's an observation on-going in China.

BG: How did Orange Grove even become a possible destination for you?

RC: Through a lot of emails! My initial plan was to find out as much as I could via the Special Smiles program with the Special Olympics. I was put in touch with Steve Perelman in Boston, who gave Dr. Rader as a contact. The rest is history!

BG: What were you expecting before you arrived, and how did those expectations change?

RC: If I'm completely honest, I had no idea what to expect! I knew I was heading to a center which catered to those with intellectual disabilities, but I genuinely had no idea what that really involved. When I arrived at Orange Grove, it was soon clear that this center is a haven for serving those with additional needs - I am unaware of anywhere in Scotland that has anything to this level. It is truly something to treasure.

I felt before that this population is often "labeled" by those who do not understand the disabilities, and it genuinely upsets me. You should see a person for who they are, not see a disability. Everyone is unique, and being unique makes you beautiful. The fact that Orange Grove caters to all ages, nobody is turned away, is something that Tennessee should be proud of! I don't think I saw one person there with anything short of a smile on their face.

BG: Had you had previous experience with dental patients with developmental disabilities?

RC: We get a lot of teaching across subjects titled "Special Care" and within our pediatric blocks, but experience of actually treating patients is limited. I've treated one

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INSPIRING VISIT ... Continued from page 5

patient with cerebral palsy in pediatric outreach clinics back home, and there is a "Special Study Module" which we can opt to do in our final year titled "Special Care", but experience apart from those is sparse. I organized to shadow a dentist in Glasgow who is experienced in the Special Care field before I traveled to the USA, which was super fun.

BG: What did you learn during your time at Orange Grove that was most illuminating, surprising or beneficial?

RC: There is no such thing as "I can't" or "I won't". The fact that some of the patients travel for 10 hours and pass goodness knows how many dental practices to reach Orange Grove is eye opening. We have the Equality Act in Scotland which states that each practice must be accommodating to those with additional needs or who require wheelchair space and that access is amenable; and a specialty within our National Health Service called "Special Care" to permit treatment of all. This incorporates those suffering from addiction too.

It was good to see that there are many specialties under one roof, areas specifically designed for different challenges, e.g. hydrotherapy pools, music classrooms, light sensory rooms, and a dementia simulator, which was possibly one of my favorite things to do!. Above all, the smiling faces of all at Orange Grove melted my heart.

BG: Were your views on sedation changed?

RC: The fact that there are many ways to treat a patient other than sedation or general anesthetic (GA) has really opened my eyes. There is often the mindset that GA is the only option, but this experience at Orange Grove has shown me that really, GA is NOT the way to go. Conventional treatment, with ample time for acclimation for both patient and dentist, is the best way to treat a patient.

If a patient has, for instance, Down syndrome, a GA should be the final option, not the first, due to the number of risks that are associated with aspects of the syndrome, e.g. atlanto-axial instability, heart defects, etc. Just because one dentist deems that patient "untreatable" in general practice doesn't mean that they actually are. When there is a will, there is a way!

There is no such thing as a bad patient, just a bad attitude.



Rachel Cruickshank observes dental assistant Daffney Watkins at the Orange Grove Center's Dental Clinic

Yes, it may be more challenging, but if life was plain sailing, it wouldn't be half as enjoyable.

BG: Lastly, what will you "take back with you" into your own work from your time and experiences at Orange Grove?

RC: To name one thing would be far too difficult. It was truly one of the best experiences of my life and I cannot wait for the time off again to return! Unfortunately when I qualify my dental license is not permitted in the USA, but if it was, I'd be straight back to Orange Grove! I've realized that a series of 10 or so lectures is nowhere near enough to allow you to truly understand the correct way to treat this population of patients.

It is fine learning about each disability in turn, but without the physical clinical application, you cannot fully empathize, understand or begin to imagine the challenges faced, how the patients feel, or how their parents' or carers' attitudes towards the care received are.

I think those with intellectual disabilities are undervalued, underappreciated and underrepresented. It is great to see a center where the misconceptions are left at the front door and everyone - staff and patients - are treated as the person that they are. Yes, appointments may take longer, but the treatment gets done, which is the most important thing.

My experience was truly amazing, and I think I left a large chunk of my heart at Orange Grove. I've been humbled by my time at Orange Grove and I believe it is going to make me both better as a clinician and as a person.

A Docent with Determination



Clancey Hopper

by Ned Andrew Solomon

Clancey Hopper has had some challenges in her life, but she has never been unmotivated. She has never given less than 100% to her pursuit of a satisfying, meaningful job that will make her a living, and keep her socially engaged with her community.

From kindergarten through her freshman year of high school, Clancey was in Kentucky. Despite her disability – Clancey has Williams Syndrome, a developmental disability characterized by medical issues and learning disabilities – she was taught in a regular education classroom with some special education support and accommodations.

From her sophomore year on, Clancey lived in Niceville, Florida. She was 19 when she graduated with a special education diploma, due to her struggle with passing the math portion of Florida's Comprehensive Assessment test, similar to Tennessee's TCAPs.

After high school, Clancey attended Northwest Florida State College for a one-year infant/toddler education certification. "I took courses on child development, childhood safety, learning about proper ratios between adults and children, that kind of thing," explained Clancey. "My dream job was to work in a daycare, which totally did not turn out to be the case. But that's ok – you have to try things out in order to see what you actually do want to do."

Actually, Clancey's first job was at Goodwill Industries in Florida, working in the non-profit's computer lab. As secretary, Clancey helped with administrative duties, and whenever possible, took the opportunity to do her own computer training. After two years in that position she took a job at Eglin Air Force Base, as a civilian employee working for Gulf Coast Enterprises, which hires people with disabilities. Clancey worked in one of the main "chow halls" on base as a busser, cleaning up tables and stocking supplies.

Clancey's life was about to change in a big way. That was when she heard about Project Opportunity, an initiative started with a grant from the Council that trained young people to work and then apply for jobs at Vanderbilt University and

Medical Center or in the greater community. She heard about the program from her boyfriend, Seth, who she had met at a Vanderbilt Kennedy Center summer music program for people with Williams Syndrome. Clancey applied, was accepted, and then her parents and grandmother moved to Nashville with her in March of 2013.

"The whole goal of Project Opportunity was for us to take time in different areas of the hospital, trying out different things, to see what we would like," Clancey said. "At the end of our internship, we basically applied for the same jobs that people who did not have disabilities were applying for. I finally accepted a job for Nutrition Services, working in Vanderbilt Medical Center's Courtyard Café. I was a line server there, in the cafeteria where the vast majority of employees would come to eat."

The cafeteria job suited Clancey's social instincts well. She loved interacting with the guests, and became adept at memorizing her customers' orders, which, according to Clancey, "made the line go down quicker!"

Unfortunately, because of her disability, Clancey struggled with the physical requirements of the job, which included handling heavy chafing dishes and putting in long hours that tested her stamina. As an alternative, she took a job working at Vanderbilt's Pediatric Rehabilitation Center at 100 Oaks Shopping Center, where she answered the phone and checked people in for their appointments.

Again, she enjoyed the interactions with the public, but after 14 months, she grew a little restless for a change. Unexpectedly, change found her. While performing in Dallas with some of her peers with Williams Syndrome for an ACM (Academy of Country Music) Gala, Clancey struck up a conversation with Pete Fisher, vice president and general manager of the Grand Ole Opry, about the possibility of Clancey working there. "He told me to shoot him an email, so I did, and I applied for a job as a tour guide," said Clancey. "I got interviewed on a Thursday and got hired the very next day."

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More Employment Success Stories...



Aimee Gibbens, the daughter of Partners in Policymaking graduate and former Council chair Roger Gibbens, has been employed part-time at the Chattanooga Housing Authority for nearly two years. Aimee processes Section 8 applications onto Excel spreadsheets for her supervisor. She also does other office work, like filing forms and sorting paperwork. Aimee loves working at CHS and looks forward to going. She works three days each week for four hours each day.



Chad Howlett, the adult son of Partners in Policymaking graduate Cheri Howlett, is employed by Fort Sanders Hospital in Knoxville. He was hired in January of 2013 and enjoys his job as a cart puller. Cheri reports that one can almost always catch Chad with a smile on his face, grateful to be employed, as evidenced by the accompanying photo.

Carolyn L. is a Claims Representative for Sitel Operating Corporation in Nashville. Employed since March 11, 2016, Carolyn works in the First Notice of Loss Department. "We service the military and their families," said Carolyn. "It is a rewarding job and I get satisfaction knowing that I have helped someone in their time of need."

That makes Elise May, MEd, the Disability Resource Coordinator/Career Specialist who supports Carolyn, very pleased. "Carolyn is happier than she's ever been in a job," said Elise. "She absolutely loves the work and has won some prizes, such as a gift card, for



receiving positive feedback on satisfied customer surveys. She has been told that her customer service is excellent."

DETERMINATION ... Continued from page 7

"The reason I wanted to be a tour guide goes back to the whole, 'I'm very much a people person', thing," continued Clancey. "I like being around people and having a good time with people so that's why I thought I would be a good fit there. And I actually love the Grand Ole Opry. My mom grew up going there as a child listening to her favorite country music artists, so country music has been a part of my life since I was itty-bitty."

Clancey just recently celebrated her one-year anniversary as Grand Ole Opry docent. She works 20-30 hours a week, and even gets to improvise and go "off script" a little with found tidbits of Opry lore, to add some "color" to her tours. She is very much appreciated in this role, and feels right at home with her Opry colleagues. "It's like one big happy family," said Clancey. "It's the best job I've ever had. We all get along so well, and we're all always there for each other. My boss thinks I'll be there for a long time, and so do I. I hope I'm there until

I'm 80 years old!"

This past May, Clancey added Partners in Policymaking graduate to her growing list of personal accomplishments. She was also appointed by Governor Haslam to serve on the TN Council on Developmental Disabilities, representing the Mid-Cumberland Development District.

And, on October 13, Clancey gave a backstage Opry tour to Governor Haslam, ending with her singing a song on the Opry stage right before presenting the 3rd annual Employment First Task Force report to the Governor. Representatives from the Council, the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Vocational Rehabilitation, the Department of Education, TennCare, the Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, The Arc Tennessee, Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and St. John's Community Services also participated in this exciting event as members of the Employment First Task Force.

ABLE



TN

UPDATE

by Shelli King,
Communications Director,
Tennessee Department of Treasury



(l to r) Michael Scott; Meghan Maynard; Treasurer David H. Lillard, Jr.; Lorrinda Mabry; Representative Debra Moody; and Commissioner Many-Bears Grinder. Photo by Dawn Majors.

Launched on June 13, 2016, ABLE TN has seen significant growth in its first five months. Families from Sevierville, Tennessee to Ewa Beach, Hawaii have opened ABLE TN accounts, contributing over \$1,800 on average. We are pleased with the success of the program thus far and are encouraged to see so many individuals eager to take advantage of this exciting opportunity to save and invest for their futures.

Our greatest challenge is raising awareness for the ABLE TN program and the unique benefits it offers individuals and families who qualify to participate. To meet this need, we are engaging with organizations, financial professionals, attorneys, advocates and families across the state to spread the word. Our team has participated in nationwide forums with key stakeholders and provided specialized training and education to organizations and families throughout Tennessee. We have many upcoming events and will continue to work with our partner organizations, like the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, to ensure families have the resources they need to understand and utilize these groundbreaking accounts.

With ABLE accounts being the first of their kind, we are working hard to inform families of the key features that make ABLE TN the best option for Tennesseans. We realize there are several important factors to consider before saving through an ABLE account, and we are providing straightforward information and

resources like ABLE Assist, the eligibility quiz on our website, to make ABLE TN easy to understand and easy to use.

Through our outreach efforts we understand many families are hesitant to save for fear of losing federal benefits and may not be aware that ABLE accounts with balances of \$100,000 or less have no impact on these important resources. Whether it is understanding the importance of low fees or evaluating the various ways to save, our friendly and knowledgeable staff enjoys assisting the many Tennessee families with their specific and unique needs.

The low fees and strong investment options offered by ABLE TN have appealed to families nationwide. While we are focused on meeting the needs of Tennesseans, we are proud to offer a program to all qualified US residents. ABLE TN has participants from many other states, including Arizona, Connecticut and Hawaii. Please help us spread the word to families you know, near and far, who could benefit from the savings opportunities of ABLE TN.

We are excited to watch more families plan and save for the future as awareness of ABLE TN grows. We will continue to work with our national and regional partners to get the word out and to provide resources, training and education. Information can be accessed anytime on our website, at AbleTN.gov, and we also share updates, news, and fun stories on the ABLE TN social media pages, ABLE TN on Facebook and @ABLETennessee on Twitter.

New Council Members

The Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities is proud to welcome our newest Governor-appointed Council members.

Jody W. Cheek, M.Ed.

Jody Cheek lives in Johnson City. She has been a resource teacher in elementary and middle schools in Math and Language Arts, and has worked with general education teachers to better include students with disabilities. She has a Master of Education, Pre-K through 3rd grades, from Milligan College, and a Master of Art in English and a Bachelor of Science from East TN State University.

Jody has served on the Board of Directors for the National Osteogenesis Imperfecta (OI) Foundation in Washington, DC since 2011, and has been an active member of the Junior League of Johnson City since 1997, serving as president and various committee chairs during her almost 20-year affiliation. She is the mother of a teenage daughter with OI.



Roddey M. Coe

Roddey Coe established the first soccer program for people with disabilities in Blount County. He lives in Chattanooga, where he is a Systems Administrator for the Tennessee Aquarium. Since serving as a Missile System Technician in the US Army from 1999 till 2003, Roddey's professional career has focused on information technology (IT).

He has volunteered extensively with the Autism Society East Tennessee, the American Youth and North River Soccer Associations, and the Chattanooga Autism Center, where he is a current board member and IT director. He graduated with honors from the Fountainhead College of Technology in Knoxville, with an Associate of Occupational Science. Roddey has a son on the autism spectrum.



Jennifer L. Coleman

Jennifer Coleman comes to us from Paris, Tennessee. She is a family Nurse Practitioner at a Rural Health Primary Care Clinic in Camden, and has served as a home health nurse and a clinical staff nurse at the Henry County Medical Center. She has a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Murray State University, and a Master of Science in Nursing from Austin Peay State University.

Jennifer is the mother of a young child with Down syndrome. When not working, she is very active with Down syndrome agencies and activities, and spends many hours providing community service for numerous organizations.

Lesley Guilaran

Lesley Guilaran lives in Jackson where she is entering her third year as a special education resource/inclusion teacher at the Community Montessori K-8 school. She is the mother of two children with disabilities. One is deaf and the other is deaf/blind and on the autism spectrum.

Lesley has a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education, K-5, and a Bachelor of Science in Special Education, K-12, from Western Kentucky University. She volunteers with the Family Resource District Council, and is a co-staff sponsor of The Red Bus Project at Union University, which supports an orphan and adoption care ministry.



Clancey Hopper

Last year, Clancey Hopper graduated from the Council's Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute, where she worked on her leadership, advocacy and self-advocacy skills. She hopes to take that training and apply it to her work at the Council on Developmental Disabilities, doing whatever she can to improve the lives of Tennesseans with disabilities.

A young adult with Williams syndrome, Clancey was an intern with the Project Opportunity program at Vanderbilt Children's Hospital, where she tried out several job rotations. After working in the Medical Center's Nutrition Services for a little over a year, Clancey networked herself into a position as a docent at the Grand Old Opry, providing public tours for the Tennessee landmark.



Jean-Marie Lawrence

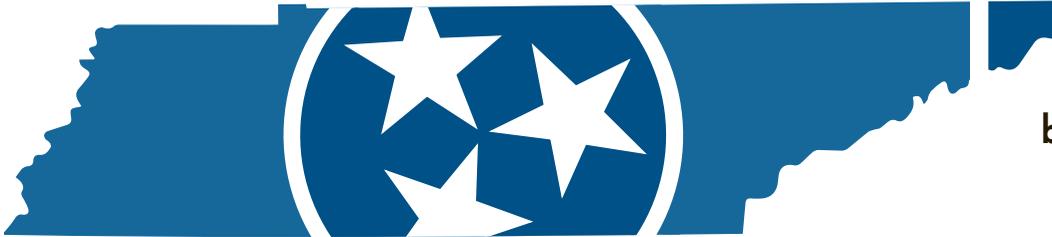
Jean-Marie Lawrence is a young adult who was diagnosed with Limb-Girdle Muscular Dystrophy at age seven. She is passionate about disability issues and advocacy, and has a Bachelor of Science in Political Science and a Master of Public Administration from UT Chattanooga.

In 2014, Jean-Marie founded and became executive director of Access-U Inc., a non-profit organization empowering high school students with physical disabilities to pursue higher education. In the same year, Jean-Marie began working as a Customer Service Representative for Convergys.

She was also honored as Ms. Wheelchair TN in April of 2012, and is currently the Vice President of the Ms. Wheelchair TN organization.



The Council 5-Year State Plan



by Alicia Cone, PhD,
Director of Council
Grant Program

After 14 months of research, preparation, writing and editing, the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities submitted its latest 5-Year State Plan to the federal government. I want to spend some time discussing the Plan, and the process we use to develop it.

The Council does not provide direct services. Instead, we identify areas of need across Tennessee and then work within our Developmental Disabilities Act (DD Act; Public Law 106-42) mandate to improve those highlighted areas of need.

We develop leaders, which includes undertaking leadership training and activities to support local and statewide self-advocacy initiatives. We strive to impact and improve public policy and practice. This includes our work at the legislature, our work with policy groups, position papers we develop and our grant program, which allows us to demonstrate promising and best practices.

We inform and educate all Tennesseans about disability policy and practice, through our magazine, *Breaking Ground*, our Facebook page, CDD e-newsletters, and our grant to Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Tennessee Disability Pathfinder's information and referral services and database.

Now let's take some time to "unpack" the state plan development process. How do we move from information about needs to tangible actions, or, what we refer to as our goals and objectives?

What is the State Plan?

The State Plan is our strategic planning document. It is our tool to assist in our systems change and advocacy efforts. We often describe it as being the road map that details what we will do to get from Point A to Point B.

The State Plan is comprised of 5-year goals. These are fairly big and extensive in scope. Then we have shorter-term objectives. These are usually more specific in nature, describe something that can be measured, can be accomplished, is

focused on results and reflects a limited period of time. Lastly, there are annual key activities, which are the small short-term steps we must take to accomplish our objectives.

The development of our goals and objectives are driven by DD Act (which establishes the state Councils, among other things) requirements; Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD) requirements; areas of need highlighted through our needs assessment and public input activities; opportunities for new partnerships and collaborations that advance the Council's mission and values; and innovative ideas that we translate into policy or practice activities.

Needs assessment activities

Doing needs assessments is a critical activity, because our work must be guided by the voices of Tennesseans with developmental disabilities and their family members. Furthermore, the DD Act assigns this powerful tool for change to the Council. Specifically, the Council must take a comprehensive look every five years at the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities across Tennessee. Without this comprehensive state review, we would not have the data we need to guide our activities; we'd simply be making educated guesses based on hunches and personal opinion about where to put our resources.

We engage in numerous activities to identify needs. Public input allows us to hear directly from Tennesseans with disabilities and their family members so that we may learn what they're seeing and experiencing in their communities. We access key data on gaps in services, availability of resources and groups not receiving services. Also, we receive needs assessment data from our Tennessee Developmental Disabilities Network partners, advocacy organizations such as The Arc TN, the Statewide Independent Living Council, the TN Disability Coalition, TN Allies in Self-Advocacy, People First of TN and Our Communities Standing Strong. We also receive data and information from State departments mentioned in the



Alicia Cone

DD Act, national and state specific data sets, as well as various work groups, task forces and committees on which we participate.

Once we have this data and information we summarize it, seeking trends, patterns and

expected or unexpected findings. We are then careful to make sure we can draw a direct line from a highlighted area of need to a goal or objective in the State Plan. Then we develop a plan of action to impact the highlighted areas of need. The actions we take will be based on our DD Act mandate to improve systems and advocate. We call this action plan our State Plan.

What we learned from public input

When asked how respondents would rate the availability of traditional disability services in their local communities, 54% indicated the services were abundantly or somewhat available, while 45% indicated they were somewhat or not available; 1% chose not to respond. When asked if generic local community businesses and services were welcoming to people with disabilities and their families, 58% of participants replied yes, 38% replied no, and 4% gave a "mixed response" indicating some were welcoming, but that there was a need for further improvement.

When asked to prioritize areas of service delivery, the top five were employment, inclusive/accessible/affordable housing, accessible/affordable health care, inclusive education and accessible/useful transportation.

I want to focus on a few of the highest priority areas. In employment, the priorities identified are supported employment; careers and gainful employment; training in job placement and job coaching; building business/industry awareness; and more internships. In housing, the priorities are increased affordable and accessible housing, more rentals for people with disabilities, and increased housing for people with autism. In health care, priorities are health insurance coverage; dental services and insurance; assistance with finding health care providers; and insurance that covers services for people

with autism. In transportation, the priorities are affordable, accessible, and convenient to use transportation in all part of the states, especially in rural areas.

I also wanted to share some great quotes from Tennesseans who responded to our surveys, to give you a taste of the input we received. In response to, "What would a perfect world look like to you?", people said:

"Individuals with disabilities would find no barriers to accessing all aspects of the community and to having meaningful employment."

"Everyone would live where they wished to, work at the job they want to for a decent wage, and all barriers to enjoying life would not exist."

"I would see all municipalities or counties requiring that all proposed new and remodeled structures must go through a review committee which is made up of at least one individual who has a physical disability. This committee would be responsible for reviewing and approving designated accessible facilities."

This is just a snippet of what we learned from our needs assessment work, but this information and data drives the development of our State Plan. The information was also used to develop a draft of our goals and objectives: leadership development, public policy activities, public information and communication in order to educate and inform, and demonstration of best practices (as needed to promote policy changes). These will be our primary areas to work on during the next five years. These goal areas also allow us to drill down in order to address issues related to home- and community-based services and to develop informational products for Tennesseans.

From December 1, 2015 to February 1, 2016, we asked Tennesseans to provide us feedback on our proposed FY17-21 State Plan. The feedback we received was very positive. Ninety percent of the responses agreed that the goals and objectives present a roadmap that can be followed; 90% agreed that the goals and objectives make sense; 80% responded that there was nothing we could do to make the plan more clear or simplified; and 90% strongly agreed or agreed that the proposed State Plan would have a positive impact on the lives of Tennesseans with disabilities and their families. The State Plan was approved by Council members at the May, 2016 Council meeting, and will be in effect from October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2021.

For detailed information about the State Plan goals and specific objectives, please visit the Council website at <https://www.tn.gov/cdd/>.

Creating Victory Quilt Leads to Literacy Skills

by Connie Robinson, Director of Deaf Family Literacy Midsouth

"Victory is the child of preparation and determination." - Sean Hampton, American actor

"Lord have mercy!" exclaimed Tennesia, "I thought she'd never get it done!"

The Deaf Family Literacy Midsouth (DFLM) program had tasked nine-year-old Anihya with a unique project that not only challenged her fine motor skills, but, apparently, her mother Tennesia's patience.

Literacy comes in all shapes and sizes. Almost anything can be used as a tool to teach language, including a quilt craft. During a mentoring session, Anihya and I read about the 1860 painting, "Victory Quilt", by Dorothy Moody Slade. She loved it and I saw a literacy opportunity.

The assignment? "Merely" to tie 600 overhand knots to create a 36-block baby quilt.

Anihya was born with profound hearing loss and delayed motor skills. Fine motor skills are of particular importance to deaf and hard of hearing children who are reliant on sign language.

Since American Sign Language (ASL) is a language of motion, correctly-formed handshapes and precise movements are needed to communicate. However, if fine motor skills are lacking, language expression can be delayed as thoughts are not conveyed with clarity and accuracy. It would be the verbal equivalent of having a speech impediment or mumbling.

There are 22 handshapes used to form the manual alphabet in ASL for example. If a deaf or hard of hearing child is lacking in fine motor skills, forming the alphabet becomes a challenge.



When a deaf or hard of hearing child has difficulty forming the manual alphabet, they will also have difficulty with spelling and reading. So it's important to build fine motor skills in children who sign.

People use fine motor skills each time they text on their smart phones, type on a keyboard, plug in a thumb drive, use a stylus, mouse or touchscreen. Building fine motor skills in children allows them to better use more complex technology later on.

Thanks to the funding received by the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy through support from Comcast, DFLM is able to increase literacy in families with deaf and hard of hearing children through the purchase of a variety of high-tech, low-tech and even no-tech resources such as a simple craft kit for children with the same challenges as Anihya.

The mission of DFLM is to see deaf and hard of hearing children enjoy success in life through empowering families with resources, services and support. In its sixth year of operation, it is the only program of its kind in the area providing families of deaf and hard of hearing children with educational mentoring sessions and support services.

"I like my quilt," signed Anihya. "It is pretty."

Through determination, Anihya can be proud of her creation. And in the process of it all, she is better prepared for her future. "Doing that quilt did Anihya a lot of good," said Tennesia. "She couldn't tie her shoes before doing that. But after that quilt she sure could!"

"Victory is the child of preparation and determination."

- Sean Hampton, American actor

As reported previously in *Breaking Ground* Issue #83, Tennessee implemented a new long-term services and supports program for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities called “The Employment and Community First CHOICES program” on July 1, 2016. The Employment and Community First CHOICES program is administered by the Bureau of TennCare and operated by the state’s health plans, also known as “Managed Care Organizations (MCOs)”: Amerigroup and BlueCare Tennessee.

The program is significant for Tennesseans because people with developmental disabilities (other than intellectual disabilities) will qualify for **long-term services and supports** for the first time. As of 11/14/2016 approximately 500 people have enrolled in the program. TennCare expects to be able to support up to 1700 people in the first year of the program.

The Employment and Community First CHOICES program is being watched nationally as the first of its kind, as it is designed to promote and support **integrated competitive employment** and community living as the first and preferred option for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Tennessee.

Below are examples of new innovations included in the program:

Person-Centered Planning

Each person receiving services will have a Support

The New ECF CHOICES Program’s Employment Focus

by TennCare Staff

Coordinator, employed by their MCO, who will assist them in creating a Person-Centered Support Plan. This plan is focused on the strengths of the individual, and includes individually identified employment, community living, and health and wellness goals. Support Coordinators are specially trained to assist people with developing these goals, including the employment goals

and to constructively address the reasons why people may say “No” to employment.

What are “Long Term Services and Supports”?

The services and supports used by individuals who need assistance to perform routine daily activities, including things like participating in community and employment.

Employment Specialists

The MCOs are required by TennCare to have Employment Specialists on staff that focus solely on increasing employment outcomes for people receiving services. These specialists provide support and expertise to the Support Coordinators during the person-centered planning process, and to Employment Service Providers as they deliver services to people. The Employment Specialists also serve as a link to additional employment resources such as Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department of Education, and assist with the coordination of services and help families navigate those complex service systems.

Informed Choices about Employment

A key tenant of the program’s philosophy is that no person is presumed incapable of working, regardless of level of disability, but recognizes that some people have never had the opportunity to think about a career, or may have been told that a career would never be an option for them. The Employment and Community First CHOICES program utilizes an employment-informed choice approach for people in the program who are not working or are not interested in pursuing integrated competitive employment.

Through the employment-informed choice process, a person will work with their Support Coordinator to receive an orientation to employment, employment supports and work incentives (“work incentives” refers to ways people can earn money without jeopardizing their public benefits). For those who are not sure if they are interested in employment, there is an Exploration service designed to help individuals “explore”

What is “integrated competitive employment”?

This term refers to employment in settings where people with and without disabilities work together and earn comparable salaries for the same work and at least minimum wage.

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Council Hires New Public Policy Director

Lauren Pearcy has been hired as the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities' new Director of Public Policy. She most recently worked at the Bureau of TennCare as director of the Employment and Community First CHOICES program.

Lauren is an honors graduate with a Master's Degree in public policy from George Washington University, the Trachtenberg School of Public Policy. She worked for the National Governor's Association (NGA) as a policy analyst for six years, and was appointed Senior Policy Analyst in Workforce Development at the NGA for three years. While there, Lauren helped produce the landmark publication, *A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities*. This publication



is widely recognized as launching the Employment First initiative across the country.

"Lauren Pearcy brings extraordinary qualifications and experience to the Council," said Wanda Willis, Executive Director. "I am honored and thrilled to have someone with both her skill and passion join our team."

"It is my privilege to be joining the Council staff," said Lauren. "I have had the pleasure of working closely with the Council for several years and witnessing the impact of its work. It is very exciting now to be part of the mission and the team here. I love working on public policy issues, and I'm especially happy to be able to work so closely with the Council members and the broader community in this role."

ECF CHOICES ... Continued from page 15

the possibility of employment by identifying areas of interests and skills, as well as experiencing various employment settings. Making sure people at least explore employment and learn about the employment supports available before making a decision helps to ensure that people don't dismiss employment as a real option because they lack complete information and a vision for how employment could be possible for them. Providers are paid more to provide employment services like Job Development and Job Coaching for people with more significant disabilities to help cover the cost of additional supports the person may need to work.

Employment and Community First CHOICES is built on the belief that employment has many positive benefits for

people. These include higher income, better health and quality of life, and greater opportunity to make friends and be part of their community. Although the Employment and Community First CHOICES program focuses intently on this philosophy, it is important to note that a person does not have to be employed to get into Employment and Community First CHOICES. The program also offers other home- and community-based services like transportation, personal assistance and residential services. All services are identified based on the person's unique needs during the person-centered planning process.

For more information on the Employment and Community First CHOICES program, visit <https://www.tn.gov/didd/article/employment-and-community-first-choices>.

Learn more about the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities.

615.532.6615 | www.tn.gov/cdd | www.facebook.com/TNCouncilonDD | Tnddc@tn.gov

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Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute

by Ned Andrew Solomon, Director of Partners in Policymaking

The Council on Developmental Disabilities has had a long commitment to the Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute. Started in Minnesota in 1987, the Partners program was meant to develop the advocacy and leadership skills of adults with disabilities and family members of persons with disabilities, through the presentations of local and national experts in the disability field. Tennessee adopted the program in 1993, and since that point, has graduated over 500 participants from across the State.

We are very pleased to introduce the members of our 2016-17 class:

Jay Anderson, Jr. of Chattanooga

Tatjana Anderson of Mount Juliet

Shontie Brown of Memphis

Sarah Bynum of Memphis

Adrian Campbell of Cordova

Jeannette Childress of Chattanooga

Allison Donald of Memphis

Clay Dyer of Murfreesboro

Bobbie Fields of Memphis

Alicia Hall of Memphis

Jimmy Jackson of Elizabethton

Tonika Jordan of Clarksville

Todd Liebergen of Madison

Michelle Madron of Old Hickory

Bonnie Micheli of Fairview

Dana Mullican of McMinnville

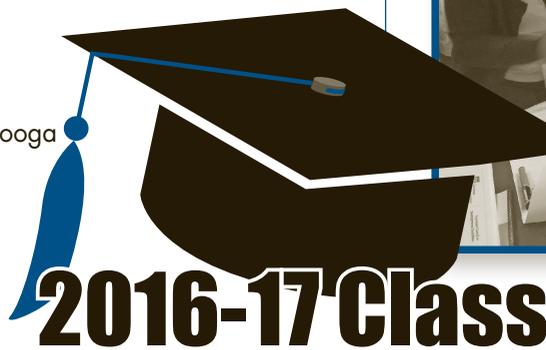
DeAnna Parker of Medina

Laura Payne of Knoxville

Jessica Peggs of Bartlett

Nicholas Pinter of Nashville

David Pointer of Murfreesboro



2016-17 Class

Amanda Reedy of Eads

Nancy Rogers of Chattanooga

LeVon Sheegog of Memphis

Gina Summer of Jackson

Petra Walls of Pleasant View

Martez Williams of Nashville

For those who may be interested in applying for the 2017-18 Class which will begin in September 2017, please contact Ned Andrew at ned.solomon@tn.gov or 615.532.6556. The Partners application is also available from the Council's website at <https://www.tn.gov/cdd/>.

VOLUNTEER STATE People First of Tennessee

by Phil Garner, Executive Director,
Buffalo River Services, Inc.

Photos by Kelly Ray

You can tell by the title "People First" that people will be involved. In fact, we know that not only will people be involved, they'll be the *priority*.

People like John Kavara, who is President of the Volunteer State People First of Tennessee Board of Directors. And Alicia McCann, who is the organization's secretary /treasurer (and a Partners in Policymaking grad!)

The mission of the Volunteer State People First chapter is "to provide people with disabilities and families of people with disabilities an organization designed to research, discover and share resources to meet their physical, social, domestic and psychological needs which will enhance person-centered supports for them, leading to fullness in longer living and positive and productive lives."

That's all well and good, and extremely important, but People First is also about empowering persons with disabilities to speak up for themselves and have an active role in the issues that directly impact their lives. It is a self-advocacy organization led by individuals with disabilities.

A little history

Most People First members were already on the path to empowerment through learning about and honing their self-advocacy skills. That "drive" led them to wanting to be involved with the existing People First of Tennessee organization, which had been around since the late 1980s. Three chapters were initiated, one each in Lewis, Lawrence and Wayne Counties. Although these chapters worked on their own projects, an early priority was raising funds to help members attend the annual Tennessee Disability MegaConferences, where they could network and continue to improve their advocacy skills.

People First is also about showing that people with disabilities can be the helpers, instead of always being viewed as the



Alicia McCann, Treasurer and John Kavara, VSPF president.

ones who are helped. All three of the chapters do a great deal of community service. When the local community of Lutts was hit by a tornado, People First members were out there sorting clothing and food and cleaning up debris. They made and sold bows for a Paint the Town Purple event, designed to bring awareness of domestic abuse. All are involved in the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life each year.

After a while the three chapters began to grow beyond what the original

People First organization could do to support them.

So they started planning on having their own organization. Ultimately, the People First Chapters of Wayne, Lawrence, and Lewis counties created a coalition known as Volunteer State People First (VSPF). And as you can see from the previous paragraphs, it makes perfect sense why this new organization would add the words "Volunteer State" to its title!

As of 2014, VSPF is a chartered and federal 501c(3) tax exempt non-profit. The group was able to repurpose an old charter that was gifted to them by Buffalo River Services, Inc. Upon successful implementation of the first three chapters of Lawrence, Lewis and Wayne, membership in VSPF is now open to other self-advocates - both groups and individuals - across the state.

Meet the leaders

But that's all the logistics and background info. In accordance with prioritizing *people*, you should know more about John. John really enjoys being a part of this group and through the process has grown in social skills and confidence. He enjoys going out in the community and doing work for others. He likes to talk to people and learn about their lives and needs. He enjoys sharing ideas with others. He assists at least three days a week at the local nursing home with patient activities, cleaning up bingo chips, putting up the weekly calendars, and visiting with four patients who he met through the Aging and Disability program. John also loves to go kayaking, hiking,

Continued on page 19

PEOPLE ... Continued from page 18

riding his bike, and taking care of his family's exotic birds. A well-rounded individual and community leader for sure!

And then there's Alicia, who enjoys attending the meetings and seeing all of her friends. She is very interested in learning about the different projects in the community that she can be a part of. Like John, Alicia enjoys attending conferences where she hears about how others get involved in their communities. Alicia delivers Meals On Wheels for the Senior Center each week at least five days per week. She also assists with watering the plants in the downtown area for the Pilot Club. She helps put out flyers for the Chamber of Commerce throughout the year to advertise upcoming events. She also helps with setting up the booths for the annual October Heritage Festival. In her spare time, she loves spending time with her husband of 18 years and his family. They attend community events at the Strand Theater and the summer time Friday Night Block Party where they dance the night away.



(l to r): Jennifer Skelton, Greg Pulley, Dalton Quillen, Carrie Hite and Nicole Daniel, board members of VSPF.

There are currently more than 40 members of the Volunteer State People First of Tennessee. They are concerned citizens, active community participants and developing self-advocates, just like Alicia and John.

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